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Thursday, May 27, 2010

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Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

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• (1530)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.)): Order, colleagues. I'd like to bring meeting number 19 of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to order.

The orders of the day are the main estimates and supplementary estimates (A). They will be debated together.

I want to pass along the regrets of the chair, Mr. Stanton, who couldn't be here with us today, who had other obligations, as well as of my colleague, Ms. Neville. But there's a much better looking man in the chair, so I'm sure that will be edifying to all of your eyes throughout the next two hours.

I want to welcome the minister. And I know his time is valuable, so we want to get right down to it. As well, I welcome his officials, Mr. Wernick and Ms. Jauvin. It's good to have you all with us. We have the minister for a ten-minute presentation, and then we'll move into the regular round of questioning.

Mr. Minister, we're glad to have you with us. Go to it.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And I'm glad to see that none of your committee members yelled "Debate" when you mentioned how the chair looked. I thought it was obviously a sign of respect for the chair.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I welcome this opportunity to bring committee members up to date on activities within my portfolio.

[Translation]

With me today are Michael Wernick, Deputy Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and Nicole Jauvin, President of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.

[English]

The main estimates before this committee reflect the resources we are asking Parliament to appropriate, to fulfill the many responsibilities of my mandate as minister. You mentioned that the other supplementaries are also included in this discussion. I'd be very pleased to answer questions on these estimates following my opening remarks.

However, I would like to first talk about the key issues on which I want to focus in the next 12 months. Many of these you will recognize as they are a continuation of our long-term agenda to make tangible improvements to the quality of life for aboriginal and northern peoples and communities. As the Speech from the Throne and budget 2010 reinforced, our government remains committed to building a stronger, healthier relationship with aboriginal people and to realizing the vast potential of Canada's north. We're focusing our efforts on achieving a real and measurable difference in the lives of aboriginal people and northerners.

[Translation]

And we are making steady progress.

[English]

A special acceleration of these efforts came from Canada's economic action plan. Our government earmarked \$1.9 billion over two years for investment in aboriginal skills and training, in housing and infrastructure, and in support of the northern strategy. I've been pleased to table quarterly progress reports on these investments, most recently in March of this year. All these reports are available on my department's website.

As members of this committee will know, my mandate is a broad one. Today I would like to divide my remarks into two parts. Let me discuss aboriginal issues first. Our activities in the past are a good indication of where we intend to concentrate our efforts in the future.

We are pursuing a busy legislative agenda. For instance, I strongly encourage all parties to support Bill C-3. Without this important legislation, the key section of the Indian Act dealing with entitlement to registration will cease to have legal effect in British Columbia. This could have serious consequences. Approximately 3,000 people per year will be denied their basic right to register for Indian status and to access associated benefits if we don't pass that bill—as well as the many other thousands of people across the country who could access it as well.

Bill S-4, proposed legislation to resolve the longstanding issue of on-reserve matrimonial real property, is being considered in the Senate, and I will be speaking fairly soon in the Senate committee as well.

Bill C-24, introduced on May 12, proposes to facilitate the development of major commercial real estate on reserve land. I thank many committee members for speaking to me about that, and I appreciate your support for that bill.

Bill C-25, also introduced on May 12, would ensure clarity, consistency, and legal certainty with respect to land use, planning, and environmental processes in Nunavut.

Just yesterday we introduced Bill S-11, the safe drinking water for first nations act, which would enable the Government of Canada to continue making tangible progress on its commitment to improving water conditions on reserve.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the committee members for their work and encourage their cooperation and support in moving these important legislative initiatives forward.

[*English*]

We are also working hand in hand with aboriginal communities and the provinces and territories to reform and strengthen child and family services and education. Building on that, budget 2010 commits \$53 million over two years to ensure further progress toward a prevention-based approach to child and family services for first nation children and parents.

It's obvious these investments are very necessary. The aboriginal population in Canada is young. It's growing. For example, the population of first nations on reserve has a higher proportion of youth under 24 than the population of Canada as a whole. Certainly, Inuit population growth is even higher.

An increasingly young population creates a growing demand for education, social development, and community infrastructure, and these vital investments play an important role in building strong communities and enabling aboriginal people to reach their full potential.

That's why budget 2010 provides \$30 million over two years to support an implementation-ready tripartite K to 12 education agreement. I am pleased to report further progress to develop tripartite partnerships in education. In February, a memorandum of understanding was signed by the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs of Alberta, the Government of Alberta, and the Government of Canada, ensuring that first nations students receive comparable instruction and obtain comparable results whether the classroom is located on or off reserve.

Aboriginal leadership, including National Chief Shawn Atleo, has identified economic development as a key driver toward greater independence and self-reliance. This government agrees. Investments in economic development enable aboriginal people and northerners to achieve a better quality of life through economic participation built on strong foundations of governance, human capital, and infrastructure. After all, the best social policy is to create a strong economy.

In addition to expenditures for basic services, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada promotes economic development in aboriginal communities and business opportunities, both on and off reserve. My department also negotiates and oversees the implementation of comprehensive and specific claim settlements, including the implementation of practical forms of self-government.

●(1535)

[*Translation*]

Let me turn now to my northern mandate.

[*English*]

Our government is moving forward with the implementation of the northern strategy. We are making significant progress in creating a world-class high Arctic research station. Twenty partners across Canada's Arctic have seen their science and research facilities improved thanks to our Arctic research infrastructure fund.

Furthermore, we are actively reforming the northern regulatory regime to ensure that the resources in the region and their potential can be developed, while securing a better process to protect the environment. On May 3 I announced our government's action plan to improve the north's regulatory regimes, which builds on progress we have seen to date and takes important strides to make regulatory frameworks strong, effective, efficient, and predictable. We are working to give northerners a greater say over their own future and taking steps to pave the way to successful devolution.

Budget 2010 laid out our vision and investments under year two of Canada's economic action plan. Strategic investments valued at more than \$100 million over two years will improve the business climate and address key health care challenges in the north.

Of course, one of the perpetual challenges of life in the north is access to healthy food. To help northerners meet this challenge, just last week I announced a new northern food retail subsidy program I call "Nutrition North". This new program will make healthy food more accessible and affordable to people in isolated northern communities. Northerners helped us to design that. A lot of consultation went into this, and northerners will help oversee its implementation through an advisory board.

The main estimates for the first time include \$61 million in funding for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, or CanNor. CanNor was created in August 2009 and is the first-ever regional development agency for the north and the only federal agency headquartered in the north. Its specific mandate is to coordinate and deliver federal economic development activities tailored to the unique needs of northern Canada and is an important achievement of our northern strategy.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to our main estimates, the \$7.3 billion that is allocated to programs and services at INAC reflects a net increase of about \$367 million. That's a 5.3% increase over last year. With the addition of the supplementary estimates (A) for my department, tabled in the House on May 25, INAC's budget for 2010-11 will reach approximately \$7.5 billion.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, these expenditures reflect our government's commitment to address the essential needs of Métis, Inuit, first nations peoples and northerners.

[English]

The main estimates will advance these goals by taking timely, targeted action in areas such as housing, education, self-governance, and land claims. Working collaboratively with aboriginal people and northerners, these investments will make a difference and help secure a prosperous future.

I'm honoured that Prime Minister Harper has entrusted me with this important mandate, and I look forward to maintaining a very constructive relationship with your members as we continue to advance what I think is a very ambitious agenda both in Parliament and here in committee.

Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

You're right on time. I understand that we have you for an hour, and then we'll have the officials with us after that.

We'll go to our first round of questioning, starting with Mr. Bagnell for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Yes, Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Is the minister here solely to answer questions on the main estimates, or can he also answer questions on the supplementary estimates (A)? We are in fact studying both today.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Mr. Lemay, it's a good question. I think we're open for questions on either the main estimates or supplementary estimates (A). So either is available to you to ask questions on.

Mr. Bagnell, for seven minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. You're doing a shining job.

I want to ask some questions on numbers first. So I don't care; if the finance person needs to come to the table, that's fine.

On the transfers to Health Canada for the healing programs, I'd just like to get the figures from 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11, projected from the budgets in the past.

• (1540)

Mr. Michael Wernick (Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Would these have been allocations directly to Health Canada for their programs? Is that the question?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Yes, for the ones related to healing.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I'm sorry, I don't have the Health Canada estimates with me. We can provide those—

Hon. Larry Bagnell: No. I'm looking for the estimates that you have transferred, because they come from INAC.

Mr. Michael Wernick: No, Parliament gave money to INAC, and it gave money to Health Canada. We could get you the information on what Health Canada received.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay, so you'll get that for those specific years that I requested, and for the future years.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: What about the transfers to Canada Post for food mail? Do you have those figures for the same years?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes. In those cases, Parliament gave us the money and we made a payment to Canada Post, so I can get you those.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Do you have them today?

Mr. Michael Wernick: What years were you looking for?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I'm looking for 2008-09; 2009-10, which was last year; and then what you've projected for the nutrition north program for next year.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: We may be able to dig that up while we're having the rest of the conversation. Of course, with the new program changes, Canada Post won't be involved in it after next year, but there is certainly—

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I just want to know what the amount of money is. I know you said, for instance, Minister, that there is \$60 million for this year. Those are the types of figures I'm looking for.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: No, Canada Post didn't get \$60 million. For Canada Post, there's a basic rate—

Hon. Larry Bagnell: No, I meant for the program for this coming year.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Oh, yes.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The projection for next year would be very, very close to \$60 million, but we can get you more precise figures.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay, and from the last two years, hopefully, by the end of the meeting.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I'm sorry, I don't want to be obtuse, but if you want the transfers to Canada Post, are you looking for what Canada Post actually spends, or what the whole food mail program entails?

It's some \$2 million for Canada Post to administer the program, and the program itself totals approximately \$60 million.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Right. Well, you can give me all those figures. I don't want to focus on details right now.

One of the biggest issues in the north, as you know, Minister, perhaps the biggest issue for aboriginal people, is poor implementation of land claims. In particular, in my riding in the Yukon, a nine-year review, as you well know, has been going on for 11, 12, or 13 years. To the credit of your department, you signed off on an agreement, and finally, after years of waiting for the money to run their governments, they should have it now. But some other federal department has put up a roadblock. Can you tell me where we are and when we're actually finally going to get that finished?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: That is a big issue, and I understand that. In fact, when I was up in your neck of the woods late last year for the intergovernmental forum, I met with the first nations and the Government of Yukon, and clearly this was one of the big issues. The other one was the mandate of CanNor and how it's going to decide that—and we can talk about that as well. But certainly the other issue was the negotiation of the FTA.

What we've been focusing on is really twofold. One is that first nations have been keen to address what they see as some more needs on the governance part of that agreement. They see that—

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Right. Try to make it quick, so I can get some more questions. So I know that's right, yes. I just want to know when the whole deal's going to be finished, because you had a signed deal and now some other federal department has stopped it.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Yes, but there's never a deal until the deal is completely signed off on both sides. It needs to be ratified on both sides. There are ongoing negotiations that have taken place, and discussions that we've been having on this, but as I said, there are really two issues. One is the governance side, and the other one is the own-source revenue issue and how for the own-source revenue there's a certain category of own-source revenue that deals with resource revenue and some other things that are dealt with one way, and then there are other own-source revenue that need to be discussed and settled on as we move forward. So really the discussion is not focusing on the OSR that we've had in times past. I think there's a consensus on how that's going to be handled and how that needs to be handled going forward.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: When's the deal going to be finished?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: The difficulty is the devil in the details on the OSR from other sources of revenue in the longer term.

• (1545)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: So after years of waiting, when is it going to be finished? That's all. They were expecting it to be finished by now, this month.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I'm always hopeful that it's going to be finished as well, but these things are complex and they are usually multi-year deals. This deal may take effect over the next 15 years, so people on both sides of the table are careful when they're signing on, because you're signing on for 15 years and you want to know what it is you're doing. That goes for both governments, first nations and federal.

So I can't give you a date. Those things come to fruition when all the stars line up, but it's hard to say today is going to be the deal because there are many different governments involved in this.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay.

On Bill C-24 and Bill C-25—which you mentioned are coming up, and which are good bills, I think—in your discussions with your House leader, do you foresee us getting those through before Parliament closes down, or on the agenda?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I don't have a date for when they'll be debated. I'm not sure even today... I know there was a bit of going back and forth on what's going to be on the agenda even next week, but I don't have a date when that might be debated. Again, I only control part of it. I'm prepared to put up one speaker, or no speaker and sit down and be quiet, if we can get them through quickly. So trust me, anything we can do to get them through, I'll help make it happen.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: One last question—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: If you can't answer this now, could you get back to the committee in writing? I have just three short questions.

You said what the budgeting was this year. Could you let us know what percentage of increase that was from last year?

I'd also like to know the estimate you used in budgeting for the increase of the number of status Indians for this coming year, because you have to pay for each one.

Lastly, I'd like information on the estimates that your financial officials used for inflation when you were calculating the payments you would have to make.

You can get back to the committee on that through the clerk.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): That will do right to the second. Thank you, Mr. Bagnell and Mr. Minister.

Monsieur Lemay, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I want to thank the deputy ministers for being here.

My first question is about the Registry of the Specific Claims Tribunal. Mr. Minister, you know we passed legislation to implement the Specific Claims Tribunal, more than a year ago now. I see the budget.

Is it operating? Has it begun working? Are details available? Could we have some information on the Specific Claims Tribunal? I would ask you to keep it brief as I have only seven minutes, as you know.

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: We can get you as many details as you would like. Where we're at is that there is a panel of judges that has been struck who have come together, and they are in turn giving us advice as to how it should be set up to make sure that we're respectful of the judges' autonomy and their ability to work with their chief justices in each of the provinces, and as well giving us an administrative overlay as to how they see this moving forward.

We're working with them, but we're trying to be respectful to make sure that... We're trying not to give too many orders, because it needs to be independent. So there is that panel of judges. I've met with them and certainly given them the assurance that we will support them in any way, but also ensuring they're developing a budget and developing, really, protocols on how it's going to work with their chief justices so that they can make sure the work can get done and that the independence they need and desire is maintained.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Yesterday, we were briefed on Bill C-25, An Act respecting land use planning and the assessment of ecosystemic and socio-economic impacts of projects in the Nunavut Settlement Area and making consequential amendments to other Acts. My colleague from the Yukon called it a good bill. I may not be willing to go that far, but it is not a bad bill since it was prepared in cooperation with the Inuit of Nunavut.

Perhaps I did not read the estimates correctly, but will funds be allocated to implement Bill C-25 if it is passed in the current session?

I did not see anything in the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The tribunals that are operating will receive the necessary funding.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I was not talking about the tribunal, but the implementation of Bill C-25.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Its implementation will add to the workload of certain agencies in Nunavut, including the Nunavut Impact Review Board. They will get the resources they need.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you.

Here is a trick question. Were Bill C-3 to be passed—which would be unfortunate, in my view—would the funds be available? It is estimated that 40,000 to 45,000 more people would be integrated. I do not see any administration funding anywhere in the supplementary estimates. Has money been allocated for that?

•(1550)

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: It's dependent on getting the bill passed. Until the bill is passed and we know what form the bill is in... It may make considerable difference as to what obligations the department or individual first nation governments may have subsequent to that. We can't put in an estimate of the cost yet, because we don't know what the bill will look like.

We have an expert panel, which I spoke to you about last time I was here, that is making some rough guesses right now. They're not guesses; they're using their expertise—we have some very good people on that panel—but all they can do at this stage is talk about the kinds of expenses, the kinds of issues we'll have to address. Until the bill is passed, we can't in the estimates know what they might be. There might be 40,000 people, or 10,000 people, or 100,000 people—who knows?—and that, of course, makes a considerable difference.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I also read the bill, whose number I forget, that was introduced in the Senate regarding the implementation of the water quality improvement program. I think you know what I am referring to. A significant amount of money would be spent under that bill. I do not see that money either. Did I read the estimates incorrectly, once again? Has anything been allocated in that regard?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: As you know, we renewed the special funding specifically for water and waste water in the last budget. That was a two-year expenditure, built on the previous two years, of I think \$330 million over two years; then we renewed it again at \$330 million over the two years. As well, some of the money that went from the economic action plan on infrastructure specifically also was spent on water and waste water.

I think this is helping quite a bit. We've been able to reduce the number of high-risk water systems across the country from 193 down to 46, I think it is, so there's been some considerable improvement.

But again, we can't in the estimates put a dollar number any further, because the bill has to go through in some form, and until that form is nailed down, we'd be really guessing at what the next step might be.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Education is one of National Chief Shawn Atleo's priorities. You said it, and I believe he repeated it. Is there anything in the Main Estimates 2010-2011 or the supplementary estimates to build more schools or repair existing ones? As we know, a number of communities have been waiting a long time. I know announcements have already been made, but will there be others in the 2010-2011 budget?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Well, what you see is what's in the estimates. Certainly we're following through on the economic action plan funding that is going to—

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Forgive me, but I want to say that Greg will be happy about the economic action plan, because he talks about it at every meeting.

Please continue. I apologize, Mr. Minister.

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: He's a very wise member of the committee, I'm sure. Of course, it didn't hurt that he has a couple of first nations in his riding that are going to benefit from this and that there are a couple of schools that we were able to announce in northern Ontario. I don't know the total number of schools that will be... It seems to me there were 17 or 18 either constructions or major renovations.

We were also able to announce this year that we've identified funding in our longer-term funding—because there's ongoing funding besides this special funding—for example, to proceed with the school at Attawapiskat, which has been a high-profile issue, and it's expensive, a big school. The design work for it is started this year, and we're working with first nations to determine the next steps on it. That one now is also on our regional plan; it will go ahead as well.

Between renovations and new construction, there are 113 schools that are either being built or undergoing major renovations. That's a significant number, but there's a significant need too, and there will be more need next year again.

• (1555)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Okay, thank you very much. I've been very liberal with my time with Mr. Lemay.

Ms. Crowder, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and I hope you're as liberal with the New Democrats.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Don't ask any questions.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for coming before us today. It's probably no surprise to you that I have a number of questions.

Just around Jordan's Principle, on pages 11 and 25 in the plans and priorities your department mentions its ongoing commitment to implementing Jordan's Principle, but I can't tell how much money is earmarked for it. You may not be able to tell me that today; I just wondered whether somebody could tell me how much money is earmarked for the implementation of Jordan's Principle.

I want to follow up on the status piece that Mr. Lemay asked about. Page 26 of the report on plans and priorities—and it may be that I'm not understanding this—talks under “Managing Individual Affairs” about the process around status. There is a significant increase in that line item over last fiscal year on page 15-8 in the main estimates. There is a substantial difference from last year, a substantial increase.

I know that the fate of Bill C-3 is unknown, but it's not only the money for people who may increase the number with status; it's also money for the department in terms of dealing with a potential increased registration process.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Also, there has been a significant backlog, and other work is being done, including such things as the secure status card and so on, but we put more human resources in there to deal with some of the backlog issues we had in the actual managing of the status for first nations. There are some—whatever you want to call it—“management” or more human resources put in, to deal with that backlog.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Is that the bulk of the increase in that particular line? It's a significant jump. I assume this is in the millions. It goes from \$30-some million to \$261 million. Am I reading that correctly?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Oh, okay; I'm sorry. I think, if I understand the line, Ms. Crowder, that most of that \$230 million is related to the residential schools agreement and the processing of CEP, common experience payments, and the independent settlement processes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay, so that's where the bulk of that goes.

So there is some additional funding around this registration fee?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, about \$20 million is what the minister was describing: we tried to clear the backlog out, which is pre-McIvor. There was a lot of caseload to do on life events, and a little bit of it has to do with the management of estates and wills.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay.

I know you already touched on this, but I also wonder, with regard to the specific claims, whether there's money earmarked for claims greater than \$250 million.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: It's \$150 million.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm sorry, \$150 million. We know there are a number of large claims out there, such as that of the Six Nations, for example. Has that process been established yet? Are there funds earmarked for claims beyond \$150 million?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: There isn't a formal process, although we were able, for example, to settle the Mississauga—at least I hope so... I'm not sure whether it's been—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Is this the Mississauga Credit?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: It's the Mississaugas of New Credit, which was outside the specific claims process because of the size of that settlement.

There aren't actually very many of these. They're big and they're significant, and because of that they're very complex. So far, I think we've been able to handle them. Each one has been so different and the requests on the first nations side have been so unique that I'm not sure how we're going to do it in a formula. The specific claims process is quite formulaic. It allows us to put in place the process and procedures to deal with it, because the claims are of a certain nature and of a certain size, and we have a process.

With the other ones, when someone talks about \$1 billion, then the research required, the capacity of the first nation to handle it, whether they want to take out loans to do it, or how it's going to be done... Each one has proven to be quite unique.

That being said, as I said, we did the Mississaugas of New Credit. It's bigger than \$150 million, so it's showing that these can be done. The James Bay project settlement that we negotiated was over \$1 billion. So it can be done, but they're treated as one-offs and they go into cabinet as one-offs. I go in, make a presentation, and say "Here's what I think we'll get a settlement for."

They're so complex and big that I'm not sure how we could standardize them. I'm not sure how we can improve the process.

• (1600)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Has there been some sort of agreement at least on timeframes for some of them? Some of these claims have been outstanding for decades.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Yes, I agree. We always want to do it more quickly, but it takes two to tango, so quite often if you say to somebody that you want this settled by the end of the year, what comes back is that the first nation will say, "It's going to take us two years just to do our research; we can't be rushed", because there are thousands of pages of documents or archeological research or whatever. And so you work with them, each case being different, to ask, as in James Bay, whether this is an implementation issue, which is one thing—or is it a self-government issue? Is it a treaty-based thing?

It has proven to be....

Ms. Jean Crowder: I understand it can be complex. I'm sure other members also have been approached by nations that simply aren't seeing any movement.

I just want to leave that, because I only have seven minutes.

On the claims settlements, there is a significant drop of almost 50% in planned spending, on page 6. It is referenced again on page 15, saying that "future settlements of claims and litigation will be added to planned spending levels through subsequent appropriations" in supplementary estimates. I am surprised that there is such a large drop in the claims settlement, given that there are significant claims outstanding in the budgeted amounts. It's just a comment more than anything else, because we know there are significant problems out there.

I just want to touch on this. You said in your presentation concerning the economic action plan that numbers were on the website, but I got my legislative assistant to run the stuff down, and what is on the website isn't particularly helpful in terms of numbers. It has dollar amounts, but it doesn't actually have the details.

For example, when we're talking about water, on page—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): We're over the seven minutes. Just close off, if you want, and we'll get a quick response.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Can you get us more detailed information on the number of projects that have been announced, started, and completed? That would be helpful. You have a map that shows some of it, but it's still pretty difficult to sort out.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Absolutely. Normally in the quarterly reports we try to give that detail, but we can certainly dig up whatever level of detail you want, and it's all part of the public record. I'm not sure whether the website doesn't have it all, but certainly we need to get that for you and we'll do it quickly.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you.

Now we go on to Mr. Rickford, from the great riding of Kenora.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): It is a great riding.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for coming here today.

I'm somewhat relieved. Seven minutes goes by so quickly, so I'm glad that my colleague mentioned Canada's economic action plan pre-emptively, because I can focus on an issue that I think is important to a number of committee members' ridings and is very important to mine. It's the Nutrition North Canada program.

I want to acknowledge the hard work of your office and this newly established advisory board in the serious revamping of a program that always had the best intentions but had some serious structural defects perhaps from the outset that prevented it from accomplishing its goals. In a couple of communities in my riding that I worked in before becoming elected, we worked around the program; we simply looked for other options with air carriers and Winnipeg Harvest and the likes to get subsidized foods to particularly vulnerable groups in the maternal and child health program that we established in one example. There have been tremendous challenges, and I appreciate that.

There were a number of problems identified at the time that this program appears to be trying to address, Minister. I was wondering if you could comment on a couple of them. There are six or seven, and I know that time just doesn't provide for it, so I want to focus on the issue of the integrity of the program in terms of eligibility versus non-eligibility. For example, there were some lists of foods or products that were on it. This program, built by northerners and to be overseen by northerners, is going to hopefully work through that.

The second one was the performance of the program in terms of not being measured sufficiently. It's always interesting that in one isolated community, potatoes might cost \$13, and in another \$18, and one community may be no farther north or south than the other. All that was explained was that it was more expensive to buy the potatoes, but the reason wasn't really identified. There were program inequities, and you had this flat subsidized rate of 80 cents per kilogram, but that didn't deal with the fact that there are communities where products are much more expensive. Even in my own riding it's much more expensive for a product in, for example, Fort Severn than it is in Pikangikum or something like that.

Finally, Minister, to the extent that my time provides for it, could you comment on the importance of bringing the private sector into this as a stakeholder? They had already been somewhat involved, but I think the perception on the ground in the communities was that they weren't providing a subsidy; however, under this program we appear to be making very strategic partnerships with them that bring benefits that people can actually see. I understand that the program has a mechanism for showing that to the individual.

I'll stop there. Perhaps you can spend the back half of my time. I have a timer, and there are three and a half more minutes. I started it before he would have, so if you could go ahead, Minister, that would be great.

• (1605)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you. This is not part of the economic action plan.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Oh! You see, I told you.

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I can't say that this one is.

A lot of work went into the design of this program. There were a lot of meetings, a lot of consultation, and I think what we've come up with is a good balance.

To answer, I'll just go directly to some of your questions.

The idea that underpins it all is that the object is to deliver more nutritious foods at the best possible price and make the most nutritious foods the most affordable. The changes we've made in the program are designed to do that—for example, the eligibility list. If somebody says "My favourite fatty, salty food is no longer on there", we say that's not surprising, because Health Canada helped us develop the list that said the most nutritious foods need to be subsidized the most—your milk, eggs, vegetables, and fruit. That is the stuff that's expensive to move, but the more of it you can get into people's hands, the better it is for their diet.

The second thing is that we put an emphasis also on country foods. One of the problems before, because of the design of the program, was that country foods were eligible, but they had to come from an entry point. So people said "If I can get my caribou down to Churchill then I could fly it back out to my community." But that doesn't make a whole lot of sense. So there's an emphasis on country foods because country foods have obvious health benefits for people who are on that diet. It's a low-fat food, it's healthier, it's available locally, and it provides some employment opportunities locally as well.

On the eligibility list, first of all, we worked with Health Canada. We also took out things that were non-perishable. We will be taking out non-perishable and non-food items and asking people to move those in ways other than the most expensive way, which is by air freight. So the horror stories that we heard of people flying up spare tires on the food mail program, displacing milk and eggs, won't be possible in this program, and we don't apologize for that. We have to focus on the food. And things that can be brought up there on the sea lift or on the winter roads, if that's possible—for example, things like disposable diapers—should be transported in the cheapest way possible. Use the sea lift, use the winter roads, but don't fly them in, because flying them in is the most expensive thing you can do.

That's how the eligibility list was put together.

Another issue is that the performance of the program is a common complaint—for example, people ask how the program is working and how they know it's working. You hear the stories.

INAC will be working with each eligible community to make arrangements to make sure. As you say, they're all remote, but remote has matters of degree. Somebody who is really remote needs a different rate from someone who might be fly-in but relatively close by. It makes a huge difference in the cost. So those have to be calculated and those arrangements have to be made with the retailers in order to make sure it happens.

It's also important that we have an advisory board. One of the things we heard is that these decisions that are made need to be adjusted as we go forward. The people on the program who are seeing it on the ground, if you will, or in the stores, don't have a way of influencing what's happening, whether it's the eligibility list or how it's delivered or a bunch of things. So one of the things to not only help us deliver the program, I think, more fairly but also to assure people that this needs to be guided by people who actually use it in the north, is to put the advisory board together to give us advice on everything from eligibility lists to how the food is handled when it arrives and whether they think it's being passed on.

And then there's a whole audit provision of an official audit position relationship that will have to be established, which every retailer has to agree to—

• (1610)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Okay.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: —that they have to not only pass on the savings but submit to an audit to make sure we can show it's done.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I think Mr. Rickford's own stop clock will tell him that he's received ample time for questions and answers.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: No, no, no.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): We'll go to Mr. Bagnell now for the second round, which will be five minutes, and then to Mr. Clarke for five minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

Deputy, did you get any answers to the questions I'd asked?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, at least on one of them, and I'll follow up on any loose ends with the clerk if I didn't get your question right.

Health Canada runs something called the resolution health support program, and that's what deals with people going through the residential schools process. Its budget last year was \$39 million. This budget gave them an extra \$66 million over two years, and that will bring their budget for the year we're just starting to \$47 million and to \$47 million next year.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

Could you endeavour to get me the figures for the same years—not now, but get back to the committee—for the polar shelf and also for the Polar Commission?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, the polar shelf is a Natural Resources Canada facility. I can get it for you, and the commission would be in our estimates.

I also have at least some of the food mail budget, if that were helpful to you. The actuals for 2008-09 were about \$56 million. In 2009-10 we think we'll land at \$66 million, and 2010-11 we're projecting about \$57 million. The spike last year was largely because of fuel price increases.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay. And you got my last questions about the total budget increase, the percent this year, and then the estimates of increase in status of aboriginal people.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I haven't been able to do the math fast enough. I think it is roughly a 5% increase.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: The estimates on the main estimates went from \$7.3 billion to \$7.5 billion. It's about a 5.3% increase on the main estimates.

Mr. Michael Wernick: We'll get you a table.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: What is the estimated increase in the status of aboriginal people? You based calculations on the estimate of inflation for the coming year?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Yes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Minister, do you consider yourself a promoter or a champion or a speaker for aboriginal people in the federal government?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Of course.

•(1615)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Along those lines, as you know, I have two questions. One is I have asked you to approach the justice minister on the Teslin file, which as you know is another land claim implementation problem that has taken over ten years. You were going to get back to me, but you didn't. Have you had discussions with him to try to get that file finished?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Absolutely I have. I know those negotiations have continued. As you know, I've said not just in cabinet but publicly that I hope that deal can be done. I think it should get done. I've said that. I think it can be done.

Having said that, these are precedent-setting negotiations. When you get a small community that wants to take over major administration of justice, for example, or child and family service, which in Yukon is another big issue and is even a big issue in my province, the problem is how do you create, what arrangements can we make? I'm not doing the negotiation on this, but what comes back is what arrangements can we make that will allow a community to efficiently administer justice or child and family services when you may be talking about only a few hundred people?

Certainly in my riding I have 5,000 Sto:lo in Chilliwack, and even at that, it's difficult to find arrangements on child and family services, for example, that allow that to be administered effectively. That's one of the things that is a constant debate on how to do that.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I don't have much time, I'm sorry. Thanks, that's great.

On the second point of championing people, as you know, aboriginal children in care get significantly less funding than non-aboriginal people, who the provinces take care of. It's been a big issue. I'm sure you're aware of it. The federal Attorney General is going before the Human Rights Commission next Tuesday to try to get that case thrown out.

Are you objecting at all, or are you trying to stand up for aboriginal people who would like to get a fair amount of money for their children in care and would like the commission to hear the case, not to take one side or another, but to hear the case fairly, as opposed to having it thrown out?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: They need to hear the case fairly. I don't think your question or suppositions are fair. We can show... Obviously we believe we do make considerable investments, including some tripartite arrangements I've made and which I mentioned in my remarks: additional funds to add provinces to the list of not only matching the funds, but tripartite arrangements that deal with the administration, so first nations get to deal with the administration and provincial involvement as well, so first nations children who don't live on reserve are also part of the mix.

These are proving to be very effective. As you know, it started in Alberta, but we've been able to work our way across the country and are making those tripartite arrangements in several provinces now. I think that is showing not only good faith, but it proves that it's not just a funding issue, it's also how the issue is managed. I think the way to manage it is working hand in hand with first nations to make it not just a dollar issue, but it's what are you funding—are you funding a prevention-based model, or do you just want to warehouse these kids? I say we should move to a prevention-based model. It's not just a matter of how much money do you want to—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you, Mr. Minister. We're going to have to call it there and go over to our colleague Mr. Clarke for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for coming in.

First, I'd like to use my allotment. If I could borrow Mr. Rickford's stopwatch just to make sure I get the proper time, it would be much appreciated.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Canada's economic action plan.

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Clarke: First of all, one of my colleagues, Mr. Bagnell, mentioned the championing of first nations issues. Being a first nation member myself—I'm the only first nation member in the House of Commons—working with the ministerial office and working with you, Mr. Minister, I've never seen a minister work so close in hand on first nations issues. Your door has always been open to deal with issues that are very pertinent to Canadians, aboriginals and non-aboriginals.

Sitting here today and coming forward on these estimates, I think I heard you mention the consultation process in the food mail program. Could you break that down even further and just explain the process of the consultations and how they were addressed with the stakeholders in the communities in the North?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you.

A couple of throne speeches ago, we promised that we were going to look at reforming the food mail system. Following that, of course, we had our own internal analysis, because those things are done in an ongoing way, but I wanted some outside advice as well. So I hired an outside special representative to spearhead that for me and to make sure that he could travel to communities that were on the food mail program and talk to everybody, from the air carriers to the points of entry folks to you name it, and then come back with what his observations were and make recommendations.

In addition, there were some 70 different meetings with stakeholders in communities; 70 separate meetings were held. I sat in on several of them. I met some folks here in Ottawa and others in the field. I think everybody is honestly trying to find the best way forward to make the system work better.

There were some pretty common themes to the complaints. The lack of accountability has already been raised: How do we know that the savings or the subsidy is being passed on? Why is it sometimes used for products that are not food, let alone nutritious food? Also, a complaint was "You're just not listening to us; there's no way we can get information to you if there's a complaint or a problem, because it's run out of Ottawa, or run by Canada Post, and there's no way we can have the influence that recipients of the program deserve to have."

I think we've addressed many of those things and tried to shorten the supply line here. We have the private sector, I think, fully engaged. I think we have free enterprise principles applying to this—that is, what's the best way to get the most food, and the most nutritious food, to the most people at the best price?

The guidance on it comes from the advisory board. We've asked Elizabeth Copeland to chair that board, and we're going to get a representative group that will not, by the way, represent any vested interests. We're not looking for people from organizations or from corporations or something. We want people who use the program, who represent all of the regions that are involved. From that, it will assure people that the consultation we've had to date, which was in good faith and I think pretty extensive, doesn't end when the program gets announced.

It's important that people feel that as we go forward, if they see a glitch in the program, if they see a problem moving forward, they can get hold of that advisory board and get it fixed before it gets entrenched. That was one of the problems previously.

• (1620)

Mr. Rob Clarke: In the consultation process, you met with the first nations leaders, Métis leaders, the Inuit, and also the non-aboriginals—correct?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Yes. It's available to everybody in these communities, so we certainly met with everybody.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): For the stakeholders, once the consultation process was complete, what was one of the main general findings in terms of proceeding with this new program?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Briefly, there are themes that I mentioned previously, but the other things that were obvious were as simple as how recipients could even know what was going on in the program. There's no signage in the store. There's nothing on my receipt. I get the receipt from the grocer and there's no way of knowing what the subsidy for the community is. What's the rate of subsidy that goes into that, so that they have some sense that the federal government is actually providing something here, when it isn't reflected on their receipt?

If there was one common theme, that was it. People just did not believe the subsidy was getting to them. That was pretty common.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you, Mr. Minister.

That's great; we're just a little over, so we're getting better.

We're off to Mr. Lévesque for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Good afternoon, Ms. Jauvin, Mr. Minister and Mr. Wernick.

No doubt, Mr. Minister, you expect me to ask you about the new project, although I asked the committee this week to hold a meeting specifically on this program.

But I do have one question. It comes on the heels of the meetings we had—and Canada Post was involved in those discussions. We know that in Nunavut, for example, there was some argument over Canada Post's administration of the program. One question, in particular, emerged: is it possible that the definition of the program, especially regarding the products in question, was not clear enough and could allow products to pass that should not? Should we blame....

You said that it cost \$2.5 million a year to have Canada Post administer the program. That is definitely not reflected in the total cost of the program.

That being said, do you think the advisory board you mentioned will be able to carry out audits in each of the communities served for the same price as Canada Post?

[*English*]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: For example, as you know, the Minister of Health is from the north, and when she travels in the communities in Nunavut she often takes her cellphone camera and just takes pictures while she's in the stores.

She gets a picture of the \$200 turkey and asks how can a turkey cost \$200? Then as soon as it's brought to people's attention, they say that was just a mistake, it should never have cost that; it's still expensive, but it's only half that much, so don't worry about it. And what she says, and what I've heard quite often from others, is yes, but it happens too often. The \$200 turkey is one thing, the \$60 pineapple is another one. And when it's brought to people's attention, often they'll say that was just a mistake, sorry about that; it actually shouldn't be that much.

The problem is we need to have a stronger audit provision. I don't suggest that the advisory board has to go to every single community all the time, but what they need to be able to do is call on a robust audit system to say show me the money; show me how it's being

translated into cheaper, more nutritious food being more readily available in those communities.

They may have to travel some, I don't know, but it seems to me a lot of their work is going to be following the audit provisions that will be established between INAC and the retailers to say let me review this; I want to see what's being done; I want to be able to follow it.

They're going to come from all over the place, so they're going to have first-hand information, but a lot of their work is going to be ensuring that complaints are dealt with, that audits are properly followed up, and that they can see the results on the bottom line.

So they don't actually have to do the audit. The audits will be part of the agreements with the retailers, but they'll be able to review it and they'll be able to make recommendations based on that. As well, the relationships with the retailers will also demand things like signage in the store that says this area here is the most heavily supported by the Nutrition North program. It's fruit, vegetables, eggs; these are the healthiest foods.

As well, Health Canada will be part of a program to actually teach healthier cooking, healthier eating, about things that are better for you and why and how to use them, because a lot of these products are relatively new to northerners. So they will give advice on how to eat nutritiously and have nutritious everything, from snacks to main meals.

They don't need help on how to integrate country food into their diet, but as part of this Nutrition North program, Health Canada has provisions in there to actually help promote healthier eating and healthier preparation of foods to make sure people get the full benefits.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Minister....

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): I think that will do it. We are at 4:59, so the five minutes are up.

Monsieur Minister, I appreciate it, but with very little time for questions after this, do you have another few minutes, or is your time...?

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I hate to say my time is yours, because it's not, because I do have to go, but do you want to go once more back and forth?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Yes, I was thinking that if we could just do one more, and then go to Ms. Crowder, that would be great.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Okay, certainly.

If I could, on the food mail, Monsieur Lévesque, on the Nutrition North program, by all means, if there are any briefings you would like on the program, about how it's going to be managed, I think you may be having officials coming here, but if you want any briefings ahead of time or privately, we members of Parliament obviously need to get that, and we can make those available to you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Lévesque.

We have Mr. Dreeshen, I understand, for five minutes.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Thank you. I may be able to share some of my time with my colleagues here. I'll try to be as quick as possible.

The supplementary estimates for the fiscal year indicate there's \$136 million of additional funding to support the implementation of the first nations water and waste water action plan. I just wonder if you could give us a few more details on that line item. That would be my first question.

My second question again relates to the estimates. There's almost \$16 million to strategically manage the Métis and non-status Indian litigation, to implement the proactive reconciliation and management for Métis and aboriginal rights. I'm just wondering what those funds are designed for.

Perhaps I could just throw a third question in to see how it can fit in there. I want to talk as well about the supplementary estimates for the first nations schoolnet youth initiatives. Could you explain what those initiatives are like and perhaps even try to tie it in to some of the memoranda of understanding you have with the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs of Alberta, the Government of Alberta, and the Government of Canada, which is trying to ensure that first nation students receive comparable education and are managing to get comparable results, whether that instruction is located inside or outside of reserves?

• (1630)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Thank you. If we don't have time to get through them all, we can get you those details.

With regard to water and waste water, there are a couple of things I could say on that. The first is that from 2006 to 2012, the period from the time we took office to the end of this budgetary document, the Government of Canada will have invested about \$2.3 billion in first nations water and waste water infrastructure. This is a major priority for first nations, and it's a major priority for us. It's still a major priority, although I must say that in the last three years it has come in behind some of the other things that are obviously of top priority. I think that people have seen our genuine effort on this front.

We've announced our water and waste water action plan, and the \$330 million—the amount you mentioned—is the one-year portion of it. That's supporting construction of infrastructure across the country. It also deals with training of water plant operators. As you know, often the case is that you might have a pretty good plant, but if you don't have a good operator, it's not so good, right? We have seen sad examples of what happens in that situation across the country, so there's more money invested in training of personnel through the

circuit rider program, for example, to make sure that they get certified and stay certified so that they can run those plants.

I mentioned the legislation that's coming forward. I think establishing a legislative framework is going to be very important moving forward. One of the reasons the Atlantic Policy Congress is interested in being the pilot group for this is that when I've talked to them, they've said they see the need for a legislative framework. Right now we have policy in place and we all do our best, but when you put legislation in place, you bump it up to a level of everybody then knowing what it is they have to do, who is responsible, what the standards are, what the regulations are, and who has to deliver them. It's a much more robust way of handling water and waste water for first nations.

They don't have that. I don't think most Canadians realize that there is no legislation. They're dependent on the goodwill of the government, if you will. I think that if we can get legislation and all agree on how this is going to move forward, it will be a big step forward for all of us. Every other Canadian lives under legislated and regulated water standards; we have policy, but not legislation. I think we need to move ahead on that.

In this action plan there are also resources for monitoring the water. We work with Health Canada to make sure it's probably monitored. We also take part in public health activities, whether it's public education or other public health initiatives, to make sure that people know how to use and protect their water systems and the intakes of them, especially on reserves.

It's quite an action plan, quite a detailed plan, and it goes through all of those parts.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: With regard to managing Métis and non-status litigation and implementing the reconciliation that you mentioned, this is funding that we use to work with Métis organizations to strengthen Métis governance and membership systems. We work with them to address legal and constitutional questions on how aboriginal rights in Canada can be addressed following the Powley decisions. It's quite commonly called the "Powley money", because it follows that decision.

Part of that is identification of Métis harvesters as well as engaging the provincial governments and territorial governments. For example, we had the first and most successful—it was the first, so it was the most successful—Métis economic development conference in Alberta. It was well attended, and the western provinces especially were there. It was a big conference and a big success that I think we will be able to build on.

•(1635)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen.

Now we'll go to Ms. Crowder for the last five minutes with the minister.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I have two questions. If I have time, I'll ask something else.

The overview on page 9 of the supplementary estimates indicates that some of the increases in the budget are going to be partially offset by decreases of \$38 million in capital. I wondered what was being cut out of the capital budget to the tune of \$38 million.

The second question was around the urban aboriginal strategy. The document indicates that the program will be sunsetted. Of course, that will have a direct impact on friendship centres, so I wondered if there are plans for a replacement program and what the mechanism is for that.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: While the deputy digs up a couple of those details... The friendship centres, of course, are funded through Heritage Canada.

Ms. Jean Crowder: They deliver a lot of the urban aboriginal strategy. Yes, I understand that. I'm concerned about the urban aboriginal strategy part of it.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: There's no attempt to wind down the urban aboriginal strategy. I'm not sure what the—

Ms. Jean Crowder: On page 9 and page 39 in plans and priorities there is no future budget allocation beyond 2012. It indicates that it's sunsetted 2012–13.

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's just a normal sunsetting. We'll have to go back to argue for its extension beyond April 1.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So the plan is to do that?

Mr. Michael Wernick: We certainly intend to argue it; I can't guarantee the result.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I meant the plan is to argue it.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: It's fairly typical in that budget process. It's like water and waste water. We had a two-year action plan, then we renewed for another two years. There will be more needs. I think it will always be a priority for governments, but it's the same for the urban aboriginal strategy.

My sense is that not only is the government in favour of it, but I think what we've seen in some of the data that's come out and some of the recent polling and so on, 50% of first nations are living an urban life.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I think somewhere in your document it says 54%.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Yes, it's more than half now, so we need to do a good job. Thankfully, provinces are also chomping pretty eagerly at the bit now asking to work together on this—and not just provinces, as we have cities coming to us and asking what they can do to work on it. The urban aboriginal strategy isn't everywhere, unfortunately. It's been targeted to a certain number of major urban centres, and I think it has been excellent, considering it's a relatively new program, if you will.

Ms. Jean Crowder: It's an important program for the ongoing function of the friendship centres, because a lot of the money is delivered through them. I understand they're funded somewhere else, but they need that program.

What about the capital decrease?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, I did find that. This is money that we use to pick up land that's either available through simple purchases on the open market or surplus federal properties that then can be translated into land claim settlements. Simply, we had a lot of business last year, and we won't have a lot this year, just given what's going on at the negotiating tables.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I don't need to tell you the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group is very interested in having land available to them. I would suspect that a number of nations—

Mr. Michael Wernick: It's related to your earlier question, the probability of getting to yes in the next fiscal year. If we ever got a deal with them or with Six Nations, then we'd deal with it.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On page 27 of the plans and priorities document there's a statement around modernizing oil and gas regulations. What's happening with that?

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's pursuant to the bill you passed last year.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Yes, so this is a follow-up to that bill.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The gist of the bill was to create a regulation-making power to keep up with state-of-the-art oil and gas regulations used by the provinces. We're working directly with the first nations organizations on the drafting and the implications.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay, so that's fulfilling the commitment in that bill.

Am I still good?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): You have one minute.

Ms. Jean Crowder: One minute, all right.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: As you remember, that was one of the things that was promised from first nations involved in Indian oil and gas. What was important to them was for it to be developed in the regulations themselves, so that's what that's about.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Yes, absolutely.

Just quickly on post-secondary education, I know that over the last year or two there's been lots of talk about reforming PSSSP, the post-secondary student support program. I don't see anything in either the plans and priorities or in the estimates that reflects that, other than a reiteration of the statement that post-secondary is policy rather than legislation.

• (1640)

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Right, and of course we've made it clear that it does need to be renovated. For example, the Assembly of First Nations is working on some research right now. I expect their recommendations to come forward within some short months on how it may be improved. We're also doing some internal work and some work with HRSDC to see how we can get even more first nations to get more access to more resources and programming that a lot of Canadians take for granted. I think a lot of that should also be available to first nations. So there's work being done both interdepartmentally and by AFN and others, I'm sure, who are all interested in making post-secondary education work more effectively.

I think there's some good work, and everybody obviously has a common objective. What's not clear yet is whether there is a common strategy on moving forward. I'm not sure what that will be. I don't have one yet, but I'm pleased to see this serious work is being done.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

I think this concludes our time with you. I thank you for your liberalness in being with us this afternoon. We appreciate the time.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: I was conservative with my answers, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Todd Russell: Well, that's debatable.

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Yes, I know.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): But we do appreciate your time here.

We're just going to take a couple of minutes' recess to allow the minister to depart from us, and we'll resume in about three to four minutes.

Thank you.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1645)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): I'll call the committee back to order, if members could take their seats, please. We are resuming.

Would somebody else like to take a question, and then we'll go to Mr. Duncan?

Mr. Payne.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): I could, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): It's a Conservative opportunity, so do you want to ask a question?

Mr. LaVar Payne: Well, I can maybe just take his five minutes; then he can come back and do it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Oh, absolutely.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Well, thank you.

And now are you going to start the clock, Mr. Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): You have four minutes left.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Somehow I knew that would happen.

Anyway, I want to thank the officials here for coming today. It's an important opportunity for us to ask some relatively pertinent questions of the department, and I'm glad to hear of some of the activities coming out of Canada's economic action plan.

I was wondering if you could fill us in a little bit more around Bill S-11, and in particular on what's happening with the remaining communities. I think there were something like 46. What's the outlook or the plan in terms of ensuring that they have safe, potable drinking water?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Thank you for the question.

If I don't get all of this right, I'm sure we can provide some written follow-up.

• (1650)

Mr. LaVar Payne: That would be great.

Mr. Michael Wernick: We've been pursuing a strategy since 2006 that basically has three parts to it. One is the actual facility. As the minister said, a lot of money has gone into building treatment plants and waste water facilities. You need the actual facilities, and there was a lot of catching up to do in first nations communities.

The second part relates to the issues around capacity to run, operate, train, inspect, and do all those kinds of things. A fair bit of money has gone into those.

The third—the missing piece, which was tabled in Bill S-11—is to have clear rules of the game. It's to have standards so that the engineers know what to build to, the inspectors know what to inspect to, and people can be trained to operate the systems. There needs to be a pretty clear sense of the rules. What's acceptable for water and waste water on a reserve would be very similar to what's acceptable down the road. The three-part strategy is now complete, we hope, with the introduction of standards.

We've used a methodology and we've already tabled four reports, I believe, on the parliamentary website. We track what we call “high-risk systems”, meaning a combination of the conditions and the capacity. That number has come down steadily. We were at about 193; we're down to about 49, and we have an action plan for every one of them. I could give you the milestones on specific communities if you gave me a little bit of time to pursue them.

Sometimes it's not going to be easy. There are tough engineering issues. There's a source-water issue. You've got uranium contamination in one place, and it's going to be very difficult to deal with it. We actually have one community in which there's a disagreement between two neighbouring first nations about where to locate stuff, and we're trying to work our way through that and so on.

We expect to bring that number steadily down. We identified 21 communities at the very outset as being really high priority; we're down to 3, and we're hoping that we'll make a breakthrough on those. Work is under way on all of those, and we'd be happy to give you specifics on particular communities.

The number that gets thrown around in the media a lot is boil-water advisories. That's not actually a useful indicator, because you can have a temporary event. The city of Vancouver had a boil-water advisory. If something gets flushed into the system or you get spring runoff, it certainly indicates a temporary problem, but it's not something you can design a long-term program around. We use a risk methodology with Health Canada that I think is widely understood by the people who run and operate the plants.

Mr. LaVar Payne: That's a good point. In my own riding of Medicine Hat, we have communities that have had boil-water advisories for many years.

Anyway, I would also like to get an indication of what the department is doing in terms of the number of housing units and schools being built for first nations, and the projected timelines on having those units completed.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Do you mean in general, or do you mean specifically under Canada's economic action plan?

Mr. LaVar Payne: In general would be fine. Would it be better under the action plan?

Mr. Michael Wernick: I think I'm going to have pursue that in writing.

What I can tell you is that we do all the schools on-reserve. As the minister said, between new field construction and renovations, we have about 100 projects under way. We could provide you with updated lists of what's being done community by community. I have those lists available; I just don't have them at my fingertips.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Okay.

Mr. Michael Wernick: We generate a fair number of projects. Canada's economic action plan was a welcome injection of resources for us and allowed us to take on some of the big projects that would have had difficulty getting to the top of the list.

Specifically, there were 13 projects related to schools under Canada's economic action plan. They've all been launched. One has been moved out of the action plan into the regular programming of the department because it was just going to be too difficult to get it all done within the two-year timeframe—this was a two-year stimulus package—but otherwise they're all under way. They've reached various milestones. We have funding agreements, tendering, engineering, and so on. We could give you a... We had plans to table another update before the end of June in any case.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you.

Can you tell me a little bit about housing?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Housing is much more small-scale. We have four units here and five units there, and so on. I could get you the overall number.

We do about half of the on-reserve housing, and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation does the other half. We tend to do more in

making the lots serviceable and ready for housing in terms of infrastructure and so on.

We do some of the housing, but CMHC does a lot of the rest. I could get you... I think the number is close to 2,000 new units and about 3,000 renovations, but I'd want to double-check those numbers.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Okay, thank you.

• (1655)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): That will do it. Thank you very much.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you for allowing me those few extra seconds, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): You're kindly welcome.

I'm going to take the Liberal slot and ask a couple of questions to departmental officials.

Is there a way for you to present committee members with an understanding comparing, over the last three years and looking forward in the next two years, how much money is going into the healing program for residential school survivors? As you know, with the cancelling of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation—and there was some debate around that, and I know it crosses two departments at least; that is, INAC and Health Canada... Is there some way we can get a breakdown of the numbers, including what was given to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, of course? I know there was...what, \$125 million over three years? This is wrapping up, so I wonder whether we can get that, because there's a certain amount of repudiation out there about what resources are going to be available to deal with the need.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, I can undertake to get that to you in writing, within the next few days, actually.

Just in broad-brush terms, the support to the survivor community, let's call them, who are actually going through the process of the adjudication of their claims and people who will be participating in the activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and are at risk of some triggering of trauma as they relive and go through those experiences... That's what Health Canada does. What the healing foundation tended to do and had done for some time was work on community-based projects, and we can get you the numbers on those.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): I think everybody realizes the value of community-based projects.

On the food by mail program, I'll just let you know that while we love northern Manitoba, the six Labrador communities are in Labrador, not in Manitoba. That's on your website.

Could we get that changed? We were very surprised to see that we had geographically shifted, even with climate change, that far. I just mention that.

At the same time, can you give us a sense of when we can get more detail on the program implementation and how it's going to be administered? We have some broad strokes right now, but there are a lot of questions out there by folks in the communities. When can we as parliamentarians get a briefing on how this is going to be actually implemented and administered?

Mr. Michael Wernick: On the first point, I certainly apologize if there's an error on the website. I know the Government of Quebec sometimes plays with the line between Quebec and Labrador. If the federal government has done that, I certainly apologize.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): I don't think they jumped over Ontario and went to Manitoba.

Mr. Michael Wernick: No. I apologize to you for that, and thank you for the feedback. We will get that fixed.

We can offer officials to come to brief the committee anytime at your convenience. I'm not sure we have all of the answers, because we just announced the program and we want to use the advisory committee to do a lot of the fine-tuning, and most of the changes only come into effect next April 1. But we have a sense of how it's likely to run.

Many of the issues will involve going out and tendering and having competitive processes for people to win contracts to take over some of this business. I can't tell you now who's going to win that, but we have an aggressive set of timelines to meet to have the program up and running next April 1.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): I really appreciate that, sir.

My last question deals with the Office of the Federal Interlocutor. In the main estimates there was a huge decrease, and then in supplementary estimates A there seemed to be a replenishing of the funds at OFI. Can you explain just what's happening there?

My final question is about Bill C-3. If Bill C-3 were to go forward, have any moneys whatsoever been budgeted for the possibility of new entrants, even based on Mr. Clatworthy's sense of when people might come on stream?

Mr. Michael Wernick: On the first one, my understanding would be the Powley program the minister referred to sunsetted so we couldn't get it in the main estimates. It was renewed. Cabinet took the decision. It was approved by Treasury Board and it has shown up in supplementary estimates. That is typically what happens with sunsetters. It's not always helpful to Parliament to understand the flow of that, but that's what's happened on that one.

On Bill C-3, the minister explained that since we didn't know whether the bill would pass, when it would pass, and in what form it would pass it wouldn't be possible to get money appropriated or ask for money to be appropriated relative to the cost of implementing Bill C-3. Depending on how the bill goes, there could be very different numbers of people entitled to registration.

We have the expert panel presided over by Mr. Emerson, and we would expect to go to cabinet this fall based on the final form of the bill, if it passes, and some work on its likely cost. We have put a lot of that out there, and there are really only two areas likely to experience immediate pressure, because we expect about 95% of the people who will be enfranchised to be off reserve on day one, so they would be eligible for Health Canada's health benefits program, and

we can do the ballpark of how many people multiplied by typical use of that program. The other would be our own post-secondary program that Ms. Crowder was asking about.

Other than that, you have to make some assumptions about whether people will ever want to move back to their reserve communities or not.

•(1700)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): I thank you for that.

I've even been liberal with my own time.

Let's move now to Mr. Duncan, on the government side, for five minutes.

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

Five minutes goes quickly.

Nicole Jauvin, you have had a lonely time. You'd never know we were in the middle of a northern economic development study from the fact that no questions have been directed your way. You've now been in place long enough that you can probably give us some pretty good updates on some things that we're not that familiar with, such as progress on the Arctic research station, maybe some progress on economic diversification, energy diversification, possible port or airport development. I don't think this committee knows where we are on Pangnirtung, and perhaps you can describe to us where that might sit.

We did have witnesses the other day who talked about how some of our national codes—the building codes, fire codes, and things—don't fit the north. I wonder if that has come into your orbit at all in terms of thinking about whether there would be a role for CanNor in all of that.

That's it.

Ms. Nicole Jauvin (Deputy Minister and President, Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency): Thank you very much for the question; I really appreciate it.

First, if I may introduce Michel Robillard, who's VP at CanNor and who is living in Iqaluit as the first senior management person in the agency. Michel has first-hand experience of living in the north. I think he's attended the committee before.

You asked with respect to the Arctic research station, which is a file that is in the hands of the department of my colleague here, Michael, so he may want to add, but first I'll talk, if you don't mind. It's the same thing with the Pangnirtung harbour facility, which comes under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. I understand there are plans to complete phase one of that file in the next year or so. Again, that's a file that comes under Fisheries and Oceans.

What I could talk to you about in terms of progress on our part is the opening of the northern project management office, which was announced by the minister on May 3. That office will provide advice to major proponents of resource projects in the north in navigating through the process and will coordinate the role of all federal agencies that have a role in the process.

Our aim is to use this office as a great way to support economic development in the north by providing us, first of all, a bit of intelligence before the fact as to what projects are likely to come through, and by giving proponents a bit of assurance in terms of timeliness and predictability and transparency with respect to the federal regulatory process.

The interesting part is a link that we can make with the economic development side of our shop, where we can support some of these projects within the communities that are close to some of these projects and try to work on opportunities for them with respect to these major projects.

I hope that provides some answers to your questions, Mr. Duncan.

• (1705)

Mr. John Duncan: In all your project proposal funding and so on, there must have been some energy-related proposals.

Ms. Nicole Jauvin: There were. The one that comes to my mind is in Nunavut. We have a project recently with the Qulliq Energy Corporation, where we have contributed \$5.8 million toward a broader \$14 million project to replace the diesel generators with new generators that will be more efficient. The project did begin last fall. It's expected to create nine person-years of employment. Also, very interestingly, it will result in an annual reduction of diesel fuel use—I have the numbers here—of 1.6 million litres, a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of more than 4,000 metric tonnes. So that's one example.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): That will do it, Mr. Duncan. Thank you very much.

I don't have anybody else on the list. Mr. Lévesque has the next opportunity. Mr. Lévesque for five minutes. Does anybody else have a question? Ms. Crowder? And that may end it for this afternoon.

Mr. Lévesque, then Ms. Crowder.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As for the nutrition north Canada program, I would really like to know the nature of the committee that will be in charge. Will it be an administrative or advisory committee? Do you have an organization chart in mind, in terms of how it will operate? I am giving you just one direction right now, because our committee wants to have a meeting on this program specifically, to review all the ins and outs.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the week, on Tuesday—and this is more topical as far as today goes—we welcomed individuals from Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. The big problem they have, and it is pretty well the same in all northern communities, is housing. The problem is finding skilled people to train the residents, because skilled people do not stay around long enough to teach and train people who will in turn train others.

Does the current budget set out any funds for housing specifically?

Mr. Michael Wernick: That is two questions.

As for the nutrition program, as offered, our experts can appear before the committee and provide clarification. As for the council's role, it is an advisory committee that works directly with the department. It gives the minister and the department feedback on the program's implementation. Administration of the program, which will be done by officials in my department, as well as program accountability will be very clear: the department will be in charge of administering and implementing the program. There will be activity reports and so forth. It will certainly be an issue for the committee in the future.

Furthermore, housing has indeed been identified as a problem throughout all of northern Canada, in the territories as well as the northern parts of the provinces, including Nunavik. Our department does not deliver training programs. That is more the domain of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and the provinces, given that the federal government has more or less delegated labour and training matters to the provinces.

We are looking for coordination on the ground. If we fund new housing construction, we will mobilize, if possible, training and apprenticeship programs to create future capacity. The needs are so great that, in theory, there should be job opportunities in the communities in the years ahead.

• (1710)

Ms. Nicole Jauvin: I would like to add something, if I may. At CanNor, we are working with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to more clearly identify the needs. And as for training—not in terms of housing construction—our programs offer adult training opportunities, for example, funding the establishment of a curriculum and so forth. We are working actively on that with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, because that is a role we can and should fulfill.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Do I still have some time left, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Keep going, sir. You have another minute.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: In terms of managing individual affairs, I noticed you had a \$231 million increase over last year. What subactivities under this heading have led to this increase? What is the funding breakdown for each subactivity?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Thank you for your question, as it also gives me a chance to answer a previous question from Ms. Crowder.

The document shows the transfer of certain responsibilities related to residential schools and the processing of residential school files. In the past, it was categorized under “claims litigation settlement”. We tried to make things clearer—obviously, it did not work—by transferring these activities to the management of individual affairs. Therefore, you see a decrease on one side and an increase on the other, but the total has not changed.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you, Mr. Lévesque. You're a gentleman, sir.

We will go on to Ms. Crowder for the final five minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of B.C.-related questions.

Page 15-11 talks about the B.C. treaty-related measures, and less than half the money is allocated in this fiscal year. Are you expecting a slowdown in activity in B.C. treaty processes? It goes from about \$7.8 million to \$3 million.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I'd have to clarify exactly what that was for. Some of it may have been the accumulation of land.

No, we're actually very busy on agreements in principle and finals—

Ms. Jean Crowder: It's partly interim measures. It says, “...third parties for interim measures and British Columbia treaty-related measures”. You'll clarify that for me?

Mr. Michael Wernick: I will clarify that, but we have a lot of very active tables, and we're close to final agreements in a number of communities.

Ms. Jean Crowder: That's what I thought. That's why I was surprised to see a drop of over 50%.

In a previous question around supplementary estimates (C), I raised the issue around the \$30 million that was announced for post-secondary education—sorry; there was \$30 million announced for education, and I wondered about what was happening with the B.C. first nations education act. The response I got didn't provide the detail. It just says “Negotiations between Canada and the negotiating first nations in British Columbia are at an advanced stage”.

As you know, that legislation was passed a number of years ago. I don't think it provides a lot of confidence for first nations if it takes several years to get the resources that you need once a piece of legislation is passed.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, but it also requires two parties to agree to something. Offers have been made and offers have been rejected. We have mandates that we have to stay within.

We're at the table; we would really like to settle with those nations—

Ms. Jean Crowder: I know there's an ongoing dispute about comparability and funding between provinces—

Mr. Michael Wernick: We can't just say yes to whatever we're asked for. We have a responsibility to make reasonable offers. We've made reasonable offers. We hope that we will be able to conclude.

●(1715)

Ms. Jean Crowder: But it's the ongoing issue around comparability between provincial and federal government levels of funding. I know that there are disputes on what is included in provincial funding versus federal funding, but across the country, first nations have documented the differences between funding. In school district 79 in my own riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan, if they send their kids to the provincial school, the band itself pays more per capita than what they get funded for per capita on reserve.

There are some differences, and I know that's one of the sticking points between the B.C. first nations and the federal government.

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's exactly right. There is a legitimate difference in view about what comparability means at the level of specific kids moving back and forth. It is about what is comparable and what the penalty is.

Ms. Jean Crowder: In some of the rural and remote communities where provincial kids are actually going to a reserve school, at one time the province was not funding back to the reserve school. Do you know if that problem has been fixed?

Mr. Michael Wernick: No. I'd have to follow that up, but across the country, a very large number of kids who live on-reserve go to provincial schools, and we pay tuition. One of the ongoing issues we have with the provinces is that they set the rates. Sometimes they don't even ask us; they just change the rates and expect us to pay, so we're trying to have—

Ms. Jean Crowder: It's a problem for the bands too.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The tripartite agreement allows us to have a more stable funding relationship, one in which we know what we're paying and they know what they need. That's the advantage of the tripartite. We were delighted to see language in the budget putting the money aside for an implementation tripartite agreement, which was... I think you know where that is.

Ms. Jean Crowder: A substantial amount of money has been allocated to cleanup of contaminated sites. There's a number on page 47, I think. There are numbers that are listed in “Accelerating Action on Contaminated Sites”. I'm looking at “South of 60” right now, on page 47.

The target is 45 assessment projects and 20 remediation projects in 2009-2010 and seven assessment projects and 24 remediation projects in 2010-2011. Do you have any sense of whether there are substantially more sites than those? These are just the numbers that you're targeting; are we dealing with larger numbers?

Mr. Michael Wernick: The short answer would be yes. There are degrees of contaminated sites, ranging from the Faro mine to an old gasoline drum or fuel tank buried in the back part of a property. There are quite a range of issues. The people who deal with this try to sort them by risk and urgency. The things that are likely to contaminate groundwater get priority, and so on.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Can we get a list of the numbers?

Mr. Michael Wernick: We can certainly give you... I'm not sure we know everything that's out there, because we haven't surveyed every single square inch of every reserve, but we have a sense of the priority list and what's been accomplished year by year. That's another program that will sunset in 2012 and we'll have to argue for its continuation both north and south of 60.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Am I done?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Yes, indeed.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): I thank all members for this afternoon.

I thank the witnesses for being with us. Mr. Wernick, it's good to see you again, and Ms. Jauvin and Mr. Robillard. I hope everybody has a good weekend.

The meeting will stand adjourned. Thank you.

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