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Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good afternoon, committee members, witnesses and invited guests.

This is the fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

The focus of today's agenda is the First Nations University of Canada.

[English]

I would like to welcome each of our witnesses today.

Before we begin this important study on the First Nations University of Canada, I want to point out to members that we have five organizations represented here.

For the benefit of witnesses, we have votes planned toward the end of our session. You'll hear bells at approximately 5:15. We will have to suspend our meeting at that point and finish, as far as you're concerned, shortly after 5:15.

Since there are five witnesses today, members, I'm going to use a fair degree of control over the length of time used for questions and responses. We will go with the standard seven-minute opening round, and then have five-minute questions for members. Each of the witnesses has five minutes for their opening presentation. We will go through each of the five in order.

We do have the order—thank you very much for assisting us with that today.

We'll go through the order, and once the fifth presentation is complete we will open the floor to questions from members.

I would like to begin this afternoon by welcoming Chief Guy Lonechild. Guy is the regional chief and is here today representing the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. With him is Dorothy Myo, special advisor to the chief.

Guy, I understand you're doing the presentation. You have the floor for five minutes.

Chief Guy Lonechild (Chief, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations): Yes, sir.

Thank you very much to the members of Parliament, and to all, *tansi; marsil; wachiyea*. Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

I am speaking with you as chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. The FSIN represents 74 first nations

in the province of Saskatchewan. On October 29, 2009, almost five months ago, I was elected chief of the federation by the chiefs in assembly.

On February 3, 2010, three months after I was elected, the Honourable Rob Norris, Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, announced that the Government of Saskatchewan would end its \$5.2 million in annual contributions to the First Nations University of Canada, stating that his government had “lost confidence in the governance and management of First Nations University”.

This announcement came while the FSIN chiefs were in assembly deliberating those very issues, primarily the downsizing and depoliticizing of the board, as had been recommended in previous task force reports.

On February 4, one day later, the FSIN chiefs in assembly made the right choice. We followed due process and gave political direction to downsize and depoliticize the First Nations University board of governors, thereby dissolving the board.

On February 8, four days later, the Honourable Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, followed suit, announcing that the federal government will end the \$7.2 million in annual funding, effective April 1, 2010, citing systemic problems related to the governance and financial management of the institution.

I campaigned for FSIN chief on a platform of openness, transparency, and accountability. Immediately after being elected I met with students to discuss the governance, management, and financial administration issues at the First Nations University. Since then I have worked to put in place changes that were needed.

Now I would like to tell you what the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations has done to address the reasons given by the federal government for ending the \$7.2 million in annual funding.

First I will address the governance issues.

Again, on February 4, 2010, the FSIN chiefs in assembly followed due process in giving the political direction to downsize and depoliticize the First Nations University board of governors. As a result, an interim board of governors was appointed, now chaired by Joely Big Eagle, a civil engineer and alumnus of the First Nations University. The members of the interim board are not first nations chiefs or band councillors. They are first nations professionals, some of whom are First Nations University alumni with graduate degrees, and respected members of the first nations community.

In mid-February, a working group was struck, comprised of FSIN, First Nations University, the Province of Saskatchewan, and University of Regina representatives, with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada as an observer. The working group was mandated to come up with a plan focusing on governance, management, and finance, and to explore transitional models or structures to meet the needs of all the parties. This was done and the model was accepted by the FSIN chiefs in assembly on March 8, 2010.

Beginning in early March, the FSIN, as part of the working group, has been actively involved in discussions with the University of Regina. We are very committed to facilitating a strong relationship and agreement between the First Nations University and the University of Regina. As of today, the working group is very close to completing a memorandum of understanding, which I will tell you about next.

The MOU outlines the timeframes for the execution of the agreement for an integrated First Nations University liaison office and the administrative services contract between the University of Regina and the First Nations University. Key benchmarks include a reorganization plan to be completed by April 30, 2010; the establishment of a long-term, depoliticized board, through the FSIN legislative process, by June 30, 2010; the completion of the restructuring and reorganization prior to the execution of the administrative services contract; the confirmation of the indemnification of liability by the First Nations University to address satisfaction of the University of Regina; and also the confirmation of funding from the Government of Canada and Saskatchewan prior to the execution of the administrative services contract.

•(1535)

Therefore, in response to the reasons stated on February 8 by Minister Strahl, significant concrete steps have been taken since early February that address the governance, administrative, and financial management of the First Nations University.

Five years in the life of a university is not a long time. FSIN chiefs in assembly have made the right choices to ensure that governance and administrative arrangements are implemented. These will ensure openness, transparency, and accountability, something we can all agree with.

This institution has a strong history and a future envisioned by our elders that is deserving of continued funding. Once again, we have taken steps in partnership with the University of Regina to address the reasons why the funding was pulled.

The Chair: Okay, we—

Chief Guy Lonechild: The confirmation of funding from the government—

The Chair: Chief Lonechild, I don't want to interrupt you there, but are you just about wrapped up? We're over time here right now.

Chief Guy Lonechild: I've just got a couple statements left to make and I'm done.

The Chair: Okay. Wrap it up then, quickly, and that'll be good.

Chief Guy Lonechild: The confirmation of funding from government is a condition for the University of Regina to enter the administrative services contract with the First Nations University. Here I am stressing to you that the only way for First Nations

University of Canada to survive is with the federal government's commitment of multi-year sustained funding. In other words, the First Nations University equation requires your financial commitment to work.

The Prime Minister said in question period that the federal government is committed to protecting the students at First Nations University. So are we. This is what the plan will achieve. Now we look forward to working in partnership with all parties.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief Lonechild.

Next we welcome Diane Adams. Diane is a representative for First Nations University of Canada Student Association.

I will just at this point, for the benefit of all witnesses, remind you that we do simultaneous translation throughout the course of your remarks. So the pace at which you speak, if it's even just slightly slower than you normally talk, our interpreters will be able to keep up with the translation.

Ms. Adams, please go ahead. You have five minutes.

•(1540)

Mrs. Diane J. Adams (Representative, First Nations University of Canada Student Association): Hi, there. My name is Diane Adams. I am a Métis woman from Sioux Lookout, Ontario, in the Treaty No. 3 territory, and I am the president of the First Nations University of Canada students association in Regina.

Today I am sitting before you representing the 2,000 students currently taking classes at the First Nations University of Canada. We currently have 400 classes going on at three campuses. One is in Regina, one is in Saskatoon, and one is our northern campus in Prince Albert.

My first and foremost objective today is to illuminate why it is imperative that the federal government commit sustained multi-year funding to the First Nations University and how important it is to do so. We're receiving \$7.2 million, and we can only build from there.

I've come here today to share not only my own experiences but also the accomplishments of our prominent and successful students and alumni. My own educational journey began at a mainstream institution, but two years ago I picked up and moved to Regina to study environmental health and science at the First Nations University of Canada. This is the only place in Canada that I can obtain the specialized education I need to pursue a career as a first nations community environmental health specialist developing innovative, culturally acceptable, and economically feasible solutions to the health problems associated with water, sewer, and housing infrastructure on reserves.

That is what the First Nations University is all about: innovation through bicultural educational. It is a place where knowledge is shared and students go forward with the best of both worlds. The sharing of knowledge is the most important thing to our students, so that they can come out with dual skill sets to enable them to succeed both in mainstream society and with their own first nations traditions.

When the FSIN chiefs in assembly elected Guy Lonechild as their leader last October, the students were very pleased, because he had actively campaigned to bring changes to the First Nations University, the same changes that the students had been calling for for some time. When the FSIN dissolved the board and put our own respected academics in charge, we knew it was the beginning of a new era of accountable, transparent, and qualified governance and leadership at our institution.

While this new era of change for the First Nations University is here, we cannot go forward without the commitment of the \$7.2 million that our university had historically been receiving. We cannot go forward without it.

The First Nations University has taught many prominent first nations and non-first nations students over the years. Our students have gone on to be lawyers, doctors, politicians, nurses, managers, and social workers, just to name a few. One of our alumni, Alika Lafontaine, won the prestigious "Canada's next great prime minister" contest, and is now a medical doctor currently specializing in anesthesiology. Connie Walker is an accomplished journalist working for CBC's *The National*. We have a provincial deputy minister, and our alumnus Perry Bellegarde ran a campaign for national chief of the AFN last year.

Countless others have completed their Ph.D. and graduate degrees. In the past five years, our nursing program has graduated 71 nurses who are now working in their northern communities, and we have the only school of dental therapy in the country.

That is just a sample of the many reasons that committed, sustained multi-year funding must be immediately restored to the First Nations University of Canada.

As a student, I must point out that no other university in the country relies on or could operate on annual proposal-based funding for its core operation. We could not attract or keep the quality of students I just mentioned on year-to-year funding; degrees take four years to complete, and all students know that.

I'd like to close by reminding the committee that it is the educators at this university who are teaching a new generation of first nations leaders the value of accountable, transparent, and qualified governance in leadership. Tom Benjoe was a fellow student association member. Last year he was named the Red Cross young humanitarian of the year, and he has received more than 30 regional, provincial, and national scholarships. He wanted me to relay this to you today, and I quote:

I strongly believe that change has come. As future First Nations leaders we are proving how education is changing the landscape for our futures, and we are demanding greater accountability and transparency for our institutions and our communities. The FNUUniv is helping develop those changes and it is only fitting that change must begin there.

● (1545)

The First Nations University needs that sustained multi-year funding from the federal government. If it is not provided, the Canadian government is sending a strong message to the students of the First Nations University of Canada, to the next generation of young leaders, that accountable and transparent conduct will not influence government decision-making when it comes to financial matters.

With that, I pray to this committee and the Canadian government to lead by example and give value to our commitment to accountability and transparency by reinstating a minimum of \$7.2 million directed to the First Nations University of Canada.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Adams.

I will now turn the floor over to Ms. Vianne Timmons.

[English]

Vianne comes to us from the University of Regina. Vianne is the president and vice-chancellor. I believe she is joined by Gary Boire. Gary is the vice-president academic of the University of Regina.

Ms. Timmons, you have the floor for five minutes.

Dr. Vianne Timmons (President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Regina): Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today.

I want to acknowledge the chief of our first nations chiefs, Chief Lonechild.

I speak to you today as president and vice-chancellor of the University of Regina, and my words convey a shared vision passed on from my predecessors, the past presidents of the University of Regina. It's a shared vision of First Nations University of Canada as an institution founded to enhance the quality of life of, and to preserve, protect, and interpret the history, language, culture, and artistic heritage of, first nations people. Thirty-four years after its initial creation as the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, First Nations University of Canada continues to fulfill this vision.

First Nations University of Canada is one of three federated colleges of the University of Regina. The University of Regina approves all First Nations University courses and provides quality assurance on all programs. First Nations University students graduate with a University of Regina degree. This is an innovative approach to the post-secondary education of aboriginal and non-aboriginal students, and it works. This unique educational model has been and remains very successful.

First Nations University enrollment has grown over the years; it stabilized this past year. In total, 40% of Saskatchewan's aboriginal university students take courses through First Nations University, as well as more than 1,000 University of Regina students, many of them non-aboriginal and many of them from far beyond Saskatchewan. They broaden their knowledge of aboriginal culture by taking courses at First Nations University each year. For many, these courses are required for their degree completion at the University of Regina.

First Nations University is not a segregated institution, but rather a unique Canadian institution that specializes in indigenous knowledge, something that is most definitely needed in Canada.

Today First Nations University offers 18 undergrad degree programs and more than 10 certificate diploma programs. It is the unique centre of indigenous knowledge in Canada. It has more than 3,000 alumni, aboriginal and non-aboriginal graduates alike, who contribute to our province and our country. The alumni are all around us, alumni such as Joely Big Eagle, a civil engineer, as mentioned before, and a First Nations University of Canada graduate, who is committed to making a difference as the interim chair of First Nations University's new board of governors.

First Nations University has recently experienced challenges, but they have been addressed. The University of Regina is committed to a new working relationship with our federated college, First Nations University, one that provides management oversight of all operations.

I could provide for you a detailed and painful list of the effects that the federal government's six-week notice of the withdrawal of funding will have on students, faculty, and staff of First Nations University of Canada, but I will not; I will share with you one story.

In Saskatoon I met a faculty member from First Nations University, a Cree woman my age. She's very close to completing her Ph.D. She's the sole provider for her grandchildren. This pulling of funding will mean she will not be able to afford to complete her degree and will likely lose her home. She's terribly afraid, because she knows the impact this decision will have on her grandchildren.

There are many more such stories.

Without federal government support for First Nations University, any gains made over the past 34 years will be lost, and lost forever. Fewer aboriginal learners will realize the benefits of post-secondary education, and Canada will be a less inclusive society as a result. That is not what I want for aboriginal and non-aboriginal students alike, and it's not what I want for my or your children and grandchildren.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Timmons.

We'll now move on to Mr. Randy Lundy. Randy chairs the First Nations University academic council.

Like our other presenters today, Mr. Lundy, you have five minutes. The floor is yours.

• (1550)

Mr. Randy Lundy (Chair, First Nations University Academic Council): Thank you.

I want to thank everyone for the invitation to speak to you today.

There is one misconception that some people may have and that I would like to clear up to begin with. It seems to me from talking to various people, particularly people in offices on Parliament Hill, that there is a misconception that it has only been governments that have been demanding changes at the First Nations University of Canada. That simply is not the case. For the last five years, since February 2005, many members of the faculty—the great majority of the faculty—and many of our students have been calling for exactly the same kinds of changes in governance and administration that

numerous parties have called for, in particular the federal and provincial governments.

It would be a mistake to think that anyone needs to inform the faculty of the university of the kinds of governance and administrative problems we have suffered over the past five years. Nobody could be more aware of those difficulties than the people who have had to go to work every day in that building and that institution. I don't think anyone would attempt to deny that there have been serious problems with the governance and the administration at the First Nations University of Canada over the last five years. It is important for our funders to remember that there have been people inside the institution, both faculty and students, who have been carrying on this fight every day for five years. We've been calling for the same kinds of changes you have been.

To add to that, I have to also say that while we've had these governance and administrative problems and competencies, to be fair, the integrity of our faculty and of our academic programming has never once been questioned throughout this entire process. In fact, the integrity of the academic programming at our institution and the integrity of the faculty members who teach there has been reaffirmed time and again, and we've been under heavy scrutiny for five years now because of governance and administrative difficulties. Naturally people would want to have a look at our academics as well, and our academic integrity has never been called into question once. This has been reaffirmed time and again by partners such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, and our partner institution, the University of Regina.

To continue on that theme and picking up on something that Diane Adams said a few moments ago, it has been suggested to us that first nations students in the province of Saskatchewan will continue to receive funding and can choose to spend that funding as they see fit at whichever institution they choose to attend. That has been presented to us as a choice that students are allowed to make.

Unfortunately, there are two problems with that scenario. One is that it doesn't open up further choices to the students at all. The students already have the choice of which institution they want to attend. They can go to the University of Regina, they can go to the University of Saskatchewan, they can go elsewhere—or they can come to the First Nations University of Canada. They have that funding already from the federal government through ISSP and they can go wherever they choose to attend. Our students chose to attend our institution. If the doors of the First Nations University of Canada are closed, the students will have fewer choices, not more. That is important to remember.

The second thing I would like to point out about this issue is that our academic programming is unique. The taxpayers of Saskatchewan and Canada have been investing in the First Nations University of Canada for 34 years now. In those 34 years, in spite of underfunding and in spite of difficulties with governance and administration in the past five years, we've been building capacity. To expect that the University of Regina or the University of Saskatchewan could suddenly pick up in the absence of the capacity we've been building for 34 years is patently absurd.

The fact is that our academic programming is unique and can't be duplicated by any other university in Saskatchewan, or anywhere else in the country as a matter of fact. Just as a couple of examples, we have a department of Indian languages, literatures, and linguistics, which is the only program of its kind in the country and in the world in its focus on first nations languages.

•(1555)

As head of the English department, I can speak about the English department most competently, perhaps. We have seven full-time members, five at our Regina campus, one in Prince Albert, and one in Saskatoon. We teach almost exclusively aboriginal Canadian literature and a little bit of the American Indian literature.

Now, that teaching capacity and the expertise gathered in our department over 34 years doesn't exist anywhere else in the country, and this is true of pretty much every one of our departments.

Sorry to our partner here, but there is no one in the University of Regina English department who is qualified to teach first nations literature, Canadian or American. And that's a fact.

The Chair: Can you wrap up there now, Mr. Lundy? We're a bit over time.

Mr. Randy Lundy: Absolutely.

The last point I'll make is this. What we've seen in the leadership, both at the Assembly of First Nations and, more importantly for our purposes, at the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, is a change in leadership that is a generational change. We are finally seeing the kind of young educated first nations leaders many of us have been hoping and praying for, for some time now, and certainly very hard in the past five years.

Under the leadership of Chief Lonechild, we've seen the kinds of wholesale changes the province has been asking for, for five years, the federal government has been pressuring for, for five years, and the kind of changes the faculty and students at the institution have been demanding, for five years.

If we want to reward transparency and accountability, then the funding should be restored to this institution. We need \$7.2 million as a bare minimum to move the institution forward.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lundy.

I would now like to call upon Mr. James L. Turk of the Canadian Association of University Teachers to make his presentation.

[*English*]

Mr. Turk, please go ahead.

Mr. James L. Turk (Executive Director, Canadian Association of University Teachers): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to members of the committee for inviting us to be here.

I'm the executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. We represent 65,000 academic staff, at 122 universities and colleges across Canada.

For the past five years, our organization has been the most persistent, relentless critic of the administration and board of First Nations University of Canada. We felt that actions taken in 2005 violated serious principles of governance that are necessary for any university in this country, or in fact North America.

We have worked diligently since February 2005 to get this situation changed. Over that five years we have met with the board of governors of First Nations University; the president and senior administration of the University of Regina; the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, which is the presidents of universities organization; the government; the minister; and the deputy minister in Saskatchewan.

The only institution that refused to meet with us during that five years was the Government of Canada. I have a number of letters that I sent to previous ministers and deputy ministers asking for meetings and they persistently refused to meet with us. We were unable to get necessary changes, so finally, in 2008, our organization took the most serious sanction we have, and that is to censure the university—the administration and board of that university. We haven't had to censure a university in this country in 28 years. We have censured other universities in the past—the University of Victoria, Memorial University, the University of Calgary—and those censures led to changes. Sometimes it took a long time. At Memorial, it took 10 years to get the necessary changes.

We took that step, which was a huge step for us. We saw nothing else that we could do to put pressure on to get the changes. The reason we were so persistent—and we made lots of enemies in this process—is because this is a unique institution. It's the only first nations university in this country. It's the only institution for first nations students who want to go to an institution in a first nations culture and tradition to study. That's why, as Ms. Adams indicated, many are there.

We wanted the institution to survive, but we knew that without changes to its governance structure it would not be able to.

Finally, in 2009, there was a real breakthrough. The FSIN elected a new grand chief—Chief Lonechild, who is with you today. Chief Lonechild worked very hard, and he showed enormous political courage to push through fundamental changes to the governance structure of First Nations University. The university board of governors was dissolved, and a new board was established along the lines that a series of commissions and task forces and CAUT had called for: a smaller and depoliticized board. Subsequently the University of Regina, the First Nations University of Canada, and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations have entered into discussions, which Chief Lonechild referred to, to deal with the administrative side.

In other words, all the pieces necessary for this institution to succeed have been put in place. The only missing element now is the \$7.2 million of core funding that the federal government withdrew—and I draw your attention to this—four days after the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations dissolved the board of governors and agreed to make the changes we had all been calling for.

In conclusion, without the federal government's commitment to restore the \$7.2 million in core funding by March 31, almost all the faculty and staff of this university will have to receive layoff notices on April 1. That will be the beginning of the end of Canada's only first nations university. The future of that university lies in the hands of the Government of Canada.

We urge you, in the strongest terms, as the organization that has been the principal critic of what has been happening there, to recognize the changes that the FSIN, the University of Regina, and the First Nations University have made around financial and administrative arrangements to allow this institution to survive. We urge you to do that in the strongest terms.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1600)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turk.

I want to thank all of the witnesses for their presentations. We will now go to questions from members.

Mr. Russell, for seven minutes.

[English]

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

Good afternoon to each of you, and thank you for taking the time to come here to Ottawa, particularly on such short notice. I understand the urgency of this particular situation for each of you, and just as importantly of course for the students and faculty and all of those who are impacted by the federal government's decision not to fund the First Nations University of Canada.

I have to say that in my almost five years at the committee, this is some of the most powerful testimony I've heard and the most compelling arguments around a particular position. In this case, it's to keep the First Nations University of Canada open. Over the last number of weeks and months, we have heard a great many different stories reported through many different types of media, whether it's by radio or by newspaper or by television, about what is going on or not going on. It is refreshing to see that you are bringing to light exactly what is happening, because when we ask questions in the House of Commons—I have to be quite frank with you—to the minister on this particular issue, Minister Chuck Strahl, all we get is the negatives. We have never heard of its successes. We have never heard about the uniqueness. We have never heard about the positive changes that are taking place.

There have been many calls by ourselves, many of my colleagues in the House of Commons, to restore the funding, and of course our leader, Michael Ignatieff, has added his voice to that as well.

You have laid out every criticism that's been levelled against this institution. It seems to me that every criticism that's been levelled against this institution by the Conservative government has been answered, so where do we go? When I asked the minister last Thursday if there was any scenario that he could see where funding would continue, he did not answer the question, but continued to raise doubts about the progress that has been made, about changes that you have undertaken. And these are extraordinary changes, as

many of you have said, with FSIN and the leadership of Chief Lonechild, and indeed I would say all of you at this particular table.

However, I think it is important as well for us to enunciate that you have made the fundamental change in governance, in administration, in management, that everybody who was a critic has asked for. You have done your part. Now it's up to the federal government to assure that this new model can succeed and, as many of you said, reward transparency and accountability, not penalize it.

There's also been a perception that, oh, when March 31 comes, April 1 comes, the students can just move from one institution to another, that life will go on as usual, that somehow faculty will all find jobs, that, somehow, this unique university will not survive.

I want to ask each of you—in a very short timeframe, I know—to tell us what impact this will have upon the students and the faculty and FSIN.

• (1605)

The Chair: Just before you start with that—I'll stop the time here temporarily—the way this works on a seven-minute question is that this includes the question and the answer. So we can get more in if you keep your responses succinct and members keep their questions succinct also. I'm sure we'll receive a number of questions from members. The more succinct we can keep it, the more we'll get through.

With that, please carry on, Ms. Adams.

Mrs. Diane J. Adams: I think the most important thing to remember is that the students of this institution are people who chose to come to this institution.

When you're entering into university, at whatever age you're at—and I assure you that our demographics look much different from those of the average university, as most of our students are actually well into their thirties, with, I would guess, 80% of our student body being parents, many of them single parents—you have made a choice about your future. You have made a choice about your future career, and you are busy defining what the path of the rest of your life is going to be.

The threat of the closure of this institution has basically thrown a wrench into the hopes and dreams, and plans for the future, of every single student who is going to that university. For many students, there is not an option to go to a mainstream institution. First nations students have barriers to being successful in post-secondary education. At the First Nations University for 34 years the first nations people have been addressing how to address the barriers, and only we know how to do it.

With that, I suspect that many of our students will just exit post-secondary forever. And if not, the future plans that they had trotted out over many years, and have overcome many hurdles to get to, will just basically be trampled on. Their futures are very uncertain. It's very disheartening for the students at the university.

Mr. Randy Lundy: Todd, were you going to follow up?

Mr. Todd Russell: No, just go ahead, sir.

Mr. Randy Lundy: I just want to make clear that we are talking about whether the doors to the institution are open or not. From what I've heard from Minister Strahl, he's not inclined to restore the \$7.2 million in federal funding. He seems to want to fund students to go wherever they choose to go—as long as it's not us, because our doors won't be open.

What that means is that 66 faculty members will be out of work, about a couple of hundred staff people will be out of work. So we're looking at least 200 or 250 staff and faculty who will be on the unemployment line. I don't think that's necessarily a plank in Canada's economic action plan, but that's what we're looking at. We're going to be at least 200, 250 people unemployed.

More importantly than whether we find jobs or not elsewhere, as I was suggesting earlier in my comments, what's important is that we have a gathering, a nexus of expertise here that will be dispersed, and it exists nowhere else in the country. If we don't get that funding back in place, then all of that expertise is going to be dispersed and spread out thinly across the country. We're going to lose a very important resource, a very important capacity that, as I said, has taken us 34 years to build.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you.

How much time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You only have 15 seconds.

Does someone want to add just a very brief comment?

Ms. Dorothy Myo (Special Advisor to the Chief, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations): Good afternoon, Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I'm Dorothy Myo.

I think at the first nations community level, there is a going to be a huge loss in terms of having an institution that is there to transfer our indigenous knowledge to the next generation. That means our languages, our culture, our ceremonies, our practices will not have a mechanism for how we will transfer it to both aboriginal students and non-aboriginal students.

•(1610)

The Chair: We'll have to hold that thought there, and perhaps you'll have an opportunity to continue with that comment further.

[*Translation*]

We will now go to Mr. Lemay.

You have seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): I want to be sure that the translation is coming through clearly.

Chief, Ms. Myo, it's important that you understand what I'm about to say.

[*English*]

The Chair: You now have six minutes left.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marc Lemay: No, no, I'll appeal that.

The Chair: Can everyone hear now? Okay.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: First of all, thank you for being here. What we're seeing here today may not be a record, but it almost is one. Why? I think all committee members are very much aware of the nature of your request. Why? Because the House resumed sitting on March 3 and the very next day, March 4, we became aware of what was happening at the First Nations University in Saskatchewan. As early as March 10 and March 11, you made a number of statements that were brought to our attention here in committee. We decided to put aside other business in order to hear from you right away. So then, you have to understand—and I hope that you do—that the committee takes your request very, very seriously.

Speaking for the Bloc and for my colleagues as well, it would be catastrophic if the First Nations University were to shut its doors.

That said, I must say, however, that you went looking for trouble, if you will excuse the expression. And I don't know how it will all end because we have not yet met with ministry authorities, although we will do so very shortly. I don't need you to go over the facts again. I know them, I read all about it. To be honest, over the last three years, I think the governments have been very patient. It took three years to finally say that enough is enough.

Now it's time to rebuild some bridges. I have one question, and only one question, and I would like the representative of the University of Regina to answer it. Chief Lonechild could probably answer it as well.

What guarantees can you give governments, that is the Saskatchewan government as well as the federal government, that if funding is restored and some assistance provided, this type of situation will never happen again? That's my only question, but I would like to have an answer.

[*English*]

Dr. Vianne Timmons: Thank you very much for the question.

The University of Regina's relationship with its federated college was clear. We were academically integrated, but they were independent administratively and governance-wise.

Under the leadership of Chief Lonechild, FSIN has said they are now prepared to go into a shared management model with the University of Regina. It's a huge step and a huge concession on the chiefs' part to say they will give up that autonomy. The University of Regina has a record of good, solid fiscal management. As long as we're in a shared management relationship with the First Nations University, we can guarantee that we will continue the history of accountability, transparency, and openness in terms of fiscal management. We guarantee that.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Chief.

[*English*]

Chief Guy Lonechild: Thank you very much, member from the Bloc.

It's important to know that we've been down this road before, in the area of gaming. We've seen troubles at our institution. When we restructured, of course, we did so in the best interests of employment and ensuring that we had governance issues in place. Within that institution, we now win governance awards from the Conference Board of Canada.

Again, with the First Nations University of Canada, we are serious and sincere about ensuring that we make all the proper reorganizational efforts and restructuring efforts. Depoliticization is the first step, but we'll look at best practices around the country. We'll ensure that, through what we learn on going forward with the partnership arrangement, we'll have a stronger institution long into the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Are the University of Regina and the First Nations University prepared to enter into an agreement, or sign a contract? Ms. Myo will probably be the one to answer that question. If such an agreement were to be concluded within the next few years, would the terms be upheld?

[*English*]

Dr. Vianne Timmons: I just received an e-mail that says that all partners have signed a contract to do a shared management agreement: the provincial government, FSIN, FNU, and the University of Regina. They've all signed on to a shared management agreement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Is this document available? Could the committee get a copy of it once all of the parties have signed it? Could it be made public, so the committee can see it? Even if it is in English, arrangements will be made to have it translated.

[*English*]

Dr. Vianne Timmons: Yes, we can get you that. It's signed and ready to be presented to you today.

[*Translation*]

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

The Chair: One minute.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Fine.

I would like Ms. Mayo, the special advisor to the Grand Chief, to finish what she started to say earlier.

How important is this university to aboriginal students?

[*English*]

Ms. Dorothy Myo: Thank you.

This university is important, of course, to our students, our young people, and other learners, because it preserves, protects, and maintains our first nations languages, cultures, and knowledge. We have the ability, with a structure in place, to pass on and transfer this knowledge to our own people but also to share it with other non-first nations, aboriginal, and non-aboriginal learners and students.

That sharing creates, I think, an understanding of who we are and our history and our languages. That understanding, I think, also creates dialogue and a place where we can begin to work together for a better future for all people.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

[*English*]

Now we'll go to Ms. Crowder for seven minutes. That will be followed by Mr. Duncan for the same time.

Go ahead, Ms. Crowder.

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

I want to thank you all for coming here today.

I also think it's important that you've acknowledged that there have been challenges with the university in the past. We all know that. I also think it's important to acknowledge the fact that we have a diverse group working together to find solutions for the institution and the students. I think it's always important to keep in mind that what we're talking about here is the health and well-being of the institution and the students.

A number of you have outlined the benefits of the institution. I just want to touch on a couple of things. One is that we've had numerous letters. I know that people are listening, and I want to thank people for writing in and talking about their personal experiences at the institution. We certainly had one here that outlined in detail the benefits of the language aspect of the university, which is simply not available anywhere else in Canada.

In the 2005 report, as well—and some of this has been covered—it says that at that time, it had one of only four environmental health sciences programs in North America. It had the only dental therapy program, which I think you touched on. The nursing program at the Prince Albert campus is the largest indigenous professional program in the world. In terms of celebrating the successes of the university, I think that gets left out of this conversation on a regular basis.

I have two questions for you. First, in the minister's appearance before the committee last week, he indicated that he's been through this so many times that he asked them, "What's the proposal?" The minister a week ago was indicating that he had no knowledge of the proposal being put forward to rescue First Nations University. He also indicated, in response to a question about the model changing, that it's still not there. This was a week ago. He indicated that he didn't know about a plan and that the model's not there. That's one question.

Second, the minister has consistently stated that the money could still be there, the \$7.2 million. But it will follow students individually or will be available through proposal applications through ISSP, and, I would presume, outside of First Nations University.

I'd like you to tell me why those proposals will not work. You've addressed it briefly, but I'd like you to elaborate.

So I have two questions: how can the minister say that there was no plan or proposal, given what we've heard today, and why will the proposals the minister put forward not work?

•(1620)

Chief Guy Lonechild: I'll ask for some assistance from Ms. Myo as well, but for ISSP funding, the funding primarily does not cover core funding, operations, equipment.

We fully believe, given that Minister Rob Norris, last year or a year and a half ago, at the Canadian Council for Ministers on Education, used First Nations University as a best practice... We asked the very same question: what has changed? Everything and nothing has changed.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm sorry, Chief, could you repeat that? A year ago the provincial government was citing you among best practices?

Chief Guy Lonechild: Absolutely. At the CCME meeting in Saskatoon...that First Nations University was a major catalyst for people entering post-secondary education, and having that as a model, for the institution itself, to be that welcoming environment for people who enter post-secondary.

Our insistence is that we need sustainable multi-year funding. ISSP just will not cut it, in terms of the program support funding that would be required to run an institution as such, and we would look to ensuring that we have a model that's going to be agreed to by our working group.

Our working group member can clarify this a little further, concerning the transitional model.

The Chair: I think Mr. Turk wanted to answer there as well.

Mr. James L. Turk: Let them finish, if you wish, Chairman.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Dorothy Myo: Thank you.

Just to finish on the ISSP funding, it is targeted for programming and doesn't address the operational funding of institutions. There are other limitations to it as well, including the maximum amount that can be accessed through the program funding.

On the other part of this, concerning our transitional model and actually having a plan, the working group has been at this for four weeks. As a working group, we have said that we would not go to the media until we were finished our work. It has just been today that we were able to sign off on our memorandum of understanding. This has been really a work in progress. So that's the reason for it.

•(1625)

The Chair: Okay.

We have about a minute and 45 seconds left, and Mr. Lundy and Mr. Turk wanted to get in a short comment.

Go ahead, either of you.

Mr. James L. Turk: I'll be very quick.

There is no university in this country that operates on proposal-based funding. Every university in Canada operates on core funding. A university cannot survive when it has to exist year by year on proposal-based funding, because of the long-term commitments it has to make in terms of programs and in terms of faculty.

Secondly, allowing the funding to simply go to the students without a first nations option for them means that those who need and want that option—and there are many—will not have it.

The Chair: Mr. Lundy.

Mr. Randy Lundy: The first question from Jean Crowder was about the minister's comments about not being aware that this proposed agreement was in the works.

I think it's important to remember that the working group has been working for about four weeks now, and Indian Affairs has had observer status, with two members observing, since the inception of this working group. I'm not sure how Minister Strahl could be unaware of the fact that this agreement was in the works. It doesn't make any sense to me, but somebody will have to ask him.

Also, I read the unofficial transcripts of your last meeting, of Thursday, March 18. One of the other things I noticed in Minister Strahl's comments was that on at least two occasions he stated that the province wasn't onboard either; that he was just doing what the province was doing; and that if we asked the province, they would say the same thing, that they were not willing to fund this model either.

I'm not sure what model Minister Strahl was referring to, because the news we've just gotten is that the province is onboard. The province is willing to fund this new model. It is signed, sealed, and delivered.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lundy. That will wrap it up.

Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

Now we'll go to Mr. Duncan, for seven minutes.

Mr. Duncan.

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

You know, the committee's in a very difficult spot. Here we are, talking about an issue that's fluid. Before you appeared today and we were talking about having you appear before the committee, I expressed great concern about this, because here we are talking about an e-mail that none of us has seen. We're talking about a situation in which nothing is finalized. We're being told different things by different people.

With regard to the statements that were just attributed to the minister, there was no certainty about anything about the statements...and I think the statements made by the minister were quite appropriate at the time, and accurate and reflective of what was going on. The department has continued to take an active role and is very concerned about the situation. Of course our primary concern is with the students.

I took the time to look at the All Chiefs' Task Force report from 2005. The problems at FNU predate 2005. It's quite clear in that report. And a lot has changed since that time. There are 60 other institutions that are receiving ISSP funding. Enrolment at all of the universities and post-secondary institutions that I have talked to, from the aboriginal and first nations community, is up, while it's down at First Nations University. The enrolment numbers that I have show that enrolment at First Nations University today is about one-half of what it was in 1995. There's been a steady decline.

There are other options. Students have exercised their ability to go where they want to go, and they've done so. At the same time, I appreciate what Mr. Lundy was saying about the faculty, the curriculum, and everything else. I think what we're looking at is a concern about administration, pure and simple.

There is something that hasn't been talked about here—and I'd like to get it on the record. There is revenue to First Nations University of approximately \$1 million per year through the lease to the federal government of part of their building. That certainly is some core funding, I would say. The department released \$1.5 million this month to First Nations University, or will be releasing it shortly. That's a result of two items that were being held back for late reporting.

I guess my question is whether this wouldn't cover the activities to the end of the school year for the students who are currently there, which has to be our first and foremost concern. Let's make sure the students get through this session, which ends in April sometime.

The second question I'd like to get some clarity on is where we sit in terms of this debate that's gone on about whether there are moneys in the scholarship fund or not. I know that's been batted around quite a bit, and it would be nice if we could get some clarity on that.

• (1630)

The Chair: Decide amongst yourselves; if you all want to speak, we'll try to fit you all in. We're sitting with about two minutes left, so maybe you can give 30-second responses, if you're able.

Mr. Randy Lundy: Thirty seconds each?

The Chair: Yes, about that. Go ahead.

Mr. Randy Lundy: I'd like to make a couple of observations. We've heard time and again that other options are available for aboriginal students in the province. I think we've made a clear case that the options of the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan, with all due respect, don't fulfill the needs of our students. They don't have the same programming that we have and they can't suddenly erect that kind of programming.

The other options being referred to are that our students become plumbers and welders and don't get a university education, because at the university level there aren't other options.

As we've said, proposal-based funding may work for other post-secondary institutions, but they don't work at universities. We offer four-year degrees. You have tenured faculty. You cannot proceed on proposal-based funding at a university level. That may be fine if you're training people to be welders and plumbers, but that's not what we're about here.

I'll defer the financial questions.

The Chair: Do Chief Lonechild or Ms. Myo want to get in there? Mr. Turk wants to as well.

Chief Guy Lonechild: We'll both respond.

I can't reiterate any more strongly to you that we have new leadership at the helm of the FSIN. We had gained unanimous support at the chiefs in assembly that changes needed to be made, that mistakes were made. The scholarship money was a problem for the university. We need to be able to ensure that those problems don't happen again.

I'd like to have Dorothy talk a little bit about our next steps, but for the most part we've seen the problems in the last few months. Of course, the Minister of Indian Affairs has made some allowances for us to continue and make payroll, and some of the short-term objectives are to ensure that the students continue. Our efforts with the working group will point to a much stronger institution in the future.

Dorothy, if I can, I'll have you answer as well.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we are out of time. Whatever thoughts you had, same with Mr. Turk, perhaps you could just hold those and then in the course of our next round you'll have an opportunity to get on the floor and enunciate your point.

We'll now go to the second round of questioning. It will be even more difficult, because it's only five minutes now for both the question and the response.

We're going to begin with Mr. Bagnell from the Liberal Party of Canada.

Five minutes, Mr. Bagnell.

• (1635)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. You're doing an excellent job, as usual.

I'd like to start by saying nothing is in motion because we can put conditions on our funding that anything needs to be in place at the time we fund it.

I'd like you to get back to us in writing—I don't want you to answer this question now—on just the technical details of what you would get through ISSP, the maximum, why it's not enough, etc. Also, perhaps you could give us on paper the written comment on the best practice that the minister from Saskatchewan said to you.

I don't really need to say anything, because you've already said it all, but there have only been three reasons why you wouldn't get the funding restored. The most ridiculous one is that we're going to continue giving funding to the students. Well, students, as you all said, all get funding anyway, so that's a red herring. They always will get funding under the ISSP and INAC funding, so that's not an answer.

That would go on if they could go elsewhere, and as you've quite eloquently said, you can't go elsewhere if there's no elsewhere to go to continue your programming. You've given a lot of unique examples. It's like saying we'll give you money for gas for a car but you can't have a car, or we'll let you learn Cree or French in this particular university when it's not even offered.

So it doesn't help that you can go elsewhere when there's no elsewhere to go. You can't get the indigenous culture transfer, the indigenous environment programs, the dental therapist, which is really going to hurt the health minister, because the only way she can get dental therapists in Nunavut is through your university. It's not as if there's an option.

The last question, of course, which you've also answered, is the problems in the past, which everyone here acknowledges, and you've dealt with them. Any suggestion that there's a problem now that the agreement's signed would be an insult to the University of Regina, a great institution.

I don't know if anyone wants to comment on any of those. It doesn't seem like anyone in this room can give a reason now, because any of the reasons there might have been have already been answered, and I don't want to use the last of the time for it; I have one more question.

In fact, maybe I'll ask my last question, and then anyone can answer on any of these things.

What is the worst thing someone from the Government of Canada—either the minister, the minister's office, or employees of the Government of Canada—has said to you in discussions you've had related to the university?

The Chair: It's somewhat open. Who wants to go first?

Ms. Timmons, go ahead.

Dr. Vianne Timmons: "I don't care" would be the worst thing I heard. And "I don't care", to me, is not the kind of answer I would expect from my federal representatives when I'm talking about the lives of students, faculty members, and staff members.

I would also acknowledge that I, as president of the University of Regina, have just stated we have a signed MOU as of half an hour ago.

If you questioned that, Mr. Duncan, I would be extremely insulted. I just said that it's signed and done.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Boire.

Mr. Gary Boire (Vice-President Academic, University of Regina): Thank you very much.

I'd like to acknowledge Chief Lonechild.

The worst thing I've heard is that "we don't believe in deathbed conversions". This is a comment that I think is an inaccurate perception of the actions taken by the chief and FSIN and the assembly of chiefs. I think it's an insensitive response to the restructuring changes the working group has been working on for the past four weeks. And I don't think it's an especially helpful

perception of the long-term vision of post-secondary education for aboriginal students.

It's been mentioned that the department of Indian languages and literatures program is unique in Canada. It's unique in more ways than one. It's not simply that books by aboriginal authors are taught. What is significant is that this unit is dedicated to the preservation of languages such as Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota, Dakota, Lakota, as well as Dene. We all know that the death of a language is the death of a culture. We all know that being prevented from speaking your own language is a crime we hope never to repeat in this country.

Thank you.

The Chair: There are only 40 seconds left. Does anyone else want to just quickly jump in on that?

Madam Myo, go ahead.

Ms. Dorothy Myo: I think what I want to say is that it's not so much what people are saying; it's the fact that there isn't anything being done. It's really a case of not so much what is said but the fact that there's no action, from our perception.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Bagnell.

Let's go now to Mr. Clarke for five minutes.

Mr. Clarke, go ahead.

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

I'd like to thank the committee for coming in here today.

I'll be asking Chief Lonechild and Mr. Turk some questions.

But first, a very disturbing comment was said here—that I don't care. That's further from the truth. I'm first nations. I care. I hear the opposition, when they're travelling throughout my riding...that I don't care. I do care what goes on in my riding, in my province.

Education is very important. My wife's a teacher. I'm very proud to say that I've had two schools built in my riding of northern Saskatchewan, two new additions, skills training, and housing for Northlands College. This isn't a racial issue. This is about education.

Now, Mr. Turk, when I hear about the accreditation being lost in 2008 by the First Nations University of Canada, what is the underlying factor that caused it? And when...or have they received their accreditation? Is it back in place as we speak, or is it still being worked on? Where are you on the timeline for that?

Mr. James L. Turk: I'd just like to clarify one thing. There is no accreditation of universities in Canada, because almost all universities are public institutions chartered by acts of government.

What I referred to is the Canadian Association of University Teachers. When a university violates a fundamental principle that we feel is essential for any university to uphold and we are unable to get them to resolve it satisfactorily, we censure the institution. This is a recommendation that faculty not take jobs there, that events not be held there, and so forth.

We censured the First Nations University over the issue of governance. As the All Chiefs' Task Force pointed out, as the Saskatchewan commission pointed out, this structure of governance was highly politicized, very large, and inappropriate. That was fixed by a decision of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, under the leadership of Chief Lonechild, and that board was dissolved. A wholly new structure, consistent with the All Chiefs' Task Force and recommendations, was put in its place. So that was dealt with.

With regard to our censure, the censure is imposed by the council of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, which is a body of representatives from all of the universities across the country. It meets twice a year. It's meeting next on April 22 to 25. The academic freedom and tenure committee and the executive of CAUT have unanimously recommended to council that censure be lifted. It will be lifted on April 22.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Okay.

There was a mention of the governance agreement being signed here. Is that the same thing as the MOU?

Chief Guy Lonechild: As we speak, the memorandum of understanding is being signed by the Province of Saskatchewan; it's signed by me. It is also going to be followed by a financial management agreement, a liaison agreement, and of course a transition agreement.

That is the overall umbrella agreement for us in this new partnership.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Chief, you've mentioned about your platform and accountability for First Nations University. Now, we know about the financial misappropriations that took place from the previous administration, and that was your main platform.

For a follow-up here, what is the position of FSIN now to make those people accountable for the possible fraud that took place? What steps are being allocated as first nations and also from the FNU to follow up on making those people accountable?

Chief Guy Lonechild: Number one, I think the board has taken the steps to fire the president and ensure that proper measures will be taken on behalf of the First Nations University of Canada. They've demonstrated that there is, I think, a willingness to ensure full accountability and transparency, that any and all funds that may have been misused or misappropriated be reported to our partners. We've done so, both with the provincial government.

I think we looked at ensuring that if people have done wrong, then the proper steps will be taken on behalf of the board.

I'll let our working group member speak a little bit about that and expand on it.

• (1645)

The Chair: We're really out of time, so Ms. Myo, just a very short 15 seconds.

Ms. Dorothy Myo: Thank you.

On the governance, I want to say that the chiefs in assembly made a commitment on March 9 that they will be dealing with this and that they will make the appropriate amendments to the legislation that

govern the First Nations University to ensure that it's depoliticized and that we have a competency-based, skill-based board of governors that will oversee the university operations and management.

The Chair: Thank you.

I know that Mr. Lundy wanted to get in, but we'll just have to hold that thought, Mr. Lundy, and we'll get you back on the next round. There'll still be time.

[*Translation*]

Do you have a question, Mr. Lévesque?

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome to all of the witnesses.

I truly sympathize with you. There was a time when I really did not like you very much, because first nations members made up one-third of my community. Every time we initiated positive action, they made it difficult, as you witnessed firsthand, and put up additional roadblocks. Because of the barrier that you erected, we managed to skirt the problem and put in place different measures to ensure the program's long-term survival. That was something that had to be done, because our first nations members had to leave their cultural environment in order to take courses that aligned with their culture.

Despite the fact that they had to leave to study, many of them speak English and write in English. They speak their native language, but are unable to read or write in that language. The gap between the two nations is wide indeed, because people still do not understand each other. The First Nations University of Canada was a critically important institution, regardless of the start-up costs and the mistakes that may have been made along the way.

Earlier, Diane spoke of how she had left her community to pursue her studies in environmental sciences and to receive a culturally sensitive education.

With regard to the university's administrative practices, what administrative powers has the First Nations University of Canada ceded to the University of Regina?

[*English*]

Dr. Vianne Timmons: In the new shared management agreement, the University of Regina will oversee all financial interactions that are done with First Nations University. We will serve as an oversight umbrella for the financial dealings of First Nations University.

That's a huge concession from the first nations community, and through that we will also work hard to build the capacity of members of First Nations University and first nations people to get the skills they need and the knowledge they need to continue operations. We will be working on mentorship, working with staff, working with faculty to build the administrative skills within the federated college.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I see. Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Dorothy Myo: Thank you.

In the partnership that we have outlined between the University of Regina and the First Nations University of Canada, which is supported by the FSIN as well as the Province of Saskatchewan, we have agreed to have what we are calling a shared management stewardship model. Thereby, over a period of four years we will work with the university and draw on their expertise and that of many of the professionals required to help us with administration and management, as well as board development and support in that regard. This is in addition to the budgeting, the financial, oversight that they will provide in that four-year period to the university. It will be a case of having an integrated approach to the management and the finances of the university, and also the board of governors will undertake a period of board training and development to ensure that at the end of the four years we will be at a stage where we can do our work.

Thank you.

• (1650)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lundy would also like to respond.

Mr. Lundy.

[English]

Mr. Randy Lundy: There are two things. I'll try to be quick, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to address a comment that Mr. Clarke made earlier. He suggested that this is not a racial issue. I would agree; it is not a racial issue, but it is a cultural issue.

Where did Mr. Clarke go?

The Chair: He's still here.

Mr. Randy Lundy: It is a cultural issue. We are talking about the only first nations-owned and -operated university in the country, so while the difficulties may have been financial and administrative, you can't divorce that from the fact that this is a culturally unique institution and therefore it is a cultural issue, if not a racial issue.

The last thing is I'd like to thank Mr. Lévesque for his question. He was asking about cross-cultural learning and understanding and cooperation, in part. This new shared co-management agreement between the University of Regina and the First Nations University of Canada is a model that we can all learn from in terms of cross-cultural cooperation and understanding.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

That will be followed by Madam Crowder and Mr. Dreesen.

Mr. Rickford, for five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming today.

I want to encourage us to have a conversation here rather than using tones that take us toward somewhere where we can't come to a resolution we can all live with. In fairness, we're dealing with a

unique set of circumstances. The federal government, as you all know, is not normally in the business of providing core funding for universities, and so it goes a long way to demonstrate historically the commitment and gives a moment for pause as we deal with what appear to be some fairly profound and systemic issues that, in fairness, other members of the committee have conceded to perhaps, or acknowledged, depending on your understanding of what they're saying, and by admissions of witnesses here today.

That said, I'd like to bring some clarity to an issue in which I have a particular interest. Those questions will be directed to Mr. Turk.

I'm reading from a document from your website that is a chronology of the events for the First Nations University of Canada. To the extent that you're familiar with that and just by way of review, it appears that in 2008, after three years of waiting for the implementation of the All Chiefs' Task Force governance recommendations, the Canadian Association of University Teachers in fact voted unanimously to censure First Nations University governance, over governance and academic freedom issues. Is that true?

Mr. James L. Turk: Yes.

Mr. Greg Rickford: So it was both governance and academic freedom issues?

Mr. James L. Turk: May I comment on that?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Absolutely.

Mr. James L. Turk: Okay.

They are intertwined. That is, when the governance structure allows those on the board, or the chair of the board, to interfere directly to seize computer files of faculty and so on, it threatens their academic freedom. So they're not "disentangleable", if I can use that word.

Mr. Greg Rickford: They're not mutually exclusive.

Mr. James L. Turk: They're not mutually exclusive, no; they're closely related to each other.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I just wanted to bring that up. I've spent enough time in several universities across the country to focus on the whole area of academic freedom issues. I'm going to drill down just a little bit more on that issue.

Can you elaborate specifically on what some of those limits turned out to be? How were they manifest, from the perspective of the teacher in the classroom or what have you?

Mr. James L. Turk: The concerns we had were not so much at the level of the teacher in the classroom. But when the initial problems happened in 2005 and the university's computer was seized—copies of the hard drive—it had all the faculty and student records, faculty research materials, things that were the intellectual property of faculty. When that was seized, we saw it as a very serious matter.

As I think Professor Lundy indicated, at the classroom level the faculty worked very hard to sustain, and I think were successful in sustaining, a good learning experience for the students. It was more at an institutional level that the issues we were dealing with existed, rather than in the classroom.

•(1655)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Beyond censure and boycott, what steps were taken to resolve the particular concern you had—if any were?

Mr. James L. Turk: It's almost hard to enumerate all the things we've done over the last five years. It started with a meeting I had in early April 2005, a public meeting for the board, the faculty, and the students of the university in the atrium of First Nations University, where we articulated our concerns. It was simulcast to the three campuses. We had a series of additional meetings and in November 2005 we had a symposium at First Nations University to which we brought principally first nations academic staff from across the country to address these issues. There's been a whole series... We did everything we humanly knew to do to try to get these things changed.

Mr. Greg Rickford: And you're comfortable that they did as well?

Mr. James L. Turk: That...?

Mr. Greg Rickford: That the other stakeholders did as much as they could, so that you could feel satisfied taking this position that you currently have taken?

Mr. James L. Turk: We're completely satisfied that the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, the First Nations University, and the University of Regina have addressed our concerns fully.

Mr. Greg Rickford: And your confidence is that there would never be limits placed on academia again, particularly in the example that you gave?

Mr. James L. Turk: We certainly don't expect that there would be. If there were to be, then we would be back.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Are there safeguards in the agreement that was signed 20 minutes ago, for example?

Mr. James L. Turk: Well, there are safeguards—

Mr. Greg Rickford: Do you know whether they're in that memorandum of understanding?

Mr. James L. Turk: No. There are safeguards in the collective agreement that the faculty have with the university. There was a governance structure that didn't respect some of those undertakings.

We have academic freedom issues going on with about 30 universities across the country currently, so I can't say that it will never happen. All I can say is that they put in place a structure that we feel is reasonable and gives as much assurance as can be given.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Is your association a party to this memorandum of understanding that she's talking about?

Mr. James L. Turk: No, we're not.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Would it normally have been, under any set of circumstances?

Mr. James L. Turk: No.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Would you even have had access to that document for your consideration?

Mr. James L. Turk: No, not normally.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Rickford.

Now we'll go to Ms. Crowder, for five minutes.

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

Due to the miracles of modern technology, some of us have a copy of the memorandum of understanding, which is signed by the province and which does commit to \$5-plus million. It does outline the reorganization and administration of the First Nations University during the interim period, the administration, the financial accounting—

Mr. John Duncan: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On a point of order, go ahead, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. John Duncan: We have an issue on this side. We don't have the document and we have somebody quoting from it. If you're going to quote from it, we want a copy.

The Chair: He is in fact correct. The member will know that when we have documents available for committee members, particularly if you're going to refer to them, they must be circulated to committee members in both official languages. That is the rule we would like to abide by.

I would ask, Ms. Crowder, that while you may have been given a copy of this privately, you keep it separate from your arguments or from questions that you put this afternoon.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I guess the only comment I was trying to make was that members of this committee have indicated they wanted some assurance that there was a signed document. I have a copy and can say that I have a copy of the signed document, then. I won't refer to the contents of the document.

The Chair: Please, yes, unless we have it in both official languages.

In fairness, it should be available to all members of the committee if it's going to be part of our discussions.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I understand it has been sent to the clerk, and perhaps in the interim, between the time we recess and we recommence, it can be made available to all committee members. I don't know about the ability of having it translated at short notice. I'm sure it won't be—

The Chair: We'll investigate that option.

Go ahead.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I want to come back to the committee members just in terms of a letter that came out from Arok Wolvengrey, and I wanted to touch on one comment in that letter. It says:

At this time of supposed reconciliation for the disastrous effects of the residential school system, language is the last great issue remaining to be addressed by the governments of this land...

I think that speaks to the importance of the First Nations University, and I'm just going to throw it open for comment at this point.

Also, did you want to have any further comment on the agreement that has been signed?

Chief.

Chief Guy Lonechild: I'll ask for some support, but very quickly, the Speech from the Throne talked about strengthening student support, and we believe strengthening student support also means that institutions that serve post-secondary students in this country, such as the First Nations University, are an integral part of that; and that the Indian student support programming as well as the post-secondary student support programming are a vital and important part of that.

In this way forward, I think, as a whole, we can say that the economic spinoffs from graduates, as opposed to people who are on the welfare line, speak loud and clear that we have a real concerted effort as Canadians to ensure that we move forward in strengthening opportunities as opposed to closing doors.

● (1700)

The Chair: Ms. Myo.

Ms. Dorothy Myo: Thank you.

The very reason why the First Nations University of Canada—which was, I guess, first the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College—was established in the first place was to look after languages so that we could preserve and protect them and pass on the indigenous knowledge, as I said earlier. That was the vision of our elders as to why this university was so important to our young people and to future generations.

We are committed to having a first nations university that's transparent and accountable to all first nations and our neighbours, our non-first nations and first nations alike. These are the kinds of benchmarks we're setting for ourselves as a working group, to have that kind of accountability, not just financial, management, governance accountability but also our historical, our language, our cultural accountabilities that I think are a really important part of this institution.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Duncan, on a point of order.

Mr. John Duncan: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we are sitting here...and I'm sorry, but we are talking about a document that is brand new. We don't know what the government approach is federally on this document. We don't have it available in French.

I'm sorry, but to perpetuate this meeting doesn't work for us. I don't think it's appropriate, and I think it's out of bounds.

So my suggestion is that in order to properly deal with something that has occurred here, the appropriate measure for this committee is to adjourn and reconvene when we've all had a chance to digest exactly what has transpired here. To continue these proceedings is simply unworkable and inappropriate.

The Chair: On the point of order, in deference to my earlier comment, I would just say that there's no procedural reason why a document that is circulated privately can't be commented on. It would be no different than someone providing a newspaper article or something one would want to quote from. And I'll get to your final question in a moment.

That said, it's recognized that this particular document that has been referred to brings a substantial element to our discussions this

afternoon. I would think it only proper that whoever is the source of that document might consider providing all members with the pertinent document. However, it can't be ordered as such.

Are you moving then for adjournment, Mr. Duncan?

Mr. John Duncan: Yes, I am. I'll move to adjourn, because this is a seminal document, central to the discussion that's going on here. It's inappropriate to the extreme.

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn.

Just to clarify, Mr. Duncan, as you know, we do have a second part to this meeting this evening. Is it your intention that we adjourn this meeting completely? We have witnesses scheduled for this evening.

Mr. John Duncan: Well, we have time between adjournment now and when we would reconvene, in any case, after the votes. So we have an opportunity to revisit.

● (1705)

The Chair: So the motion would be to suspend the meeting until after votes.

Members, that is the motion. The motion is not debatable.

Chief Guy Lonechild: Just for the record, this has been sent to the clerk.

The Chair: I don't know that it has been verified. As you know, the clerk is with us here this afternoon. We can't verify that in fact it has been received or that we can have it available in both official languages.

Nonetheless, the motion has been put on the floor. We're past the point of order. I've ruled on the point of order. We now have a motion to suspend. It's not debatable.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan, for your intervention.

We will continue on, but I will say again, for whomever is the source of this document, that this is extremely pertinent to our conversations here this afternoon. I would urge you to consider sharing it with all members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemay?

Mr. Marc Lemay: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I know Mr. Goodale has some questions that he wanted to ask. We could hear from him, then adjourn the meeting in 10 minutes to go and vote.

In the meantime, we'll take the document and set it aside. We can't use it because it is not in both official languages. Obviously, we cannot discuss the contents of a document that has not been translated and officially tabled in both languages. However, we could allow those who had questions to ask them, so that we can wrap up our business.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for your intervention. However, I do have a speakers list at the moment, and the meeting will continue.

Ms. Crowder, you had about one minute and 20 seconds left, if you would like to finish your five minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I know there were other people who wanted to comment.

Diane.

Mrs. Diane J. Adams: I would like to build on the idea of the languages and how important they are. Languages are just a small piece of the puzzle of all the important cultural preservation that the First Nations University has been doing for 34 years. Students at this university are being told, time and time again, by the Government of Canada that they are being protected. But when first nations students and non-first nations students who have chosen to study at the First Nations University are being told that the university that has been working so very hard to preserve their culture, their languages, and all of those things that were lost through residential schools is going to close, and they will be forced to go and integrate into a mainstream institution that has not been doing that important cultural preservation work, on the floor and to the students, it feels like a policy of assimilation.

I will say very strongly that this is the reality of how students are interpreting this and how they feel that it is a real attack on their ability and their right to learn in an environment that honours their traditions and their culture; no different from French Canadians deciding to study at a French university, or Christian people deciding to study at a Christian university.

[Translation]

The Chair: Fine then. Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

[English]

That's the end of our time.

Merci, Ms. Adams.

Now we're going to go to Mr. Dreeshen for five minutes, followed by Ms. Fry.

Go ahead, Mr. Dreeshen.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

I'm a former educator. As a matter of fact, ironically, I have taught for 34 years, the length of time that your institution has been around.

Whether it's labour disputes or week-long blizzards during diploma exams and so on, I know there's a lot of stress that students have. I'd like to really focus on the types of things that are happening for the students, because that's really where I'm coming from, and for all the educators and business managers who are here, that should be what we're talking about.

To Ms. Adams, what types of support from staff and from your peers are you getting in order to relieve some of the pressures that students will be having under this stressful situation?

• (1710)

Mrs. Diane J. Adams: I think that were it not for the fact that we were students of the First Nations University, we would all have had

nervous breakdowns by now. Fortunately, First Nations University has been incredibly successful in creating what I like to call really a home, a safe place.

In fact, I would just like to let you know that right now the students of the university have moved into the university, because they feel it is their home, and the faculty and the staff have committed to not only being people who facilitate education but to being mentors and supporters. There's also the fact that we have three staff elders.

So it is the cultural components that are allowing students right now to continue and the fact that I and our student association have been fighting on behalf of most of our students so that they can go back to school.

However, the traumatic effects of the pulling of the funding are far and wide, and I would just like to give you an example. The president of our student association in Saskatoon is expecting, and the stress of the situation, because of the government's action to pull the funding, has put her at risk of miscarriage of her pregnancy. That is the true effect of these actions.

You know, it's really a situation where thank goodness we're at the First Nations University, because if we were not, we would be in big trouble.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you for your comments. I guess I was trying to see whether or not there is some sort of cohesion or whether the problems you've indicated are being exacerbated by commentary, some of what we're hearing today, and it's kind of unfortunate that it is taking place.

On our tour of the territories last fall as a committee, we met with several college leaders and we found a great collaboration between the facilities and their affiliates, such as the University of Regina.

I wonder, Ms. Timmons, whether you could explain how that affiliation works and how your distance learning program works. I know that a lot of discussion took place about language training in my former school division. This is something that we did online. It's something that is being expanded upon. This is the way in which we are planning to reach out to all other areas.

I'm wondering whether it becomes part of the model that you have, and quite frankly whether or not, if the university were trying to expand to all people, they would be thinking of those models rather than the concept of institutionalizing: bringing people into one particular facility area.

So my first question is for Ms. Timmons, and then perhaps Mr. Lundy.

Dr. Vianne Timmons: The University of Regina has extensive outreach programs, right into Nunavik, where we do our Bachelor of Education program with Arctic College. We do programs in Whitehorse and we do programs all over Saskatchewan, as does First Nations University presently.

We have not duplicated the knowledge base at our federated college, First Nations University, so we do not have the capacity or knowledge in our own institution to do the kind of work First Nations does. It would seem ridiculous to us to hire people when we have expertise in a federated college that our students access all the time. As I mentioned before, a thousand of our students access courses through First Nations University. We approve all the hiring of the faculty; we approve all the courses they offer. So we're intimately integrated, but we have no intention of duplicating the vast knowledge there. And they do outreach all over Saskatchewan and into the Northwest Territories, as do we. We don't duplicate; we complement.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Lundy.

Mr. Randy Lundy: Unfortunately, we've been under-resourced in terms of developing the level of TEL, which is what we call technology-enhanced learning. We simply haven't had the funding in place to do as much as we would like to do in that area. So federal funding in the realm of \$10 million to \$12 million would be very nice, because it would allow us to do that.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Let me ask a question: is this because of a lack of administrative oversight that you've had in the last number of years? You said that you folks had talked to the administration and said that there are problems and difficulties that occur. I know that as you're speaking now you're asking, "What can we do in the future?", but I'm curious to know whether some of those things had been discussed prior to—

The Chair: We are out of time, so make just a short response.

• (1715)

Mr. Randy Lundy: We haven't had the financial capacity—to keep it short—and obviously we won't have, if we don't get our funding restored, and soon. So that has been the holdup.

In terms of moving forward, absolutely it's an area we need to expand into and do more in than we have done in the past. Only certain programming is actually deliverable through those models; there is some "face to face" that has to happen in certain programs.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Lundy, we're out of time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Dreeshen.

Now we'll go to Ms. Fry, for five minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to apologize for any suggestion that many of us in this committee did not believe your word when asked what the worst thing was that you were told by the government. You said you were told that they didn't care. I would like you to know that many of us accept your word.

Secondly, when a department or a federal institution is audited and it's shown that it isn't doing its job appropriately or that there are administrative problems, the Auditor General in many instances allows that department or that institution to fix it, to carry on, and gives them a first chance. That's the first thing that is usual procedure.

Thirdly, given that universities cannot exist without core funding and that most or all universities get core funding from provinces, but

that you, because of your uniqueness, are the only university which the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility to fund, then obviously you would close if that funding did not occur.

My question, therefore, is this. Given those processes, given the ability to give people a chance to set a plan of action, and given that the University of Regina has agreed to partner with you on administration, have you had any sort of response from the federal government that shows and understands...? Has it moved forward in any way to help your university continue to provide the unique services that it does?

Chief Guy Lonechild: I would say that by its—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Chief Lonechild; I have to stop you there. We have a rule here that once the bells begin, we need unanimous consent of the committee to proceed with the meeting.

I'll just ask, then, is there consent to continue with the meeting for, let's say, another 10 to 12 minutes?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: There is no consent.

Ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate your time and interest this afternoon. This has been very helpful. You will know that we have a second meeting planned; we'll continue with witnesses.

Members, we will reconvene here immediately after the votes. We'll have some food here for you. I'll ask you to come quickly, get a bite to eat, and then we'll sit down and get going as quickly as we can.

Again, thank you very much.

The meeting is suspended until after votes.

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_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1825)

The Chair: Members, we're going to get under way here for our second section of this study of First Nations University of Canada.

We have most of our guests. We have three joining our committee meeting by video conference.

First, I'd like to say to all of our witnesses who are joining us by video conference that we apologize for the delay. The House had votes—a number of them—to get through. I'd also like to say that you'll see on your screens that members are having a bite to eat. We're going to make this a working session.

For those of you who are joining us by video conference, we'd like to pass along that the audio and video are going to be voice-activated; that is to say that when you put your microphone button on, members here at the committee room will see your video image come up as well. So when you wish to join the conversation to make a point, simply by putting your microphone button on you will have video. We have three different witnesses, but members will only see one at a time here in the room.

Members, when you're speaking to someone who is on video link, direct your attention to the camera that happens to be zeroed in on you and you'll be speaking directly, as opposed to talking to the screen, which we tend to do just out of human nature. I've done this myself. So if you would direct your attention towards the camera, that would be great.

I'd like to begin. We have five witnesses. We'll proceed with a five-minute presentation from each one.

We'd like to begin by inviting the Honourable Rob Norris, Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour with the Government of Saskatchewan, to speak.

Minister Norris, it's great to have you with us. We'll begin with a five-minute presentation. We'll go from your presentation through each of the four remaining, and then we'll open up to questions from members—

We have a point of order.

Mr. Rickford.

• (1830)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Actually, Mr. Chair, I'm not sure it is a point of order, but I'll try it out.

The Chair: Well, go ahead.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I wasn't sure whether we were officially finished with the last round of guests, and certainly on behalf of my colleagues here and on my own behalf, we want to thank those who are still here from the previous round. We appreciate very much the enthusiasm and their presentations. I wasn't aware that we were completely finished with that round.

The Chair: Yes, because we came to the end and bells were on; we had to finish with the first round. And we did thank the witnesses.

Mr. Greg Rickford: To them, then, thank you very much.

The Chair: It's good that you should add your thanks as well for the time they spent with us earlier.

Let's go ahead, Minister Norris.

Hon. Rob Norris (Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, Government of Saskatchewan): Thanks very much for the opportunity to join you, sir, and your colleagues.

Speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, and certainly on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan, I appreciate this opportunity to appear before the standing committee to discuss First Nations University and, more broadly, issues pertaining to post-secondary educational endeavours for first nations and Métis students within the province of Saskatchewan.

I am joined here today by a number of officials, but I think what I'll do is jump directly into the body of my remarks.

We know the significance of post-secondary education for first nations and Métis students, as well as for others within the province of Saskatchewan. We're pleased that we have more than 13,000 first nations and Métis students participating in a range of post-secondary programs across our province. Those attending the First Nations University of Canada would come in at just under 1,000.

This is certainly not to detract from the significance of those students, but it is to put it in a broader context. The significance of this context, quite simply, is that we have a variety of models and, quite frankly again, there is enough work for everyone on this very important public policy issue.

Having noted the context, I'll speak directly to some of the evolution of First Nations University over the last five years. Over the course of the last five years, there has been an ebb and flow of controversy. As we came into office in late 2007, I was brought up to speed quickly on some of the key elements of those controversies.

By the summer of 2008, officials within First Nations University had approached me. The message was clear: there was a financial crisis at First Nations University. In addition to the millions of dollars that the province had already given as part of our routine budgeting, we found an additional \$2 million: \$1.1 million to take care of an outstanding collective bargaining agreement that had been in existence since 2005, then \$500,000 for increased operational spending and \$400,000 for a blueprint. That took the form of the Hanselmann-Standing report. Not unlike a previous report, the All Chiefs' report from 2005, this blueprint laid out a plan for progress.

Instead of seeing the progress that we had agreed to, there was a period of backsliding, and as we've seen over the course of the last year or so, a vice-president has been fired, CAUT has put a censure on this institution, a CFO has been fired, and along with that firing came allegations of misspending in the forms of trips, excessive compensation packages, as well as a variety of other problems. We had delays on another report that was commissioned, by Dr. Begay, and more recently we've come to discover that there are a number of questions outstanding regarding restricted funds, those pertaining to scholarships.

In early February, after much prompting and prodding, we can say that we sent a clear message, and that was that the Government of Saskatchewan had lost confidence in the direction of First Nations University. We made some very public, important comments that I think hold true today. We would not renew funding for First Nations University. We said that a path forward for the students and for others would be through a partnership, and that partnership could be with any relevant post-secondary educational institution in the province of Saskatchewan. We said we would put an emphasis on student success because, after all, this is vitally important not just for Saskatchewan but for all Canadians, and we made a clear point that we wanted and expected federal dollars, those federal dollars that were also removed from this file in the days following our decision. We expect those dollars to stay in Saskatchewan.

We also met with Chief Guy Lonechild. I want to applaud Chief Lonechild for his efforts. Under his leadership, he's been able to reinvigorate a reform process within this institution. Work began through a working group that has gone on for more than six weeks.

• (1835)

Today, obviously, you've heard and we're pleased to report that there is an umbrella agreement, an MOU that has been signed, which I think ensures that we have a blueprint for the future. It ensures greater certainty for students, greater accountability for taxpayers, and under specific conditions will ensure that provincial dollars can flow, investing in that partnership. Again, our goals are to ensure that the students, upon whom we put such great value, can continue in their studies. But we also want to make sure that there's increased accountability for the taxpayers of this province.

I want to say that all the way along I've been able to have a very respectful, frank, but friendly relationship that has been established with Minister Chuck Strahl. At this stage, certainly after ongoing dialogue, I would like not just to provide an update regarding the MOU but to say clearly—with respect, with all sincerity, but with great seriousness—that we would like the federal government to keep these federal dollars in Saskatchewan by investing in the partnership that has been established and signed today. We think this partnership, while far from perfect—and certainly we are attentive to the fact that there are many steps yet to take, with conditions that have to be met—offers an opportunity to help give greater certainty to our students and greater accountability to the taxpayers of this province.

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Norris.

We'll keep you on standby.

We have two other presentations here in the room, and we'll go back to the others. We'll take the rest in sequence.

Now I would like to invite back Ms. Christine Cram. Christine is the assistant deputy minister for the education and social development programs and partnerships sector of *le ministère des Affaires indiennes et du Nord canadien*.

Madam Cram, it's good to have you back.

[Translation]

You have the floor, for five minutes.

Ms. Christine Cram (Assistant Deputy Minister, Education and Social Development Programs and Partnerships Sector, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you very much.

Good evening, Mr. Chair, committee members, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to talk about the First Nations University of Canada and, most importantly, to discuss the important steps being taken to help ensure current students of the university can complete their academic year.

[English]

Minister Strahl has been clear that helping first nations students access and complete their education is a priority, while at the same time the government must be accountable and transparent to all Canadians, including first nations.

For many years, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has worked with the First Nations University of Canada to help it address the long-standing systemic problems related to governance and financial management of the institution. There were repeated delays by the institution in taking action on these matters. After assessing the long-term implications for sustainability of the institution and based on the record of the institution, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada decided it would no longer directly fund the university, effective March 31, 2010.

• (1840)

[Translation]

I would like to provide some context on Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's financial relationship with the First Nations University of Canada. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has provided more than \$7.3 million annually to the university to support its core operations through the Department's Indian Studies Support Program. The total budget of this program nationally each year is approximately \$22 million. The program supports more than 60 post-secondary institutions with their First Nation and Inuit studies programming across Canada. As with any financial agreement, there are terms and conditions which must be met to ensure accountability and transparency for how government monies are being spent.

[English]

In 2009 the department's regional office implemented performance-based funding in an attempt to move the university's board toward a better governance structure. The department and the university both agreed that approximately \$1.2 million in funding would be held until two critical reports were released by the university, tabled by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, and delivered to the department by the agreed-upon timeline.

These reports were a board of governors manual and a report on governance reforms, commonly referred to as the Begay report, due June 30, 2009, and a comprehensive action plan due January 1, 2010. These reports have recently been received. Pursuant to its financial commitments under the current funding agreement for fiscal year 2009-10, which is effective until March 31, 2010, the department released \$1 million last week. The final \$250,000 will be released later this week.

Although our financial arrangement with the university is ending, the \$7.3 million investment that was previously allocated to the First Nations University of Canada will remain in the department's Indian student support program under the post-secondary envelope and will be available for proposals that meet the terms and conditions of that program.

Note that this does not include operational funding. The ISSP funds the direct cost of developing and delivering college- and university-level courses for Indian and Inuit students, or of research and development of Indian and Inuit education. Operations funding for the First Nations University of Canada was the subject of an exceptional Treasury Board submission.

[Translation]

The First Nations University of Canada, as well as other eligible institutions, are always encouraged to submit proposals for funding consideration, provided that proposals are within the program guidelines.

[English]

The department's investments under the Indian student support program are supporting a wide range of programming, from aboriginal early childhood education programs to first nations governance programs and community health programs. These types of first nation and Inuit focused programs are providing benefits to the lives of not only the students undertaking those studies but also their families, and to the communities and Canada as whole.

The department also provides approximately \$300 million annually for financial assistance to eligible first nation and Inuit post-secondary students, including many students enrolled at the First Nations University of Canada. This is for their tuition fees, books, transportation, and living expenses. The funding is provided irrespective of the post-secondary institution they attend.

We all understand the importance of education and know that education is key to success and prosperity in today's knowledge-based society. The government wants first nations and Inuit to graduate with the skills they need to enter the labour market successfully and share fully in Canada's economic opportunities.

•(1845)

[Translation]

Improving education outcomes is a top priority for the government, and particular emphasis is being put on partnerships as the way forward for improving academic success for first nation and Inuit students.

[English]

We are encouraged by the fact that a joint working group was recently established between the Province of Saskatchewan, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, the First Nations University of Canada, and the University of Regina. We are hopeful that the partners will take measures to ensure that students are able to complete their academic year.

[Translation]

The department is also pleased that the Chiefs of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations approved the interim transitional model for the university.

[English]

We understand that these are difficult times for students and faculty, and the department's priority is the students currently enrolled at the university. We are working with our partners to help provide students with the support needed to successfully complete their academic year, and the department is committed to working with first nations, provinces, and our partners to improve access to post-secondary education and improve academic success.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue with your committee. *Merci beaucoup.*

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Cram.

I would now like to call on Mr. Del Anaquod to take the floor. Mr. Anaquod is the chief operating officer of the First Nations University of Canada.

You have five minutes for your presentation, Mr. Anaquod.

[English]

Mr. Del Anaquod (Chief Operating Officer, First Nations University of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I'll keep my comments to under five minutes.

First off, I welcome this opportunity to talk to you about the success of the First Nations University of Canada. One of the problems we've had is getting our story out there. Previous speakers have talked passionately about some of our successes, but I want to highlight again a number of those successes.

The decision of the federal and provincial governments to cut off funding to First Nations University on April 1, 2010, has direct impacts on: 2,000 students; 350 classes; over 200 employees, including the largest number of aboriginal Ph.D.s in Canada; 3,300 graduates; 70 research projects; and the largest concentration of indigenous programming in the world. Throughout its history, tens of thousands of students and business leaders have taken classes and courses at First Nations University of Canada.

The government's decision has more far-reaching impacts beyond these. It affects all Canadians and all of Saskatchewan's citizens.

In regard to our success, I would like to briefly highlight the impact of First Nations University's success, which is our alumni. As previous speakers mentioned this afternoon, this is a measure of our success. Our alumni includes doctors, nurses, health care providers, teachers, dental therapists, business leaders, engineers, scientists, social workers, and lawyers. We have produced hundreds of civil servants for the federal and provincial workforces and another thousand for first nations governments.

First Nations University is one of the most successful producers of first nations taxpayers in Saskatchewan. Our university draws students from across Canada, which contributes to the Saskatchewan economy and to our reputation in Canada and abroad.

Thousands of non-first nations students have completed our courses as requirements in academic programs, including justice, police studies, women's studies, education, and social work.

First Nations University provides the most unique program in the world. We offer bicultural education so that our students are completely qualified for work in the mainstream and have the additional training they need to serve in our communities.

I want to briefly touch on some of the budgetary shortfalls and jurisdictional issues we have faced since our inception.

The true measure of a great institution is not only its successes, but the obstacles and adversities it has overcome. Throughout our 34-year history, First Nations University has faced ongoing budgetary shortfalls due to federal and provincial jurisdictional disputes, and this in turn has created uncertainty and hardships. Each has a role to play: the province for its jurisdiction over universities, and the federal government for its responsibilities for Indians and lands reserved for Indians, and its treaty and aboriginal rights and constitutional obligations under section 35.

We take responsibility for some of the past actions that have happened. First Nations University has experienced internal governance and management issues. For this, we take full responsibility. However, we should not allow the decisions of a few to affect the success of many. The new interim board and leadership have addressed governance and management problems.

Based on the negative actions of a few, to shut down an institution that has had so many success stories and provides for the future of so many is unthinkable and irresponsible. It has taken many, many people to build this institution over a 34-year period and only a few to potentially destroy it. Governments have chosen to highlight the actions of these few and ignore the success of the majority.

We have a challenging future. As citizens of Saskatchewan and Canadian citizens, we are facing many challenges. One is our youth and the future of our great country. In Saskatchewan, we have over 60,000 aboriginal youth in the first nations and provincial K-to-12 system. As I sit here today, one out of every three students in Saskatchewan is aboriginal, and this number is continuously on the rise.

We are also facing a 50% dropout rate. Thirty thousand aboriginal youth will drop out in the next 10 years. Where will they go? Will they join the 2,000 street gang members that we now have in the

province? Or is the answer jails? Over 80% of the people in our provincial jails are aboriginal people. That's not the answer.

• (1850)

We have close to 5,000 children currently in out-of-home care; 75% are aboriginal. We struggle to find aboriginal foster homes for these children. Within these marginalized and frustrated youth, we are sowing the seeds of homegrown problems. As a Canadian, this is a statistic I am not proud of and a future I do not relish.

The Chair: We're over time now, Mr. Anaquod. Perhaps you could just wrap up.

Mr. Del Anaquod: Sure.

What is the answer? One of the answers is First Nations University of Canada. The First Nations University is a bridge between two cultures. The Queen, on her visit to our university in 2005, laid the foundation of that bridge by presenting us with a stone from Balmoral Castle.

Let us not tear down that bridge. Let us ensure stable, long-term funding so that, like our graduates in the past, successive aboriginal generations will become productive and contributing Canadians.

Thank you.

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

We now go to our second video conference witness, and that will be Mr. Lorne Dennis.

Mr. Lorne Dennis (As an Individual): All right, coming through.

The Chair: Great. So it works when we want it to.

You've heard the audio here, Mr. Dennis. We're delighted that you could join us here this afternoon from Edmonton.

Members may know that Mr. Dennis is a former chief financial officer for the university.

Mr. Dennis, you have five minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Lorne Dennis: Thank you so much.

Thank you for giving me, as an individual, the opportunity to address the committee. As I'm not representing any group, I suspect the flavour of my comments may be somewhat different from what you'll hear from others, and I beg your forgiveness if I may not be quite as politically correct as some.

The issue I'd like to address is whether there is a significant long-term value in keeping FNUC open and operational.

Let me give you a little bit of background as to why I have anything at all to say on this topic. I became connected with the First Nations University of Canada in the last half of 2004 and the first half of 2005 when I was under contract to the school. I was indeed the senior financial officer.

I came to FNUC as a skeptic. I was a management consultant, an MBA with a 15-year history of dealing with businesses in crisis—bankruptcies, insolvencies, and turnarounds. I had seen it all from the perspective of bad management, and I was led to believe that I would see more of it at FNUC.

I found the school to be a place of extremes. I was impressed with the overall competence of the staff. I was also profoundly struck by their commitment and passion for the school. Conversely, I was extremely frustrated by the ongoing interference of the FSIN, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, in both operations and financial processes.

I worked at the school for about a year. In July of 2005, following Dr. Eber Hampton's retirement as president of FNUC, I was instructed to use funds belonging to Dr. Hampton's Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre for FNUC operations. I refused, and offered my resignation—or, perhaps more accurately, I terminated my contract at that time. So that's my connection.

Why is FNUC important? Let me make a couple of general comments from my perspective. Higher education is aligned with greater employment opportunities within Canadian society. If we are going to be concerned about growing aboriginal employment, post-secondary education for aboriginal peoples needs to be preserved and developed.

Those of us in the west and the north are painfully aware of the need for both skilled aboriginal workers and aboriginal professionals. First nations people understandably and correctly demand that they be participants in northern development, but they need the educational and intercultural tools to do so.

First nations population growth is explosive, running at six times the national average. Where aboriginal peoples exercise control over their own education, success rates are dramatically improved. However, aboriginal involvement in post-secondary education still lags well behind that of the non-aboriginal population. FNUC, I would suggest, is a bright light in this relative darkness.

First nations, Métis, and other indigenous peoples' success in higher education will breed more success, and it will also fuel our country's economic engine. As a corollary, it will reduce social assistance.

Let me make some FNUC-specific comments. First Nations University of Canada is a unique institution, growing out of the Indian Federated College, founded by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. When it became FNUC, it expanded to include all indigenous people of Canada. Its staff and faculty are almost all first nations and Métis, and are competent as well as committed. Nevertheless, the school is not exclusive. It offers higher education in a first nations-friendly environment, but provides that education not just to first nations folks but to all who choose to attend.

A culturally compatible education at FNUC provides the tools for first nations and Métis people to achieve academically. A vanilla, heterogeneous approach is much less successful than a culturally compatible or culturally relevant program.

What I observed at FNUC was that they empower students intellectually, socially, and emotionally. The school uses specific first

nations culture, including cultural objects and symbols, to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The school's faculty create a bridge between first nations students' experience and their education while still meeting the needs of the curriculum. Its approach to teaching utilizes first nations background, knowledge, and experience to frame and help inform each professor's lessons and methodology. Then the experience is reinforced back again through its own affirmation of first nations culture. And it works.

• (1855)

Now, in my opinion, using the current governance structure, or indeed any governance structure that gives a political organization control, will not succeed. Points have been made before with regard to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and their long-standing issues, as well as NFUC's volatile history. It clearly shows a governance incompatibility with regard to the school and its political masters. There are other governance models—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Dennis. Could I ask you to sum up now? We are a bit over time, so if you could just bring it to a close, that would be great.

Mr. Lorne Dennis: Thank you.

I guess the question then becomes, is it wiser to repair or to allow the broken institution to die and then start fresh? While a greenfield approach can be attractive, in the business world it's an option that's seldom chosen. It's much more difficult to start a new business than to save one that's not completely gone.

Apart from politics, NFUC has been a success in every way. Rather than ignoring those success and giving up on the vision, I strongly believe we should be remedying the clear and identifiable problems and then moving forward.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak.

• (1900)

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

Now we'll go to our final witness, certainly by no means the least. Joining us from the University of Victoria, we have the executive director for the university, Nikki Macdonald.

Ms. Macdonald, by video conference.

Ms. Nikki Macdonald (Executive Director, Government Relations, University of Victoria): Okay, I'm on. Can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes, and as you've probably heard, we have approximately five minutes for your presentation.

I'll note for all of our witnesses that after this presentation we'll go to questions from members.

Please go ahead. You have the floor.

Ms. Nikki Macdonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members, for the opportunity for the University of Victoria to speak to you today.

Dr. Lalonde and I are here to speak about broader opportunities for first nation students in post-secondary education and, in particular, to share with the committee today the great success we've had here at the University of Victoria. Our success over the past decade has been increasing the number of first nation students at the University of Victoria from 64 students in 2000 to over 700 students in both graduate and undergraduate programs today.

I will provide you with a brief overview of some of those innovative programs at UVic and then Dr. Lalonde will speak specifically to the LE,NONET project, which is a national research program that has been under way at the University of Victoria for the past six years. He will share with you a preview of the final results of that program.

In 1996, as part of its strategic plan, the University of Victoria made a commitment to develop innovative ways to make our programs more accessible for first nations peoples. This commitment has led to a number of innovative programs on campus, including: community outreach programs to aboriginal youth to enhance science, technology, engineering, and math skills; many youth student camps; an elders program on campus to support students, faculty, and staff; an aboriginal teacher education program; and, more recently, the opening of First Peoples House, which creates a welcoming and inviting environment for UVic aboriginal students that respects and acknowledges their cultures and values.

We also continue to work to further the partnership through research, with organizations such as the Centre for Aboriginal Health Research; the aboriginal transitions research project, which is examining how to support students in their transition to public post-secondary institutions; and the first nations partnership program, which trains community members in early childhood care and education in their communities, thus incorporating traditional knowledge and practices with the UVic School of Child Care and Youth Care curriculum.

These are just a few of the programs on campus at UVic. Dr. Lalonde is going to speak more specifically to LE,NONET, the research project.

Dr. Chris Lalonde (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and committee members.

I want to begin by acknowledging that I'm speaking to you from the traditional territories of the Coast and Straits Salish peoples, and I've been asked to give an overview of the LE,NONET project.

LE,NONET is a Sencoten word, a Straits Salish word, that means roughly "success after enduring many hardships". It was a pilot project funded by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, with the aim of enhancing the success of aboriginal undergraduate students at the University of Victoria.

This was a four-year research project. We developed a set of programs. We delivered them to 200 individual students, and we're currently evaluating the results.

Our programs included two financial aid programs, one a bursary program that would provide aboriginal undergraduate students with up to \$5,000 a year for their education, and the other an emergency relief funding program, because we discovered that students often

have to endure a temporary financial crisis to complete their education.

We had a preparation seminar that included general history on aboriginal peoples and specific information about the first nations of these territories. It prepared students to do research apprenticeships and community internships.

Research apprenticeships matched a student in our program with a faculty member, and they would work together on a research project of mutual interest to them. They received a course credit and a small stipend. Community internships matched a student with someone in a community or an aboriginal organization, again to work on a project of mutual interest and benefit.

We had a peer mentoring program that matched more senior aboriginal students with incoming students to help them navigate the university. And we had a staff and faculty cultural training component that helped our faculty and staff in their interactions with aboriginal students.

Now, in terms of the funding that we distributed directly to the students, we gave out nearly \$900,000, through the bursary and emergency aid program. We gave out \$230,000, roughly, for each of the mentoring, research apprenticeship, and internship programs. That works out to about \$4,100 for each student who was in our programs.

The question now is how do we measure the success of that investment? Was it worth it?

There are two ways you can do that. The first way, the more standard way, is to just look at graduation and retention rates: did the students who were in our programs have higher retention and graduation rates than the ones who weren't? But also, measuring success as it's defined by students and communities, did the programs contribute to the student's sense of identity as an aboriginal person? Did it make them feel a part of the aboriginal community on campus?

We had three comparison groups: 1,000 students who attended the university in the five years before our programs began, the comparison group; then our 200 aboriginal student participants who elected to take part in our projects; and 819 non-participants, that is, other aboriginal students on campus who elected not to participate.

● (1905)

The Chair: Professor Lalonde, we'll have to try to wrap it up there. We're a little over time right now. Could you just bring that to a close? Then we'll go to questions.

Dr. Chris Lalonde: Sure.

Here's what we found. For our participants, the continuation rate was 55%. For non-participants, it was 24%, so you get twice the continuation. The withdrawal rate for our participants was 13%, compared to 48% for students who didn't participate, so two-thirds less withdrawal. Thirty-two percent of our students graduated during the study compared to 26% of the non-participants. Ninety-two percent of them said the program contributed to their success. Eighty percent said it made them feel part of the aboriginal community. Seventy percent said it increased their sense of aboriginal identity. Eighty-two percent said it increased their understanding of aboriginal issues.

So from our point of view, an investment of \$4,100 per student pays off quite well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, both.

Thank you to all our witnesses for the presentations this evening.

At this point, we will go to questions from members. We'll start with a seven-minute question round.

For the benefit of our witnesses and those of you who have not been through this committee process before, seven minutes includes the time for the question and the answer. So keeping them as succinct as possible is always helpful, and members will be able to get more questions in and find more information that we need to do our work.

Let's begin with our first question from Mr. Russell.

Go ahead, Mr. Russell. You have seven minutes.

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

Good evening to all our witnesses. Thank you for being patient as we did our parliamentary duties.

My question goes to Minister Norris.

I first want to thank you and many others who have been in this working group trying to look for solutions to keep First Nations University open. I believe you and so many others understand the value of it. When I listened to the presentation from the University of Victoria, it certainly said to me that what First Nations University does is just the kind of work that's needed. The University of Victoria might be able to add something to that because of its success, but First Nations University certainly already has it in many respects.

Minister Norris, I want to ask about the MOU that's reportedly been signed by all four parties. Does this MOU, in your view, facilitate processes whereby you will have to have additional guarantees?

The Chair: Just hold that thought for a moment, Mr. Russell.

Go ahead, Mr. Duncan.

• (1910)

Mr. John Duncan: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we've already been here in the previous session. We said we weren't going to go back here. Here we are talking about this seminal document once again, which has not been distributed to the committee. It's a game

changer, potentially. You're going right back to the same subject again that we said we weren't going to.

I would request that the chair rule that this is off limits.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

There is no procedural ability to withhold those documents if they have been circulated to members previously. They can refer to them. As I said before, it would be helpful if more of the members were privy to them. However, the point of order is not upheld. There's no procedural problem here.

We'll go back to Mr. Russell. His question is in order.

Mr. Todd Russell: To continue on, the MOU that has been signed between the four parties...at least reportedly; that's what we've been told, and we understand. Does this, Minister Norris, in your view facilitate a way forward for First Nations University to keep its doors open for the Government of Saskatchewan to provide the \$5.2 million?

With that, am I understanding that you're asking that the federal government provide their funding of \$7.2 million, which they had previously provided to the First Nations University?

Hon. Rob Norris: Thank you very much, sir, for the question.

While there is and will remain much work to do, we think the document, the MOU, provides a blueprint or a path forward for the institution. It's a four-year agreement that will see over the course of the first year, essentially, an independent entity helping to oversee the financial situation, then the University of Regina stepping in for the final three years, playing a greater role.

We think there's a great degree of prudence here. In the first measure, if I understand your questions, yes, I have confidence that as long as the conditions within the agreement are met and can be met, then certainly this provides a pathway involving multiple years. Again, our goal is to provide that balance of greater certainty for students and greater accountability for taxpayers.

Regarding the second part of your question, as I understand it, sir, that is regarding the federal dollars, I'll draw on a recent article in the Regina *Leader-Post*, quoting the member of Parliament for Regina—Qu'Appelle. He said, "Scheer said he will do what he can to ensure that the \$7 million stays in the province."

Certainly, from where we sit, one of our initial principles as we made our decision was that these federal dollars should stay in Saskatchewan. The reference point for us was that this was not a budgetary decision taken by the province. This was a decision after much deliberation that was meant to ensure greater accountability within this institution. Certainly, for us, we want to ensure these dollars stay in Saskatchewan. Today I'm in a position, possessing the signed MOU, to say certainly we have every confidence that the best way to do that to is to ensure these federal dollars—

The Chair: Minister, could I just interrupt you there for a moment? We have another point of order here. I'm sorry.

Go ahead.

Mr. Todd Russell: Is this being taken out of my time?

The Chair: No, it's not.

Go ahead.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On a point of order, we are now talking about and hearing witnesses talk substantively about an agreement that we have not had an opportunity to review. It is not available in French for our colleagues or for anybody at committee who wants to see it.

Furthermore, I understand and respect the previous ruling you made, but there's no distinction now between background documents that we might use for discussions and questions versus a document that we would otherwise procedurally introduce at committee for the purposes of discussion. We're no longer referring to it as committee members; we're listening to witnesses talk substantively about a document that may in fact change the circumstances of what we're discussing.

I'm asking you to reconsider your decision or take it from that perspective in an effort to understand that we are talking now about the document and about its impact on this issue, period.

• (1915)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rickford.

As I said earlier, I do find it somewhat distressing that the document in question, which, we understand, has just been signed or adopted even earlier today—

Mr. Greg Rickford: Well, in fact, Mr. Chairman—

The Chair: Let me finish.

It is in fact very pertinent to today's discussion; however, as you know, the rules for committee documents are that they cannot be distributed to all the committee members unless they are submitted to the clerk, translated, and then provided.

That does not prevent either members or witnesses from making references to these. I would suggest, if members wish, that they use their own questions to put those questions to witnesses if there are certain details they would like to know more about.

As I've said before, the ruling is upheld. We'll go back to Mr. Russell and his question and we'll proceed on that basis. I admit that there is some difficulty with this, and understanding that it is recent, members have the ability, if they wish, to continue consideration of this study at a later time—

Mr. Greg Rickford: What's the purpose of the document being tabled at committee, particularly when witnesses are making references to and answering questions based on the pith and substance of the document?

The Chair: Mr. Rickford—

Mr. Greg Rickford: What's preventing me from just referring to any document at all and not having consideration made for it being in a second language or for the benefit of the whole committee?

I'm sorry for my outburst.

The Chair: There's really nothing that restricts you from doing that. I've made the ruling. I would ask members to respect that. These are the rules we're guided by.

Let's go back to Mr. Russell.

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

I'm sure we will all have the benefit of seeing the document in print at some point. We're just probing without the benefit of having it in print—for all of us, at least—so I appreciate the minister taking the time to provide more detail on the MOU.

I thank you for that.

I just want to turn to Ms. Cram for a second. Your speaking notes say that “Indian and Northern Affairs Canada decided that it would no longer directly fund the university...” Does that leave open the possibility, if there's some other mechanism by which funding can flow, that the \$7.2 million could find its way to First Nations University? Have the ISSP under this special Treasury Board directive...?

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

When the minister met with the delegation from Saskatchewan, including Chief Lonechild and others from the university and the FSIN, he invited, in fact, a proposal through the ISSP. No amount was discussed, and indeed, at that meeting—

Mr. Todd Russell: Just to be clear, though, there was \$7.2 million being provided by the Government of Canada through a special Treasury Board “directive”—

Ms. Christine Cram: Right.

Mr. Todd Russell: —if you want to use that word, out of the ISSP. Is that right?

Ms. Christine Cram: It's \$7.3 million and there is a total of \$22 million in ISSP.

Mr. Todd Russell: Yes, I'm aware of all of that.

Ms. Christine Cram: So the \$7.3 million is part of the \$22 million and when—

Mr. Todd Russell: I'm aware of all of that.

Ms. Christine Cram: Okay. Sorry.

Mr. Todd Russell: But you say that you invite a proposal and then you say the proposal must deal with the terms and conditions of the program, that is not necessarily how to receive the money out of the ISSP in first place. Is that right?

Ms. Christine Cram: There is a special Treasury Board approval that the department received in order to fund core funding at the First Nations University.

Mr. Todd Russell: But is the minister inviting a proposal from FNU or some other mechanism for core funding out of the ISSP for FNU?

Ms. Christine Cram: No, he invited a proposal under the ISSP program, but it would have to meet the criteria of proposal-driven ISSP.

Mr. Todd Russell: But that doesn't include core funding.

Ms. Christine Cram: It doesn't include core funding, no.

Mr. Todd Russell: While they need core funding to continue, you're telling them to apply to a program where you don't provide core funding.

Ms. Christine Cram: But under the program, and I'll just give an example, you can fund particular programs. So there are elements that the First Nations University currently undertakes that would be eligible for the ISSP program.

• (1920)

Mr. Todd Russell: Would you not agree, though, that they're saying they need core funding, this is the way this university needs to go forward, and what the minister is offering is basically nothing in terms of making sure that this university continues to survive? You're offering them something that does not meet the need.

The Chair: That's it, Mr. Russell.

Can you just respond briefly to that last question? Then we'll move on.

Ms. Christine Cram: I would just note that on Sunday evening the department did receive a plan from the First Nations University of Canada. We are currently reviewing it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

The next member to take the floor is Mr. Lemay, who will also have seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Minister Norris, good evening. You have heard—

The Chair: Look at the image over here.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Minister, since you are on television to my right, I will be looking in that direction.

Mr. Minister, you have heard the statement made by the deputy minister of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Since I am a lawyer in my spare time, I am going to read you something. Ms. Cram, you can correct me if I am wrong.

There is a program related to native studies meant for supporting core operations. It is a \$22 million program, and \$7.3 million of that funding was allocated to the First Nations University. It has been announced that the program will be cut.

Mr. Minister, today I saw certain documents that I was not supposed to see because they were not translated. I saw them anyway. I saw the likely agreement. We cannot talk about the agreement. We will not talk about it, Mr. Minister, but you are on the right track.

That being said, the Deputy Minister said in her statement that just like other eligible institutions, the First Nations University of Canada is always encouraged to submit proposals for funding consideration, provided that the proposals are within program guidelines.

Mr. Minister, here is my question for the deputy minister. Ms. Deputy Minister, do you believe that the First Nations University was until recently following the program guidelines and that, if not for administrative problems, it would still be entitled to the sum of \$7.3 million?

Ms. Christine Cram: That is a very difficult question, Mr. Lemay. It is clear—

Mr. Marc Lemay: Let's try to answer the question tactfully.

Ms. Christine Cram: Okay, thanks.

Clearly, there were challenges involved in the situation of which you speak. That is why the department decided to allocate funds for this year, 2009-2010, based on performance. In my statement, I have talked about the relationship between these funds and the delivery of specific services.

We decided to proceed in this manner in 2009-2010 because we were not receiving the necessary documents on time. As I have explained, though the documents were due in June and in January, those that were due in June were received in March. In the end, both sets of documents were received in March.

Mr. Marc Lemay: What if by chance there was an agreement between First Nations in Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan's Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour which would perhaps meet your requirements? What if this agreement was spelled out in a document that we are not allowed to talk about and that you might get a glimpse of soon?

Would it be possible for the government to set some money aside, perhaps around \$7 million, to come up with a solution after talking to the minister? I am certain that the minister who has been listening to our discussion will contact your minister by phone over the course of the next few hours, unless the \$7.3 million sum has already been allocated or distributed.

• (1925)

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you, Mr. Lemay. No decision has been made with regard to the \$7.3 million in question.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Listen to this, Mr. Minister.

Ms. Christine Cram: No decision has been made. It is possible that there is a memorandum of understanding or other agreements. That is our understanding of this situation. It would perhaps be possible to approve a proposal for the Indian Studies Support Program, but the recipient would have to be a partner. Perhaps there could be a partnership with the University of Regina.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Therefore, all is not lost. There is still work to be done. Mr. Minister, I wish you good luck.

[English]

Good luck to the First Nations University.

[Translation]

I have no further questions, unless you would like to add something, Ms. Cram.

Ms. Christine Cram: Yes, but—

Mr. Marc Lemay: This “but” worries me.

Ms. Christine Cram: I mean to say that it all depends on the proposal, and the proposal must be within the guidelines. We will not know how this will turn out until we have received the proposal and analyzed it.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I agree with you, but there is still a possibility. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

Ms. Crowder now has seven minutes.

[English]

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

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing today. I'm going to have a question for Ms. Cram and for Minister Norris.

Ms. Cram, just to clarify, because I'm less optimistic than monsieur Lemay, my understanding of what you're saying is that the ISSP money, the \$7.3 million, will be allocated to the Province of Saskatchewan for post-secondary education; however, it will be proposal-driven and will not provide core funding.

Ms. Christine Cram: I would say, Ms. Crowder, no, I'm not saying... There have been no decisions made about who would be recipients of the \$7.3 million.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay, so let's say hypothetically the University of Regina applied for an ISSP program that they would use to keep the doors of FNUC open. Would that meet the criteria of the program as it stands now?

Ms. Christine Cram: It depends. The ISSP program does not permit the covering of operational costs—

Ms. Jean Crowder: So in other words, FNUC would need to find another source of funds for operational costs, but it could provide for the delivery of programs—for example, language problems—that are currently delivered.

Ms. Christine Cram: It's possible—

Ms. Jean Crowder: It's possible.

Ms. Christine Cram: —for a program; depending upon the proposal and the analysis, etc., that is possible.

Ms. Jean Crowder: But in effect, it could not cover core funding.

Ms. Christine Cram: No.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay.

Minister Norris, I have a question for you. If, for example, the government does allocate the \$7.3 million to the Province of Saskatchewan but without any commitment that it could go to keeping the doors of FNUC open, where does that leave the Province of Saskatchewan? I guess the question is whether, in your view, FNUC will have to close if the federal government does not come to the table.

Hon. Rob Norris: Thanks very much. I appreciate the question.

For the Province of Saskatchewan, we've said consistently that while there is no renewed funding to First Nations University, this

partnership and certainly the agreement today are vitally important. We will invest in that partnership as long as conditions are met. Certainly the financial circumstances within which First Nations University finds itself are going to be taxing. We've said that as long as those conditions are met...and so far we're the only partner at the table that has put real dollars—over \$5 million—on the table.

We have some reference points for what other federated colleges are able to operate with regarding their funding. I would reiterate that First Nations University is a federated college at the University of Regina. But at this stage, I want to reiterate that we certainly want the funds to stay in Saskatchewan. We ask respectfully that they stay in Saskatchewan. We think and have confidence that the partnership provides a balance between the accountability piece that has been missing in the past and greater certainty for the students.

As far as federal instruments go that may be considered or utilized for that funding, we want to work as constructively as we can to ensure they suit the partnership and also suit some of the circumstances that Ottawa may have. But the bottom line is that we are going to need federal dollars. That's been on the table right from the start. We certainly don't want to see those dollars no longer flowing to Saskatchewan; we expect that they will.

● (1930)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Madam Crowder.

Mr. Duncan, you have a point of order.

Mr. John Duncan: Our notes say that we're going to be here until 7:30. It is now 7:30. I move to adjourn this session.

The Chair: Okay.

We have a motion to adjourn the meeting. This is a motion that is not debatable.

All those in favour of adjournment?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Witnesses, thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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