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Chair

Ms. Candice Hoepfner

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC)): I call to order meeting number nine of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. We are continuing our study today on the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada.

We are very pleased to have, via video conference from Kelowna, Chief Robert Louie, who is chief of the Westbank First Nation.

Welcome, Chief Louie. We are very pleased to have you with us today.

Can you hear us all right?

Chief Robert Louie (Chief, Westbank First Nation): Yes, I can.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to be here.

The Chair: It's good to have you. We're looking forward to hearing what you have to tell us.

We will begin with your presentation. You will have approximately ten minutes to present, and then we'll begin the round of questions.

Does that sound all right?

Chief Robert Louie: Thank you.

The Chair: Good. I am going to turn the mike over to you, Chief Louie, and I will let you know when you are at about the nine-minute mark.

Chief Robert Louie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's certainly a pleasure to be here, and I thank you very much for the opportunity. I'd like to thank Mr. Cannan, our MP representative here in the Kelowna area, for inviting me to be a participant.

My name is Robert Louie and I'm the chief of the Westbank First Nation. I have been chief now for 18 years and on council going back to 1974. So I've seen some changes.

For us at WFN it is important that we make strides for successful change. When I'm talking successful change I'm talking about jobs, homes to live in, reaching standards at least equal to or on par with the average Canadian. So when we're talking about poverty and all the disabilities there, we've experienced it at Westbank. We've worked hard to take ourselves out of the poverty and move into the realm of self-sufficiency.

So that's what we've been doing. I won't bore you with too many of the details. You know the details with regard to suicide rates in Canada. I'm sure you're well versed in the poverty of children in Canada and the numbers of children that are under the child welfare system in Canada, so I won't bore you with these details.

I can say that something has to be done, and the cost of doing nothing is an impediment for first nations in Canada. I quite agree. I know the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples studies indicated that \$11 billion was needed—that's a projection from ten years ago—by 2016 to address the needs of first nation peoples in Canada. So if we can rely on some of those estimates somewhat, knowing that the cost of doing business has gone up, the cost of doing nothing is probably higher than \$11 billion.

Why is it that our community at Westbank has been able to achieve the achievements that we have? I want to touch on some of those avenues and offer you some food for thought or recommendations that you and the committee may well want to consider.

First and foremost, I believe that our self-governance and the work that's being done in that regard has proven that a first nation needs governance capabilities. You are probably aware and may have heard from different presentations about the decade of research that Harvard University in the United States has done to support the need for first nations governance. I don't think those studies are out of whack. Certainly for us, we've seen a dramatic increase in what it brings back to our first nation and the community at large.

Coupled with that are things that are perhaps also achievable incremental steps for first nations communities, like the first nations land management process. I chair that process nationally. First nations are looking at and now taking control of their lands and resources, and it is an incremental step towards self-governance. I think there are tremendous success stories that have transpired across Canada as a result of that. But it's all about having control and taking those steps to implement self-governance.

The whole issue of taxation implementation on reserve lands, section 83, which former chief Manny Jules was involved with—those keep service moneys that taxpayers pay from a reserve on a reserve, and this allows infrastructure to be put back into the community. You're talking sewage lines, water lines, the basic services needed to be a catalyst for development. Those areas are crucial.

Economic development opportunities I think are extremely important. Infrastructure Canada, the infrastructure dollars from the Department of Indian Affairs, and programs like Aboriginal Business Canada are all contributors towards economic development. So there is much to be stated with regard to the need to help first nations with economic development opportunities.

● (1535)

Land claim settlements are another whole area, and I think you've seen the evidence of what they can bring to communities. When you're talking about settlements, when you look at the prairie regions—Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta—and at what has transpired in that regard, those are real catalysts. In British Columbia, those are objectives that the masses of us, including Westbank, need to achieve. We believe revenue-sharing agreements with the province, with the support of Canada, are going to be crucial.

There are other opportunities, such as gaming, that are relatively new in British Columbia. There are not that many first nations involved in the gaming industry, but I think it presents opportunities that go into economic development. The success you see back in Ontario and throughout the prairie regions with first nations in the gaming industry are really strong catalysts to provide the resources and the moneys needed to take a first nation community out of poverty and into the business world.

For first nations, generally, to have accessibility to social supports and services from Canada and from the provinces to create that fairness and stability is also important.

Perhaps certain policies need revision. I can give you one example: to address the issue of jobs, and so forth. If policy changes could be made, instead of spending money to supplement welfare, why not have money spent to actually be a catalyst to creating jobs so that first nation peoples have the pride and the opportunities to work, and if they have to, as a result of seasonal issues, then go on unemployment and not sustain it with the welfare mentality? Those are policy changes that I think could be done.

Another issue is education, in many aspects. I'm talking about starting at an early age with things such as the child development centres, having our own schools developed by first nations, having the education, and having future parents know things such as the effects of alcohol on pregnancy and the effects of the use of drugs and the prevention of that. In terms of children in care in this country, from an aboriginal perspective, I think we probably have the highest record of that effect, which is a cost to our society. So having prevention and having the head start programs and all of this is needed and is vitally important.

That takes a lot of work, but it requires support from Canada and the provinces to get to those levels. Those programs can't operate by themselves.

Another thing is to have communities—first nation communities—do things such as community needs assessments to determine directly from the community what is actually needed in the community to address the community issues. That includes poverty, health care, jobs, and employment. It's something we're going through right now in my community at Westbank, the

community conversations whereby our people themselves tell us the needs, so it's not driven by the chiefs and councils, it's driven by the community. Those are important areas, and perhaps they need more support in terms of funding to help get some of these first nations into that aspect. They can help themselves if they have the tools.

Another issue is structural changes in the bureaucratic system that would support first nations design of these programs, the delivery and the management of programs and services, where you have first nation decision-making. All of those areas need to be focused on. Really, I think the crux of it is empowering our peoples, as first nations, to empower themselves. Those are issues that must be looked at.

In my community at Westbank, I think we've been successful in many areas. Having the peer pressure of seeing success by some of our community leaders and people in business, for example, acts as a catalyst to our peoples. I think that creates an added desire in our overall community that they too can be successful. They can have the jobs, they can have the employment opportunities, and they can have the contracts and be contractors themselves in all kinds of areas.

All of those are just some very preliminary suggestions, but they need to be focused on.

● (1540)

I've been speaking fairly quickly, but I know that my time is probably up. In a very brief summary, I'll say that I see those as some of the ways things can be improved. I think we can focus on the successes, not only here at Westbank but in other communities. I see successes across the country. I see the jobs, the creation of programs, and the people really rolling up their sleeves and working together. That's how we can succeed. That's how we can address poverty.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Louie. You did an excellent job of staying right in that ten-minute time allotment. Congratulations on that, and thank you.

We will begin our first round of questioning with Mr. Savage, please.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Chief Louie, for spending some time with us today in our study on poverty, which we hope to wrap up soon and have a report on. We've been at this for some time.

We met a couple of weeks ago with the AFN, the Métis National Council, and the National Association of Friendship Centres. It sounds like you have some good stuff going on.

I congratulate you on the economic development that your community has put together—certainly under your leadership. I come from Nova Scotia, so I'm about as far away as you can get from where you are, but we have some very entrepreneurial first nations people as well. We have Membertou, Millbrook, and a number of first nations that are doing very well and are showing a lot of leadership economically.

You talked a lot about how you've managed the economy at the Westbank First Nation. Do you have any programs specifically for the most impoverished of your citizens?

Chief Robert Louie: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Savage.

Specifically, we've got a community services department located in our health and wellness centre. I am in one of the meeting rooms in this building, as we speak.

One of the programs we have, for example, provides some of the basics of getting a job. I'm talking about how one presents himself or herself to an employer, getting some of the basics down so that they know how to dress and they know how to maybe answer questions for the possibilities of employment. We provide some of the tools and basic knowledge.

If we are addressing poverty, that's where we've got to start. That is the one area that needs funding. We don't have enough financial support from outside governments to help sustain that, so we have to inject dollars into that process ourselves. It would certainly be nice. I suppose we're fortunate in that regard, because we'll find ways to help bolster these programs, but many other first nations I know simply cannot do that. They just do not have the resources or the moneys to create this. Those issues are essential.

When you are talking about poverty and the poorest of our poor, they have to have those means and they have to have support. Sometimes giving support is handholding in some cases with our community members. Poverty is a factor here. Some of our members are experiencing alcohol and drug abuse. So poverty in a family.... If you've got the mother or father, or in some cases both parents, in that situation, what about the kids...? What is the dramatic impact they have in their everyday functions? Getting up in the morning, having a lunch packed so they can go to school, going to school...what if that particular child needs support in the schooling system, tutoring or whatever, and you have parents in that alcohol syndrome or drug abuse? That impact on the child—you know, thoughts of suicide and so forth—those are the issues.

We have that in our community. As far as our schools go—substance abuse in schools, for example—they look for what is going on in the home life and how that gets passed down to the child. There are programs in that regard for the proper counselling of the child, and for knowing when the parents have to be told there are problems with the child at school, and told that we think it's a factor of home life. We tell them they've got to work with us if they want their child to be successful. We tell them we can't do it without their help.

Those are the types of things that have to be addressed. There is an immediate need. If you miss one child and that child subsequently goes off the rails, you've got another potential family in another generation consumed by poverty. So it's an issue that has to be addressed quickly. You have to start from the basics and go from there.

• (1545)

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you very much.

I want to follow up on the issue of education for a second. Can you tell me what you have specifically on the education side? Do you have a head start program, early learning in child care, that you

support? How do you help your high school students finish high school? What success do you have in getting kids into university, community college, that sort of secondary training? Can you just chat a little bit about that and some things you may have had a role in supporting, educationally?

The Chair: You have a minute to wrap that portion up.

Chief Robert Louie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

We do have head start programs. We have an early childhood development centre, and in some cases we start right from the time the child is a baby and old enough to go into a facility. Our Westbank Child Development Centre supports that child through to kindergarten and then eventually into first grade, second grade, and so forth. We have a school with grades one to seven, and we focus on that. It's an option for our first nations communities, not a requirement. Many of our community members choose that option for their children.

So we have those types of programs and put a lot of emphasis in that regard. Counselling is a big issue as well as recognition from birth to have the means to do that. We have tutoring programs. Part of our education is to provide tutoring and support to our children who need that. I think a lot of our success can be attributed to the tutoring support from early ages all the way through the system.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to our second questioner, Mr. Lessard, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would also like to thank Chief Louie for coming here to tell us about the situation on his reserve.

First of all, Chief Louie, I have to say that when I read the information about your reserve, I was pleasantly surprised to see that your community boasts a dynamic economic and a range of services.

If I understand correctly, your reserve is located in the Okanagan Valley on land that is fairly conducive to development. Your reserve covers approximately 5,300 acres and your community has 434 members.

There is also mention of 8,000 non-natives. Do they also live on the reserve?

• (1550)

[*English*]

Chief Robert Louie: Yes. We don't know the exact numbers, but we estimate just over 9,000 non-natives. Those are actual residents on the reserve. Our total membership is just shy of 700. We have five reserves, both on the west side of the Okanagan Lake Bridge and on the east side of the Okanagan Lake Bridge. Location is certainly a factor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I see.

You say that these residents are non-natives. Am I to understand then that they have no ties to the native community? If they do have ties to the community, what kind of ties are we talking about? What conditions must be met in order to live on the reserve?

[English]

Chief Robert Louie: We strive to provide opportunities here. Leasing of lands is one of the big steps we have taken. We provide a lot of 99-year leases. So our community members, including the non-natives, certainly having 9,000-plus population.... It started first with the development of mobile homes, then it moved into the higher-end homes, and today homes that many of our non-natives live in are well in excess of \$1 million in value.

Today, including the residential and all the commercial, we've got in excess of \$1 billion of investment on the Westbank lands. To deal with the non-native population—not only are they welcome and invited to participate—we have representation. We have a five-member board that sits on an advisory council. One of the first laws we passed under self-government was recognition of this advisory council to give it teeth. The non-native citizens of our community elect themselves and have five representatives and they are involved in the direct business of taxation primarily, their moneys. So whether it is the direct impact of their tax dollars—and right now we're collecting somewhere close to \$10 million annually—they look at the budgets, they pre-approve the budgets with us, make recommendations on that. They look at how their moneys can be better used for things like street lights, paved roads, or better services overall—maybe it's bylaw enforcement, maybe it's more parkland, any of those issues. They are directly involved with us.

It helps create a united community. The recreation services, for example—some of our tax dollars go into our recreation complex and professional-style ball fields at Pine Stadium, having the gymnasium and new floors put in when they're needed, and maintenance. Being able to offset some of those tax moneys so everyone benefits makes for more of a united community. So things like this we work hard at, and our non-native community are very much part of the support and the growth that's happening here. It's a united front and doing things together.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Excuse me for interrupting, but part of this information comes from what we have read.

You live on fertile land, from an agricultural standpoint. You have vineyards and various other types of crops. Has this always been the case for your reserve or was there a turning point? If so, could you explain to us how everything got started?

[English]

Chief Robert Louie: I have to say thank you very much for that question.

I just want to make sure that you're not confusing Westbank with Osoyoos, for example. Chief Clarence Louie is from Osoyoos. If I were to say fertile lands, they have the vineyards and the agricultural lands, whereas, yes, we're economically suited to the location we're at, but we focus not so much on the agriculture and the fertility of lands but more on the fertility, if you will, of the people and the

economic aspects of shopping centres and that sort of thing. That's where we focus.

If I were to say a turning point, I think the turning point goes back in time when we actually started being recognized as the decision-makers of our lands, where we could make the decisions without having to have our hands held by the Indian agents in the district offices or having decisions being made elsewhere, off the reserve. Once we got to the self-government aspect of doing business, that's where the magical curve, if you will, started to happen. When we were empowered and recognized as a government with authority over our lands, our resources, and how we do business from day to day, that's where the entrepreneurial aspects took place. That's when we just said this is how we can do the water lines, the sewage lines, to attract the investment. That's where we can focus in on the culture and the heritage to get the support of the community so they know that this was being addressed as we moved into this next level of a generation that we're seeking, and that is having everyone with jobs and a place to live and homes.

We still have a ways to go, there's no question about it. Certainly the location, we've been fortunate with that, knowing that it's one of the fastest-growing regions in Canada. I think that's all attributed to the fast, rapid growth rate here. But it's the turn of the governance and the manageability of our lands, that's the turning point.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Louie.

We'll go to our next committee member. Mr. Martin, please.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Thank you very much. There has been some very interesting information this afternoon.

I want you to talk a little bit more maybe about the whole question of taxation and how you got to a place in your community where that was acceptable and how you do that.

Chief Robert Louie: Thank you very much, Mr. Martin.

I go back to taxation. When I look at our property tax assessments and what we did in the early 1990s, we were one of the first communities in Canada to look at what then Chief Manny Jules was doing under section 83 with the amendment to the Indian Act. We looked at it carefully. Taxation, of course, has been a fiery topic for first nations in Canada, but for us as far as property taxation is concerned, it has provided a means to keep the dollars on the reserve. Prior to the 1991-92 timeframe, yes, the Province of British Columbia was collecting taxes on all of the businesses and mobile homes and the early developments, but it was tax money the province collected. It took those moneys off the reserve, it took the moneys and put them into the province of British Columbia, but it did not focus any of those moneys back into our community. Even on things like the general portion of the taxes, that is, the road building and the maintenance of roads and the snow plowing, there was zero, absolutely zero, put back into the community.

So when we looked at property taxation we asked what the benefits were for us. If we took control of the property tax assessments and were able to focus those dollars into services that actually went into the reserve, then we could make a difference, and that's what we focused on. Property taxation is about providing services. It's not about taking a cut of that and handing it out to the members; we don't do that. We focus on taxation as a separate piece of business that's needed for our lands. As I mentioned, we have over \$1 billion in investment on our lands on which non-natives pay taxes. The taxes go back into services. Yes, we still have fire protection needs and we have local service agreements with the local and regional districts and the municipalities where part of our moneys go. Those are necessities.

However, we also have moneys that we put right back strictly for road building and sewage lines. You can't do a major shopping centre development without proper sewage, without proper water. That takes a lot of energy and costs a lot, and we budget accordingly.

That's what we see and that's how we went about taxation. It's something that allows us to deal with the future growth of our communities.

Other forms of taxation that we have include our agreements with the government on things like the GST equivalent, the tax on alcohol or tobacco or fuel. That similar GST amount is now the Westbank First Nation's tax component, which we now use to offset the needs of the community.

So things like that have worked for us.

• (1600)

Mr. Tony Martin: In terms of the property tax, which seems to be the biggest taxation program you have, you tax not only the non-aboriginal businesses and properties on your land, but do you also tax your own people?

Chief Robert Louie: If I chose to do that in our community, or if a council wanted to do that in our community, on things like property assessments, then I and the council of the day wouldn't be in office. We focus on the non-aboriginals. A person who has a corporation, for example, can exempt himself from the provisions of the Indian Act and then become a corporation. So in property taxation we focus on the non-aboriginals. Our peoples see it as a benefit, as a right, and it's something they are not prepared to give up as far as their internal benefits are concerned. We're a long way from that right now. Now it's a matter of catching up and knowing that we have some source that actually can go back into the community, and that's how our people really look at that.

So property taxes, for example, are assessed on the non-aboriginal person. Yes, the non-aboriginal person pays it, but our own membership do not. We have two reserves, for example—Tsinstikeptum Indian Reserves 9 and 10 on the west side of the Okanagan Lake—where 80% of the land is held by certificate of possession. Our peoples have the entrepreneurial spirit to actually make use of those lands, and they're not taxed per se for property taxes. Once they develop, though, and once a non-native is involved, either in a business venture or a residence, or is in any way connected with their venue and locale of doing business and residence there, then the lands become taxable. So it's collected in that fashion.

Mr. Tony Martin: As we cross the country there are a couple of big issues that people raise with us, and one of them is housing. So let's focus on that. Do you have a housing program for the people of your community? What are the needs? How do you see housing in terms of basic infrastructure and rights of families and individuals?

Chief Robert Louie: Housing is certainly a big, big topic. It guides council elections and it guides the will of our community. We are just in the process now of tabling a final community needs assessment, and housing is certainly part of that. So our council is focusing on meeting the housing needs.

What we have looked at in the past—and we see it across Canada—is that while housing needs are there, first nation communities like ourselves can't be the full risk-taker. We've seen that. I believe that the full 25% to 30% of the problems in Canada with housing are, where first nations are involved, in the CMHC housing needs and programs in having to offset the cost of the houses. It's a problem. I've seen first nations where if you guarantee too much at the governmental level to support the housing and if some of your members don't pay enough, it puts that whole program in the red and you're going to have economic problems. There will be spinoffs and it will affect your community services. It will affect whether or not you are viable as an entity and all those things.

So for us, we've looked at ways to counter that. We try to provide mortgage financing and have empowered our band members to actually mortgage themselves. We have created things like the A to A lease. An A to A lease simply allows a band member to create a lease in his or her name, and that lease is signed by him or her as the CP holder, the certificate of possession holder of the property. The banks now will look at that A to A lease and provide financing. It's only available if you're in land management or self-government right now. At least that's up to the present. That is a form of empowering the first nation person to create a mortgage and have a mortgageable financial instrument that allows him or her to build a house.

So for us, when we look at that, that works fine when we have CP lands. I mentioned that 80% of our lands are CP-ed out, where our individuals are empowered with the rights of ownership and they're viewed as if they were fee simple owners. It's a structure that works.

We have other programs such as our overall band subdivisions, where we have CMHC financing, where the band will actually put in the dollars and in some cases rely on the support from CMHC and the guarantees therefrom, and we'll put subdivisions in place. But our policy is one of entrepreneurial ownership. So in those types of subdivisions, what we put ourselves in is when that mortgage is paid off, one by one by one, in band subdivisions, those band members will eventually, for one dollar, at the end of that mortgage payout, then have their houses. Such members become entrepreneurial persons and it's viewed as fee simple.

So that works for us in those situations. In other situations where we have social development, recipients on welfare, those sorts of things, we have band housing, which will always remain band housing. We'll put in fourplexes or sixplexes or sometimes duplexes, and lower-income homes where we need to subsidize, and that will become housing that will never be owned by individual band members. It will always be owned by the band itself.

We have to have a mixture to accommodate the needs of our community.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Louie. We went well over on that one, but I think it was really important that we heard how you manage housing, because that definitely is one of the biggest challenges we're finding.

We'll go to Mr. Cannan now, please.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Chief Louie, for giving us some of your valuable time and sharing your wisdom and experience with our committee. We've had the opportunity to chat several times about the challenges of first nations communities across the country, and we appreciate your leadership of 18 years. I understand you just put your name forward for the next election, so congratulations, and I hope you'll be able to continue on with your success.

I just wanted to add a supplemental to my colleague Mr. Savage's comments about education. Maybe you could share with the committee some of the successes and the opportunities of the youth. Our fastest-growing demographic in Canada is young aboriginal Canadians. What we're looking at is how we can take that education component. We've had success in the community working with Okanagan College as well as UBC Okanagan.

Could you share with the committee how Okanagan Nation Alliance as well as the Westbank First Nation have been able to partner for post-secondary education for trade skills and training, so you have the labour, and you can give the education, which means employment, which provides for prosperity in the future?

Chief Robert Louie: Thank you very much, Mr. Cannan.

Yes, education is one of the hallmarks, one of the pillars, of what's needed in our community here, and yes, we do work with the Okanagan College, for example. One of our council members, Councillor Loretta Swite, is a board member there and has direct input into some of the planning and some of the priorities that need to be advocated. That direct involvement allows for the Okanagan College to hear our needs, I think, to hear about what needs to take place, and allows for it to help provide support.

As well, we provide support to our students. We have dollars that we look to in order to supplement our students getting into these programs. Trades and the apprentices needed are one focus, and there are the academics, of course. All of the areas have to be covered.

We work very closely, we believe, with UBCO, the University of British Columbia Okanagan. Even something like their addition here, where they now have an aboriginal centre component within

the university itself, provides a means to address issues when and where they arise. The Okanagan Nation Alliance is a culmination of six bands in British Columbia, Westbank being one of them. We work very closely through that group to work and align ourselves with the Okanagan College, and of course UBCO, in some of the programming.

I think that input and that involvement of some of our cultural language speakers and so forth are important in the overall education system. I think that has met with a lot of success.

What's important is a lot of curriculum development. Some of that curriculum development to encompass aboriginal needs is something that now the universities and colleges seem to be listening to. I think we've made some strides and some headway at that level in incorporating it into the curriculum planning of the schools. I think those have all been positive things.

The youth and the support of the youth are fundamental, so when we have graduations, to have the councils there, to have the parents there, to have that recognition, those are all stimulants that show the upcoming youth how to say, "If they can do it, then we can do it." There are steps in that regard. There are things like having the aboriginal graduation of Métis and status peoples and having the sharing of that celebration of success. I think those are all positive avenues towards education. We contribute dollars to help put on these events. All of them are stimulants to education.

• (1610)

Mr. Ron Cannan: That's fabulous. I have the opportunity to work with Minister Stockwell Day, who's also your member of Parliament, as the band covers two ridings, and there's one of the opportunities I'd like to provide for the committee right now.

Mr. Lessard alluded to some of the residential development that you've had taking place. Maybe you could just share with the committee a little bit about some of the success you've had to date and some of the hope, opportunities, and economic development plans you have for the reserve lands.

Chief Robert Louie: Yes, I think we've had some fair amount of success.

I mentioned the 1.25 million square feet of shopping centres. We deal with thousands of leases. We now have between 3,000 and 4,000 leases that are in place residential-wise. We've just signed an MOU with a developer where the WFN will be a fifty-fifty partner for another shopping centre. The two phases will include 280,000 square feet. The WFN is a direct 50% co-venture partner in that. I think that's something that will work very well. The creation of those partnerships will be momentous, I think, for the future.

I'll mention as another example the Okanagan Lake Bridge development, and the partnering of WFN with the intersections, such as the Campbell Road interchange. That was a \$15 million-plus project where WFN was the first in British Columbia, and maybe one of the first in Canada, that actually was respected...to administer the particular delivery of that project.

That was a big impetus for the next phase. Now we're handling a \$41-million project on the Westside Road interchange. That's building an overpass over Highway 97, the main highway corridor through the Okanagan Valley, and having detour roads that will help divert traffic from the highway and give proper directions and easy accessibility. That project is being administered by our organization. Our objective, as with the Campbell Road interchange, is to deliver that project on time and on budget. Thus far we will meet that objective.

Those types of things create opportunities for us, we believe. This shopping centre that I talked about, the MOU with the fifty-fifty joint venture partner, will provide an avenue for that easy accessibility to that shopping centre and will hopefully be of benefit to the overall community.

These types of things provide economic development spinoffs. Tourism development is one example. Last week I attended ceremonies with West Kelowna, the new municipality here, and WFN donated approximately \$29,000 to that tourism fund. We're working in partnership with West Kelowna municipality and with the regional district to promote tourism in the area. We even have an exact figure—24.86%—that represents tourism on the west side. That is a tremendous catalyst, and we're involved in that.

In terms of future planning, and how tourism will impact the overall community, there are spinoffs from that. Hotels, restaurants—all of these entities are beneficiaries. We're working closely in that regard. I think these are all stimulants in terms of what we're involved in and working toward on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Louie.

Before we begin our second round of questions, I want to ask you if you're able to stay a little bit longer so that we can get a few more questions in. You are scheduled to be with us until 4:30. Is your time schedule pretty tight?

Chief Robert Louie: Madam Chair, I do have to leave in ten minutes. I have a roomful of our staff and outside consultants who are actually waiting for me to attend another meeting. Within ten minutes I have to attend that function. I apologize, but I have no choice there.

The Chair: Okay.

Well, I'm glad I asked, because we will begin our second round with three minutes each, I think, and try to get in as many questions as we can. We'll try to really keep to the time schedule.

Madam Minna, three minutes, please.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you very much. I'll try to be very brief.

I want to turn to the reserves. There are five reserves, and two are populated. We know the population on the reserves. How many members of your reserve, members who consider themselves to be part of your community, would be living in urban centres at this point?

Chief Robert Louie: I believe it's greater than 50%, so between 450 and 480. That's the latest statistic I can recall. Our total membership is actually 680, or maybe 680-plus right now.

Certainly more than 50% actually live and reside here on WFN lands.

Hon. Maria Minna: How many of your members are living in urban centres now and would relate to your community?

Chief Robert Louie: That's a little more difficult question. I apologize for not having the exact figure in my head. Over 50% actually live here on the reserve. I kind of contribute now to the thinking that it's more urban-oriented as opposed to rural. If we look across Canada, we have residents who live in Toronto. We have some in Texas. We have them all over the place. Vancouver is another spot. If I were to take a guess about urban versus rural, of our total population on and off reserve, more than 75% to 80% would be in urban-oriented areas. I'm sure less than 20% would be in remote rural areas.

Hon. Maria Minna: What percentage of young people go on to post-secondary education?

Chief Robert Louie: That figure is climbing on a yearly basis. I don't have the exact statistics, but our graduation rates from grade 12 are up quite dramatically and are approaching 60% to 70%. I believe we are now at least within ten percentage points of equalling the national norm for graduation. We're catching up fairly quickly with the program. So our community is really focused on graduation rates from grade 12.

On post-secondary education, I don't know the percentages, but we do have members now in law training, for example. Others have expressed a desire to go into the medical profession and I'm sure they are going to be there—dentistry, and that sort of thing. So it's growing dramatically.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thanks.

We'll go to Mr. Casson for three minutes.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Thanks, Chief Louie, for being here today. We won't hold you up and keep you from your important meeting with your developers. It sounds exciting. Let us know how that turns out.

Chief Robert Louie: Thank you.

Mr. Rick Casson: It seems to me that the example you have set for your people is something that should be duplicated and repeated across the country. Are you aware of any mentoring at the leadership level by yourselves and others who have been successful? I don't think you take enough credit for what you've done there on a personal level and with your band council members. Without your leadership I don't think it would have happened.

On the whole issue of poverty, I think people need a hand up, and you certainly have created an environment where that's possible. So congratulations on that.

Do you have any thoughts on how this can be replicated and moved across the nation?

Chief Robert Louie: Thank you very much, Mr. Casson.

First, I thank you for your kind words.

Our objective for mentoring is to try to get more of our own membership at the management level. We're not all the way there yet, but we are moving in that direction. We have over 200 people who are employed directly with WFN, if I include the Pine Acres intermediate care facility. It's certainly a big area for employment. Through general administration, the work we have, and the various corporate entities we have, well over 200 people are directly under the employ of WFN.

As far as management, we work purposely to try to provide opportunities. As an example, our new director of operations is a band member who took the position as of April 1. Our existing director of operations will continue throughout and well into the summer months and will also be available to work on special projects that we've discussed with the outgoing director of operations. In our community health division, for example, one of our band members works as the overall manager. Others are in training. Our objective is to provide that opportunity to the next band member. Those are some examples.

We have a lot of experience in things such as shopping centre developments. One of the conditions we put in our joint venture partnerships is for not a lot but some money to show the intent that a band member would have an opportunity to learn about the leasing of shopping centres and how shopping centres work. It's a position we've intentionally tried to create to provide management opportunities in that field in the future.

We still have a long way to go. We still need post-secondary training and business attributes, but we're getting there. Those are forms of mentorship that we find are working.

In our constitution, for example, when we have self-government, we have to balance the issue of human rights with regard to employment. One of our objectives in the community when there are opportunities is to give first nations members at Westbank the first chance. We then look at other families of first nations and other first nations people in the area.

For example, a lot of labour is involved in our contract for the Campbell Road interchange. A requirement put into the provincial contracts was that 10% of all labour and employment had to come from the Westbank First Nation. It had to at least be available. We built the same thing into the Westbank interchange. Those are avenues we've worked on.

For Walmart, Home Depot, and the other shopping centre retail outlets on the reserve, we don't have an actual policy saying they must do that. It's not in a contractual binding agreement for some of the leasing arrangements. We very quietly talk to the management at Home Depot, Zellers, and Walmart. If there are opportunities, we ask them to look at employing first nations people. We'll help those individuals get to the needed levels to be good employees for the businesses.

Through those things, I think we help in mentoring and working towards employment.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thanks, Chief Louie.

Do we have time? Can we have one more question and answer?

Chief Robert Louie: Yes, by all means.

The Chair: That's great.

Madame Beaudin, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, Chief Louie, for joining us today.

We have very little time. Two issues concern me, as they do you. In order to help out people in a community, we need to start with the young children. Earlier, you stated that you have an early childhood centre targeting infants. I was wondering if the centre also addresses the needs of children aged five and under. I'd like to know if any of your activities target children aged five and under. How many children are there in this age group on your reserve?

You also mentioned problems with parents suffering from drug and alcohol addiction. I believe you also said that on the economic front, you operate a casino. I was wondering how you reconcile everything. How do you reconcile drug and alcohol addiction problems with the operation of a casino on the reserve, and with your desire to help young children? What is your plan of action in this regard?

[*English*]

Chief Robert Louie: Thank you very much. I apologize if I wasn't clear enough. I'll go with that last point first, if I may.

Gaming is something that we do not have at this point in time. We have an ambition to carefully look at that and perhaps at some point in time be involved in the gaming industry. I used gaming as an example of success in other provinces and other areas, but we're not quite there in that facility. So I can't comment too much more on that.

On the early child centre and the developments there, the child development centre is focused on under five years of age right up to the kindergarten level—just the preschool level. Yes, we do have children under five years of age. The childhood development centre, quite frankly, used to be open to all of the public with our first nation children involved. Over time it's evolved to where we focus now on the WFN first nation community children.

The need is so great in that area, we've had to supplement. But we do that with eyes wide open. It costs more to operate than we can provide in actual raising of dollars. Therefore we need to find other programs and other ways to assist, and that's what we willingly do.

The dividends, I think, are very important, because the thinking we have there is to provide the opportunities for that early learning. A lot of the kindergarten children come out of that early childhood development centre with knowledge that helps them in that first grade level. I think it's really important to focus in on that younger age.

I've seen communities in the far north, for example. Fort Nelson is one of the communities where I've seen the mothers with the babies in the classrooms or in the facility in the community centre, and their other children are perhaps enrolled in the school. But it's one of invitation, it's one of inviting in that community in Fort Nelson that really works. It has the parents directly involved at the school level and feeling part of it. They don't feel that they come just to simply sit there, drink coffee, and have a babysitting service.

It's an environment that has to be created whereby the young children, the babies, and so forth have that comfort. They have the knowledge that their parent or the school system or the first nation community is there to help them. I think that's the feeling that has to be attributed from early birth right through.

In some cases it takes training of the parents, because alcoholism and drug abuse is where I think the real poverty lies. It's within families in that situation. So that has to be focused on. It's a big challenge, I think, in Canada to make sure that's a focus. If you don't start at that very early age, I think communities will have less advantage and it will be more difficult to get individuals out of that poverty.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Louie. We don't want to keep you any longer. We really appreciate the time that you've spent with us.

I think you've articulated in such a short time some things that really can bring success. As I used to say before I was elected, if you find something that works, copy it shamelessly. I know that's a bit simplistic, but as we're looking at poverty in Canada, and

specifically on first nations reserves, and as we look at what you've done and what your community has done, you're really bringing some important points forward.

I do wish we had more time to ask you more questions. I'm not sure, we may as a committee decide that we actually would like to speak a little longer with you. We'll discuss that and maybe you would be open to coming back. I do think it's important when we're looking at solutions, and we have a first nations community that is successful, that we listen very carefully to what you're doing.

Thank you again. Thank you for your work and thank you for your commitment to your community.

With that, we are going to let you go to your next appointment and wish you all the best.

Chief Robert Louie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My next appointment is actually not with the developers, but it's land claims and addressing that whole issue. It's a very big issue for us.

Yes, I would like to offer any help that I can, or that my community can, if it will be of assistance to your committee. I and others in my community would be very pleased to assist wherever we can. Thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now suspend for three minutes, and then we'll come back in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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