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Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good afternoon, honourable members. I welcome the witnesses and guests. This is the 32nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2) and the agenda, we are going to proceed with the study on the Nutrition North Canada Program.

[English]

This will be the first time in our fall session that we're going back to a series of witness hearings, followed by questions. We'll be following that normal course today, in that we have six different witness groups with us here this afternoon.

We'll be starting off and limiting opening presentations to five minutes each. We'll proceed much in the same order as is on your agenda today. After each presentation is finished, we will proceed to questions from members.

I know members are always eager to get in as many questions as possible. We have a pre-set order as to how the questions go. The first round is seven minutes. That includes the question and answer, so we try to keep our questions and responses as succinct as possible.

Once we do the first round of four questions, each seven minutes, then it goes to a five-minute round. I know that some of you have done this before. And this will come back.

When we start the presentations, keep in mind, if you are reading from your text, we have simultaneous translation going on. So keeping it at a good, slow pace, pretty much the way I'm talking right now, is good for the interpreters. That way, we can be sure every bit of your presentation is heard.

Let's proceed. We'll go in order.

We'll welcome first Mr. Richard Jock, who is the chief executive officer for the Assembly of First Nations. Welcome, Mr. Jock. Please go ahead with your presentation.

Mr. Richard Jock (Chief Executive Officer, Assembly of First Nations): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Today I'd like to focus on the need for involvement and full participation of first nations in the development and implementation of the Nutrition North program, which was announced in May of this year. This includes having the proper mechanisms and tools to ensure that the proper execution of the program is done, and it also includes accountability and transparency. The AFN is pleased, as part of this implementation, to see Health Canada taking a more

prominent role in the Nutrition North program than they previously had in the food mail program, particularly given the health implications of access to nutritious foods. Some of those I'll just review briefly.

Over half, 55.2%, of first nations children on reserve are either overweight, 22.3%, or obese, 36.2%. First nations children between the ages of three and five are more likely than not to be obese. Type 2 diabetes accounts for 10% of youth onset diabetes in North America. It's an emerging problem in first nations children and youth, and there's a significant number of first nations children and youth cases reported in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and northwestern Ontario. First nations people are four times more likely to experience type 2 diabetes than non-aboriginal Canadians. The actual rate of diabetes among first nations is 20%, which means one in five first nations people are diabetic.

The incidence of cancer is rising faster in first nations communities than in the general Canadian population. It is now the leading cause of death in some first nations communities. A poor diet and obesity are two of the greatest risk factors contributing to this emerging crisis.

Community-based nutrition initiatives, therefore, will be a vital component to promote the consumption of both healthy market foods and traditional foods. This is particularly important as many first nations do not have access to dietitians or nutritionists, and it's important that capacity-building be built into Health Canada's funding agreements in support of community programs. By way of context, the new Nutrition North Canada study impacts 27 first nations communities across northern Canada that are on the eligibility list, and 17 first nations communities that are on the nominal subsidy list. These communities are in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and the Atlantic provinces.

To date, there's been little communication with first nations citizens and communities at the grassroots level—in other words, those who will be impacted directly by the program. In fact, the AFN has heard from a number of first nations communities that they're not aware of the new program, its details, or how it will affect their communities. It's the understanding that preliminary communications have focused on retailers and wholesalers to ensure they are ready for the new program to come into effect.

Additionally, from our review of the details, our general view is that these are sufficiently vague and that we really need time to have feedback from communities in order to have informed input into the process. Two examples are that the eligibility criteria are unclear for both the communities and for the subsidized foods. Also, without regulations for the price of food, it may be difficult to enforce the subsidy at the point of sale and to ensure that this subsidy is being passed on to the consumer. We also need to ensure that communities not currently eligible because of lack of participation in their previous food mail program can be eligible in the future and may be able to apply for the subsidy.

There are also some transition mechanisms that need to be looked at. For example, withdrawing a subsidy for non-perishable foods and non-food items means that retailers need to order stock well in advance, which presents other challenges. Other communities, even if they're able to do so, don't have the ability to store stock, which may drive up costs due to the need to have additional storage space rented. There's also concern, given the timing of this, that barge and ferry services will not be available as those generally are not available in about one month.

In conclusion, by including first nations in the development of a nutrition program, we feel we can address these issues before additional challenges or problems emerge, and first nations and the AFN are keen to engage in those discussions and to work out those important elements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1535)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jock.

Now we'll proceed. We are going to welcome today, from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Chief Arlen Dumas, from the Mathias Colomb First Nation; and also Grand Chief Ron Evans.

I assume, Chief Evans, you're going to lead off for the presentation, and then certainly you'll both have an opportunity to participate in questions. So please go ahead.

Grand Chief Ron Evans (Grand Chief, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the standing committee, as well as the other witnesses. I thank you for this opportunity to present on behalf of the chiefs of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, together with Chief Arlen Dumas, Mathias Colomb First Nation.

It is good to speak with members of Parliament from all parties on this committee, and to greet you in a good way, so we can both understand the situation of Manitoba first nations.

Of the 63 first nations in Manitoba, 25 communities are considered remote and isolated. I believe you have the maps with

you. Fourteen are remote and can only be reached by air or water, which means they may be accessible by winter roads only six weeks a year, as changing weather patterns are lessening the use of winter roads each year. Eleven are isolated, with some being accessible by rail, although not on a daily basis, and some by lengthy gravel roads and possibly a ferry.

Many of these first nations are not accessible for freight for two to three weeks during freeze-up in the fall and breakup in the spring.

Although in the recent past I have urged Ministers of Indian Affairs to continue the food mail program, we see that the Government of Canada is implementing the new Nutrition North Canada program. Thus, we are here today to make recommendations for improvement.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs supports the way in which the new program states that most nutritious, perishable foods such as fruit, vegetables, bread, fresh meat, milk, and eggs will receive the highest rate of subsidy, and we look forward to finding new ways of including commercially produced, traditional northern foods in this program.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs wishes to remind the standing committee members that Canada is a northern country, and that the 25 first nations in Manitoba who are remote and isolated deserve to be full participants in this new program.

We have reviewed the May 2010 announcement of this new program by the then INAC minister, the Honourable Chuck Strahl, and the present health minister, the Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, both of whom I have had the pleasure of working closely with on other initiatives. However, it causes us some concern that the announcement stated that it reinforces the Government of Canada's commitment to the northern strategy, which is focused on the Arctic. We urge this committee and this government to involve the remote and isolated communities of Manitoba in further design and implementation of this new program.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs recommends a fair review process to review and reinstate several first nations being cut from subsidies for nutritious food at lower cost. This process must include more communication with the first nations in Manitoba regarding what has been developed and what is anticipated to happen.

Five of our northern first nations are set to be cut from any transport subsidy program as of March 31, 2011, including two of our northernmost first nations. The first one is Barren Lands Dene Nation, which is listed as Brochet, and it's air only. Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, which is listed as Pukatawagan, gets rail freight once a week, and its satellite community is Granville Lake. The others are Opihooon NaPiwin Cree Nation, listed as South Indian Lake; Sayisi Dene First Nation, listed as Tadoule Lake, again air only; York Factory First Nation, listed as York Landing, access by road and ferry. These five first nations, which make six communities, must be able to make their case to continue to receive freight subsidies through the new Nutrition North Canada program.

Please note that the third Dene first nation, Northlands Denesuline at Lac Brochet, is on the third list of communities that will be continuing from the food mail to the Nutrition North Canada program. This makes these lists quite questionable, as the three communities are all accessible only by winter roads or air and are within about a 30-minute flight of each other.

The fair review process must also apply to the next category that will be on a watch list for 2012-13 to re-evaluate their continued subsidy access. This list includes four first nations accessible only by air: Berens River, Bloodvein, Pauingassi, and Shamattawa.

● (1540)

The Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board must include at least one representative from the remote and isolated first nations in Manitoba.

There must be at least one representative of the remote and isolated first nations in Manitoba included in the formal committees responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of this new program, to ensure that attention is paid to ensure that a fair review process is established to reconsider the inclusion of remote and isolated first nations in Manitoba to be involved in the Nutrition North Canada program.

We need to ensure that stores do follow-through on labelling food and goods under the Nutrition North Canada program as "subsidized" and charge at a lower price.

We need to ensure that milk prices are lowered and continue to be set at a lower price.

We need to ensure that Health Canada works with the Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board and remote and isolated first nations in Manitoba to develop the community-based, culturally appropriate nutrition education components, such as promotional materials and activities with Manitoba first nations to encourage healthy eating. These initiatives are to be incorporated into the stores receiving federal subsidies, such as exhibits, signs, handouts with recipes—for example, healthy foods diabetes prevention initiatives undertaken by Neechi Foods in inner city Winnipeg, which have received national acclaim.

We need to ensure that the Health Canada and first nations food security initiative is connected to the Nutrition North Canada program in effective ways, including the first nations in Manitoba, and that their recommendations are heeded to improve the Nutrition North Canada program.

Thank you for this opportunity of speaking with you today.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs is committed to working together with the Government of Canada and all partners, including the private sector, in achieving a better future.

Ekosani.

Chief Arlen Dumas has comments for this committee as well.

● (1545)

The Chair: Maybe we could just incorporate those comments, Chief Dumas, into the question and answer period. We're well over our five minutes. I'm sure we'll have an opportunity....

Did you have something, Grand Chief?

Grand Chief Ron Evans: Sorry about that. I was speaking slowly, at your request, for the translators, just for the record.

The Chair: Of course.

Chief Dumas, did you want to take a minute and perhaps just capsulize your comments and then whatever was missed there we'll try to incorporate into the responses during that period of time? Go ahead, for a minute, and we'll see how we make out.

Chief Arlen Dumas (Chief, Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs): Thank you very much.

I'd like to echo the comments of my colleague. I'd like to commend this program and the potential that lies therein. However, when we take one step forward sometimes we take a couple back.

My community as well as a few of my other colleagues' communities are some of the communities that have been or will be removed from this process. I'd have to object to that, because, for instance, yes, there is a railway into my community, but that train only comes once a week.

For some of the people in our communities who do not have a regular income or are under some form of subsidy, they're sometimes unable to access freight on those days. Therefore, I think it's important that we have a proper dialogue, so that we can move ahead and actually enhance the potential this program has and properly reflect the needs of the people it will serve.

With due respect, I will cut off my comments with that. However, I'm hoping to contribute later on in the discussions.

The Chair: Yes, of course. I think there will be ample opportunity to do that.

Thank you, Chief Dumas and Chief Evans.

The pace was great, by the way. It was spot on. Good for you.

[*Translation*]

We would now like to welcome Bernadette deGonzague, Sr. Health Policy Analyst for Chiefs of Ontario.

[*English*]

Ms. deGonzague, please go ahead.

Ms. Bernadette deGonzague (Senior Health Policy Analyst, Chiefs of Ontario): Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the committee for the invitation to Chiefs of Ontario to speak about this important issue and also to pass on regrets for Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse, who couldn't be here today.

I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Algonquin people here in Ottawa.

Many nations have approached food security from the perspective of food as a human right, so we fully appreciate Canada's efforts to improve access to healthy foods through the new Nutrition North Canada program.

Poverty and food insecurity and diets high in processed foods and lacking in traditional foods are well-known determinants of health and are implicated in the major conditions that negatively impact the health status of many of our people. These include, as Mr. Jock has mentioned, type 2 diabetes, childhood obesity, heart disease, cancer, as well as poor oral health, which impacts both physical and mental well-being.

I'd like to address some of the positive aspects as well as some of our concerns for first nations in Ontario as this new program is implemented. Since we had only less than two weeks to prepare for this presentation, we haven't had time to gather adequate feedback and input on the process from our communities. Therefore the points that I bring out here today are by no means representative or all-inclusive.

The food mail program review report by Graeme Dargo made several recommendations based on discussions primarily with Inuit communities, organizations, and other stakeholders. However, he did not appear to conduct discussions with any of the 32 fly-in or remote first nation communities or organizations in northern Ontario, only eight of which are eligible for Nutrition North. So we have no information on why some of these communities didn't use food mail, which eliminates their eligibility for the new program. The Dargo

report also mentioned possible transfer of this program to Health Canada. Such a transfer will need to be transparent and involve discussions with first nations if it does go forward.

Communities need to be involved in the determination and periodic review of the list of eligible foods to be sure that they are culturally acceptable as well as healthy. We're happy to see recognition of the importance of traditional foods. However, the requirement that they be commercially packaged to be eligible restricts this benefit to a select few northern producers of Inuit country foods. So we support the implementation of provisions for transport and sharing of locally harvested traditional foods within northern Ontario region as well, to help reduce reliance on market foods.

Critical to the success of the program is the need for a mechanism to keep retailers accountable in keeping their prices as low as possible on the subsidized items.

Although the advisory committee will be conducting audits, without regulation they will have no authority to enforce pricing limits at the point of sale. We have concerns about what consequences there will be for a retailer who isn't compliant. If the subsidy is removed from the community, it may leave them with no recourse and result in exorbitant food prices. We need to be assured that this program will not result in financial losses that will in turn result in less healthy foods being ordered by retailers, or those losses being passed on to consumers by increases in the prices of other items.

As far as the eligibility criteria, 24 remote communities in Ontario are only eligible for a nominal subsidy or none at all. Use of the minimum weight order as a requirement for eligibility penalizes smaller communities that could still benefit greatly from the subsidy. We therefore recommend greater transparency in how this eligibility was determined as well as a mechanism to allow currently ineligible communities to apply for the subsidy in the future.

In 2006 food prices in three fly-in communities in northern Ontario—two of which were on food mail—were used to determine the cost to feed a family of four, which was close to \$1,400 a month. That is double the average of \$700 for municipalities in Ontario.

Since first nations demographics include larger families and a much younger population, the average cost to feed a family including teenagers—and if any of you have teenagers you know—would be even higher. Making these communities ineligible for subsidies under Nutrition North Canada will only result in even higher food prices.

The Health Canada nutrition education component is an important aspect of the new program, as remote communities don't always have access to dietitians or other nutrition professionals to provide this education. However, we'd like to be assured that the resources for this education will not be redirected from other Health Canada program areas, such as CPNP or ADI. Staff in these communities are already stretched to the limit providing education within communities specific to diabetes prevention and maternal health. This is a prime opportunity to expand the community food educator program to increase community capacity by training lay educators.

• (1550)

In closing, we look forward to our first nations being fully involved partners in the development, implementation, and evaluation of this program. We need to ensure a positive impact on the health and well-being of our people and accomplish the mandate of the program to improve access and availability of healthy foods.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. deGonzague.

I have just one question before we carry on. You used a couple of acronyms there—CPNP...

Ms. Bernadette deGonzague: I'm sorry. CPNP is the Canadian prenatal nutrition program, and ADI is the aboriginal diabetes initiative. My apologies.

The Chair: Excellent. I just wanted to make sure of that for the record. Not a problem.

Now we'll proceed. Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mary Simon. Welcome, Ms. Simon, again. She is the president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. It's great to have you here again. Please go ahead with your presentation. We are keeping the presentations to about five minutes for the opening, and then we're going to go directly to questions from members.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Mary Simon (President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami): Good afternoon.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

The nutrition program is vital to the lives of Inuit, and I am pleased that this committee has made the time for this very important study. As you know, food prices throughout the Arctic are alarmingly high. I think Ottawa residents would be shocked if they

were forced to pay \$15 for two litres of milk or \$8 for a loaf of bread. Yet that is our reality in our communities.

As numerous studies have found, these conditions are producing escalating rates of hunger, especially among our children. The Nutrition North Canada program builds on the federal government's long-standing recognition of unacceptable food insecurity in Inuit communities, and we commend the government for the program's focus on nutrition.

Inuit have some concerns about the transition to this new food subsidy program. With exactly five months left before the full rollout, we believe there are still many challenges to overcome. In the short term, there appear to be inadequate resources in place to meet the targets of the transition, with potentially serious ramifications for small retailers and Inuit consumers. For instance, in my home community of Kuujuaq, in northern Quebec, in Nunavik the local independent store began implementing price increases of 40% on items such as disposable diapers and canned vegetables, after subsidies were removed from these items in early October.

An incomplete understanding of the social and economic impacts on independent retailers could ultimately decrease, not increase, the choices available to Inuit consumers who do not have the option of expressing their discontent with food prices by taking their dollars elsewhere. In addition, there seems to be a great expectation placed on the program's external advisory board—a volunteer board—to track and provide advice on consumer satisfaction with the new food subsidy program. Details of the retail registration process, community-customized food subsidy rates, third-party auditing and claiming processing systems, and marketing and outreach planning for the program still remain unknown at this point. We do not yet know how the program's funding will grow to meet increased demand with burgeoning populations and increased awareness of the program.

Around the world there is evidence that uncoordinated efforts lead to adverse effects on the most insecure food, and those effects will probably be compounded more severely in the Arctic by the effects of climate change and the global food, fuel, and financial crises witnessed in recent years. We encourage the Government of Canada to create mechanisms for engagement between the public and the private sectors, so that ordinary Inuit may collaborate on concrete solutions to food security and nutrition issues.

Moreover, efforts to make the program accountable must be directly tied to the efforts to track and evaluate its impact on the food security and nutritional status of its users. We need innovative thinking and expanded capacity, especially during the transition period. Examples of innovations include the potential to expand the country food component of the program to support the sharing networks making up traditional Inuit food systems.

Finally, I would like to remind you that Inuit are the major users of these programs. Nearly two-thirds of all eligible communities are predominantly Inuit. And roughly 90% of funds spent on Nutrition North Canada's predecessor, the food mail program, were spent in Inuit communities.

• (1555)

It is Inuit consumers and small northern retailers who will bear the brunt of Nutrition North Canada's growing pains. So the socio-economic realities of food-insecure Inuit families must be paramount in our thinking and in our actions.

Thank you very much. I will be glad to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Simon.

We also recognize that we have Anne Kendrick here, senior policy advisor with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, as well. It's great to have you with us.

We have two representatives here with us today from the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services: Marie-Josée Gauthier and Elena Labranche.

Ms. Labranche, you're going to lead off, and we'll go from there. Thank you, and go ahead.

Ms. Elena Labranche (Representative, Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services): [*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*]

Thank you very much for allowing us to be here for you to hear our concerns about the food mail program.

I'm Elena Labranche. I'm the assistant director of the public health department for the whole Nunavik region in northern Quebec. I'm here with Marie-Josée Gauthier. She's the only nutritionist for the region, for the 14 communities, which are all remote.

I'll be talking about a few facts about the food source problems we have in Nunavik.

The latest research results have concluded that food insecurity is at 24%. The poverty level is up to 30%, and 44% of the households maintain minimum comfort budgets. There are almost no employment opportunities in most of the communities. Welfare is at the maximum, and people using the system get the same amount of funds as people using the same welfare system in the south.

The cost of groceries is enormous. On average, the cost is about 57% higher in Nunavik compared to Quebec City. A bag of groceries that would cost \$200 in the south would cost a minimum of \$314 for the same basket. Country food is another source we use very often, but country food can't be relied on at all times because of the seasonal migration of the animals. Most times they don't use the same route patterns. During the late spring and late fall, when people

cannot go hunting anymore to get food, everyone depends on store-bought food.

The change to the food mail program is way too fast, in our opinion. There is not enough time in the transition period for the northerners to adjust and for the retailers to prepare for the changes. For example, there is no time to build the warehouses to stock up on dried goods. Also, in the homes of the people, there is no room to stock up on foods, for those who would be able to afford to stock up. Besides, that is not part of our culture. When you have more than enough of what you need, you share with others.

There was no time to inform the public of the changes to the food mail program. We are already seeing an increase in prices of up to 40% for some of the items, such as canned goods, dried pasta, and rice. These are essential staples for feeding large families. For example, in Kuujuaq, where food is the cheapest of the 14 communities, two of these bottles would be \$7.88.

We'd like to understand, too, if there is going to be another program that is going to cover these essential items.

Under Nutrition North Canada, we will be receiving funding through Health Canada for nutrition education purposes, which is going to reinforce our existing work on promoting healthier eating. However, with prices skyrocketing, we are worried that the public will struggle to access foods. When people are worried about having enough food to put on the table, we do not have the ideal conditions for trying to change food habits for better choices.

Thank you.

Nakurmiik.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Labranche.

Finally, last but certainly not least, we welcome Darius Elias, who is a member of the Yukon legislature.

It's great to have you here with us. Please go ahead with your presentation, and then we'll go to questions.

Mr. Darius Elias (Member of the Legislative Assembly, Yukon Legislative Assembly): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Darius Elias. I'm a member of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, and I represent the fly-in-only community of Old Crow. We are the only community in the territory to benefit from the food mail subsidy program.

I want to begin by expressing my community's appreciation. The federal food subsidy program is an investment that means a great deal to my constituents.

My testimony to you today will focus on a united message from my constituents, the community of Old Crow, the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation chief and council, and all 17 of the territory's members of the legislative assembly.

The Nutrition North Canada program objective to ensure that healthy foods are more accessible and affordable to our community of Old Crow will not be achieved should the program be implemented solely as a retail subsidy on April 1, 2011. My ask to you is that come April 1, 2011, the Nutrition North Canada food subsidy program include an exemption for our community. I ask that it have flexibility to maintain the personal shipping transportation subsidy from Whitehorse, our capital city, to Old Crow, for nutritious perishable food, non-food items, non-perishable foods, and essential non-food items, via Air North—Yukon's airline. I also ask to maintain a transportation subsidy that is administered by Air North, removing Canada Post from the picture altogether, with the airline being directly accountable to the Department of Indian Affairs.

Implicit in this ask is the ability for our community members to purchase affordable, healthy foods from wherever they choose, and to take those healthy choices to Air North, which provides the only and most direct transportation service route possible to get the healthy foods to dinner tables in Old Crow.

We feel this community-based solution is the best way to fulfill the Nutrition North Canada program objectives. It is my hope that our united message from the Yukon Territory will provide the necessary justification for a change in mandate, a program exemption, and flexibility to fully meet the Nutrition North Canada program objectives, thus helping to maintain our strong, vibrant, healthy Arctic community in Old Crow, Yukon.

We understand we need the best investment possible, and we believe we already have a workable system in the Yukon. With some fine-tuning, it can be more efficient. My constituents are wondering what the department of INAC is trying to fix in the Yukon. This level of overhaul in the food mail program is considered to be excessive and unnecessary by my constituents.

The Nutrition North Canada program, implemented as is, has the potential to negatively impact the physical and financial health of our families and the single mothers and elders who are on a fixed income. That is unacceptable. The Nutrition North Canada program is viewed as a step backwards and a potential disservice to our community.

I'll finish by submitting some prices of food in Old Crow and in Whitehorse. The prices in Old Crow are subsidized. In the Northern Store, the parent company to the North West Company—the distribution centre is in Winnipeg, Manitoba—a loaf of Wonder bread in Old Crow, as of last Saturday, was \$6.19; in Whitehorse, it was \$2.97. Two litres of milk in Old Crow are \$9.59; in Whitehorse, it is \$2.98. One dozen eggs in Old Crow is \$6.19; in Whitehorse, it is \$2.98. A five-pound bag of McIntosh apples—there are about ten or eleven apples in the bag—in Old Crow is \$11.59; in Whitehorse, \$4.49.

I thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony to you today. *Mahsi Cho*.

I'll be willing to answer any and all questions that are presented to me on behalf of my constituents. Thank you.

•(1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Elias, and all our witnesses, for your presentations and for sticking to the timeframe. You did a fantastic job.

Now we're going to proceed to questions from members. The first round is seven minutes. We'll begin with Mr. Bagnell from the Liberal Party.

Go ahead, Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): [*Member speaks in Inuktitut*]

It's great to have all of you here. As the critic for the Arctic, I try to push all your issues when you ask me. It's great to have Darius here from, as you can see, the farthest community from Ottawa here on the map, and it's great that the committee gave him access. As at least Darius and the committee members know, I've been fighting the bad changes in this program for over a year.

Among other things, Darius, you're asked to try to get special consideration for that situation that all parties in your legislature passed unanimously, as did the chief and council.

I was shocked at what we can see from the testimony today. People are being cut off, some items are ineligible, necessities are being taken off the list, and some communities aren't eligible. The prices are skyrocketing, so how do you know the savings are passed on? Some of those concerns are even a shock to me to hear today, over and above the fact that I've already been fighting changes that I think will hurt.

Darius, I want to ask you about two things. The rationale from the department seems a little weird in your situation. I don't understand how it works, actually, some of the other more complicated travel. It says here in the paper that the rationale for going with a direct subsidy—this is from the spokeswoman from INAC—is that it will “shorten the supply chain and reduce handling of fresh foods”.

Well, in Whitehorse they go into the grocery, they buy their stuff, they take it up to Air North, they put it on the plane, they get off the plane, and they take their food home. That's pretty short. Now they'll have to go to a retailer—some of whom have already refused to do this—and convince the retailer to sort out what goes under which category, to take it to the airline, and to negotiate a price for it. Obviously it could sit around the store forever. That's not any shorter.

In another article just last week, another rationale from the department was that with no oversight on the kinds of goods being shipped, there are two risks. There's no oversight. They're suggesting that the reason they had to change the program was that there's no oversight. Well, I happened to be in Air North on the weekend to pick up something else, and I saw the food guide. It's a very complicated list that tells exactly what is allowed on the plane or why it's not, so the department is not giving a true rationale.

It says if everyone went out and loaded up on goods each time, triggering a transportation subsidy, it could be destabilizing for local retailers. Well, the department's rationale for the program was to provide competition for local retailers, which would keep the prices down for people in the north. Now they're arguing against their own rationale. If everyone went outside.... The Inuit must be laughing at that one. They're suggesting that the people are just going to go from those northern communities to the grocery store at several thousand dollars every time and then cost the department a few cents to get their groceries.

Also, Darius, I heard that the caribou didn't make it past the village this year. That's where most of you got most of your food normally, which exacerbates any problems with this program.

• (1610)

Mr. Darius Elias: Absolutely it does, tenfold. Yes.

You gave me a lot of information there.

This is how it works in the Yukon. Residents of my community of Old Crow either phone their families in our capital city of Whitehorse or travel to the capital city. We don't get our food from Yellowknife. We don't get our food from Inuvik. We don't get our food from Dawson City. We don't get our food from Edmonton or Vancouver. For us to get healthy foods on our tables, Whitehorse is it.

I receive several calls throughout the month asking if I can shop for individuals, meaning I go pick it up, take it to Air North, and ensure it gets on the plane. We have a workable system in the territory. We want to stay as close to the status quo as possible. The elimination of Canada Post is fine.

Larry, your had a question about getting fruits and vegetables to the community. For the most part now, especially with people travelling from Whitehorse to Old Crow, that's a carry-on item. Just about every single one of my constituents has a bag filled with fruits—apples, bananas, pineapples, oranges, whatever—as their free carry-on item. That's the regular order of business now. It's care and control.

Let's say 20 stores in our capital city sign up for this retail subsidy. Why would the Department of Indian Affairs want 20 accountability

structures and reporting structures versus the single one of Air North, the only company that flies into and out of Old Crow?

The Chair: Could you try to keep your talking at a pace that's a bit slower, Mr. Elias, just for the interpretation? Thank you.

Mr. Darius Elias: Okay.

Again, with regard to the caribou, this is the second time in five years that they didn't migrate past the community of Old Crow when they were supposed to. As far as food security goes, 80% of my community's food intake is from the Porcupine caribou herd. Without them, we are an unhealthy community, case closed. So the access to nutritious perishable foods affects the day-to-day lives of my constituents. It just compounds this situation tenfold when the caribou don't come by.

The Chair: You have roughly a minute and a quarter, Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay.

Somebody made a good point about how when they've taken a number of things off the list, as they have now—and I hadn't thought about this before with all my other criticisms—the retailers are going to have to have these big warehouses to store that extra stuff in, because in some of the Inuit communities in the north there's no shipping. They can go in only once a year. You have to have this huge storage space, and the cost of maintaining this retailer in the north is of course much more than it is in the south, so then the people are going to have to pay for that. Does anyone want to comment on that?

I'll ask my other question, just so I can get it in. For Ontario, the eight communities that aren't allowed are the Manitoba ones that are being kicked out. Are any of those in the fly-in north? I can't believe the program's going to help people if it's taking people off the eligibility list.

• (1615)

The Chair: We have time for a short response there. Does anybody want to jump in? Go ahead.

Ms. Bernadette deGonzague: With regard to Ontario, yes, there are only eight communities of the at least 32 that are remote and/or fly-in communities only. Only eight of those are eligible for the new program. Because the use of food mail depends on whether or not they are eligible for the new program, we don't know why they weren't using food mail, and we know that a lot of communities weren't even aware that food mail was available. Communication is key here.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Simon, with a short response.

Ms. Mary Simon: Mr. Bagnell, I just want to echo what my colleague from Yukon said about the availability of country food. It's the same in other parts of the north as well. For instance, in Nunavik, in northern Quebec, where we live, there are no caribou this year. In fact, people have to fly in to another location to hunt for the caribou, so it's costing them extra dollars to hunt for the meat that we need for the winter. The fact that you can't always depend on animals that migrate has to be taken into consideration in this scenario.

The other thing is, in terms of storage space, the bigger businesses like Northern Stores can think further ahead and prepare for the sealift, which comes once a year in the summertime, but for the smaller private sector retailers, it doesn't work that way because they don't have the facilities or the storage space to stock up. That's what happened in Kuujuaq, for instance, when the food mail program started. All of a sudden they had signs all over the store saying that things were going up by 40% because they were no longer covered. People were totally confused.

The Chair: We are quite over time at this point. I think we'll leave it at that.

Ms. Simon, thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lévesque, the floor is yours for seven minutes.

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

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleague who is usually first to ask questions. This time, since I am very much interested in the problem we are currently experiencing, he allowed me to go first.

I would like to welcome you.

I am very happy to see you here. Although I understand the eagerness to hear from all the witnesses we can, it seems to me that, once again today, we have a lot of witnesses at the same time, and I am afraid that we might not be able to get to the bottom of things.

The program is extremely important not only for Inuit but also for everyone working with them in the north. They are all facing the same problem.

I would like us to go back briefly to the current Food Mail Program. We know that, in order to reduce costs, perishable food is shipped over land as much as possible. The goal is to reduce costs because shipment by air is very expensive.

Until now, Canada Post asked carriers to bid to ship the products from the location closest to the territories. All carriers were able to bid for a contract. Taking into account all feasibility criteria, Canada Post would choose a carrier and oversee the implementation of the program.

And now, we want to invest \$45 million over two years to establish a new program. Instead of subsidizing transportation for perishable food by the kilogram, we are going to subsidize retailers

—usually the major retailers—and they will have to ask various carriers to submit bids. So there is a loss of bargaining leverage.

It is all well and good to say that non-perishable food will be excluded from shipping to lower the costs of the whole program, but the communities don't have the means to store non-perishable food. They may be non-perishable, but they must be stored in the communities for at least eight months.

I wonder if \$45 million is sufficient to allow the community, not the retailer or the wholesaler, to build a warehouse to store all products on its territory.

By removing non-perishable food items from the list, could we not provide enough funding for the program to really lower costs, while checking the real retail price against the shipping costs right from the start? I feel we would then be better able to control prices in the communities, although we could ask for oversight, as Nutrition North does at the moment.

This question is for each of you.

Is it possible to find less expensive means of transportation than by air for each of your communities, taking into account the quality of the food that is being shipped and the price—since price is important for the communities—to be able to compete with, say, fast food?

The floor is yours.

• (1620)

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go around the table. We'll actually start with Ms. Labranche, for about 30 to 40 seconds each if we don't exhaust our time. So a short response on Monsieur Lévesque's question.

Ms. Marie-Josée Gauthier (Representative, Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services): Could you just repeat the last question?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Could you repeat the question, sir?

Ms. Marie-Josée Gauthier: You would like to know if we could find other means of transportation—

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: —that would be less expensive.

Ms. Marie-Josée Gauthier: —for perishable food.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: For perishable food, taking into account both quality and price.

Ms. Marie-Josée Gauthier: I don't see any means of transportation other than a plane for perishable products. In my opinion, there is no other way.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Simon or Ms. Kendrick.

Ms. Mary Simon: For Inuit communities, there is no other way of bringing in perishable goods, because if they're on a ship, it takes days for a ship to come into the Arctic. There is really no way of bringing in perishable goods, so it has to be done by air. This is where the high cost really comes in.

There has to be a way to make sure that the retailers are getting their maximum ability to get good fresh produce that isn't going bad, and costs less. There could be a situation where retailers are buying food that isn't fresh, but it costs less and then it goes up to the community. We don't want that. We want fresh produce. The retailing system has to work.

• (1625)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Jock.

Mr. Richard Jock: I think one of the things we're trying to emphasize by having the communities involved, particularly in designing the appropriate transition and providing more input into the design of the program, is that it will ensure that the maximum benefits are achieved, whether by looking for new shipping mechanisms or at ways of ensuring that the program is having an impact through the price reductions.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Excuse me, Mr. Jock, but could you focus on my question? Can you think of a means of transportation that would be less expensive and more profitable, and that would ensure the quality of food in the communities?

[English]

Mr. Richard Jock: In terms of whether airlines or...?

[Translation]

The Chair: The translation is not working. Could you please repeat the question, Mr. Lévesque?

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Is there a way other than by air to ship food at a lower cost, ensuring that the quality is still good at destination? And I am still talking about the location closest to the communities.

[English]

Mr. Richard Jock: I would say in general that airlines are the best mechanism, but at times the northern roads and ice roads are mechanisms that are in place for parts of the year, which can be also useful for northern communities. But those northern roads are actually diminishing in terms of the amount of time they can be used for on-ground transportation.

The Chair: Okay. We are getting to the end here. We had a couple more witnesses—

Ms. Mary Simon: That doesn't apply in the eastern Arctic. We don't have ice roads; we only can do it by air.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Ms. Simon.

Just a very brief response, Chief Dumas, and then Ms. deGonzague.

Go ahead, Chief.

Chief Arlen Dumas: Thank you very much.

I think anything is possible. I think the most important step is essentially to talk with the communities first and perhaps find other creative ways to deal with the issue; but more importantly, you need to discuss the issue with the communities. For instance, we are fortunate enough at the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation to own our own airline. As the chief, it is my interest to provide the best service to my people; therefore, if I had an arrangement with whomever to provide this service, I would guarantee that my community members were to receive the best possible prices for their food.

I guess when you take a look at the North West Company, that's one of the contentious issues here. How are we going to monitor them, how are we going to police them, how are we going to do all of these things? I can guarantee that what they will do initially is that they will meet those prices. However, they provide credit to community members, to our people, at a 28% return. So they're going to sell those groceries at whatever that rate is, but they're going to recoup those costs. How do you police that?

The Chair: Unfortunately, we'll have to leave it at that. We are well over time here.

Chief Arlen Dumas: Mr. Chair, just one more....

The Chair: Yes, I understand, Chief. Okay, you have ten seconds. Can you get it out in ten seconds?

Chief Arlen Dumas: Yes, totally, ten seconds.

Sir, I guess the other thing to consider is the cost of the freight subsidy and then the costs of the long-term health issues, such as renal failure, and all of those things. So we have to find that cost-benefit analysis, and that's a huge issue.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Chief Dumas.

Thank you, Mr. Lévesque.

Ms. Crowder, you have seven minutes.

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

[English]

First of all, I want to thank all of you for coming.

I think the testimony we're hearing today is disturbing on any number of levels. I was just making a list of all the things people have talked about. I haven't captured them all, but they include lack of community process, concerns about controls over pricing, culturally appropriate decisions, storage issues, concerns around the advisory board, concerns around the inability to consistently access country food, and commercial packaging and labelling. The list is huge.

I only have seven minutes, as you're well aware, so I'm going to start with two questions. I'd like one to go to Chief Dumas and one to Ms. Simon.

Chief Dumas, I understand from Grand Chief Evans' presentation that your community is one of those that are now going to be excluded from the process. Can you tell me a little bit about the process that led to your exclusion, or how your community was involved in being dropped from the list?

• (1630)

Chief Arlen Dumas: It was done unilaterally, I guess. There was no consultation, no input.

Actually, my community, the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, called Pukatawagan, has a rail link, but a few of our satellite communities that are farther out on the land have no access; they're fly-in.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Help me understand this. The decision was made unilaterally; people did not come to your community to talk to you about how people were going to access food.

Chief Arlen Dumas: That's right.

Ms. Jean Crowder: There was no two-way dialogue—

Chief Arlen Dumas: No.

Ms. Jean Crowder: —no discussion about how you were going to meet your community's nutritional needs?

Chief Arlen Dumas: No, not all, and there was actually no information that the food mail program was going to be tendered, if it was at all.

Ms. Jean Crowder: To your knowledge, is there any appeal process? Is there any way for your community to say wait a minute, we don't want to be excluded from this list?

Chief Arlen Dumas: I'm hoping that we'd be able to determine that here today and that we have opened up some dialogue so that those questions can be answered and we can deal with them.

Ms. Jean Crowder: How was your community notified that it was excluded?

Chief Arlen Dumas: It wasn't.

Ms. Jean Crowder: It wasn't notified?

Chief Arlen Dumas: No.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So just, one day, the subsidy stops.

Chief Arlen Dumas: That's right.

Ms. Jean Crowder: What a terrible way that is to make a decision. I'm sorry; that's my inside voice.

Ms. Simon, I've had the great privilege to visit many communities in the north, and as a southerner—I'm from Vancouver Island, and we're of course not included in this program, nor should we be—I was shocked at the prices. We took photographs of the prices so that we could come south and tell people what it's like for people.

What were the problems with the existing program, in your view, that resulted in this wholesale change?

Ms. Mary Simon: One of the things we heard from the people was that there wasn't enough transparency. Many people didn't know what was and what wasn't subsidized. There wasn't enough information going to the consumer about how this food mail program was benefiting the people at the community level and how much of it was going to, let's say, Canada Post and how much of it was going to other handlers of the food mail program.

That kind of transparency didn't allow people to really know how much savings there was in relation to their own costs. But all of a sudden you can see now that they've arbitrarily, I think, taken certain things off the list, even before the program actually starts. For instance, tea is on the list, but coffee is not, and there are a lot of coffee drinkers up north. Pampers are no longer on the list.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm sorry; let me ask you a question. Tea is on the list and coffee is not; Pampers aren't on the list—

Ms. Mary Simon: This is in Nunavik, in one of our retail stores.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Were your communities involved in a consultation around what was on the list and what was off the list?

Ms. Mary Simon: No. One day they—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Did anybody talk to the women who are the primary caregivers of children?

Ms. Mary Simon: No. One day we just had these signs all over the store saying this is now \$40 instead of \$20, because the subsidy no longer applies to it. There were signs like that.

Ms. Jean Crowder: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have three to three and a half minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Good.

Ms. Simon, I want to come back to you again and others about country food. I can't remember who said it, but I understand that country food will be eligible for the subsidy if it's commercially packaged. Explain to me how many communities have facilities to commercially package country food.

Ms. Mary Simon: It's probably none.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So virtually what is being eliminated is any talk of a subsidy for country food, which is, as we know, a very important part of the nutritional....

Ms. Mary Simon: Yes, and I think that really shows how different the needs are.

I don't know what they're doing in Old Crow, but in Kuujuaq, what some of our people are doing—in fact, what my family is doing—is fly to another place where there are caribou and hunting the caribou. Then we put them in containers ourselves, and then Air Inuit has graciously given us a subsidy—I think it's 88¢ per kilo—for country food, if you pack it yourself and you bring it on the plane.

So there are ways that we are trying to figure out how to get our country food, but it has nothing to do with the program. We're trying to figure it out ourselves, though it should be more of a policy issue and a discussion on how these things are going to work for people at the community level. Hardly anybody can go on Air Inuit and go to another community to hunt caribou. They're not going to have caribou for the winter.

• (1635)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Anybody who has had the experience of travelling in the north understands how expensive it is to travel into the north, or into any of the fly-in communities.

Did you want to say something quickly?

Ms. Bernadette deGonzague: I just want to echo that the cost for anyone to try to do this on their own is much less efficient than it could be if there were policy in place to help with the sharing of traditional foods.

There are 133 communities in Ontario, at least half of them are in the north, and it costs \$7,000 to fly to Fort Severn. So we need to have that discussion on sharing of traditional food, because that's an important aspect.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Elias, I read your speech in your own legislature on the motion that you introduced. We do sometimes read these things, you know.

My understanding of what you're asking for is that the current program be left in place, with perhaps some minor tweaking—I know you said to remove Canada Post from the picture. So essentially, the program as it stands was working for your constituents.

Mr. Darius Elias: For the most part it was, yes. Over the years we've tweaked the system from having all of the administration happen at the Air North hangar. The excellent employees at Air North would put the category of items in different boxes and then send them to Old Crow. If they weren't under the subsidy program, they'd package them and send them as freight, for whatever Air North charged. That system worked very well.

For the Nutrition North Canada program to go around in the capital city—I'll use Whitehorse—and ask who wants to participate in the program.... If two of the major stores—Superstore, Loblaws, or a specialty store that only operates six months of the year, such as the fruit stand that brings fruit from the Okanagan—don't sign up,

then we can't receive the subsidy. That takes away opportunity and choices from my constituents, and that's unacceptable.

So again, implicit in our request is access to affordable food, and that's going to achieve the program objective.

The Chair: That will do it. Thanks, Ms. Crowder.

Now we'll invite Ms. Glover, for seven minutes plus, since that's the trend. We'll make sure we're balanced.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you.

I want to take a moment to thank all the witnesses for being here, because it is a very important issue. As Mr. Elias just said, this is really about making sure that we get affordable, nutritious food to the people who absolutely need it who are in remote areas.

I've heard all of you commend the government for trying to look at this in that way and to achieve that objective. We are still several months away. We still have an advisory committee, which is going to be used as the voice for our northerners to ensure that we get this right. So I appreciate your input today.

I have heard, however, a number of statements that were just completely incorrect or false, and it's become obvious to me that more information has to be shared. I would encourage all of the witnesses.... On the website you can see exactly how some of these things are going to transpire. For example, perishable apples are never going to be on a boat rotting. Perishable foods are going to be the foods that are subsidized and will be flown by air. The comments that I hear today suggest to me that we need to do some more work to educate concerning this Nutrition North Canada program, and we are several months away, so we intend to do that.

We're also going to ensure that education is available in the communities through Health Canada. I was very pleased to hear some of you talk about the need for pamphlets and the need to educate people, particularly those people who are affected by many of the diseases that aboriginal people suffer from, such as diabetes. We have a huge problem with diabetes, and I am very confident that the Government of Canada is looking towards a program like Nutrition North Canada to help stop the deaths that are occurring in our northern communities because we don't have accessible, affordable, nutritious food.

I just want to correct a couple of things. Funding.... The one really good thing about this new program is that in the past funding was at about \$27 million per year, and since the year 2000 we've had to go back to ask for more money. This is going to bring stable funding. There will be \$60 million a year invested in this program. It's stable funding that I believe will allow many of the retailers and wholesalers and the people who are stakeholders in all of this to better prepare for long-term solutions.

Country foods, of course, will be subsidized. I heard a lot of suggestion that they won't be subsidized. That's just not factual.

The eligibility requirements.... Again, the website dictates who is eligible and who is not.

I'd like to ask Chief Dumas, when did your community use the previous food mail program?

• (1640)

Chief Arlen Dumas: Yes. That would have to be based on the individuals. There were people such as teachers, there were community members who did participate in certain portions of the program historically.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I'd like those details from you, please, Chief, because my information is that you've never used it.

Chief Arlen Dumas: Okay.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: If we're wrong, that's why we have an advisory committee with stakeholders who can assist us with this. The eligibility, and I want to make this very clear, reads as such: "Communities that use the current Food Mail Program extensively will continue to be eligible. Communities that use the program, but not extensively, will be eligible for a nominal subsidy rate during the first year of the new program."

Communities that have not been using the food mail program at all are the only ones who are ineligible; and furthermore, if they want to become eligible, we do that case by case. So there are no cuts. If we're wrong, please send me that information. I'd be pleased to look into it for you. But again, I'm going to refer the witnesses to the website to get much of the information that is listed.

With regard to Old Crow, Mr. Elias, I was very pleased that you touched on some of the prices, because they are extreme. You were touching on prices of nutritious foods, and that's what this program is going to try to focus on, providing those nutritious foods at an affordable rate. It is ridiculous that someone would pay a higher price for milk than for a bottle of Coca-Cola. It just doesn't make sense, particularly when many of our communities are suffering from some of the diseases we've talked about earlier. And Old Crow is the exception, so I want you to know that.

Mr. Darius Elias: I asked for an exception.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: The exception is there, sir. The exception is there, so Old Crow, because of its unique situation, is an exception and will continue with many of the subsidies and whatnot.

I did want to ask some questions, though, because I want to make sure we fine-tune it, and I was listening very intently to hear that you want some fine tuning. There are some non-food items that you may want to have included. As I said before, we're concentrating mainly

on perishables that will have subsidies; non-perishables will go by boat or other methods of transportation. But I want to know from each of you, is there an essential non-food item that you would like to see included on the list of eligible food products?

I have one more correction before I get to the answers on that question. Coffee and tea are equal. Ms. Simon, again, coffee and tea are equal. So if someone in the community is telling you, a retailer or wholesaler, that they're not equal, refer to the website. Let us know. We're pleased to intervene on your behalf. We will be monitoring these very closely to ensure that they follow the rules.

But please, answer my question: if there are some essential non-food items that you feel should be supported by the program, I'd really like to hear about them.

Chief Dumas?

The Chair: We'll just take the hands up on this.

Actually, let's go to Chief Dumas, and then over here to Ms. Gauthier.

Chief Arlen Dumas: I guess the initial issue is my community is unique because the North West Company actually runs Canada Post, so there may be a bit of a conflict of interest, but we'll get to that later.

I guess the two non-food items that I would recommend would be gasoline and ammunition, because when the people go out onto the land, there's a cost. It costs \$2 a litre for gasoline in my community, so if we're going to subsidize something, I think my community would be appreciative of those two items.

• (1645)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Is there anyone else?

The Chair: We had Madame Gauthier, I think.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Josée Gauthier: Perhaps I am going to switch from English to French.

[English]

For the nutrition education part, that's great that they will include us in the program. It's perfect that this side is worked on as well. But being the only nutritionist for 14 communities, I do wonder how I'm going to use it. I've been working on the retail-based nutrition intervention here with Health Canada. We did recipe cards that were sent to all northern stores. It has proven ineffective because you have to do it with some kind of educational component with an activity by itself, not just giving out a recipe card like that. It has been evaluated and it was not effective. So giving out pamphlets and recipes like that is not going to change anything. We do have to have, really, ongoing activities, capacity-building, and everything.

However, in Nunavik we don't have community health workers, community representatives, in the clinic yet. It's just starting as a program. We only have clinical care, so I do wonder who I can send the money to for them to do the education and appropriation.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will now go to Ms. Simon.

Please be quick.

[English]

Ms. Mary Simon: Okay.

In terms of non-perishables, you've probably heard that we have the youngest population in Canada. Diapers are a very important aspect of daily living. Just like every other society, we don't depend too much on cloth diapers any more. Also, equipment for hunters—to be able to hunt, you need the gasoline, as the gentleman said, and other hunting equipment.

One last point I wanted to make is in regard to the volunteer advisory committee. It is a volunteer committee, so we don't want to put an onerous job onto these people. I don't know how many are going to be on this committee. The government needs to be proactive in terms of communications and education with regard to this advisory committee. As I said, it's an advisory role that it will play.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Simon.

We are now starting the second round.

Mr. Russell, you have five minutes.

[English]

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

Good afternoon to each of you. It's good to be with you.

It sounds like a conversation that should have happened a long time ago, before the program was announced, in my view. So many issues have arisen in this committee room this afternoon that obviously the program has not taken into account.

For instance, the eligibility list that just came out in October.... Most of the sealifts have come and gone by October. You have a regime coming in that doesn't take into account the nuances in certain parts of the north. In Labrador, we have a number of communities on the list; some are going to be dropped and they weren't notified and weren't involved in it. They're facing the same

circumstance. People are going to the grocery store, going to the retailer, and asking why is this now so pricey compared to what it's been in the past.

The aim of the program—nutritious foods for healthier people and healthier communities—is a noble goal. It was one of the goals of the food mail program. Under the food mail program, you could have tweaked the eligibility list to put more focus on nutritious foods or perishable items. There's a question whether a wholesale reform was necessary.

To me, it would have had to do with the structure of the program and how the program was implemented. Maybe a wholesale structural change was not what was necessary. It will be nice when we get the officials in front of us to hear what they have to say, whether there was some kind of comparative study done between what was happening with the food mail program, what's going to happen now, and why this one is apparently going to be a great successor.

On country foods, I'd just like to correct the parliamentary secretary. Not all country foods that are going to be transferred from community to community are going to be subsidized. It's only if you have an abattoir—somebody that's producing and manufacturing these country foods for retail sale. That's what's going to be subsidized under the program, not in the case of Ms. Simon, whose family and relatives are moving and transporting foods because of the lack of caribou in other areas.

The whole issue of the advisory committee being the voice of northerners—there are many voices in the north, I would think. Not all the areas are going to be represented on this advisory committee. We've got to have an avenue where all the voices of the people in the north can be given some hearing and can certainly be taken into account.

Do you believe that maybe a delay in the full implementation of this program would be something we could recommend to the minister until a lot of these nuances—through more collaborative effort, more consultation—are resolved?

Would you give us another six months or something to work out some of these things? Five months, and it's gone. Would a delay in the implementation of the program work, while keeping the \$60 million in stable funding there?

• (1650)

The Chair: Mr. Elias, go ahead.

Mr. Darius Elias: If I could address that quickly, it has been incredibly hard to engage my community members and my constituents. Since May, details and practical examples could not be given, and they still can't be given. We're five months away from this program and we don't know exactly what the rates are going to be. No suppliers have signed up in our capital city yet. We don't know who is going to be on the external advisory board. The list goes on and on.

The Chair: Ms. Simon.

Ms. Mary Simon: I think the capacity issue has to be addressed right up front, in advance of this being implemented. Also, the advisory committee should have been set up before—the chain just started to be introduced to the communities. There's a huge gap in terms of what the government is doing. We're not saying the government is all wrong; we're just saying that there's this huge gap and we're not sure how to deal with it, because the people at the community level are ending up paying the extra dollars they don't have.

The Chair: Okay. I'm trying to keep within our time, so let's go to Mr. Jock and then that will be the last one.

Mr. Richard Jock: Just a comment that one possibility is to have a transition period and some transition planning to support what is clearly a set of good goals.

In our case, we would say that first nations communities really should be involved in helping to deal with and overcome some of the issues that arise from the new program. I would say we should even be looking at how to mitigate the impact of the dry goods and other items, like diapers. I think there are ways to mitigate the impact of those things with a transition plan that includes some ways to do that and then to directly engage some of the folks with that.

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

And Chief Evans, I saw your hand up. We're going to go to the next question, but then we'll come to you at the next opportunity to get you on the record.

Monsieur Lemay.

[Translation]

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

I don't mean to take away from the time my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou has. He is very sensitive to this issue.

Could you tell me whether any of our guests today have submitted a written brief? If so, could we have the translated version as soon as possible? If not—and I believe that's actually the case for some—could we have the notes they read? Could they leave their notes with us or send them to us as soon as possible, even if they are in English? They are important for our next meetings.

The Chair: We have three documents here.

[English]

We'll make the translations and get them out to you, but thank you for the point, Monsieur Lemay.

Monsieur Lévesque, *cinq minutes*, and we'll get Chief Evans on the record as well.

Monsieur.

[Translation]

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

We have established that health care in Inuit and Aboriginal communities in the north came to roughly \$2 billion a year. And this amount does not include care for diabetes, maternal health and suicide prevention, which are an additional \$285 million.

The minister told us that he had consulted with people on approximately 60 different occasions, I believe. Have any of you been consulted on the Food Mail and Nutrition North Canada Programs?

• (1655)

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Gauthier.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Josée Gauthier: I was consulted once on the list of food products. They were trying to redo the list by taking nutrients into account. They showed us the draft of a list that had been changed. That happened once. It was in October two years ago, I believe. A group gave a presentation here in Ottawa and I sat in on it. They were nutritionists who really delved into the nutritional content of food products.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Were you also consulted on the quality of food products upon delivery?

Ms. Marie-Josée Gauthier: No. We looked at the entire list and simply gave our opinion on that topic.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: The minister told us he held 60 consultations. Unfortunately, I don't have the list here with me today. We could look at it later. Has anyone else been consulted?

Ms. Simon, I wonder if you were consulted as a resource person.

[English]

Ms. Mary Simon: INAC had a consultant, Mr. Dargo, work with the different organizations. He came and talked to us about our views on the program and what we'd like to see changed. But after that was done we weren't involved in it, in the writing of the recommendations and so on.

[Translation]

The Chair: Grand Chief Evans?

[English]

Grand Chief Ron Evans: As far as I'm aware, there was very little consultation, very little communication. I did submit a letter early on stating our views on the food mail program.

Again, I just want to say how important it is for communication. Obviously, as we're sitting around here we can see that very little communication has taken place. As far as consultation is concerned, we need to be involved, we need to make sure that we have representatives from our regions so that we can properly inform and properly educate our communities so that we can maximize the benefits from this initiative.

As far as the products are concerned, milk and Pampers, for sure, I would like to see them subsidized. If liquor can go to any part of Manitoba at the same price, I'm sure we can do that for milk, which is so important for the health of our future, which is our children who are going to be consuming the product.

I just want to say again how important the need is for more communication, more consultations, and also to ensure that we have representatives who sit on these advisory bodies.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have one minute, sir.

[English]

Ms. Bernadette deGonzague: I just wanted to point out that in the Dargo report, on page 22, you'll see the list of people who were consulted or they had discussions with on the food mail program. There was no one who was consulted from Ontario that I can see.

I had another point I wanted to make, but it's gone. I'll think of it later.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Anyone else?

The Chair: You have 40 seconds, sir.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: So I will make the most of them.

There is now a problem with traditional food, which is shared among communities. Ms. Simon mentioned earlier that Air Inuit received a subsidy, but I would like to know whether, given the additional funding, we could have found a beneficial way for the communities to continue the sharing under the Food Mail Program.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: There's only time for one response.

Ms. Mary Simon: I believe so, because we don't have facilities in our communities to package our caribou and other country food in a way that is acceptable to, let's say, the Agriculture Canada standards. People share food all the time, but if we're going to benefit from a food mail program, people in their homes have to package that food and send it to another community. It's not done in a professional building, per se, but it's done by people who are used to sharing. A lot of it is sharing, but right now it costs a lot of money to transport the country food back and forth to different communities because Air Inuit is charging. But through a subsidy program, it would be a lot more cost-effective. Right now, Air Inuit has decided to help out.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Simon.

I apologize for my error here. I jumped ahead. I got too much into the pattern of the first round. We're going to go to Mr. Clarke for five minutes. That will be followed by Mr. Payne for five minutes, and then we'll get back on track.

Mr. Clarke, take it away. And my apologies for missing you the first time around.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming in. It's great to hear the witnesses coming in, especially from all over Canada, especially northern Canada. It's so diverse. Everybody has a different issue here and a different problem.

First of all, I'm going to ask Grand Chief Evans and Mr. Jock a question. You're an administrator. If you had a program that was only

61% effective, what would you do if your funding was only being utilized by 61%?

Mr. Richard Jock: I'd talk to the communities that were using the system. The other piece is, for example, about the ones that are no longer eligible for the food mail. I think it would be interesting to find out why. I think that would tell you just as much as the other.

Grand Chief Ron Evans: The other thing I just wanted to caution on, when I hear what's being said around encouraging traditional food, is that some of the communities are experiencing a decline in some of that traditional food. So if we're encouraging thinking that our people can go back to the land, which will save the government money, I think that's wrong. I think we should do what we can to ensure we can get all the nutritious food into the communities. If you're going to cut, I think you need to really meet with those communities, make sure that they fully understand they're going to get cut from these programs. I don't think that took place.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Okay.

Just in regard to 61%, Canada Post's food mail is 61% inactive. The rest of the funding is not reaching the communities. That's where I'm looking at some of the statistics here. I know I only have about five minutes to speak, but I go back to the public accounts. Back in 1998 to 1999, \$15 million was in the main estimates, continuing to 1999–2000. It remained stagnant at that level to 2003–04. Then we see an increase in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, up to \$27 million. But the question I get, and I have to ask you this, is when we see items and the bureaucrats adding items that aren't, I see, food-oriented, essential foods such as bread, meat, vegetables, that's very troubling, because the prices go up through the roof.

I see the stable ongoing funding being increased to \$60 million, but when I go to 2008, the total program cost was \$47 million. So this government is committing extra funding to try to give first nations.... Especially in my culture—I'm first nations—I'm very concerned about diabetes, heart attacks, strokes, and malnutrition. That is very worrisome for me.

Hopefully, Chiefs, you can answer this question in regard to retailers. I know that a lot of the first nations have stores on the reserve. When we come to picking out produce, will the leaders and the stores be able to pick out the foods that are required for each individual community's needs through the retailers and order them? Also, I look at Nunavut, and every program is going to be a work in progress, but what I see is money spent from years past being spent unwisely and recklessly.

I'm not too familiar, and when I did the tour up north in Nunavut and Iqaluit, I'm wondering.... For diapers, we hear of diapers and toilet paper, I'm just wondering, can they be stored when the season is right through Sea-Cans, through transport cargo containers, and stored over a full year or two years, however long, and keep them stored so they're readily available for the store? That would probably keep the price low.

• (1705)

The Chair: You're down to 30 seconds, Mr. Clarke. Sorry.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Sorry.

The Chair: I think I heard.... We'll direct it to Chief Dumas, and then perhaps Ms. Simon. Let's go to Chief Dumas on those questions, and then that will be it.

Chief Arlen Dumas: I think your question is twofold. As you can ask me the question, I can ask you the question as well. If you're going to make an investment to try to better the nutrition of the north, then what are you doing to ensure the communities are properly aware, properly informed? What are you doing to accommodate the communities? What are you doing to ensure that communication is there, that information is made available? I can say that as well for my community.

If we want to enhance the food mail program, then it's a collaborative effort. It's not just one way. If we want it to be successful in the communities, then it has to be a concerted effort and everybody has to move in that same direction.

The Chair: I don't know why we always end up with Ms. Simon at the end, and I end up having to cut her off. But go ahead, Ms. Simon, with just a brief comment, if you could.

Ms. Mary Simon: He said most of what I was going to say.

Transparency is a very important issue for people at the community level. This program has to work with the people, not just with the retailers and the people who actually sell the products, because they are in it to make money. The consumers are there to reduce the cost to themselves, because it costs three times more to buy milk and bread in our community. Their interest is completely different from that of the retailer. So transparency and working with the community is extremely important. That's probably one of the reasons it was 61% effective. People didn't know that it even existed.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Simon. Thank you, Mr. Clarke.

Now let's go to Mr. Payne.

We have a point of order. Mr. Bagnell, go ahead.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Sorry. I just have a clarification so that witnesses aren't confused. When we had the minister and the officials at committee, they said that in a recent year, it was \$66 million in expenditures. That is just so people know.

The Chair: All right. I don't know that you had a point of order, but anyway....

Let's carry on to Mr. Payne for five minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Rob Clarke: I have a point of order.

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Rob Clarke: I'd like to clarify that 2007-08 was the year I quoted.

The Chair: Okay. I don't know that this is a point of order either, but let's carry on.

Now we are really going to go to Mr. Payne. Go ahead.

Mr. LaVar Payne: We're starting over, right?

The Chair: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Like Mr. Lévesque,

[*English*]

we start again. Go ahead.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for coming today. And hopefully I'm not going to be making a point of order here.

I notice that nutritious perishable foods make up 80% of the volume, which is quite a large portion. We did hear some of the concerns about other products. So that's an important piece we've heard. As well, we've heard a lot of concerns from all of you. I think the process today is important because we can get that information.

One of the things I was quite interested in finding out from Mary Simon was that in fact two-thirds of this program is for the Inuit. That certainly surprised the heck out of me.

Anyway, as I understand, certainly there are issues with transportation, particularly in the north. One of the questions I have, and maybe you can help me out, is about competition. We're trying to make sure that the food, the perishables, certainly, are subsidized. So the issue is transportation, as Mr. Elias has talked about. Is there competition for air transportation to these remote communities? That, I think, is an important element in terms of providing this nutritious food to all of your communities. Please make comments on that.

• (1710)

Ms. Elena Labranche: There's no competition.

Mr. LaVar Payne: There's only one airline that flies in.

Grand Chief Ron Evans: In Manitoba alone there's basically.... In many of the communities, it's just the one airline that flies in.

Ms. Mary Simon: In the Arctic, in some parts of the north, there is competition, depending on where you're located. In Nunavik, there's really no competition. But if you go into Nunavut, there is a fair amount of competition. You have three airlines going into that new territory as well as to the Northwest Territories. They can make quite a difference.

The other thing is that the big retailers have an opportunity to negotiate much more than the smaller, private sector retailers do. So they may be in a better position to offer more competition. It's a fairly complex process.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Okay.

Mr. Richard Jock: I'll just make a quick comment. There's no doubt that the program has an impact on the Inuit, but I would add that our information is that in terms of population, about 47% of the folks using the program are first nations. It's a significant program for both the Inuit and first nations. I just wanted to add that comment.

Mr. LaVar Payne: That's fine. I appreciate that.

Mr. Elias, I think you had your hand up.

Mr. Darius Elias: From the perspective of the Yukon, we have only one airline that provides regular service. It changes from season to season with regard to how many flights a day they have to the community, but we have only one option, and that's Air North. It's the only airline that flies in and out of Old Crow on a regularly scheduled basis.

In 2008-2009 we had \$333,300 used for the subsidy program. Last year, \$264,800 was used for the food mail program. And every single item came on Air North. We have only one option. That's why we suggested that the Department of Indian Affairs deal with Air North as a transportation subsidy, as one accountability structure and reporting structure, versus however many other retail outlets want to participate.

The Acting Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell): Ms. deGonzague.

Ms. Bernadette deGonzague: I have just a comment regarding the number of first nations who might use the program were they eligible. Since we only have eight of 32 that are now eligible—at least in northern Ontario—I think, as Mr. Jock has remarked, that it's not a matter of who's using it but who could use it. I think the committee needs to look at where the capacity is.

The Acting Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell): You have 30 seconds.

Mr. LaVar Payne: I have just a real quick comment. I know we talked about obesity, certainly I think that's an issue right across Canada. So if you have some solutions that would be good for first nations as well as all Canadians, please speak up.

The Acting Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell): Sorry, the time's... Okay, go ahead.

Grand Chief Ron Evans: As I sit here listening to this particular issue—we're talking about good nutrition—I just want to remind the committee that we need to look at communities in a holistic way. We need to look at all the contributors and ask why we're talking about the health of the people.

The Acting Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell): If anyone wants to get back to the committee on that—it's a big topic—just send it to the clerk and he'll distribute it to all the members, or anything else that you didn't get a chance to say today.

We'll move on to Ms. Crowder.

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

Just to clarify something, from the department's website about country foods it says that transportation of commercially produced

country foods between northern processing and distribution locations and eligible retailers in communities within the region will be subsidized. So you're correct: it's commercially produced country food, according to the department's website.

Since I've only got five minutes and you won't get any summary comments, I'd actually like to go around and ask if there is anything that we've missed or that we didn't ask?

Ms. Labranche?

• (1715)

Ms. Elena Labranche: One thing we've always had problems with are the entry points. Maybe that's why fresh produce is not so fresh by the time we get it—because it's bought in Montreal, trucked to Val D'Or, where it's inspected, then trucked back to Montreal, then distributed to the communities. That's a long space for fresh produce. It's a waste of time.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Ms. Simon, is there anything that hasn't come up over these last two hours that you think the committee should know about?

Ms. Mary Simon: I think, just consulting with Ann here for a second, the funding cap isn't well understood by the people at the community level. It is increasing, but it's limited to \$60 million, and people don't understand that. So communicating about that concept and helping people understand it really needs to be developed.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thanks, Ms. Simon.

Mr. Jock.

Mr. Richard Jock: The food mail program was basically on the verge of extinction or modification several times over the last 10 to 15 years. Really looking at this as a stable funding base will enable you to look at this program differently—to look at how it should be grown, perhaps, and how it can serve its objectives fully. Establishing it as a permanent interest is an important aspect that I haven't necessarily seen addressed in the questions.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Grand Chief Evans.

Grand Chief Ron Evans: I think communication is important. We do have a high turnover of leadership in first nation communities, as you are well aware, so we need to continue to ensure that the information is current with new leadership.

In terms of changes, when we talked about making this change and reducing it, we've had a high turnover in leadership since then. The only way we can benefit from any of these programs is to ensure that there's communication. They need to work with the regions so that the information doesn't get lost, so that it's current and we can bring to you the solutions for each region. Listening to the other witnesses, I can see how all our challenges are somewhat different. So I would suggest that you consider that.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you, Grand Chief.

Chief Dumas.

Chief Arlen Dumas: Thank you again for the opportunity to speak.

I think one issue that I'd like some examination on is the fact that in my community—I'm not sure farther to the north with ACL—the North West Company has been the only show in town for the last hundred years. It used to be called the Hudson's Bay Company but it is the North West Company now. If we're going to move in a new direction and try to maximize the value of our dollar, then I want to know why the North West Company is the only company that is being considered. There's Safeway, there's IGA, there are all these other companies that exist down south. Perhaps they should be informed that if they came and reduced their prices by 100%, they'd still be making a 100% profit. I'm serious. If they came and they reduced their price by 100%, they'd still make a 100% profit, and that's how the North West Company operates in many of our communities. So that's an issue I'd like to see explored.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Elias.

Mr. Darius Elias: I would like to echo the issues of communication and my community's issue with regard to flexibility and exemption. If you look at one specific issue that I did not mention yet, with the external advisory board, it says that you cannot be a direct beneficiary of the program and sit on that board. So that excludes everyone from my community, and their families and friends.

So that's an issue. If I look at this thing from 30,000 feet in the air, as the Arctic opens up, when the world looks at the Arctic, to me, sovereignty means strong, healthy, vibrant, sustainable Arctic communities. If you want to subsidize a box of Gain laundry detergent so a single mother can look after her children properly and doesn't have to pay \$43.59, then that's strength in a community. She won't have to worry about that any more. Those are the finer details we're talking about here.

As one of my constituents says, if the federal government wants this Nutrition North Canada investment to bear fruit, then they must listen to the people who know.

I want to thank all the honourable members here for listening to the people who know.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crowder, Mr. Elias, and witnesses.

We're going to go to Mr. Weston for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you, guests, for being here. It's been an extraordinary education. Clearly, the issues with which you deal are so different from those that someone from West Vancouver—Whistler would deal with, where I hail from.

I want to get back to the question that LaVar Payne began. I think you have a lot to teach us. You know the expression, “the canary in the cave”. If diabetes is, as you said, Mr. Jock, four times the rate of what it is outside your communities, and you mentioned that over 50% of your communities are subjected to obesity or problems of being overweight, then this is a trend for all Canadians.

You started down the path, and I wonder if you could tell us what we could do as MPs, not only for your community, but for all Canadians. It's something I personally care about. Many of us are involved in a parliamentary fitness initiative, trying to use ourselves as role models, as humorous as that might sound to you, to try to make Canadians more conscious of the importance of being fit. Can you give us some advice, any of you, on what we as Canadians can do?

Mr. Richard Jock: I would think in addition to looking at nutrition, if you look at the programs available to our youth in schools and the facilities that are related to that, you'll see that those don't measure up to those in the south. I would say that in addition to that, we are launching and the national chief is launching an indigent action program, which is aimed at getting much more activity at all levels of the population—elders, youth, and particularly children—and using role models to do that. We see that as being part of a holistic approach, as the grand chief has said, and we think that all of these elements fit together. Part of it is really anchored in pride in yourself and your community.

So I think all of those things fit together in terms of looking at the complicated issues of health and wellness.

Grand Chief Ron Evans: I think if you look at the articles in the *Winnipeg Free Press* last Saturday and the articles in the *Toronto Star* about the conditions of the communities, the lack of running water, the poverty, when you have anywhere from a dozen to 25 people living in an overcrowded home, I don't know what this nutrition program is going to achieve. So we really have to look at this in a holistic manner, especially when you have no place to put all that food for that many people. Those are current realities.

So all of you as parliamentarians need to look at the first nations in a holistic manner, as well as the Inuit and all of us in the north. I think that's the reality for us.

The Chair: Mr. Weston, your question has been well received.

Let's go to Ms. deGonzague and then back to Ms. Simon.

Ms. Bernadette deGonzague: As a dietician by trade, I want to echo Ms. Gauthier's comments that pamphlets don't work. I think the Health Canada nutrition education component of this is going to be critical and will have an impact on change and behaviour, as will things like physical activity programs and access to places to be physically active. Poverty is certainly an issue that prevents many people from engaging in a healthy lifestyle, and I think we need to look at that in a holistic manner, as echoed here.

Also, there may be other avenues, such as commercial greenhouses where people can actually grow healthy foods in the north. That may be another way of educating people on nutrition and where food comes from. We can talk about the time it takes to transport food that's coming from South America before it even gets to Montreal, and then has to go to Val-d'Or. So you've added another couple of weeks to the length of time food takes to get to a person's table.

The Chair: Ms. Simon.

Ms. Mary Simon: Accountability is not just related to government. The fact is that retailers have to be accountable as well, because there is so much junk food in our stores, and it really perpetuates the whole idea of being obese and the different kinds of diseases that come with obesity. The whole point that's being made about the nutrition program is extremely important, because the retailers also have to realize that they can't fill their shelves with pop and potato chips all the time. That has to be replaced by nutritional foods.

• (1725)

The Chair: That will do it, actually, Mr. Weston. Thank you very much.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

I have a bit of a problem coming at the end when much has been asked already. I'm struck, as I'm sitting here listening, by the complexity of this challenge and the fact that one size does not fit all, that different responses are required for different regions.

We're at the end of the afternoon and many of the questions that I was going to ask have been asked already, so I'm just going to ask a very simple one. The afternoon is over, so what would be your last bit of advice to us as a committee as we move forward with this study? Could each of you just comment very briefly?

The Chair: We'll start on this side this time.

Ms. deGonzague.

Ms. Bernadette deGonzague: I think my comment would be to speak to the communities involved, to those who are eligible and those who are not.

The Chair: Good, that was quick.

Mr. Elias.

Mr. Darius Elias: If you look at how you're going to achieve the program's objectives, to me flexibility and exemptions are necessary to achieve healthy Arctic communities. Just be open to flexibility.

The Chair: Chief Dumas, or Chief Evans.

Chief Arlen Dumas: Just to reiterate what has been said, we need to communicate. We need to collaborate and make this project a success, because I see the potential of it. It is a step in the right direction. However, we need to make those changes so that it will work properly and serve the people it's meant for.

The Chair: Mr. Jock.

Mr. Richard Jock: I would say that dialogue with communities, effective transition planning, and communications at the top are key.

The Chair: Ms. Simon.

Ms. Mary Simon: My view is pretty much the same. Work in partnership with us, not just at a one-time consultative meeting that doesn't really produce very much. Work on a continuous basis with us so that the program does meet the needs of the different regions and is more transparent to the consumer.

The Chair: Ms. Labranche, or Ms. Gauthier.

Ms. Elena Labranche: Yes, echoing most of what everybody said, it's about more communications and more time for the transition part.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Neville.

I have a short time for Mr. Dreeshen. Go ahead, Mr. Dreeshen.

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

Really, what I want to talk about, as I have been listening, is the focus on education. And again, communication and education is so significant here.

One of the things I'd like to hear from each and every one of you is how can we best communicate or make sure that communication gets out to your communities? The ideas that we might have, as you've said—the recipe card and so on—may not work, so it would be nice to know just what types of processes and procedures you feel would be important, or that you think you can implement in order to make sure these things are done. I'm sure it's not going to be the same in one community as it is in another. That's my first comment.

The second thing is the good opportunity we've had to listen to your comments, so that when we do have department officials here we're able to ask those kinds of questions as well.

And my last comment, because I'm looking at the clock and I have to go through this quickly, has to do with competition as far as air transportation is concerned. As you've said, in a lot of your communities there is only the one airline that is coming in. My question is, has anyone taken a look at perhaps bringing in some of the materials with other airlines and in other manners? If that were to happen, you might find you would be able to reduce costs there as well. The only specific question I would have has to do with competition as far as airlines are concerned. What do you think is possible?

The Chair: Any comments from anyone?

Go ahead, Mr. Elias.

Mr. Darius Elias: From a Yukon perspective, I understand that Air North, Yukon's airline, has been invited to submit their testimony in front of the committee as well on November 17. I don't have a forensic type understanding of business in that matter, but in the north there's a reason why there is only one airline, and it's to do with business, the bottom line. That's why there is no competition in some of these communities, because there is no room for two airlines to operate.

• (1730)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I would like to get back to that.

Is there no opportunity to say that it doesn't have to be regularly scheduled or whatever, but if you need a lot of it moved in as it would normally come in, with ships or whatever to other particular points of entry, has anybody looked at it and said, "You're supplying us—regular airlines and everything else—but we need this brought in and it needs to come in on an airlift"? And if they're not doing it, I'm just wondering what the costs would be like. That was really the thrust of my question.

Mr. Darius Elias: There used to be a competitive airline in Old Crow, and there is a reason why it is not any more. Our store in Old Crow is smaller than this room we're sitting in. There is no room for large, bulk shipments to be stored anywhere. Just to build a house in Old Crow—what most people would basically call a log cabin—is well over \$100,000.

The Chair: Chief Evans wants to get in just very briefly.

Grand Chief Ron Evans: Thank you.

In our province, in our region, the carrier that goes into the majority of our isolated communities or remote communities is well established. They have been there for 50 years. They just celebrated their 50th anniversary this year. We've had other competitors that have tried to break into that market. They would come for a while and then they just couldn't compete.

The Chair: Madame Gauthier.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Josée Gauthier: In terms of education and communication, we must first take the time to get things done because, once we send it to the Nunavik public health branch, at regional level... We have to communicate with 14 isolated communities in Nunavik.

Last Friday, I received the draft for the education component of Nutrition North Canada. But this tool has to be used in the next five

months. That does not leave me with a lot of time to get in touch with the communities where we are going to use the tool. The tool has to be developed, but the communities still don't really have the ability to do that. We need time for consultation, but we have to cover several levels. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen.

Monsieur Lévesque, I know we're over time here, but did you have a point of order? Or was there something you wanted to get in on?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: You are perhaps aware that the current Food Mail Program has been in place for 56 years. Today, we have a program where a central government controller is responsible for everything to do with bids. A new program called Nutrition North Canada will be administered by wholesalers and retailers.

You are the current government and I would like to know what you are doing to improve this service in the north and to bridge the gap between the prices in the north and the prices in the south as much as possible.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's a question, and we really don't have time for a response, but I'll give somebody 30 seconds just to voice that.

Chief Dumas, see if you can do that in 30 seconds.

Chief Arlen Dumas: Force the retailers and wholesalers to do joint ventures with the community so that the communities have a vested interest in the success of the program. So buy our relatives over here a warehouse, and ensure that the company partners with them to make it a successful program.

The Chair: Very good.

Thank you very much. I know we're a little over time, and I thank you all for your patience and your presentations this afternoon. I'm sure this is going to be a terrific help for our study on this topic. I wish you all a great evening and afternoon.

Thank you very much. Merci.

The meeting is adjourned.

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