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The Honourable Rob Moore

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•(0850)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC)): Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

We're very pleased today to have a couple of guests as witnesses for our study on Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017. We have Jeffrey Cyr, from the National Association of Friendship Centres, and Clément Chartier, president of the Métis National Council. Welcome to you two gentlemen.

We're scheduled to go to about 10:15 with our witnesses and questions. Then we'll have half an hour for committee business. We'd like to discuss in committee business December's agenda as well as the motion by Mr. Benskin.

With that, we'll get started. We'll start with you, Mr. Chartier. You have ten minutes for your opening comments. The floor is yours.

Mr. Clément Chartier (President, Métis National Council): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

First, let me provide a brief overview of the Métis National Council. We are the national government of the Métis Nation in that part of our historic homeland encompassing the prairie provinces, and extending into Ontario and British Columbia. Our homeland also extends into the Northwest Territories, in the northwestern United States, historically known as the old Northwest. We represent approximately 400,000 people, about one-third of the total aboriginal population in Canada.

Our five provincial affiliated organizations or governing members all use province-wide ballot box elections for determining their leadership, and adhere to the same Métis Nation citizenship code in registering their citizens. They administer and deliver a variety of government programs and services in areas such labour market development, business financing and economic development, housing, child and family services, education, and culture.

Your study of Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017 affords Canadians the opportunity to reflect on how they wish to relate to confederation. It has particular significance to the Métis Nation, the founders of Canada's first post-confederation province, Manitoba. Our ancestors, for the most part, were not directly affected by the events in 1867 because they did not reside in the four confederating provinces. They lived in Rupert's Land and in North-Western

Territory, both of which were controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company. Originally of mixed offspring of indigenous women and European fur traders, they evolved into a distinct people with their own culture, language, and political consciousness. They played an instrumental role in the fur trade economy as traders, boatmen, provisioners, merchants, and interpreters.

While they were not part of the negotiations leading to the Constitution Act 1867, our ancestors were impacted greatly by its enactment. A major impetus behind political union was the desire of expansionists to push westward in order to reach and unite with the colony of British Columbia. A transcontinental railroad would spur this westward expansion and settlement. The national sentiment fueled by this expansionism expressed itself in a Canadian version of manifest destiny.

Little attention was paid to those occupying the vast expanse of territory between the Canadian confederating provinces and the Pacific. By 1867, the population of the Red River settlement, one of the largest settlements on the plains of North America west of the Mississippi and north of the Missouri, consisted of 9,800 Métis and 1,600 whites. This was a community that lay in the path of the new Dominion of Canada as it began its march from sea to sea.

In 1867 the Hudson's Bay Company sold Rupert's Land to the Dominion of Canada for £300,000 and one-twentieth of the territory's fertile land. During the negotiation of the sale, no provision was made for the rights of the Métis majority in the Red River settlement that was expected to become part of a territory governed directly by Ottawa.

In the words of historian W.L. Morton, one of the greatest transfers of territory and sovereignty in history was concluded as a mere transaction in real estate. The response of our ancestors in 1869 was to establish the first Métis provisional government under Louis Riel, which took control of the Red River settlement. It drafted a list of rights demanding no less than provincehood, and sent emissaries to Ottawa to negotiate the terms of admission of Manitoba as a province into Confederation through the Manitoba Act.

●(0855)

Unlike the confederating provinces, Manitoba would not have control over public lands as compensation. Section 31 of the Manitoba Act provided for a land grant of 1.4 million acres of land for the children of Métis heads of families. A process for distributing these lands to the Métis, envisaged by the lieutenant-governor of the province to take one or two years at the most, took more than a decade for the federal government to administer.

Amidst a rapid influx of hostile settlers from Ontario moving onto their traditional lands, the vast majority of the Métis moved on. Their proportion of Manitoba's population dropped from 83% in 1870, to 7% in 1886. Our leader, Louis Riel, was three times elected to the House of Commons, but he was denied his seat. Nevertheless, in 1871 he led the Métis against the Fenian invasion force of the United States in defence of the province of his creation.

The continuing failure of the federal government to address Métis land claims in 1884-85 led to the formation of the second Métis provisional government in the Saskatchewan Valley, again under Riel's leadership. The federal response was an armed invasion, leading to the North-West Resistance of 1885, the defeat of the Métis Nation at the Battle of Batoche, and the execution of Louis Riel on November 16, 1885.

The background I have provided is of more than just historical interest. A 30-year battle in the courts over the unfulfilled Métis land grants under the Manitoba Act, which has been driven by our governing member, the Manitoba Métis Federation, will reach the Supreme Court of Canada on December 13. This case will likely alter the way in which the federal government views the rights of the Métis, as the Manitoba Court of Appeal has already upheld certain principles that should have significant implications going forward.

I believe Canada's 150th anniversary provides an opportunity for Canadians and their governments to reflect on what has happened in the wake of Confederation. Confederation and the federal system of government was a means of accommodating regions and cultures within a state. Through Riel's provisional government and the Manitoba Act, the Métis established themselves as one of Canada's founding peoples or nations. Despite this historical fact, we, the Métis Nation, must struggle to have our existence recognized and our aspirations realized.

While recognition has been slow in coming, there has been some progress. In 1992 Parliament unanimously passed a resolution recognizing the unique and historic role of Louis Riel as a founder of Manitoba. In 2010 Parliament and a number of provincial legislatures declared the "Year of the Métis" in order to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the North-West Resistance of 1885, the Battle of Batoche, and the execution of Louis Riel.

I believe this committee should recommend that Confederation commemorations recognize the historical contributions of the Métis Nation as a founding people who had to rise in resistance in order to enter Confederation. Furthermore, I encourage this committee to start giving serious thought to the 150th anniversary of Manitoba in 2020, with particular focus on the historical and contemporary role of the Métis Nation in its development.

Given this committee's oversight over Heritage Canada and the country's historical and culture sites and institutions, one of the greatest contributions this committee can make is to encourage Heritage Canada and national cultural institutions to support the development and expansion of Métis Nation heritage sites. The Métis National Council's governing member in Alberta, the Métis Nation of Alberta, owns and operates Métis Crossing, Alberta's premier centre for Métis cultural interpretation, approximately 100 kilometres northeast of Edmonton. The council's governing member in Saskatchewan, the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, sponsors a major annual heritage and tourism event, Back to Batoche Days, at the Batoche historical site near Saskatoon. The Manitoba Métis Federation is working on the establishment of a national Métis museum in the future heritage park at the site of Upper Fort Gary in Winnipeg.

●(0900)

Another important contribution your committee can make is to encourage Heritage Canada and national cultural institutions to support the expansion plans of the Métis national cultural and education institutions. Prime examples are the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatoon, the Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg, and the Rupertsland Institute in Edmonton.

Other concrete measures that can be taken by your committee include recommending to the federal government that fiscal resources be provided to our governments and institutions so that we can save our Michif language, and that as part of the preparations for the 150th anniversary Canada take into account that the Métis Nation flag will be 200 years old in 2015.

On that note, Mr. Chair, I'll be happy to respond to any questions you may have later.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

On to you, Mr. Cyr.

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr (Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres): Good morning, Mr. Chair and distinguished members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I wish to acknowledge the traditional lands of the Algonquin Nation upon which we are meeting today. And I want to thank you and the committee for the opportunity to present to you on Canada's upcoming 150th birthday in 2017 on behalf of my organization. I'll talk a little bit about that first.

I'm Jeff Cyr. I'm a Métis from the Métis Nation in Manitoba. I'm executive director of the National Association of Friendship Centres. This is my first official presentation to your committee in my capacity as the executive director. My president sends her regrets. She's off to another event here in town.

The National Association of Friendship Centres comprises 119 urban, community-based, aboriginal-controlled service organizations from coast to coast in Canada. They are assisted in their work by six provincial and territorial associations, and of course, by our national office here in Ottawa.

The early history of the friendship centre movement is found in the cities of Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver, starting in the 1950s. The history and evolution of the friendship centre movement has been one of continual focus on meeting the health, social, economic, educational, employment, cultural, language, and transitional needs of first nations, Métis, and Inuit people in urban centres in our country.

Friendship centres do not just provide invaluable services to the urban aboriginal people who utilize the programs. The movement also provides employment opportunities at the local, regional, and national levels. Combined, the movement employs over 2,600 people, of which 72% are women.

The overall purpose of friendship centres in Canada is to improve the life chances of and the opportunities for the urban aboriginal population in our country. Our continuum of services includes prenatal programming, healthy babies, the head start program, youth programming, mental health and wellness, lifelong care, diabetes clinics, and drug and alcohol prevention, all of which are vital programs that help to address the spiralling cost of healthcare in Canada.

We also provide education-related programming, which includes literacy, alternative high schools, and of course, the previously mentioned head start program for young children. Friendship centres also provide employment and training programs, coupled with economic development support services, which help urban aboriginal people establish secure futures for their families.

While friendship centres have had long-term success in offering and delivering these vital services, we confront many challenges. Some are demographic realities. Others pertain to organization and human and fiscal capacity.

The urban aboriginal population in Canada continues to increase. In 1996, it was 47%. In 2001, it was 49%. In 2006, it was 54%. We anticipate that it's close to 60% today. As well, our population is young: 48% of the population is under the age of 25. These demographic realities place strong pressures on the human and fiscal capacities of our centres, especially in light of the fact that federal core funding of the aboriginal friendship centres program has been frozen at \$16 million since 1989.

Throughout our history, friendship centres have been places of social innovation that have required employees to be creative in finding resources to meet the full scope of needs among urban aboriginal peoples. Friendship centres generally turn five cents of federal funding into \$1 of services by seeking and securing funding from other sources. Friendship centres in our provincial and territorial organizations also have productive and well-established relationships with municipal, provincial, and territorial governments. These relationships provide additional funding, which is utilized to offer the cadre of programs and services I mentioned earlier.

The national association has fostered strong relationships with the federal government. We have worked on various issues with the Public Health Agency, Health Canada, Corrections Canada, the RCMP, HRSDC, Statistics Canada, and Parliament, through the all-party friendship centre caucus, which is co-chaired by Jean Crowder and Chris Warkentin.

The national association is also fostering strong relationships with several universities in Canada through our Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network. Our relationship with these universities is central to a research proposal we have submitted to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. We hosted a very successful national health conference in February of this year.

We are also working hand in hand with the Office of the Federal Interlocutor.

As you see, the friendship centre movement is busy in Canada. I've not highlighted our international work and efforts. We are very busy, and we need to be. The urban aboriginal population is dynamic: it's growing, and it's young.

● (0905)

Priorities for the movement include health, employment, training, youth programming, economic development, the social economy, crime prevention, creating safe communities, protecting first nations, Métis, and Inuit heritages in urban environments, and protecting Mother Earth.

In 2017 Canada will be celebrating its 150th birthday, and you have asked us here today to provide you with our thoughts regarding this.

I'm sure you are prepared to hear from us and from other aboriginal organizations that the history and relationships with first nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit have not always been positive and that we are all trying to find ways to reconcile these relationships. Indeed, the apology delivered by the Prime Minister and other federal party leaders in 2008 was a huge step in the right direction. Canada's endorsement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples last year was a strong second step, and tonight I will be attending an event hosted by the NDP in honour of the declaration.

Canada cannot divest itself of the roles and place that aboriginal peoples have played in the history of this country. Simply, the name Canada itself is an aboriginal word, as are many other places and names in this country, including Ottawa, Quebec, and Manitoba. Therefore, any celebration of Canada's birthday, including its upcoming 150th, must be inclusive of our rich cultures, traditions, and societies.

As John Ralston Saul states in his book *A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada*, Canada is a country heavily influenced and shaped by aboriginal peoples.

I would even advance for your consideration that the pre-history of Canada be included as an integral part of upcoming celebrations. Recently I have been reading the book *1491*, a book that I feel accurately reflects and describes the richness of aboriginal cultures and societies prior to first contact. This book describes the deep and thriving aboriginal societies that existed prior to contact, with aboriginal populations that were very large—much larger than we have in today's Canada.

We would suggest that, leading up to 2017, serious efforts be made to support the reconciliation that is occurring in our country. Bridges of understanding and mutual respect need to be built between Canadians and the indigenous peoples of these lands.

In my opening I acknowledged the land we are on and upon which Parliament sits, as those are the traditional lands of the Algonquin Nation. I do this not just as a passing message, but as one who recognizes the many-centuries-old care of these lands by indigenous peoples.

As we move towards 2017, the NAFC and our member friendship centres are willing and able partners in commemoration activities in support of Canada's 150th anniversary. Friendship centres are vibrant community spaces that support cross-cultural education and offer opportunities for dialogue between Canadians and aboriginal peoples, to come together to listen, learn, and share in a spirit of friendship and respect.

Let us together set reconciliation as a strong goal to be achieved by 2017. Let us sit together to set the agenda and work plan for this, and let us both play vital roles in achieving this. If we work together on this, I know we can make significant steps to advance this among all of our populations. It is for the better of Canada and it's for the better of all our citizens and nations.

Thank you for your kind attention. *Meegwetch.*

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cyr.

Thank you both for your presentations.

Before we go to our rounds of questioning, I just want to inform the committee that at some point during our committee meeting there's going to be a delegation coming in from Bangladesh. There are four members of Parliament, as well as eight parliamentary staff, who are here to study how our committee system works in Canada and to learn some best practices, so I guess we'll have to be on our best behaviour at that point. They're going to be coming in at some point, just in case you're wondering.

Mr. Calandra, the floor is yours.

• (0910)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for attending. I'm wondering if either of you have any experience or can talk about your experiences with the Vancouver Olympics and how first nations and Métis were treated during that, how they were involved in any preparations, and what their experiences were at Vancouver.

Mr. Clément Chartier: Thank you for the question.

The Métis Nation was involved. We signed an agreement or some kind of protocol with the four host first nations. We were accorded every opportunity. Our youth were directly involved. We had our time at the first nations house, and we were invited to various openings, receptions, and so forth.

For the Métis Nation, we have no room for complaint. We commend the four host first nations, the organizers of the Olympic Games, and I guess the Prime Minister and the Governor General for inviting us to the receptions. It was a good experience for us. It was a very good experience for our youth, who participated throughout the Olympics and were part of the opening ceremonies. One of the big highlights for me was when the youth walked in and they announced the Métis Nation. It was a great opportunity for us. We had difficulties in getting ourselves out there, and that was a big moment for us. We were involved as well in the torch relay. We had our youth along the way, and some of our elders.

All I can say is that it was a very good experience

Mr. Paul Calandra: Do you have any comments at all?

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: No, we weren't really engaged within that.

Mr. Paul Calandra: The reason I asked is I was trying also to facilitate ways we can involve people properly when we're planning for Canada's 150th celebrations, and of course the Vancouver Olympics were an incredible success for a number of different reasons.

You did mention briefly getting people out there. I'm assuming you're talking about the costs and the logistics of travelling and moving people. That's interesting, because that's something we talked about in our last meeting, getting people out and about, and it's something we're hearing again.

You also, Mr. Chartier, in your comments talked about some infrastructure projects that you'd like to see as part of the 150th. I'm wondering if you could go over a couple of them again. In particular, you mentioned a language component. I wonder if you would talk a little bit more about that, and again touch on the infrastructure things that you were mentioning.

Mr. Clément Chartier: We have several institutions, primarily in the prairie provinces, where we've been organized the longest and where the majority of our population lives. Primarily, our relationship has been with the provincial governments in terms of on-the-ground delivery of educational and cultural programs and services. There are some major initiatives we'd like to do. For example, under the infrastructure stimulus program, we were excluded from the budget round. We were asked to put in proposals, and we did. We put in proposals for building up Batoche and for educational infrastructure in Saskatchewan. We put in proposals for developing a national museum at The Forks in Winnipeg, and one for Métis Crossing in Alberta, and for an educational centre in Abbotsford.

In the end, the Prime Minister pushed through two projects: one for Alberta and one for B.C. The catch, we found out later, was that we had to have matching dollars, so I don't think we actually took advantage of that.

We still see the need to build up those cultural and educational institutions. In particular, as I mentioned in the brief, the Manitoba Métis Federation, on behalf of the Métis Nation, is seeking to establish a national museum at The Forks, in conjunction with, I believe they're called "Friends of The Forks". It's something we've been trying to do for the last 20 years, to have a place to keep our heritage and to promote our culture. We find that The Forks in Winnipeg would be the ideal place.

In Batoche, we're looking at continuing to build up the infrastructure and making it a tourism destination. Doing so would meet some of our economic development needs as well as our cultural needs.

These are some examples. We'd also like to look at the possibility of having museums in our communities, one or two throughout the provinces. We don't really have any. For example, I'm from northwest Saskatchewan, and for a number of years we've been looking at how we could establish a museum, sort of an interpretation centre, and we still haven't found a way to do that.

In terms of the language, the Métis evolved as a distinct people some 400 years ago. As the Supreme Court of Canada said in the Powley case, Métis rights are based on the customs, practices, and traditions of the Métis as they developed prior to effective control by Europeans, as opposed to pre-contact. So we have our customs and cultures, our traditions, our clothing. Our language is made up basically of French nouns and Cree grammar or verbs, or whatever it's called. But it's a language that's recognized as a language. Unfortunately, it's a dying language, as are several other aboriginal languages. Michif is unique in the world, and it's something we feel should be preserved. We would hope that Heritage Canada would continue its program of financing our ability to not only retain but also promote the language.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you.

At this point, I would like to welcome our guests from the Republic of Bangladesh. Thank you for joining us here today for our committee meetings. We're in the middle of a meeting, so we're going to carry on, but I do want to recognize some of the chairs of committees who are here.

The chair of the committee on social welfare, the chair of the committee on agriculture, the chair of the committee on labour and employment, and the chair of the committee on fisheries and livestock are joining us here today. Welcome to all of you, as well as to your parliamentary staff. We hope you enjoy your stay here in Canada, and we hope you learn something from our best practices.

We discussed before you came in that we were going to try to be on our best behaviour while we have guests here, so welcome to all of you.

Now we'll turn it over to Madam Boutin-Sweet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, thank you for agreeing to appear before us today. Welcome also to our guests.

Today, and for some time previously, we have been talking about Canada's 150th anniversary. But first nations have been on this land for quite some time longer, at least 12,000 years, and probably much longer than that. A lot has happened in that time. Colonialism, of course, has left its mark. Some land claims have been met with a yes, others by a no. It has varied a lot.

As well, some witnesses have talked to us about a survey that indicated how Canadians are reacting to the desire to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary. But in those statistics, there were no precise figures about first nations.

Perhaps Mr. Chartier could talk about the Métis nation. Mr. Cyr, I am not sure if you feel able to speak for first nations in general, or for the Odawa nation. Still, I would be interested in knowing how first nations are reacting to the celebrations planned for Canada's 150th anniversary.

You can both answer, in whichever order you prefer.

• (0920)

[*English*]

Mr. Clément Chartier: Thank you for that.

If I understand you correctly, the Métis Nation, of course, sees the 150th anniversary as an important milestone for Canada.

At the current time the Métis Nation, as represented by the Métis National Council, is still pursuing its mandate. In 1983 we withdrew from what was known as the Native Council of Canada, now the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, because we were a significant minority in a national body we created in 1971, the three prairie Métis organizations.

We were invited at that time to participate in constitutional conferences following repatriation of the Constitution from Great Britain. We were successful in getting a seat at the table. The *raison d'être* of the Métis National Council is to promote the right of self-determination and to acquire a land base. It basically spells out to a land base and self-government, but we've decided that it would be within the state of Canada. That is, not outside of Canada, but within it we're looking at that space.

We see the formation of Canada in 1867 as the four confederating provinces, and in 1870 the joining of Manitoba, which was at that time a province with a Métis majority population. We saw an accommodation at that time, which didn't happen. In fact, there was dispossession and, to this day, exclusion.

The Métis people, by and large, are excluded totally from the land claims processes of the federal government. We were excluded from the Prime Minister's apology. Those who went to Métis residential schools were excluded from the settlement agreement. We were excluded from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission mandate. We are excluded from First Nations and Inuit Health Branch services to status Indians and Inuit. So it's basically a story of exclusion.

What we're hoping is to find accommodation within Canada as a people, as a nation with true reconciliation based on re-acquiring our land base and having the freedom to be self-governing as one of the three orders of government in Canada, which is guaranteed to us by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, wherein the federal government's position is that the inherent right of self-government is already in there; it's just negotiating what it means.

We see that as a necessary requirement, and the 150th anniversary, which gives us some five years, is a great opportunity for us to work out a true reconciliation of the Métis people, the Métis Nation, within a united Canada.

At the front I have a Métis Nation protocol signed in September of 2008 with the federal government. One of the provisions in there is to address outstanding rights, including land rights, so we do have a framework to move forward with in connection with the federal government. We haven't triggered that potential, but at my last meeting with Minister Duncan several weeks ago we agreed to begin looking at that issue, particularly in light of the fact that the Supreme Court of Canada, on December 13 of this year, is going to hear the appeal of the Manitoba Métis Federation dealing with the 1.4 million acres of land that were guaranteed in the Constitution in 1870, which we say we in the end did not get. But that's a decision the court will have to deal with.

We do realize that we have to begin meeting on that, because there are going to be principles of law coming out of that decision—and some already have come out of the Manitoba Court of Appeal—which is going to change the relationship between the Métis Nation and the federal government, regardless of the outcome of that case.

• (0925)

As well, in 1994 the Métis of northwest Saskatchewan, the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, and the Métis National Council filed a claim for the total of northwest Saskatchewan, claiming that we still have existing aboriginal title and rights and self-government within that territory, as the system used for dispossession of the Métis

following 1870, a system known as scrip, which was dealing with Métis as individuals as opposed to collectives, was so vitiated by fraud that the Métis were basically just dispossessed of our land without legitimacy on the part of Canada. That is another case. But if we can settle it through a political process, that certainly would be a lot better than having to deal with the courts.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

What do you think, Mr. Cyr?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: I wouldn't attempt to speak for all the other nations in the country, by any means, but I will provide some perspective on what I think about the issue of the 150th birthday and perhaps the perspective of some aboriginal people within my organization.

I believe there would be a strong desire to celebrate it as much as the rest of Canada would. Of course, there is a long history behind that, as Mr. Chartier pointed out on the Métis side, and on the first nation and Inuit side as well. It is not always a pretty history with aboriginal people.

In terms of where aboriginal people are, in my organization when we deal with 60%-plus of the aboriginal population in urban centres, we are dealing with, to be honest, the real low end of the social strata on almost every indicator that you can possibly imagine. On health, education, welfare, you name it, the aboriginal people are at the bottom of those indicators in Canada. I think if we come to look at ourselves in Canada in terms of how we are making progress within this country after 150 years, we need to come to terms with the place of aboriginal people within our society.

One way, I would politely suggest, is that we could have legacy projects beside those just celebrating the history; there's also going forward and how we encourage this very large youth population to be economic participants within society.

When I look at the programs by which friendship centres run, the major programs, I see that they have been, in my opinion, structurally impoverished since the late 1980s—with not even cost-of-living increases—so whether that is the friendship centre program itself, which is run by the Department of Canadian Heritage, which your committee oversees.... Even for the cultural connections for aboriginal youth, for youth programs, the funding has not changed in over 20 years for some of these programs.

So when we talk about a legacy, I would suggest maybe it's a legacy of investment in the future of the country through young people, including through things like language, through Michif and the other aboriginal languages as well, to preserve the 50-plus aboriginal languages within the country. This is a certain sort of perspective that aboriginal people might have coming toward the 150th birthday of the country, when they are struggling to make ends meet, struggling to go to school, struggling to find housing in urban settings, and struggling to raise their families and children. So that is perhaps a different perspective to put on the celebration.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cyr.

Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I've had this question prepared for the last 10 to 15 minutes, and I think during the proceeding two minutes you've just answered it, so I'm not sure what to say any more.

I am very taken aback by the statistics that are here and what you presented, in that 48% are under the age of 25. That's a substantial number for such a low age—certainly under 25. According to the 2006 census, 54% of the roughly 1.2 million aboriginal people live in urban centres. That is an increase from 50% since 1996, over 10 years.

I see what you mean by the friendship centres and the vital role they are playing, and certainly they are worthy of our attention. That being said, the number that I think is most striking is that number of 48% under the age of 25. The 150 celebration certainly is an exercise in discovery, not just for all of Canada to understand the heritage of Métis, but also for young Métis as well. It is a golden opportunity to introduce them into a national conversation.

Do you think the friendship centre concept and the network of friendship centres represent a good opportunity for Canada 150 to invest in as a legacy project?

• (0930)

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: The short answer is absolutely.

The long answer to the question is how do we responsibly deal with the issues the country has created over 200 to 300 years of history? I think that would show a maturity in terms of us as a country dealing with the issues. I think it deals with the future of Canada as well, 48% of the population being under the age of 25—that's your future labour force. That's the future of the country, and if you want to celebrate Canada at 175 in a positive way, I think we need to deal with the issue now.

That's also the future workforce of the country. There's a huge aboriginal population in Métis and first nations communities who want to work, who want to go to school, who want to participate in the booming economy in many areas like Saskatchewan, Alberta, and other areas and be engaged within it.

Youth programming is critical: investing in friendship centres and other institutions to bring youth in, both through education and family programming, those key elements of the responsible social democracy that we are. That's a real legacy project for Canada at its 150th, to reinvest in its own people that way.

So the answer to that is yes, absolutely.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Chartier, would you like to respond to that as well?

Mr. Clément Chartier: I think the friendship centres have a role to play and a very important role. Of course, so do the Métis Nation governments within the provinces. A substantial number of our people live in urban centres, and a lot of our people are engaged as well in the friendship centre movement, so I believe there is a space for that.

In fact, we are looking at signing some kind of protocol agreement between the National Association of Friendship Centres and

ourselves. I know at the provincial level the Manitoba Métis Federation and the Métis Nation of Alberta have signed agreements with the provincial counterparts just so we don't overlap unnecessarily on programs that we can see being delivered by either one or both, because there are a lot of social issues out there. I would see that there is an opportunity.

In terms of youth, the unfortunate thing about youth funding, particularly for the Métis Nation, is that funding was cut off about three years ago for our national youth body. So they haven't really been very active nationally—

Mr. Scott Simms: What was that under? Can you describe that program?

Mr. Clément Chartier: Well, one was called UMAC, Urban Métis Aboriginal...

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres.

Mr. Clément Chartier: That was the primary funder, and then there was some funding under employment and training itself, some components, but those have gone away.

I think that is still in place under a different name, but more at the local and provincial levels, not at the national level, so our youth don't have that capacity to get together as much as they should, except on a project basis. So there is much room for youth engagement.

Mr. Scott Simms: They certainly provide a vital service in a large urban centre where there's a sea of cultural differences, and we don't hear a lot about the distinction and the history going back for the Métis themselves—outside of Louis Riel, which is a golden opportunity here to do that, not just to engage youth, but also to educate the public. I see these groups, like the friendship centres and others, as being the best vehicle to do that. Perhaps when we discuss talking about our 200-year celebration, maybe one of those young persons will come in and talk about how these centres were able to provide information and outreach to the community itself.

When it comes to Métis history, over the past 30 years what has been the best vehicle we've used to teach other Canadians about Métis history?

• (0935)

Mr. Clément Chartier: Well, one of these successes we've had in Saskatchewan under the Gabriel Dumont Institute, which has been in place for a little over 30 years, is SUNTEP, the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program.

Mr. Scott Simms: SUNTEP?

Mr. Clément Chartier: Yes, SUNTEP. And we've graduated well over 1,000 graduates with a bachelor of education degree. So they go into the schools and they're basically now reaching out and teaching Métis history and Métis studies in the classes they're in. That's one—

Mr. Scott Simms: All classes, you mean?

Mr. Clément Chartier: All classes, yes.

A lot of them are also in universities now as well. We've had that kind of outreach.

We need more than that, and I think a national museum is going to help. I would think that the capacity for the youth to be organized, and to be able to have meetings, and so on.... We used to have annual awards as well, which we don't have any more. There are things that can be done, but they require some resources.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Mr. Young.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming here today, gentlemen.

Mr. Cyr, something you said really grabbed me, really caught my attention, and that is taking the 150th anniversary of Canada celebrations and making them—in part, at least—about getting our youth more involved in our economy, especially aboriginal youth. We have superb colleges and universities in Ontario and across Canada.

We all know that education is the great equalizer. I'm wondering if you have any ideas or if you agree that it's a good idea to get more aboriginal youth into programs that suit their aptitudes and interests. They start out life on a road to success in the colleges or universities, or both, because sometimes there are articulation agreements between the colleges and universities. They would have to leave home, in many cases—in most cases. Most students do leave home in Ontario, even if it's a shorter distance. Would that be worth pursuing, and how might we encourage that to happen?

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: Yes, it's worth pursuing. I think it's perhaps slightly more complex than it looks on the face of it.

Aboriginal students have very low grade 12 education rates, and low rates passing through secondary school and getting to universities and colleges. There's a host of reasons why that is. I think addressing them across the spectrum is really what's required.

Doing programs that suit aptitudes is bang on, of course, and doing programs that suit the location of the labour market is critical as well, of course. You need to match those two things up.

There's a first nations education summit closing panel going on at the conference centre today talking about education in particular. Aboriginal students need a host of programs and supports just to get there, and to make it through college.

It's great to have those programs that are suited, adapted, and have special entrance streams, and all of those sorts of issues. But, for example, housing in centres where there are colleges, which is generally urban centres, is a huge issue for aboriginal students. Where are they going to live?

There are also cultural supports that are needed for them when they come. This is the issue friendship centres were created from in the 1950s. When you're coming from a rural or remote or reserve area to a city, it's like coming to a foreign country.

Mr. Terence Young: Do you provide satellite services on campus anywhere?

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: No. Well, potentially. There are 119 friendship centres, and I don't have all of the programs at the tips of my fingers.

There are some, but not on campus. There are a lot of aboriginal student associations on campus, but they don't provide.... There isn't a large host of services for that.

Mr. Terence Young: So providing services might be the solution to make this happen.

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: Sure.

There have been piloted projects. The Métis have done them in the past, and first nations, and other areas, where you can provide support to students going to college to help that transition that's going on. Essentially, they are coming to a city, and they need to know how to eat, how to get from point A to point B, where to get their books, where to find money, and where to bank.

You need that structure in order to get them through college, and have that economic participation that we require.

● (0940)

Mr. Terence Young: Thank you.

Mr. Chartier, I wanted to ask you if you saw the opening ceremonies to the Vancouver Olympics, and the closing ceremonies on television, because they were spectacular. There was a very significant role there for aboriginal people from Vancouver and the Vancouver area.

What did you think of it, and is there anything you saw there that could be built on for ceremonies in 2017?

Mr. Clément Chartier: I was there for the opening. I did see the closing on television.

The engagement of the four host first nations right from the outset, in terms of the bid and getting support from the national aboriginal organizations, I think was precedent-setting, and it was something that could be potentially looked at in terms of major events that will be taking place in Canada.

I haven't given it a whole lot of thought in terms of how the engagement would be, but I would think one of the things that could be looked at is the major event. I'm sure there's going to be some kind of major event on the Hill in that particular year, and I think engagement of aboriginal youth in some way would enhance that.

Mr. Terence Young: It's good timing now, because we have lots of time to plan ahead for that.

Thank you.

Mr. Cyr, in seven out of ten provinces a majority of high school students learn no Canadian history. That is to say, they're able to get their senior matriculation without studying Canadian history. This is a shame. Then one or two years later, they're allowed to go out and vote, having only studied Canadian history as children, without a mature view of Canadian history.

Have you any ideas of what we could do, leading up to 2017, to explore and expose especially our young people, but all Canadians, more to our history and how it helped form Canadians as a people, how it made us a nation?

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: The first thing is to adapt curriculum. That seems to be the obvious choice, working with provincial governments, of course, to adapt educational curricula to include the history of the different aboriginal peoples in the country and exactly how Canada was formed, including Métis, first nation, and Inuit.

Without having given it a great deal of thought till now, I would suggest probably a series of events or a series of ways in which they can celebrate different events. If you have a five-year window, you could lead up to the 2017 marker. For example, there have been some resources put toward the War of 1812, and the same sorts of resources, I would say, would be put toward the different aboriginal events throughout history, whether it is the Battle of Batoche or whether it is different first nations or Inuit historical events, so that students can at least see and participate in these events.

Mr. Terence Young: That's very helpful.

Mr. Chartier, the geography of Canada, the size of Canada, our natural resources, and our natural beauty all help form our national character, and aboriginal people have traditionally been connected to the land and respectful of the land. Are there ways, once again leading up to 2017, in which we can raise awareness of that and celebrate that, making Canadians more aware of how the land itself has helped formed our national character?

Mr. Clément Chartier: That's a very good question.

Of course right now we're in battle in the courts in terms of land rights for the Métis. But for the Métis in Alberta, who have eight Métis settlements set aside by the province in 1938, the Métis do not have a land base, but Métis do have a rich history of having worked on the land, with the land, living off the land, and also part of the fur trade economy, a substantial part, including the buffalo hunt, the provision of the pemmican, the freighters, and so on and so forth.

I was trying to think of something as we were talking. I would think that during that year in Ottawa, perhaps there could be an opportunity for pavilions to be established in which aboriginal peoples could share their culture and history with those people who will be visiting Ottawa from around the world, and from the rest of Canada. I think that would be a great place to explain these kinds of things. For example, in northwest Saskatchewan we have done traditional land-use mapping. I interviewed our elders, and they have done it in various other parts as well.

Things like that could be put forth for the public to look at. Of course, for us the biggest thing that could happen is if we signed a massive land claim treaty with the government that would enable some of the return of our lands within that year.

• (0945)

The Chair: Mr. Benskin. And now we're into the five-minute rounds.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Thank you, gentlemen, for your presentation.

I think it was you, Mr. Cyr, who talked about participation and reconciliation. I'd like to explore linking that with education. It was brought up by my colleague Mr. Young, who mentioned the fact that in schools today Canadians do not learn either a lot of factual information or factual history about the relationship between the building of Canada and the first nations people.

We heard something about that from some of our previous witnesses, the need to explore history without going back and saying you did this, you did that, but exploring history to gain an understanding as to where the current relationships come from. The 150th seems to be a good possibility to make that happen. How would you respond to that? How would you see that?

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: I wholeheartedly agree with you. It's a great statement in terms of exactly where we would need to go. There's of course a truth and reconciliation commission working right now in the country dealing with residential schools and specific aspects of that. But reconciliation, in my opinion, is about reconciling the history of aboriginal people with the Canadian public, not with governments. The government is fairly educated about what happened. It's the Canadian public in general.

The 150th anniversary provides a great opportunity to share information about what really went on in a neutral fashion, and how we have arrived at this position and how our country was built as it is today. It explains a lot of the things to young Canadians, and even young aboriginal Canadians, who aren't sometimes aware of their own history as well, about why, perhaps, there is a blockade going on over here, or why aboriginal people are protesting there, or why we're in court seeking a land claim on x number of issues. I think it's critical for the rest of Canada to provide that support to its aboriginal population and that it learns and goes through the process.

The friendship centres are a huge network within this country, in 119 urban centres. It's the largest in the world. It's a best practice in the world. We often get called to make presentations about how we're structured and govern, and that sort of thing.

We have 2.5 million points of contact with non-aboriginal and aboriginal people through our programs every year. It's a great way to get the word out as well. Part of the education goes to the aboriginal population and part goes to the non-aboriginal population as well. It's a great milestone or touchstone by which to start educating the rest of Canada about our history.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Thank you.

Mr. Chartier, would you care to weigh in on this?

Mr. Clément Chartier: Yes. I think that's very good.

In terms of the Métis Nation, there's a lot of misunderstanding, and there's been of course quite a long period of suppression of the Métis Nation and Métis rights. I would think projects that enable aboriginal nations or peoples to deal with their histories would be good, and particularly for the Métis Nation.

I know we have a difficult time in terms of just the term "Métis". Some people view that as meaning just anyone of mixed ancestry, from coast to coast to coast, throughout Canada and the United States. We talk about the historic Métis Nation, a people that evolved as a distinct entity in basically western Canada. For example, in the east, the mixed-ancestry people evolved as the Acadians. The mixed-ancestry people in Quebec evolved as the Québécois. It's only in the west that the mixed-ancestry people evolved as a distinct nation.

We need to look at that. We need to look at representation. When we're at the table it's only our government that can speak on behalf of the Métis Nation, and we don't purport to speak for anybody else. As I said before, the friendship centres certainly have a role to play. The friendship centres are not a government and will never be a government but do provide valid and much-needed programs and services. The Métis government needs to find some way to work in collaboration with the friendship centres to enable programs and services to take place that the Métis Nation itself doesn't provide or where it would provide them jointly.

So major projects of that nature would be very helpful.

● (0950)

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: I am going back to education. What would you say to a legacy project in regard to education?

Mr. Cyr, you had talked about basically revising the curriculum taught in schools to a more inclusive teaching of history. As my colleague mentioned, not a lot of Canadian students graduate from high school with a full sense of history, their history, Canadian history.

I've always believed that being able to see yourself in your educational material is one of the things that help keep students in school. It creates a relevance to their being there. It creates a meaning to what they're learning that they then take into the world.

As a legacy project, what would you say to a full-fledged revising of our school curriculum to make it more inclusive of the aboriginal contribution to Canada?

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: I think that's a fantastic idea.

I think collaborating among national aboriginal organizations, to sit down and collaborate together, bringing expertise from different first nations and Métis education institutions.... There are some areas in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, I know, where the curriculum has been adjusted to some degree to more properly reflect Métis history and in some other areas to reflect first nations history.

I think a global look at exactly how that curriculum is presented to students, how this history.... The history of residential schools, the history of treaties, the history of the Manitoba Act and the role of Louis Riel needs to be better told.

We're a professional service-delivery organization in friendship centres, and of course we would volunteer to work with other aboriginal organizations to assist in that. It would take a collaboration of people to bring that forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you both for being here. I enjoyed your presentations.

Mr. Chartier, you talked about the December decision that's going to be made at the Supreme Court, or the case that's going to the Supreme Court. When that court case is resolved, do you see anything coming out of it that we should consider as a committee to try to include in this study on Canada 150?

What impact could that have on our preparations for 2017?

Mr. Clément Chartier: On that note, what's on trial, if I can use that term, is the history of Manitoba, and of course the history of Canada, in that sense. There are going to be certain findings coming out of that. A lot of that the Canadian public is not aware of, and a lot of our own people aren't aware of it, because it's been a long time; it's been over 100 years.

Again, as part of the legacy projects, in terms of history, that would be one of the things people should be educated about. As I mentioned, with the minister and the Office of the Federal Interlocutor we are looking at ways of trying to get messaging out, and it's possible that once we learn more, perhaps we could share that information with you as well.

Certainly it's a very important part of Canadian history, and regardless of which way the court comes down on the question, I think Canadians should understand why that result was reached, based on what the history is, just so people are fully aware of it.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Sure.

Leading up to the Olympic Games there was a well-celebrated impact or role for aboriginal communities in the planning and the celebratory nature of that whole festival we had in British Columbia. It wasn't just athletics; it was arts, and it involved many cultures across this country. We really showed the world what Canada is all about.

Do you see a consultative process leading up to this in which we include first nations? What type of structure should that have for our sesquicentennial?

Mr. Cyr, I'll send that to you.

● (0955)

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: I didn't participate in the Vancouver Olympics, so I won't comment on that side, but in terms of structure, we need to find a way to have a very strong and vocal aboriginal participation in the 150th.

I don't know what that looks like structurally. I know it would be a group of national organizations that sit down together and start working on how we bring legacy projects forward that properly reflect the history of those aboriginal peoples. It immediately strikes to mind that you'd be in some sort of a committee or national working group structure that would start that way, and there might be a whole bunch of regional representations of what that would look like in each province.

Those are just my opening thoughts on it.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: We and many witnesses talked a lot on this committee about moving people around, relating it back to 1967, when there were a lot of youth exchanges. We have an incredibly immense geographic nation, and it's important that we encourage people as much as possible to see different parts of the country.

I'm a former educator who has had the opportunity to work with a lot of first nations communities in the schools where I was a teacher and administrator. If we engage in that again, where we're moving people around and having youth exchanges, I see us having to work really closely with our first nations communities to encourage people to engage in that, to encourage our youth. With aboriginal people having the highest demographic growth in the youth component, I think we have to do it not only through the schools or through municipalities, but we're also going to have to engage directly with aboriginal communities across the nation.

For the aboriginal students who live off reserve, though, it's going to be even more difficult for us. Is there some mechanism to engage directly those aboriginal youth, and maybe youth living in the urban areas? Do you have any ideas on how we could do that, as a recommendation to this committee?

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: I think it's a fantastic idea. I'm a product of an exchange program myself. I spent a year and a half in India, and I think it's a fantastic learning opportunity.

Within Canada itself, of course, it opens up a whole bunch of possibilities to take, for example, urban aboriginal youth, who are often disconnected from their culture, back to even other aboriginal communities in rural or remote settings, and of course to bring non-aboriginal youth both into the urban reality of aboriginal people and the remote reality—the reserve and small communities, and the Métis settlement reality.

There are several infrastructures in place. We have provincial associations and then we have the friendship centres themselves in communities. The Métis organizations have their structures as well, as do first nations, and I think there are easy, ready-made structures to at least start the conversation and to work through and to get access to it.

For example, in Ontario, the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres runs urban, alternative, aboriginal high schools. There's one here in Ottawa, for example. There are eight or nine of them across the province. There are urban high school students going to alternative high schools, because they get better rates of graduation from it.

So you could already see there's a ready-made group. But you can go to a lot of school boards and with the help of organizations you can find the appropriate students. It's important to find the non-aboriginal students as well and to bring them to a Métis community, or to a first nations or an Inuit community, and do that part of the exchange to learn.

It's a great idea.

The Chair: Mr. Cash.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank both of you for being here today on this incredibly interesting and thought-provoking....

You've been getting some questions, and the committee has solicited your comments around things like the opening and closing ceremonies of the Vancouver Olympics.

I have to say that today being national housing day in this country.... We have a crisis up in Attawapiskat right now. We have 70,000 or more people in my city, Toronto, who are on affordable housing waiting lists.

Mr. Cyr, you referenced housing as one of a host of issues that affect urban first nations, Métis, and Inuit—indigenous peoples who are living in our urban centres. So if you were on this committee studying this, or if you were potentially named to an independent committee that was going to organize our 150th, I wonder how you would prioritize things.

Beautiful ceremonies are great, and they teach us about ourselves to a certain extent, but if we're talking about substantive legacy commitments, legacy issues, especially in terms of young people.... You know the median age in 1967 for Canada was 26; the median age for Canada now is 41. What you're saying about aboriginal youth in our cities is that they're at the median age that we were as a country 50 years ago. It's a staggering statistic, which I'm not convinced a focus on the ceremonial aspect of our culture is going to get at.

I'm wondering if you could both comment on what your priorities would be if you were on an independent body studying this issue and planning it.

● (1000)

Mr. Clément Chartier: Of course my priority would be looking at the accommodation of the Métis people within Canada that's going to be lasting and productive for both the Métis people and Canada. In this case again, I would go back to the need for a land base and the opening of the space for self-government.

As I said, we signed this Métis Nation protocol. Some good things have come out of it. We have a Métis economic development symposium process. We've had two meetings chaired by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development with the five provincial aboriginal affairs ministers from Ontario west. Certainly part of that is the need for youth. We have the aboriginal affairs working group under the Council of the Federation. More economic development is an important issue. Violence against women and education are both important. We deal with CMEC.

I believe Mr. Watson was asking about school. In Manitoba they came out with a new curriculum or history text—I think it's for grade 10—that deals with contemporary issues and actors. We're looking to see if we can replicate that across the rest of western Ontario.

I would say, for us, it's accommodation of a people. Of course there are various issues that would need to be addressed in the long run, such as housing, employment, and so on. In terms of bursaries or education for the Métis, we don't have access to federal scholarships and so on, as do first nations people. Through our assets program, which is the employment and training program, we have a system set up with some universities where we have endowment funds. We contribute so much and the universities match them. The proceeds of that go towards scholarships. It's minimal, but if we can build up things of that nature, it's going to assist our young people.

The big issue for us is the accommodation of ourselves within Canada.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Okay, thanks.

Mr. Cyr.

Mr. Jeffrey Cyr: I agree with you that celebrations are nice. They're perhaps galvanizing. People get focused on a date, and they're galvanized towards it. That plays an important role in celebrating Canada. As a legacy project, I would say we need to invest in aboriginal people. The question is, how do we do that? We need to invest in reflecting the demographic realities of where they are. They're young, unemployed, and facing social issues.

It would be a legacy project for the Government of Canada to reinvest in itself. How would it do that? It would look at the existing infrastructure through friendship centres and through first nations or Métis organizations, the infrastructure that Canada has helped build but has let slide over the last couple of decades. Reinvest in that seriously. That's how we deal with those social issues. It's proven to be successful when aboriginal people have self-created friendship centres: they are self-determined; it's aboriginal people running programs for themselves, essentially. It has proven to be successful over 60 years.

Then we need to look seriously at investing in our youth. How do we do that? Education is one, but we have to prepare the fertile ground for them to take up education. I would say there should be a serious expansion of the aboriginal head start program off reserve, where the majority of aboriginal people are. Almost every friendship centre I know has one. They're under-resourced. You can have maybe 23 children.... Here in Ottawa, there are almost 30,000 aboriginal people in the area, so there are more than 23 aboriginal kids who need a head start program.

We need to invest in things that work. We know head starts work. We know friendship centre structures work. We need to look back at what we were doing and proceed forward. That's what I would consider a real legacy—investing back into young people, to be honest.

● (1005)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cash.

Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank our guests for being here.

I should start off by saying that I am not a regular member of this committee, but I certainly feel very privileged to be here today during the study that's taking place at this committee.

I'm from Saskatchewan. I represent the riding of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar and perhaps have the largest first nations and Métis population in the city of Saskatoon in my riding. It is also home to the Gabriel Dumont Institute, which has been talked about today. I have also had the privilege of attending the Back to Batoche celebrations in Saskatchewan, and working somewhat with Claire Bélanger-Parker on the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the Northwest Resistance.

In 2010 Premier Brad Wall proclaimed 2010 to be the year of the Métis in Saskatchewan. I know there was a very significant

ceremony that took place in which the premier was presented with a Métis sash. That sash now resides in the legislative chamber and is part of the ceremonies whenever the House sits. So I know we recognize the contributions that the Métis people have made economically, culturally, and socially to our province.

In talking about the various issues that have been raised here today, I'm wondering, Mr. Chartier, if you could talk a little bit about Batoche and the role it plays in the province in terms of telling the story. I know there's an interpretive centre at Batoche.

Also, in reflecting back on the 125th celebration—I know you were there and had an important part in that—would you describe for us best practices that you saw in the development of that celebration, moving forward to 2017?

Mr. Clément Chartier: Thank you.

Before I get to that, I want to say that in addition to what you mentioned with the legislature, I should inform the committee that on November 15 the City of Regina, Mayor Fiacco, and the Métis Nation raised the Métis Nation flag, which is now going to be flying permanently at city hall. I think that's another positive step.

In terms of Batoche, I was more engaged in the centenary in 1985 than I was last year. What I saw from last year was that there's been an expansion and growth from 1985, speaking to the greater regional actors, in terms of destination tourism. I think last year there was a greater cooperation or coordination between not only the Métis Nation and the Back to Batoche site itself, but also with the—I'm not sure what their name is—the tourism committee that deals with the northeastern part of Saskatchewan. So there was that collaboration. I think they're trying to coordinate it with those other destination sites within the province. I think that's been helpful, so people don't look at Batoche as only the one week and then nothing else. I think they're looking at various aspects.

We'd actually like to build that into northwest Saskatchewan as well, where you have the Methy Portage, which is a significant portage on the fur trade route, and there are various sites within northwest Saskatchewan as well that could attract tourism. I see that sort of thing being a major part of it, but being an integrated part of something bigger I think is important.

In this case, the 150th is for Canada as a whole, but I think there needs to be a significant part for the aboriginal peoples and nations and in particular the Métis Nation right from the outset. We're engaging today through the carrying out of various activities and developing infrastructures that are going to be lasting.

● (1010)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Could you comment on the Gabriel Dumont Institute and the training and employment initiatives, the impact they also have in Saskatchewan? I know I've had the privilege of participating in a number of announcements for funding to the Gabriel Dumont Institute. Could you comment on that?

Mr. Clément Chartier: It was set up basically coming out of 1976, on behalf of Métis saying that we have to start promoting our culture, we have to start preserving our culture, we have to make our culture known and our people known. That is where the Gabriel Dumont Institute came from. It's expanded now. Of course it has SUNTEP, the teacher education program. It also has Dumont Technical Institute, which delivers employment and training within Saskatchewan. It has Dumont college, which is part of the University of Saskatchewan.

Of course Gabriel Dumont Institute itself has a working relationship or affiliation with both universities in the province. So it plays a tremendous role in Métis education. It also does publishing and curriculum development. It's very successful and a leader in terms of how it could be replicated in other provinces as well. Federal funding has been made available over the past few years to enable it to do further research, have a website, and so on. More of that certainly would be helpful.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Block.

Thank you to both of our witnesses, Mr. Chartier and Mr. Cyr. Your input is valued. As we study Canada's 150th anniversary, we certainly will take into account everything you said in your opening remarks as well as your answers to all our questions. Usually we have a couple more witnesses, so you took a lot more questions than people normally would have in a panel, and we appreciate your doing that. Thank you.

At this point we will go in camera to discuss upcoming committee business.

We'll suspend for a couple of minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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