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Chair

Mr. Chris Warkentin

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

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• (1630)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC)): Colleagues, we'll call this meeting to order. This is meeting 39 of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Today we have the minister here. Pursuant to Standing Order 81 (5), we're currently studying supplementary estimates (A), 2012-13.

Today we've asked the minister to come before our committee to answer some questions with regard to supplementary estimates (A).

We thank you, Minister, for being here. You've made special arrangements to accommodate our desire to speak with you in regard to supplementary estimates (A). I understand you have a meeting at 5:30, so we will undertake to ensure we get as many questions in as possible before that time.

We'll turn it over to you, Minister.

We should welcome, though, Mr. Wernick and Madam Swords. Thank you very much for accompanying the minister today. I'm certain we'll be hearing from you as well.

We'll start. And thank you, Minister, for being here.

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you very much, Chair. I can tell you had a carpentry background by the way you pounded that gavel when you started.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's supplementary estimates (A) for fiscal year 2012-13. The supplementary estimates (A) include a number of additional investments that demonstrate our government's concrete efforts to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity of aboriginal peoples and northerners. They include more than \$159 million in initiatives, on top of the \$7.8 billion approved in the main estimates, bringing the total investment to approximately \$8 billion. There may be additional supplementary estimates in the fall that change this total.

More than 90%—\$150 million—of these supplementary estimates will go to fund the settlement of specific claims. As members of this committee appreciate, negotiated settlements resolve outstanding legal obligations of the Government of Canada and enable first nations to access the resources they need to realize their full potential.

The action plan launched in 2007 on specific claims has had a dramatic impact on the number of settled claims. Since 2007, 77 claims have been settled, totalling \$1.2 billion. There are currently more claims in active negotiation than ever before.

In March I had the pleasure of announcing the final settlement of an outstanding specific claim made by Long Plain First Nation in Manitoba. On December 16 of last year, our government, the Government of Ontario, and Fort William First Nation announced the final settlement of a 160-year-old land claim that will strengthen the economy and create jobs in northwestern Ontario.

In July of 2011, the Government of Canada and the Roseau River First Nation announced the final settlement of a long-standing land claim in southern Manitoba. The negotiated settlement provides the first nation with \$80 million to resolve the claim. Other negotiated settlements will soon follow.

The second item in the supplementary estimates now before you relates to self-government agreements with a number of Yukon first nations: Ta'an Kwach'an Council, Kluane First Nation, Kwanlin Dun First Nation, and Selkirk First Nation. A total of \$3.4 million is needed to support the implementation of these agreements. The full implementation of these self-government agreements will have a positive impact on the lives of all Yukon residents.

These estimates also include \$1.6 million to support the implementation of the historic Sechelt Indian Band self-government agreement, concluded more than 25 years ago in British Columbia.

Another item listed in supplementary estimates (A) is \$2.6 million for the first nations and Inuit youth employment strategy, under youth initiatives. This program provides work placement opportunities for first nations youth living on reserve, enabling them to gain valuable skills training in the field of information and communications technology as well as the work experience they need to find employment or continue their education. The funds listed in these estimates will be allocated to seven first nations regional management organizations that provide training and technical support to first nations schools.

The supplementary estimates now before this committee also include \$2 million in 2012-13 to design and build phase one of an \$8 million first nations child and family services information management system. In recent years, this government has concluded tripartite agreements to improve the delivery of on-reserve child and family services in six provinces. Thanks to these agreements, nearly 70% of all first nations children and families residing on reserves across Canada can now access enhanced services that focus on prevention and early intervention.

• (1635)

When all three phases of the information management system are completed in 2014, we will be in a better position to measure the impacts of our investments to support the well-being and safety of first nations children and families and report to all Canadians on the results achieved.

The next item I'd like to discuss relates to the major projects management office initiative. These supplementary estimates include \$1.4 million to support this department's role in the review of large resource projects and to implement the responsible resource development initiative that was announced recently. Major resource development projects can provide valuable opportunities for aboriginal people, enhanced opportunities for well-paying jobs near their communities, and the opportunity to negotiate direct benefit agreements with industry. The major projects management office embedded at Natural Resources Canada coordinates the review of proposed projects through a whole-of-government approach.

The additional funding included in the estimates for my department will ensure that more than 70 projects currently managed by the major projects management office are reviewed in a timely and thorough manner and that meaningful aboriginal consultation obligations are respected and well integrated into the new environmental and regulatory processes.

Mr. Chair, this government believes that all Canadians, regardless of where they live, north or south, on or off reserve, should be able to fully participate in our strong Canadian economy. As the committee conducts its review, I encourage members to consider each item of these estimates in the context of the government's larger strategy. I'm confident these investments will lead to further progress for aboriginal people, northerners, and all Canadians.

With that, I'll do my best to answer any questions that members of the committee may have pertaining to supplementary estimates (A), 2012-13.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for keeping your opening statement concise. It will assist in allowing members to ask more questions.

Colleagues, just remember that the minister has been asked to come here prepared to answer questions with regard to supplementary (A) estimates, and because we only have one hour, I would ask that members keep on the subject of supplementary (A)s. That will ensure that questions with regard to them will be able to be answered.

I will now turn to Mr. Genest-Jourdain for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Good afternoon, Mr. Minister.

At the gathering between the Crown and first nations which was held earlier this year, your government stated that it was a priority to close the funding gap in the area of education for first nations. I obviously had not been invited to that meeting, since security escorted me to the exit. In any case, the main estimates do not provide for any additional funding, and the money announced in the 2012 budget is not enough to reach parity in the area of education between aboriginal children and other Canadian kids.

Could you, once and for all, give us a deadline by which this funding gap will be closed, so that parity can finally be reached between first nations and Canadians?

[*English*]

Hon. John Duncan: Thank you for the question. You made reference to the crown-first nations gathering. Of course, shortly after the crown-first nations gathering in January, we signed an agreement with the First Nations Education Steering Committee in British Columbia. That agreement provides an extra \$30 million over the next two years. It provides for level 2 and level 3 services for essentially all of the first nations-operated schools in the province of British Columbia.

In the budget we have included \$100 million for literacy. That money can also be used in other jurisdictions to lead us to a place where we can ensure equity when there is a transfer of students from the first nations-operated schools to the provincial system, and the reverse.

We recently signed agreements in other regions. Of course, we have the example in Nova Scotia that's been going for quite some time, and that's with the Mi'kmaq.

We're on our way. We know that if we just throw money at the education system without, in tandem, effecting the changes required, we won't get the outcomes we're seeking. All the reports that have been done—the K to 12 education panel, the Senate report—would indicate the same thing. So we think we're in good company. We're making progress, and we have new money in the budget to make major progress on education.

The Chair: I just want to again remind colleagues that we're sticking to supplementary estimates (A). If you refer to the supplementary estimate you are questioning, that might be helpful in assisting in the conversation.

I know there is more that people want to talk about, but I also know that there are many questions other colleagues have with regard to these estimates specifically, and this is really the only opportunity we'll have to ask questions in regard to these estimates.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Minister, I will stay with the issue of chronic underfunding of services for first nations. We also learned recently that first nations in New Brunswick obtained an injunction to prevent your department from reducing grants and contributions to band councils for social assistance payments. In light of that injunction, which will prevent you from taking away up to \$300 in social assistance for single mothers, and regarding the report from the UN's special rapporteur—

• (1645)

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me, I have a point of order here from Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): I appreciate the member's question. The minister is here today to speak to supplementary estimates (A), and there are precise points within those estimates we should be focused on.

I want to remind the members across the floor that this is a good-faith exercise, from a motion put forward by a member from the other side, specifically with respect to supplementary estimates (A). We should confine our discussion to those points.

Thank you.

The Chair: On that point of order, Ms. Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): I just want to indicate that this is certainly about what is in the estimates, but it's also about what is not in the estimates. The minister did speak about different things relating to the estimates, and I think we have an opportunity here to elaborate on some of what he has spoken about.

Sometimes there are interventions at the beginning as we lead into the estimates.

I just wanted to make that point.

The Chair: I didn't hear the whole question. We'll have to listen to the full question before we can make a ruling as to whether it pertains to it.

We can only speak to what is in the estimates, not to what's outside the estimates, Ms. Hughes.

Just to make sure we're all on the same page, maybe you'll refer to the estimates specifically or the line item you are specifically asking about, Mr. Genest-Jourdain.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Chair, I was just told about the friendly nature of this meeting. It seems that the minister is on

top of his files, and he should be able to answer any question put to him.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Genest-Jourdain, I agree that the minister, I'm certain, could answer questions on a whole host of different things, but the committee has instructed me to ask the minister to come here to discuss supplementary estimates (A), so we as a committee will move forward in that course of action.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Let me try again. In light of the injunction which will prevent you from taking away up to \$300 in social assistance to single mothers, and regarding the report of the UN's special rapporteur on food security, which concluded that hunger is a real problem among Inuit First Nations and the Métis, what are your immediate plans to reduce poverty on reserves?

[English]

The Chair: Now that I've heard the rest of the question, I wonder if you'd refer to the line item with regard to supplementary estimates (A) that this is referring to.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: It's under operational expenditures.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Operational expenditures.

The Chair: Which line item?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Under operational expenditures.

The Chair: Under operational expenditures is there anything that refers to the subject material at hand?

Is there a page specifically, Mr. Genest-Jourdain?

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: It's on page 63.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes: It's under capacity development.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: It says "for Indian and Inuit and the furnishing of materials and equipment".

The Chair: I guess the question, Minister, is with regard to vote 1a. Could you highlight the allocation of funds in that specific vote?

Hon. John Duncan: As I read it, that's \$6.4 billion out of the \$7.8 billion in the main estimates. If there are no rules and we're not talking about supplementary estimates (A), then there are no rules.

The Chair: Minister, maybe we can just run down exactly what's included in vote 1a, and maybe that would answer Mr. Genest-Jourdain's question.

Is that right, Mr. Genest-Jourdain? Is that the question you're asking?

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: It depends on the answer.

The Chair: It depends on the....

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Chair, to clarify, vote 10 is grants and contributions, which is the major part of the department. Vote 1 is the other part, and that's our operating expenditures. That's virtually all of the departmental spending. That's just a summary. That page is a summary of total spending under the grants and contributions. That's not what supplementary estimates (A) or (B) or (C) are about, which is the incremental spending after the original budget.

So it's whatever the chair rules. It's not what I rule; it's what you rule.

• (1650)

The Chair: I just wanted to make sure that Mr. Genest-Jourdain got an answer to his question. Clearly if it's outside the scope of supplementary estimates (A), then we'll have to move on.

Mr. Genest-Jourdain, we'll turn it over to you for the next question with regard to supplementary estimates (A).

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I need some clarification here. So—

The Chair: Mr. Genest-Jourdain has the floor. We'll turn it over to Mr. Genest-Jourdain for his question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Obviously, people are trying to play for time, but I have other questions.

Will you admit that reducing social assistance, combined with the lack of investment in education, is a mistake, and will you also recognize that we need to invest more in training, instead of reducing eligibility to the social assistance program?

[*English*]

The Chair: Again, Mr. Genest-Jourdain, you'll have to refer to the vote that you're speaking of with regard to supplementary estimates (A).

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: We have just looked into that, Mr. Chair. I have just given you the exact page, page 63. It's all there.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Genest-Jourdain, which vote are you specifically speaking about?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I have a point of order on this.

The Chair: On a point of order, Mrs. Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Thank you.

We've indicated that the operational expenditures encompass a variety of things, which is the capacity development for Indian and Inuit and the furnishings of material and equipment, and there's a lot that goes into that amount.

The Chair: This isn't a point of order, Ms. Hughes. If Mr. Genest-Jourdain would like to pass on some of his time to you, that's fine, but Mr. Genest-Jourdain should continue with his questions.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: It was some clarification. It was a point of order.

The Chair: That's not a point of order. I'm ruling.

Mr. Genest-Jourdain, we'll continue with your question.

Ms. Sims, on a point of order.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): I'm just trying to seek some clarification, Chair, so please bear with me, because I'm new to this committee.

When I heard the presentation made by the minister...I believe the minister himself opened it up to go beyond the supplementary estimates, which you keep trying to limit the speakers to.

The Chair: Is there anything in specific terms that you can bring?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Well, there are actually so many different sections in this.

As I was listening to him, I heard your admonition at the beginning and I was very conscious of it. But when you look at it, he talks about the supplementary estimates of \$150 million that will go.... Then he gets into the action plan of 2007, which once again has very little to do with it here. Then he starts giving the history—

The Chair: Ms. Sims, have you had a chance to read the estimates (A)?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: I have had a chance to—

The Chair: I believe you'll find all that information contained within that document.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: I really would urge you to...and I think I saw some nodding of heads—

The Chair: I'm not finding that this is a point of order.

We'll turn it over to Mr. Genest-Jourdain to complete his questions with regard to the supplementary estimates (A).

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: As indicated, it's at section 1(a), under the heading *Department*, on page 63. It's all there.

Regardless, I will share my time with Ms. Hughes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Hughes, we'll turn it over to you for the last minute.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: First of all, it's just with respect to some clarification from you, because everything that we are asking has to do with expenses from the estimates. So basically what you're saying is that you're not allowing the minister to answer the question.

The Chair: That is absolutely not the case, Ms. Hughes. I am actually asking that members limit their questions to supplementary estimates (A).

Mrs. Carol Hughes: And that is exactly what we've had here. The information we're requesting is specific to the estimates.

The Chair: So far, Ms. Hughes, I haven't heard a question concerning the supplementary estimates (A).

Mrs. Carol Hughes: So if you're not going to answer the questions by my colleague, then I will ask a question—

The Chair: Ms. Hughes, your time has now expired.

We'll move on to the next questioner.

We're going to turn to Mr. Wilks for seven minutes.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome the minister here and say hello to all of his friends he might have known in his old former hometown.

With regard to supplementary estimates (A) for 2012-13, on page 66 of the document that I have in front of me, the total supplementary is just under \$161.2 million. Could you please outline for the committee some of the key initiatives included in these supplementary estimates?

• (1655)

Hon. John Duncan: Thank you for the question. I think you could get quite a bit of it out of my speaking notes.

The key initiatives are \$150 million for specific claim settlements, \$3.4 million for the renewal and implementation of self-government financial transfer agreements with three Yukon first nations, \$2.6 million for first nations school net youth initiatives, \$2 million for the first nations child and family services program information management system, \$1.6 million for the implementation and self-government costs of Sechelt Indian Band self-government, \$1.4 million to support regulatory reviews and to modernize the regulatory system for major resource projects—this is part of the major project management office initiative—and \$0.2 million for the compensation related to the transfer of provincial crown land pursuant to the McLeod Lake Indian Band Treaty No. 8 adhesion and settlement agreement.

I think you'll find that adds up, more or less, to \$161.2 million.

Mr. David Wilks: Thank you very much.

Further to that, under supplementary estimates (A), it also includes \$3.4 million in funding for the renewal, as you just mentioned, and implementation of self-government financial transfer agreements.

I wonder if you could explain why this expenditure is necessary.

Hon. John Duncan: Treasury Board approved the newly negotiated self-government financial transfer agreements for the three self-governing Yukon first nations that I mentioned in my speech—Kluane, Kwanlin Dun, Ta'an Kwach'an Council—as well as the transfer of responsibility for delivery of the departmental post-secondary education program to a fourth self-governing Yukon first nation, and that's the Selkirk First Nation.

This included an increase in spending of \$3.34 million in 2011-12, and this was included in the supplementary estimates (C) for 2011-12. The inclusion of the \$3.4 million in the supplementary estimates (A) 2012-13, which we're talking about today, is to provide ongoing funds to the departmental budget for both the increase in the new self-governing financial transfer agreement and the post-secondary education transfer increase to be funded for 2012-13. They should be more straightforward next year. Presumably it will be in the main estimates, not in the supplementaries.

Mr. David Wilks: Thank you very much.

I wonder if you could explain to the committee the purpose of increasing the funding to support self-government implications in

Sechelt and in the Yukon first nations, as outlined in the supplementaries.

Hon. John Duncan: The money in the supplementary estimates for the implementation of the self-government acts is on a one-time basis to be available to support the development of fiscal and financial policies and procedures, human resource policies and procedures, a land code, registry of laws, system upgrades to track own-source revenue and training and transition, and then on an ongoing basis to be available to support enhanced financial management, implementation of fiscal and financial policies and procedures, insurance, implementation of a comprehensive human resources management regime, legal and accounting services, community-based planning, and ongoing system maintenance.

• (1700)

Mr. David Wilks: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I don't have any further questions. If I have any time left I will allot it to anyone on our side.

The Chair: There's limited time left, so maybe we'll catch them on the next stage.

We'll turn it over to Ms. Bennett for seven minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I think the chair understands that the purpose of supplementary estimates (A) is the opportunity for the minister to request additional funds for issues that do not have sufficient funding through the existing mechanisms. So I think Ms. Hughes's point is correct, that the thinking around what the minister asked for, or hasn't asked for, is within the mandate of what is in the supplementary estimates, or is not.

With respect to the survey that was released over a year ago, in terms of the massive investments needed to improve first nations wastewater systems, your government then supported a Liberal motion on the right of every first nation to claim safe drinking water. Mr. Minister, why is there no additional funding in supplementary estimates (A) to address this appalling crisis in water and wastewater capacity, and when do we expect 100% of first nations families to be properly housed with safe drinking water?

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: There's a logical fallacy in the argument being put forward by the other side. To suggest that supplementary estimates (A) allows you to ask questions about what's not there leads to the logical conclusion that you can ask any question under the sun, because lots of things aren't going to be in the supplementary (A)s. We could ask why Aboriginal Affairs isn't funding programs in downtown Toronto for non-aboriginal youth. It makes absolutely no sense.

We're here to ask questions of the supplementary (A)s. Many of us have questions on the supplementary (A)s, and I think we should be moving toward those questions.

Thirty minutes of the committee time has elapsed in three rounds of questioning because people won't ask supplementary (A) questions.

The Chair: I know that members want some latitude with regard to this, and it's an opportunity today to have the minister before us to ask questions. Now I think it's important that we undertake a study of the supplementary estimates (A). It's something that Parliament has been allotted to do by a lot of people, and I think it's important that we stick to it.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, with due respect—

The Chair: Ms. Bennett, you referred to Ms. Hughes's intervention. She kept referring to page 61. In fact, supplementary estimates (A) are found on page 66, so I would ask that members—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, just about what's in and what's not in—

The Chair: I would ask that members ask questions with regard to the supplementary estimates (A).

I'll turn it over to you, Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you.

I would just like to get it on the record that seeing there's been a refusal to divide up the budget implementation bill and that it will not be studied at the aboriginal peoples committee in the Senate, this is the time when the minister is before us to examine the implications of the budget, as well as the supplementary (A)s. The supplementary (A)s have already been reported back to the House.

We have the minister before us. This ought to be an opportunity for us to ask the minister what we want, and it won't be about non-aboriginal youth in downtown Toronto. It will be only about things that are the direct responsibility of the minister. I will try again.

The supplementary (A)s include \$7.4 million for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As you know from the interim report of February 24, the commission has asked about extending the time of the mandate of the commission, but as well for significant dollars to properly do their work. I'd like to know what the minister thinks the \$7.4 million will do, when clearly the commission is asking for a great deal more than that in order to do their work properly.

Hon. John Duncan: As you know, the—

The Chair: I hate to do this, and I recognize the words are there and there's a reference to that program, but as you know, there are no adjustments for supplementary (A)s with regard to that. I take the point that members want to ask questions with regard to different files that may be under the minister's purview, but the committee

specifically asked the minister to come here to speak about the supplementary estimates (A). These are allocations of cash that were put forward for the purpose of additional funds.

I'll turn it over to you, Ms. Bennett.

• (1705)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: With due respect, Mr. Chair, when the invitation was extended, we had not been led to believe that they would have already been reported back by the time the minister arrived. What is under scrutiny right now is the impact of the budget, as well as the supplementary (A)s. I do not think it's unreasonable to ask the minister to answer questions about the impact of the budget, as well as the supplementary (A)s, and particularly the things that actually are listed in the supplementary (A)s as an issue.

I would really encourage that you allow the minister to answer the question on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Chair: Ms. Bennett, I again have asked members to keep it to the subject matter that committee members asked the minister to come here to speak about.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The \$7.4 million is in the supplementary (A)s.

The Chair: Ms. Bennett, I think maybe you and I are reading the document differently. I don't see an adjustment for supplementary (A)s with regard to that particular envelope. I'm sorry, but that's not within the supplementary (A)s, so I'd ask that you refer to a different line item—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I hope that these questions you have deemed out of order will be answered by the minister in writing.

The Chair: I'd welcome the committee to invite the minister to discuss a different subject matter at a later date, but there are committee members who are desperately looking for answers with regard to the supplementary estimates (A). I think it's important that we give members that opportunity. The minister really has only one hour, and I want to ensure that on the subject matter he's been asked to bring us information about he is asked those questions and that he is allowed to answer questions with regard to that subject matter.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In the supplementary estimates (A), as of April of this year, the administration and control of the urban aboriginal youth and community programs unit has been transferred from the Department of Canadian Heritage to Indian Affairs and Northern Development. There was a report last year saying that didn't seem to make any sense. Can you tell me why that's happening?

Hon. John Duncan: Certainly, the—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: What specific programs are you taking from Canadian Heritage?

Hon. John Duncan: All the programs, the three major program elements that were under the aboriginal friendship centre program, which were funded from Canadian Heritage, are being transferred.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Is there any reduction in the money or the staff?

Hon. John Duncan: There is no reduction in money or staff. The money transfers to us and the staff transfer to us. There are 13 staff who are involved.

Of course, the friendship centres themselves have been advocating this measure for quite some time. They welcome the measure very much. I've talked with the national president. I've talked to members at individual friendship centres and also at provincial organizations. They all welcome the move.

We've brought them into the family where they feel most comfortable, and we look forward to actually being able to work very well together.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In the departmental deficit reduction measures, it explains that there will be 480 positions lost across the department, with significant reductions, and yet the supplementary estimates (A) are seeking an increase of \$156.4 million.

Could you explain if there would be any effect on the additions to reserve staffing and/or funding? Certainly this committee has been apprised at almost every hearing about the backlogs there and about how much is required.

Hon. John Duncan: My understanding is that on the additions to reserve initiative there would be no impact on communities or on staffing, as per your question.

I could ask my officials to give you a little more detail on that if you would prefer.

• (1710)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

Mr. Michael Wernick (Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): I don't have much to add, Mr. Chairman. There shouldn't be any impact on the service. We're trying to actually take out some of the duplication and redundancy between our front-line regional offices and headquarters, and streamline and speed up the process. We have a working group with the Assembly of First Nations on how to do this faster. Some of it depends on cooperation with the provinces, because we're often talking about crown land, but we should not expect any impact on service levels.

The Chair: Mr. Clarke, go ahead for seven minutes.

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

I'd like to thank Mr. Wernick, the minister, and Ms. Swords. Welcome back.

I have just a couple of questions for you, Minister. I understand the supplementary estimates (A) also include an internal reallocation of resources for the Canadian high Arctic research station. I'm hoping you can provide some clarity as to what this money is going towards.

Hon. John Duncan: Thank you very much for the question.

There is approximately \$400,000 in internal reallocation to the high Arctic research station. As part of the design phase for the station, these funds will be allocated to projects that test green building and alternative energy technologies for application at the station and across the north.

The station is to be a year-round, multidisciplinary facility on the cutting edge of environmental and resource development issues. The station will promote partnerships and collaboration among the

private, aboriginal, academic, and public sectors, both domestically and internationally.

The international research community is very much looking forward to it. We just wrapped up the International Polar Year conference in Montreal in April, I believe it was. We had 58 countries represented there and 2,600 participants. This is a major Canadian initiative and a world-class facility.

The station will work with aboriginal people of Canada's Arctic and recognize the importance of traditional knowledge. It will include cutting-edge laboratories, offices, and meeting facilities to support collaboration, accommodations, and advanced mechanical and telecommunications systems to ensure safe and efficient operations.

This will all be delivered in partnership with northerners and will strengthen and develop our approaches in the Arctic.

There are a bunch of projects I could talk about, in collaboration with Yukon College, Nunavut Arctic College, the Nunavut Planning Commission, the Hamlet of Cambridge Bay, which is where the station will be, and with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, ITK. That is what this allocation of money is for.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Can you describe the Inuit transfers to government departments' internal reallocations totalling \$1 million included in these supplementary estimates?

Hon. John Duncan: This is a transfer between departments involving the transfer of program responsibility and authority, as well as associated funds from one department's appropriation to another department that becomes responsible for delivering the program.

The transfers and internal reallocations included in these supplementary estimates are a \$630,000 transfer from Health Canada to fund the Sechelt Indian Band health programs under the Sechelt Indian Band Self-Government Act. This is a bunch of core program funding provided by Health Canada.

The core budget is \$325,000. There's an aboriginal diabetes initiative, a head start on-reserve initiative, a drinking water safety initiative. In addition, there's a community care initiative. There's one on communicable disease control, sexually transmitted infections, and there's money for the Sechelt health centre, operating and maintenance.

There's also a \$21,000 transfer from Health Canada for the self-governing Yukon first nations programs and a service transfer agreement on health. In addition, there's a \$497,000 transfer to Human Resources and Skills Development to support the Kativik regional government, to streamline delivery of youth programming, to support youth programming and services delivered by HRSDC, including programs under the first nations and Inuit youth employment strategy, normally administered by my department. This will result in streamlined services and reporting.

• (1715)

The Chair: There's one minute left, if you have a supplementary question. Otherwise, we'll move on to the next questioner.

Mr. Bevington, we'll turn to you for five minutes.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Seeing that we have a new procedure in committee now, and seeing that I'm sure your decision to proceed in this fashion will be upheld by your majority, I'll try to find something to talk about here.

I'm very glad the minister is here, but I find this procedure is very limited, compared to other occasions over the past seven years when we've had ministers in front of the committees on supplementary estimates.

I'm curious about page 67 under contributions. You have \$420,000 for "Contributions promoting the safe use, development, conservation and protection of the North's natural resources". Is that with reference to the high Arctic research station as well, or is that something separate?

Hon. John Duncan: What page are you on there?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Page 67.

Hon. John Duncan: That's a transfer from vote 5 to vote 10 for the high Arctic research station. You're correct in that.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Can you describe the process by which you've come to the conclusion that the high Arctic research centre is under...? Is there a research agenda that you can point to within the Government of Canada that says that the investment in the high Arctic research centre is really such a primary investment? Is there an agenda for Arctic research? Is that something we can have tabled in front of this committee?

Hon. John Duncan: There absolutely is an agenda and a strategy. I can tell you that the time I spent at the International Polar Year Conference in Montreal was very enlightening as to the work that's been done up until now, and the synergy, I guess for lack of a better word—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Are you prepared to present that agenda to this committee, table the agenda with the committee?

Hon. John Duncan: Certainly we can provide a lot of background on science in the north, and—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: So I'll look forward to the direction of that facility.

Hon. John Duncan: I can tell you that based on the international requests to participate in research at that facility, we are very readily going to be oversubscribed. We're going to have a very large success on our hands, for sure.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Once again, this leaves us with very few avenues to talk about things that I think are very important to be brought in front of this committee. I don't know whether you'd be...

We're taking money out of the conservation and protection of the north's natural resources, or transferring it over. Does that impact on the NWT protected area strategy? Are you looking at continuing with financing that strategy going forward?

• (1720)

Hon. John Duncan: There is no impact from the estimates in any way, shape, or form.

I would like to say that there's been a lot of procedural wrangling here. I have now been in the House of Commons for 16 years. I sat

on this committee for many years. I can tell you that we never would have seen a minister before this committee after supplementary estimates had been reported. I think I'm probably the first minister to ever do that.

I'm happy to talk about supplemental estimates (A). If you want to invite me back for something else, I'm happy to come back for something else. I shouldn't be subject to criticism for appearing here and not talking about whatever comes up. I came here on the nature of supplementary estimates (A).

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Minister, the decisions about supplementary estimates are being made by the chair here, not by you, and I appreciate your being here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bevington. Your five minutes are up.

I will refer members to the document that was circulated by the analyst to the committee. There's a fair bit of documentation related to supplementary (A) estimates. If there is a difficulty in coming up with questions, I know that the reference material will assist you in that.

We'll now turn to Mr. Rickford for five minutes.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

I have some specific questions, Minister, on a couple of key initiatives that focus on information communications technology. I'm pleased to see these in supplementary estimates (A). Obviously, in the great Kenora riding we understand the challenges on the programmatic end of things and that the need to develop information and communications technology is essential. So I would proceed in this way.

I'd like you to explain, Minister, what the government is going to do with respect to the former first nations SchoolNet program and its youth initiatives, as it is a line item here in the estimates.

Hon. John Duncan: Thank you very much for the question.

This is another interesting example of a program that was born in a different department; that was Industry Canada. It was transferred to this department in December of 2006. It was a program that sunsetted in March of last year and was consolidated into the new Paths for Education program as the information communication technology component. Annual funding for this component is almost \$6.7 million.

The initiative under first nations SchoolNet youth activities was incorporated into the first nations and Inuit youth employment strategy. Funding for that is \$2.6 million. It's used to fund seven information technology regional management organizations that help support first nations youth on reserve with Internet communication technology, skills training, and, most importantly, work experience needed to find employment or to continue their education. Participants also can assist their own schools, of course, with ongoing technical support.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Minister.

We've had an opportunity to visit some of the larger regions in this country. Particularly, you and I were in Thunder Bay. We understood then, I think, the importance of broadband development for specific programs, but I think the general statement can be made that we're focusing on capacity and experience with modern technology.

As we drill down, of course, we start talking about specific programs and their impact on youth and the delivery of certain health programs. So my next question, with respect to another item here in the supplementary estimates (A), is the \$2 million for funding for the first nations child and family services information management system—pursuant to the specific request of my colleague across the way, in her motion, to talk about supplementary estimates (A).

I know there is a lot of other stuff going on in child and family services that we can look forward to, but with respect to this allocation, as it's laid out in this estimate, how will the money be spent for the information management system for first nations child and family services?

• (1725)

Hon. John Duncan: Thank you for the question.

I think we all know how important child and family services is on reserve—and the six agreements we've signed across the country with provinces, which are making a positive difference.

One thing in getting to better outcomes is to be able to measure outcomes, so we're building a first nations child and family services information management system to strengthen our accountability and delivery of this programming. The system will help us to better support first nations children and family well-being.

There's \$2 million identified in fiscal 2012-13 to build phase one, which will automate and enable reporting on information that funding recipients and service providers currently supply to the department. The total cost of the system is estimated to be \$8 million. In addition, commencing in 2014-15, we will spend \$1 million per year for maintenance of the system. We've already invested \$4 million gathering all the requirements for the system. The project is on time and within budget.

I might add that this whole exercise responds directly to recommendations from the Auditor General.

The Chair: We'll turn to Ms. Hughes for the last question.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I'll give this a try.

As you know, the Harada report released this week revealed that 59% of the people in Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong First Nation had symptoms of mercury poisoning.

I am referring to page 64, vote (S) of the supplementary estimates, on this one.

They had symptoms of mercury poisoning, and 34% of them would have been diagnosed with Minamata disease. This shows that the symptoms of mercury poisoning are carrying on into the next generation; yet only one out of four people diagnosed by the Japanese expert received compensation, and those payments aren't indexed to inflation.

I'm surprised to see that the supplementary estimates include only \$15,000 for the Mercury Disability Board. I'm wondering whether

you feel this is enough money, given the scope of the research that was just recently released. How did you come to that number? Is there some consideration to indexing those payments to inflation in the future?

The Chair: Ms. Hughes, I hate to do this, but there has been no adjustment to the \$15,000, so there is no change as it relates to the supplementary estimates.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I understand. I just want some clarification as to where they got the \$15,000.

The Chair: Okay, well, that wouldn't be under supplementary estimates (A).

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Well, it's part of the supplementary estimates (A) document that we've received. One of them is the budgetary authorities, and then there is—

The Chair: Maybe I'm seeing it under a different—

Mrs. Carol Hughes: —the “Explanation of Requirements”. If you look at page 64 and you go to “Grassy Narrows and Islington Bands Mercury Disability Board”—

The Chair: It seems like that is previous estimates to date, not supplementary estimates (A).

Mrs. Carol Hughes: So we can't get some clarification on the previous estimates to date even though it's there...?

The Chair: I'll recognize a point of order from Mr. Rickford.

• (1730)

Mr. Greg Rickford: We have tried, but this motion has been put forward by your colleague, dealing specifically with the supplementary estimates (A), and some latitude has been afforded for some discussion—

Mrs. Carol Hughes: There has been no latitude afforded—

Mr. Greg Rickford: There actually has—

The Chair: This isn't a point of order.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Okay. I'm going to go to another—

Mr. Greg Rickford: My point would be then, Chris, that this is a previous estimate and not a supplementary (A) estimate.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I'm going to go to another question because obviously people are refusing—

The Chair: Ms. Hughes, I'll turn it over to you to ask another question that's pertinent to the supplementary estimates.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Minister, I understand that this is as frustrating for us as it is for you. We've never had problems with some latitude with respect to answering questions that are related to the estimates, so I'll go to child welfare, because obviously they're trying to protect something—I'm not sure what.

I'm going to refer now to page 66 and vote 1. How's that?

More first nations children today are in state care than at the height of the residential schools, yet funding for first nations child welfare is less than what other Canadian children receive. This makes it very difficult to keep families together or even to keep those children in communities.

Given the fact that the federal government is appealing the Federal Court's decision to compel the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to hear the complaint by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society that this inequity represents discrimination, I'm wondering if the government has any intention to commit to increased access to prevention services by working with first nations and provincial and territorial partners to implement the enhanced prevention focused approach.

In that, I'm wondering if, in the \$1.9 million, whether or not that actually is improving funding and equity for these services.

Hon. John Duncan: I find the question passing strange. The reason I find the question passing strange is that we are doing exactly what the thrust of your question is, which is that we're entering into tripartite arrangements with first nations, the provinces, and the federal government to improve child and family services to make it better. We've entered into six agreements. We've put a lot of extra money into it. We're continuing in that vein. This is the direction of the government.

One of the things we have accomplished is that where we do have measurable outcomes, we know we've made a difference, but we need to.... In order to run programs properly and to be able to effect change to make things better, you have to be able to measure them, and that's what the investment in the supplementary estimates is all about, as we just described in the previous line of questioning.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Minister, I'm just trying to get some sense of the \$1.9 million that is for the information management system. I'm wondering how that moves us forward with respect to improving funding and equity for these services.

Hon. John Duncan: Well, this is just the amount in the supplementary estimates. In the main estimates, you will find money for child and family services, and it's considerable. It's a lot larger today than it was in 1995, because we entered into those child and family service agreements. There was an agreement with these tripartite arrangements, and in each and every case we provided additional funds so the programs could be more effective at keeping children either with extended families or in their communities, as opposed to apprehensions, as was the model before.

As a matter of fact, the child and family service model prior to these agreements in many cases actually had an incentive for children to be removed from their families, because each removal was an incremental transfer of money from the federal government to the provincial government or other authority. So we've changed the incentive, and that has changed the results. Now we want to be able to measure the results and outcomes better.

● (1735)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Unfortunately, that hour went fast. Thank you for staying a little bit longer. I held you here for five minutes extra to ensure that Ms. Hughes had an opportunity to ask those final questions, so thank you so much for being here.

Colleagues, thanks so much.

The committee meeting is adjourned.

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