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Chair

Ms. Julie Dabrusin

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.)): Given that it's 3:30 p.m., we will begin this meeting.

This is the 142nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. We are doing a study of Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous languages.

[Translation]

This afternoon, we welcome Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism. He is accompanied by Hélène Laurendeau, Deputy Minister. Stephen Gagnon, Director General of the Aboriginal Affairs Directorate, may be joining us later.

Mr. Minister, you can begin.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, distinguished committee members and colleagues, thank you for inviting me to appear as part of your study of Bill C-91.

As you mentioned, I am accompanied by Hélène Laurendeau, Deputy Minister of Canadian Heritage. I thought I was also going to be accompanied by Stephen Gagnon, but he is not here. He must be going through security. He will join us shortly.

[English]

I want to start by recognizing that we are gathered on the ancestral lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabe. Two weeks ago, on the same lands, I had the privilege of introducing this historic legislation in the House of Commons. This is legislation that's long overdue. That's because, according to UNESCO, three-quarters of the 90 indigenous languages spoken in Canada are endangered, and if they die, so will a huge part of our identity.

Since work began on this bill, many indigenous groups and people have told us how critical this legislation will be for them, their children and their grandchildren.

Just the other day, we heard from Olive, an elder from the Oneida Nation of the Thames in southwestern Ontario. Olive's mother tongue was Oneida. It was the only language she spoke until the age of seven, when she started school. At school, Olive was punished for speaking her language. The shame it brought wounded her deeply. It was then that she decided she wouldn't teach her kids Oneida so she could spare them the humiliation she felt.

Today, there are only 45 fluent Oneida speakers left in Canada, and none of them are under the age of 65. The indigenous languages act is for people like Olive, whose community is losing its language at an alarming rate.

[Translation]

So we must therefore act with urgency to revitalize and strengthen indigenous languages. We have already waited too long.

Today, I will focus on two key matters related to the bill. First, I will speak about our dialogue and engagement efforts. Second, I will speak to the question of funding: how our government is going to support the revitalization of indigenous languages.

[English]

Madam Chair, let me start with engagement and co-development. This legislation had to be developed with respect to the rights of indigenous peoples.

From the outset, my departmental officials asked indigenous groups how they wanted to be engaged to participate. We did not impose a structure. We designed a process together. To achieve that, we worked with our partners: the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Métis National Council.

[Translation]

Each of the partners launched their own independent engagement with indigenous language experts, practitioners and academics across Canada. During that period, Canadian Heritage officials conducted 20 roundtables.

The feedback from all of these sessions, along with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action 13, 14 and 15, helped create the 12 principles used to co-develop this legislation.

[English]

The Department of Canadian Heritage then held intensive discussions with about 1,000 first nations, Inuit and Métis people. This included working respectfully with key indigenous organizations and governments, such as the Council of Yukon First Nations in Whitehorse, the Manitoba Metis Federation in Winnipeg, the Nunatsiavut government in Nain, and self-governing and modern treaty governments across the country.

Our online portal also connected over 200 questionnaires and electronic submissions.

We also provided funding to the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centres, the Native Women's Association of Canada, and the National Association of Friendship Centres to conduct their own research in engagement.

These voices—the voices of elders, knowledge keepers, indigenous women and young people—are echoed in the indigenous languages act.

Participants told us that indigenous languages should be recognized as a right; that each indigenous language, culture and history is distinct and unique;

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

that the needs of elders, women and children must be addressed. That a language commissioner should be created. That communities need sufficient, predictable and long-term funding. And that each of the groups and nations were at a different place in their path to the revitalization and preservation of their languages. This is exactly what the legislation contains.

For example, some communities would like to focus on training teachers. Others want to prioritize immersion programs or developing dictionaries. Indigenous peoples told us clearly that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work and that they are best placed to determine what will work, not government. We agree with them. Our legislation incorporates all of these considerations and elements, and more.

[*English*]

Madam Chair, I'd like to turn our discussions to funding.

For the first time in our history, there is legislation that commits to adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for indigenous languages. We're exploring funding models to decide how funds would be best used and distributed.

[*Translation*]

Again, it is indigenous peoples, not the Government of Canada, who know what is best for their communities. We know that they do not want project-based, annual funding. They want the flexibility to determine their own priorities. The latitude to define concrete approaches that will allow them to reclaim, revitalize and maintain their languages.

This bill is not about creating national bureaucracies and bigger project-based programs. Instead, it is about getting the investments to the people and organizations in a long-term and sustained manner through multi-year agreements that will ensure reports on progress. In fact, the bill states that the Minister of Canadian Heritage must consult with diverse indigenous governments and other indigenous governing bodies, to provide sustainable, adequate funding. This is important and it demonstrates our commitment to indigenous peoples, their communities and their future.

[*English*]

The indigenous languages act was developed in close partnership with indigenous people. It is truly their legislation. Its impact will be felt by many generations, including people in Olive's community. Despite the odds, Olive has worked hard to retain and maintain

her language and she's helping her people regain a language that was taken from them.

The students have gone from speaking no Oneida to being able to carry on a six-minute conversation in their language. People in the neighbourhood are starting to speak to each other in Oneida, and that gives a strong feeling of pride that comes from knowing who they are. This is why this legislation is so important.

Five generations of harm inflicted upon indigenous peoples have brought us to where we are today. Reconciliation is a long and difficult journey and it requires a broad approach, one that includes improving access to clean water and reducing the number of indigenous children in foster care. The indigenous languages legislation is another step toward helping the next five generations and beyond.

I welcome feedback and amendments that could make this legislation even stronger. We must, however, move forward with purpose, and we look for support from all parties to pass Bill C-91 without delay.

Thank you.

I'm now ready to take your questions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now start the time for questions and answers.

Mr. Breton, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Minister, thank you very much for being here with us this morning. We can feel that you are really passionate about this bill.

I am going to ask you three questions, one after another. Then you can have the time to reply. Your answers can be personal or professional.

In your view, how will this bill really change things?

How will it help us as a society to preserve, promote and revitalize indigenous languages?

As I just said, this bill seems to be really close to your heart, and rightly so. I would like your opinion on the really important matter of reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

• (1540)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you very much, Mr. Breton. I think I have your three questions straight in my mind.

You are right that this bill is close to my heart. Here is why. Today, I am speaking French and English, but neither of them is my mother tongue. My first language is Spanish. I learned French and English at the age of eight. I can only imagine the pain, the grief, I would have felt if I had been told that I could not keep my mother tongue and I had to choose another one. That would have been horrible. But that was the experience of so many children in indigenous communities all over Canada. So many children were snatched from their homes and told that they no longer had the right to speak their own language. The intent was to snatch from them their language, their culture and their identity.

I always say that our language is our identity. It is our past, our present and our future. We want to tell our stories to our children in our own language. That is what makes it essential and why we have to act now. We should have acted long ago, but we are acting now by introducing this bill.

The bill moves us forward in terms of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The bill responds to Calls to Action 13, 14 and 15, that deal with the country's legislation and obligations in respect of indigenous languages.

The bill requires the government to provide stable, sustainable and adequate funding in order to preserve, maintain and revitalize indigenous languages everywhere in the country. We have put that in writing.

The bill is unique in that it is extremely flexible. It will allow indigenous peoples, different nations and groups in all regions and all provinces to determine what is essential for themselves. No two indigenous languages are in exactly the same situation. As I mentioned earlier, in certain places, only a handful of people who speak a language are left. In others, the languages are more vibrant, although the people who speak them may have many challenges to meet.

Who are we in the government to tell indigenous peoples what is good for them and what they must do to revitalize or protect their languages? It is not for me or for the government to tell them; it is up to the indigenous peoples.

The bill provides enough flexibility for the different indigenous groups, wherever they are and whichever language they speak, to meet their own needs in their own way.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you very much.

How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Okay.

Mr. Minister, we are well aware that the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Métis National Council have worked together to develop this bill. I would like to know how the government went about the co-development project. You can go into detail: tell me how many meetings there were and in what spirit they were conducted.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Breton.

Before we even began to develop the bill, we met to define the process. That was a key factor. The co-development process was not determined by the government alone, it was determined as we worked in partnership with the Métis, the Inuit and the First Nations.

Not only did we agree on the content of the bill, we also agreed on consultation methods in advance. We held meetings all over the country. Stephen Gagnon steered the process and he knows much more about the details than I do. He can talk about it later. We had roundtables, individual meetings and meetings with First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders, and with women's associations. We also received more than 200 comments and suggestions online. The consultation process was very broad and extended over about two years, so that we could be sure of moving in the right direction together.

• (1545)

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you for your reply.

Welcome to Ms. Laurendeau, who is here with us, and to Mr. Gagnon, who has finally made it through security.

That is all from me for the moment.

The Chair: Okay.

Before I give the floor to Mr. Blaney, I would like to welcome you, Mr. Gagnon. I am happy you could join us.

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

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Minister.

I am going to delve back into my memory a little. In 2008, you and I were in the House of Commons when Prime Minister Harper apologized to indigenous peoples for the residential schools. It was he who began the process that led to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The commission's final report, tabled in 2015, contained the three recommendations you mentioned dealing with the importance of preserving indigenous languages.

As you know, we gave the bill a warm welcome in our new House of Commons. We look forward to studying it in committee. I am told that it will be voted on in the House this week, I believe. Of course, it is our intention to support the bill so that it can be studied here at our committee.

We are now in 2019, at the end of an election cycle, just a few months from a federal election. We can see time slipping through our fingers. That being the case, a question jumps into my mind: why has it taken so long to introduce this bill?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you for that important question, Mr. Blaney.

The process took a little longer because we wanted to do it in co-development. Ms. Joly, my predecessor, or I could have sat down at the end of a table in the wonderful office of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and drafted a bill. But we decided to do quite the opposite, to consult, from region to region, with Inuit, Métis, First Nations, women's groups, and elders. Why? Because this bill is not for us. It is for the indigenous peoples, their children and the generations to follow.

For this bill to make sense and to achieve its objectives, it had, in our opinion, to be developed in partnership with the groups affected. That is why the process took a little longer, Mr. Blaney. But it was the right thing to do. We have consensus on a lot of issues.

Hon. Steven Blaney: You mentioned consultations. We are going to be hearing from representatives from the Assembly of First Nations and from the Métis. However, one group, the Inuit, will probably not be part of the consensus on the bill. Could you tell me why?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: There is a consensus around the bill. The Inuit would like other elements added to the bill. That's where there is not a consensus. However, they were included in the discussions from the outset. The entire co-development process includes the Inuit 100%. They would like the bill to go a little further. We are ready to continue the discussions. My door is always open and we have consultation mechanisms. On the other hand, we have to start somewhere.

Mr. Blaney, you yourself mentioned the importance of the time factor. We do not have a lot of time left, actually. We needed to introduce a bill. This one is already built on something extremely solid: after two years of consultations, we have agreed on 12 basic principles, for which we have obtained approval from various groups. In parallel, we can continue to negotiate specific points. In due course, if we agree on particular points, they can be included, either in the bill or in other agreements.

Hon. Steven Blaney: In their statement, they said the process went on behind closed doors. We almost sensed an allusion to colonialism in their criticism.

We are certainly going to invite them to appear before us, Mr. Minister.

• (1550)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I really hope you do.

Hon. Steven Blaney: That said, how can we ensure that we are inclusive? Given the witnesses that we will be hearing from, will you be open to amendments to the bill?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes. As I have said from the outside, this is a baseline, but it is a very solid baseline that can be amended as the committee deems fit. However, the baseline is taking us somewhere. It responds to the Commission's Calls to Action numbers 13, 14 and 15. It moves forward on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It provides stable funding. In the short term, it will allow our communities to immediately begin work on revitalizing languages.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Okay, you are talking about funding, Mr. Minister, and you talked about it in your speech. Let me ask you the million-dollar question, Mr. Minister: how much?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We will see about that as the discussions continue. Clearly, the quicker the bill is passed, the quicker you will have a specific answer to your question. As you know, specific amounts of money are not mentioned in bills.

Hon. Steven Blaney: We have been told that \$30 million have been allocated in the current budget and that this amount will continue for the next two years. Are you able to tell us anything more about that?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That is another program. You are right in saying that a program is underway. It involves \$90 million over three years to revitalize indigenous languages. That is while we are waiting. The legislative measures we are talking about here, however, go much further and will have transformational results in the long term.

You are correct in saying that a three-year, \$90-million program is underway. That's \$30 million per year. This bill, however, looks to the future and, among other things, will establish things like predictable, long-term funding mechanisms.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Are you telling us that, for this year and the next two years, the envelope will fit with the parameters of your bill and that you are going to continue it into the future? Could other amounts be added subsequently?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: There will be additional amounts, but the bill first has to be passed and discussions have to continue.

The bill actually gives us no choice. It tells us in writing that we have to provide stable, adequate, sustainable and long-term funding. Clearly, there will be additional funding that I am not in a position to announce today, but that will be discussed with the indigenous peoples.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Are you asking the House of Commons to vote on a bill whose financial implications are unknown?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That is how bills are made. It is very rare for a bill to specify precisely the costs involved. There are mechanisms.

In addition, you asked me if I was open to the idea of amending the bill. If I say yes and we pass an amendment, what will that amendment represent financially? For example, if we respond positively to one of the claims of the Inuit or another group, what are the financial consequences? I can't tell you right now, because we are still not sure where we agree.

Hon. Steven Blaney: In other words, you are aware that the bill involves obligations. At that point, did...

Is my time up already, Madam Chair?

The Chair: It's been seven minutes.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, it comes with obligations, and that's what we want.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: I'll now give the floor to Ms. Jolibois for seven minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Thank you very much.

[*Member spoke in Dene as follows:*]

Sı Denesųłıne hesų,

[*Member provided the following translation:*]

I am a Denesųłıne Woman,

[*Member spoke in Dene as follows:*]

ııı dene ʔa yastı

[*Member provided the following translation:*]

I am speaking in dene...

[*English*]

I am a Dene Tsuut'ina person. I speak my language. I say that with pride.

I'm looking at this legislation from that framework. I'm looking at it from the framework of all the Dene-speaking people, all the Cree-speaking people and all the people speaking every indigenous language across Canada. From our perspective, there are some things that we would like to provide. These are suggestions based on conversations that we've had. I want to highlight two things.

The NDP, as you know, including me and my colleague Romeo Saganash, supports the use and education of indigenous languages done in conjunction with first nations, Métis and Inuit people. We want to see the three TRC calls to action related to indigenous languages succeed but not be rushed through. I feel that this legislation is being rushed through. That makes me nervous because I am one hundred per cent behind retaining my language and passing it on. All indigenous communities, first nations, Métis and Inuit, are thinking that. I know that you want to make the right choices, move this along and support it.

You said that you're open to amendments. Are you? There are some suggestions provided by the people who speak the language, the educators, the service providers, the parents, the elders and the list goes on. With that, how can you ensure that this bill is not pushed through without proper consultation with a broad range of people across Canada?

• (1555)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We can do this because there's a will to change things and because there's a will to have a good bill.

I think we're starting with a good bill. Is it perfect? No. Can we improve it? Probably. However, it is based on consultations that

took place over two years across the country, with different groups, elders and experts.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: With all due respect, Minister, I wasn't consulted. My colleague wasn't consulted. Many people I know, Dene-speaking and Cree-speaking, were not consulted. Therefore, they want to have a chance to present.

I'm sorry to cut you off, but another concern is there is not a specific amount for funding. I had conversations with on-reserve schools and organizations, and also discussions with provincially run schools and organizations. They have the same goal and the same purpose. They want to do the same thing: to teach the language and culture and to retain it.

How can we ensure that we make changes with regard to the funding, to expand the funding to allow provincially run schools, as well as non-profit organizations, to apply and have access to the funding? What about even the radio stations across Canada?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: In that case, it would imply negotiation with the provinces, but what is done with the funding will be decided by the indigenous leaders, by the groups, by the different representatives. We are not the ones who are going to decide how you do it.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: That makes me nervous, because you are the government. The Liberal government is the government proposing this legislation to allow leadership—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It's in collaboration with them.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: —that's failing the day-to-day people, the children, the elders, the parents. I'm not confident that will work to teach and to retain the languages, if we allow that mechanism to take—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Are you saying that you prefer that I tell them what to do?

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: No, that's not what I'm saying.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I think you understand what I'm saying, but you're just playing the game here.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: No, I'm sorry. I don't.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: In terms of the mechanisms, with all federal organizations, when they say funding is available, they provide mechanisms. They provide rules and regulations and say this is what it will be. Then the groups on the ground apply for funding following those rules and regulations. That's what I'm saying.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: There will be mechanisms, and those mechanisms I discuss with the different groups. There will be stable and long-term funding. There will be mechanisms for the three different groups, but on the ground what is done will be decided by the different communities. Why? Their needs in terms of languages are very different, one language or the other, and how many people remain speaking the language. Therefore, the mechanism will be co-developed with them, but at the end of the day, the projects are theirs. That's what I am saying.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I'm really confused by your description, because that's not where I come from, where the indigenous people are at. That says to me this is not taken seriously; my language is not taken seriously; the Cree language is not taken seriously; ITK languages aren't taken seriously. That makes me nervous. I want to make sure that the children of every indigenous language group, every indigenous family, feel proud in making sure that they are passing it on. That's where schools are really crucial, elders are really crucial, bands are really crucial, northern villages are crucial and everything from friendship centres to organizations right across are crucial.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We have exactly the same objective.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: That's not what I'm getting.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: However, we are. We're going to the same place.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Okay.

Regarding the letter that was sent to you by ITK, have you had discussions with them since this came?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes. The last time I spoke with them was in New York, three weeks ago, face to face.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Was it face to face?

• (1600)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes. I mean we were sitting together.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Okay. I'm assuming that you had extensive discussions on how to make changes to the proposed legislation.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We have ongoing discussions, because as I said at the beginning, my door is always open and my team is there to discuss with them. If there are things we can accommodate and amend, we'll do it. If we agree on stuff, there are things we can do, either amend the bill or do it through agreements in the future.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I have two quick questions.

The Chair: Unfortunately, you're out of time.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: We will now be going to Mr. Hogg for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gordie Hogg (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you, Minister.

I was delighted to hear you tell the story of Olive. That reminded me of a story I heard about four months ago from Chief Harley Chappell, who is the chief of the Semiahmoo First Nation and a member of the Coast Salish people, and he too was anxious to have this passed.

I heard you twice explicitly state a principle, that indigenous people know best. I was encouraged by that and the extensive consultation you have been through.

I don't expect you'll have time to meet with Harley Chappell and the people of the Semiahmoo First Nation, and I don't think you'll have a chance to meet with everyone. However, I want to be assured that the principles you have talked about are enshrined within the legislation so they are reflected as the values upon which this goes. I believe in the principle and the value of the creation of public policy and legislation, that it is best developed when those people who it most profoundly impacts have their say with respect to that.

Can you speak to the principles and values that are made explicit within this legislation?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Absolutely.

As I mentioned before, the principles have been adopted together with the various groups. Why? This is the core, the base of the bill. The bill is based on those principles. The bill is based on our response to calls to action 13, 14 and 15. It's based on the fact that we want to advance UNDRIP, specifically the sections related to indigenous languages, and want to make sure that money is there for the long term, so that it's stable and is sufficient for the priorities of the different groups in the various regions.

There are many things related to the principles, but the key thing is that we're recognizing indigenous languages as a fundamental right within section 35. This is a right for the indigenous people—and it is a right. How do you tell your stories? How do you communicate? How do you feel proud about yourself, your past, your culture, all the things you had in common once upon a time that, because of a succession of government, you've lost?

The element of the principles is fundamental, as is the fact that our government announced that we were supporting UNDRIP. That has to have a meaning. It has to be something concrete. Our answer to it is passing the bill, in which there's a direct reference to section 35 stipulating that indigenous languages are a fundamental right.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: One of the skill-testing parts of making legislation is the consultation process and whether you feel that it's extensive enough and that you get a chance to speak to everybody who wants to be heard. A second is whether you enshrine within the legislation the values that allow you to move to make changes, because changes will be needed over the course of time. Some things are held in policy, some of them are orders in council, and some of them are different strategies around those things.

Are you comfortable that the legislation you have here allows for that type of flexibility, so that changes can be made to respond to nuances and needs as we become more aware of them, or as the indigenous people become more aware of them?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That's a very good question.

The answer is absolutely, and that is reflected in various things.

First of all, while we discuss this bill, there are and will be more discussions with the groups, Indian and Inuit. As they know and as I told them personally when we met a couple of weeks go, and as the House and my staff and the deputy minister told them, we're always ready to sit down with them, and it's going to happen very shortly.

If we agree on more things, then there are various mechanisms. One is to amend the bill to include them. Clause 9 of the bill allows us to have agreements or arrangements in the future with a government, indigenous groups or nations.

• (1605)

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I support the comments from Madam Jolibois concerning the ability to do so, but I'm not sure, if I'm understanding correctly, that everything can be contained in legislation. That's why I think the values and the principles have to be enshrined there with the flexibility to respond to those matters on an ongoing basis.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Absolutely.

It's clearly stated in clause 9 that we can have those kinds of arrangements or agreements. There are always possibilities to improve bills. As I said at the beginning, this bill is not perfect, and I'm pretty sure we can improve it. Is it, however, something extremely solid, as a base that we need now? Absolutely it is, because if you want to amend something you have to have that something. If we don't adopt this bill, we will have nothing.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Mr. Blaney asked why it is urgent that it come now. Certainly the people I've talked to in Semiahmoo First Nation have a sense of urgency. They'd like to see this. They also need to be comforted and confident that the values and principles being reflected in it are there, so that if they have an issue come up at a later point in time with the Coast Salish people—particularly the Lummi people, who live in the United States, but they were invited—separated by the Canada-U.S. border. They are the people who have two people who still speak the language, and they need to continue.

There are those types of nuances. We're not going to have a chance to meet with all those people, but there needs to be comfort that those values and principles are reflected in this bill and that as those issues come forward—which are so important to these people and I'm sure right across Canada—you'll have the flexibility to do that because of the values and principles that are contained in the bill.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I agree with you. If I could meet with everybody, I would. Of course we know that's not possible.

The consultations were broad, serious, responsible and extremely important. The process never stopped. At the moment, we say we're ready to table the bill, but we keep discussing things that are more specific because we also have questions about some of the things that have been suggested. If we can agree on something, then it can be as amended by the committee or implemented through an agreement or an arrangement. Also, as you know, things evolve with time. Legislation can be amended.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: The chair has said that my time is up. I'll catch you in the corner later.

The Chair: It is.

We will now go to Mr. Shields for five minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Minister Rodriguez, for being here today to speak about this piece of proposed legislation.

As you read through it, the word “diverse” showed up in the legislation. I could see it if you were saying “the indigenous peoples”, but I don't know why you have the word “diverse” in there. If you're saying “all the indigenous people”, what is the word “diverse” doing in there?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm not sure what you mean by that. This bill includes everybody—

Mr. Martin Shields: I know.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: —and it will include the Inuit, also.

Mr. Martin Shields: You use the word “diverse”, which you read in your statement. You said, “a diverse indigenous people” and in the legislation the word is “diverse”. I just don't know why you have it in there.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It touches all indigenous people.

Mr. Martin Shields: Why do you need the word “diverse” in there? I'm saying it's a word that you don't need.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'm including everybody in this, Mr. Shields, just for you to be comfortable.

Mr. Martin Shields: If you said “all Canadians”, that would be all Canadians. You wouldn't need to say “diverse Canadians”. If you say “all indigenous” or if you say “indigenous”....

I think the word “diverse” is—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It's all indigenous people, and I've been very clear since the beginning.

Mr. Martin Shields: I get that, but I think the word “diverse” is—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I can take it out and read the speech again if you want.

Mr. Martin Shields: That's what I'm saying. It's a confusing word in there. To me it is.

If you say “Canadians”, you mean all Canadians. If you say “indigenous”, you mean all indigenous. That's all I'm saying.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay.

Mr. Martin Shields: When you talk about funding, you have the word “adequate”. It's an interesting word. You're using an adjective to describe funding. Adequate to me would be if you're getting graded on something and you get a C. That's adequate. C is a funny level of funding if it's that important. I'm not sure if that's the best word you want to use. I'm not sure if that's the best adjective, if it's that important, because adequate is just average. That's how it hits me.

When you talk about “funding” and not “project”, I think that's really interesting. When I think of the gas tax, for example, that municipalities get from the federal government, you don't have to apply for it as a project. It comes to you, and you make the decision about how you spend the money. When I was at the municipal level, I can say that we liked the gas tax because we didn't have to apply for a project and we could make the decision. Then you get into how to decide who gets how much. Is it by population or are you going to establish a base?

Let's say one band has 1,000 people and another band has 5,000 or 10,000. How are you going to decide the funding if it's not project-based? I don't like project-based because it doesn't allow you to make the decisions, and you're very clear that you want the groups to make the decisions. Do you have any thoughts as to how you would distribute this money or what basis you would use to distribute it? That's the critical piece when you talk about funding.

• (1610)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you for the question.

Adequate for me is what's necessary to succeed. That is my definition of adequate. Adequate and predictable long term is a direct response to a call to action.

Mr. Martin Shields: I like the long term. That's great.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You're right. In all our discussions with indigenous peoples, they said, and rightly so, that they don't want to go on a per-project funding basis. They have to submit, and they need the resources to prepare the project. Then they need the resources to prepare a report, and then they have to reapply.

Mr. Martin Shields: I agree with you on that.

How do you think you might do it?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It's going to be funding that will be available for this bill that will be based on everything that the bill sets out to do. Again, the bill could be exactly as it is now, or it could be amended by you.

Mr. Martin Shields: I got that; I got that.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Such is the case. It depends.

Mr. Martin Shields: How would they get the cheque and how would you determine the amount?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Those are based on the priorities by the different groups, by the different communities: on their needs, on the number of people who still speak the language, on what they need in terms of schools, education, classes, books, whatever. All of that will be prepared together, but the sooner we adopt the bill, the sooner we have an answer.

Mr. Martin Shields: I got that, and it may be a detail that you don't have, but I think it's critical that you have it because that's what the indigenous are going to want to know if we pass this. How are you going to fund this? What you basically said is project funding. That's what you just said. I hope you get a better understanding because that's a critical piece.

The Chair: That's the end of your five minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Long for five minutes, please.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, colleagues.

Good afternoon, Minister Rodriguez. Thank you, Pablo, for coming in, for leading the department, for being a wonderful minister, for having a great vision and for moving bills forward, especially this bill, Bill C-91, which will preserve, promote and revitalize indigenous languages.

I have a short story to tell you about my days in aquaculture when I travelled extensively around the world. I visited Scotland, the Isle of Harris, I believe. We were there talking about salmon farming and such, but we were out one night and there was a language spoken that I had never heard before. I was quite curious about the language. It was Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic. I was very surprised. I didn't understand it all, or very little of it, but I was fascinated by it. I was fascinated by the pride with which it was spoken, by just how people in that community were so very proud of the history of the Gaelic language, and by how they were preserving that language.

I'll fast-forward to two years ago. I was at my mother's house for Christmas dinner, and my nephew was there. My nephew is a student at StFX, and he started speaking Gaelic. I was shocked by that, that StFX offers a course in Gaelic; it is in Nova Scotia. The fact that the university, StFX, is offering courses in the Gaelic language, teaching that language.... Again, it is about preserving that language and educating the youth in those communities about how important that language was, Scottish Gaelic.

With respect to Bill C-91 and the preservation of indigenous languages, I absolutely respect and understand what our government is doing there. As you said earlier, is the bill perfect? No. Is there an opportunity to look at amendments or other scenarios? Sure. There is one thing you did say that was of interest to me. I want to go back just to the funding side because, obviously, there have been different questions, I think, from all three parties with respect to the funding. Will there be long-term funding over years to preserve the languages, Minister? Is there a commitment for long-term funding?

• (1615)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Wayne Long: Can you elaborate? You also mentioned, with respect to funding and the bill, that one size does not fit all. Can you elaborate on what you meant by that?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Absolutely. Thank you for the question.

Mr. Wayne Long: For sure, and thanks for coming today.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It's a very important question. It became very clear from day one that there are different needs for different languages and different groups and we had to have a bill that would be flexible enough to take that into consideration.

The other thing that was clear for us from day one is that this is a long-term process. You cannot arrive there with a bill, and the day after, you have helped to revitalize many languages and have protected them. It's a long-term effort that requires long-term funding. It requires multi-year funding, which this bill provides.

In the meantime, as we head there, we have this other program, which has, as I mentioned before, \$90 million over three years. That's something which is there, but we want way more. We're more ambitious and the needs are more important than the program that is actually there. That is important, but this bill goes a long way in terms of respecting those rights and saying clearly that indigenous languages are a fundamental right. We say it in writing, and we also say in writing that there will be long-term and stable funding. We're committed. We're stuck. We tied our hands, and it's a good thing we did, so we have to provide that money.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Minister. I congratulate you for this.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Yurdiga, for five minutes.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair; and thank you to the minister for taking time out of his busy schedule to come to speak to us.

I'd like to talk about the mechanics of implementation of indigenous languages within our communities. I understand first nations; they do have the infrastructure in place, so it's a lot easier for them to put a program forward. Then we have Métis settlements, which is fine; they also have infrastructure in place.

What I'm concerned about is how we are going to reach the urban indigenous people. There are little clusters here and there, and they just intertwine into the fabric of their communities. Are there any plans to address these people who don't have infrastructure to pursue learning the indigenous language, whatever it may be?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That's an excellent question and a question that I asked the team also. How are we going to be able to reach all these people we want to reach out to and all the people who want to participate in this? How will we elaborate the actions with the different national groups? By sitting with the leaders of the first nations and the leaders of different groups, we will work on solutions on how to reach them. For now, there is no clear answer.

• (1620)

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you, Minister.

I didn't want to go into the budget side of things—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Okay. Madam Laurendeau might want to add something.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau (Deputy Minister, Department of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Minister, with your permission, the only thing I would add is that the bill provides that we can enter into agreement with various types of organizations. It could be band councils. It could be government, self-governing nations, but it can

also be indigenous organizations. One of the things we've heard is that there are some educational organizations or friendship centres, particularly other types of groups in urban areas that actually can provide some programming based on the demand they have. Therefore, we have provided that agreements can be struck with any of those organizations.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you very much.

I was saying earlier that I didn't want to go into the budget side of things, but obviously the department has figured out how much it's going to cost to roll out the program, the initial steps. It's not going to just happen with no money.

How much has the department established as the cost of initial rollout of this program?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We are working on that, on determining how much money will be requested, based on exactly what is being done. This is done through consultation with the different groups: the Métis, the Inuit, first nations. It's ongoing discussions that will end with different numbers that will be applied to different groups for different projects, based on needs.

Mr. David Yurdiga: What you are saying is that you don't have any budget in mind. You have no business plan.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: No—

Mr. David Yurdiga: There's always a rollout cost.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: No—

Mr. David Yurdiga: It's administrative. You must have an idea.

Is it—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We do have ideas, but those are things that we are discussing with them because it's something that we're still co-developing with them. It's in partnership, and it's something that, for now, is among the groups that are discussing it.

Mr. David Yurdiga: There must be an anticipated cost. Any business always anticipates what it will potentially cost for the first year of operation. We're not going and buying.... Say we have no money...but you have to have money to move forward.

What's your estimate of how many dollars are going to be spent in the first year once you start implementing the program?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Those are things that will be public eventually when we get those—

Mr. David Yurdiga: So, you have a number, but it's not public.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We have ideas. Of course we know how much different routes will cost.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Are you not willing to share that with committee?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I cannot at this moment because we're discussing that with them. It's part of the ongoing process of co-developing with them. At the end of the day, it also depends on what we do based on their needs, their objectives, their level of organization, readiness or whatever. Those things will change.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Will we ever know?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Eventually, of course.

Mr. David Yurdiga: When? After the study? After the bill passes? When will we know the budget?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: When we get to agree about that.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Okay.

I have no further questions.

The Chair: That was the end of your time, so I appreciate that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Breton, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Mr. Minister, we were talking earlier about the co-development process that led to this bill. In my opinion, it went well.

This bill is very close to your heart. On a personal level, what did you and your team learn from this long-term exercise? I think I heard you mention that this work took two years. I would like us to come back to that, because I think all these consultations are an important part of it. Nothing is perfect in this world, a lot of work has been done on this issue. Could you tell us more about it?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you for your question, Mr. Breton.

One of the things I learned is that I still had a lot to learn, and I say that in all humility. I have always been interested in the situation of indigenous peoples, I have many friends from indigenous communities, I have read a lot and I have travelled. However, there is a whole reality that we often think we know, but that we do not know as well as we think we do.

I have also learned the importance that indigenous peoples—all of them, without exception—attach to the protection and revitalization of their languages. All this is partly due to the efforts of successive governments to destroy the culture of those peoples and to ensure that they no longer speak their languages.

The work is a huge undertaking, which explains why we do not have all the answers. However, these answers cannot only come from government; they must come from co-operation between government and indigenous peoples. This is the only way to resolve this whole issue, to make sense of it and to make a difference for our children and grandchildren. That is one of the lessons I have learned.

• (1625)

Mr. Pierre Breton: This is all extremely interesting.

For my next question, I will go into detail, but it is more out of curiosity. In the consultations, were interpretation services provided to allow participants to express themselves in their own language?

Perhaps the department's officials will be able to answer this question.

In addition, did you become aware of any best practices during the consultations?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I'll answer your second question quickly, then I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Gagnon, who was part of the consultations from the beginning and who knows everything.

I saw something extraordinary this weekend. While I was in Winnipeg, I was invited to a round table where people were trying to reconnect with their language. The discussion was moderated by a 19-year-old who did not speak his language, but who had decided to learn it. There were people of various ages. The level of language knowledge was different: some understood 10% of the conversation, while others understood 80%. The most magnificent thing was everyone's desire to reclaim their language and transmit it to their children.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Gagnon (Director General, Aboriginal Affairs Directorate, Department of Canadian Heritage): I would just add that when we were doing the consultations across the country in the summer, we didn't always have simultaneous translation. We always did for the Inuit organizations because it was important for them to have people in simultaneous translation such as you see behind you, so that happened.

In the other areas, we didn't always have translation, but I always heard indigenous languages. Often the opening statements were made by people who were speaking their languages. I'd know that I didn't speak the language when occasionally people would look at the federal guy and start to laugh, so I knew they'd just said something about what I was wearing, or what have you. They would then translate back for me, and I guess it was to say to people that this is what it's like when you're in your area and you don't speak the language and someone has to tell you what was just said.

As the minister said this morning, you always learn that something gets lost when it's done that way. We did learn that it was important to encourage people to speak the languages across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Breton.

[*English*]

For the final two minutes, we will go to Ms. Jolibois, please.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you very much.

I'm pleased to hear the words that you used, "indigenous languages as a fundamental right". I take that seriously and to heart. In my understanding, I'm pretty sure I mean it differently than the government does, because what I'm hearing is language spoken and we talk about funding, and there is no clear funding. There is no description of the indigenous groups who would access the funding.

There's this understanding that all indigenous people live on reserves. That's what I'm sensing and what I'm hearing when I read this. I want clarification when we say "all first nations, Métis and Inuit". To me, that would be inclusive of all the reserves, then the Far North, the Inuit people and all the three territories, and then the Métis, and in the provinces, all the languages that exist.

As my colleague pointed out earlier, many of us do not live on reserves. We live in municipalities and cities, and we, at this level, want to make sure that our organizations would have access to the funding. Therefore, for that purpose, I'm looking for specific funding that language keepers and educators and everyone else is looking for.

That said, I did hear you say that you're open to making amendments, right?

• (1630)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: What kind of time frame are you looking at with these amendments? I want to recommend some groups to you to make sure that they have a chance to talk to you and to make sure with the TRC recommendations that some processes are done properly. They can't go separately; they have to go hand in hand. We have to take it seriously. I think we're on the same page about that one, that they have to be done together.

The Chair: I'm going to jump in, because Ms. Jolibois has gone over her two minutes. If you could provide a quick answer, that would be wonderful.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: The three calls to action are included. The response to the three separate calls to action are included in this bill, clearly and specifically.

When we say that we include everybody, we do include all the Métis, first nations, the Inuit, the modern treaty, the self-governing nations, and everybody on and off reserve. That is why, as the deputy minister said, the money can also go to non-government indigenous groups, community groups or organized groups that could, for example, do what is required in a specific community.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Minister.

[*English*]

That's going to bring to an end this first hour.

For the next hour we will have H el ene Laurendeau, who's going to stay, Stephen Gagnon, and I believe M elanie Th eberge as well.

We will briefly suspend the meeting.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: We're going to start up again.

For the second hour with the Department of Canadian Heritage, we have H el ene Laurendeau, Deputy Minister; Stephen Gagnon, Director General, Aboriginal Affairs Directorate; and with us now also, M elanie Th eberge, Manager, Policy and Research, Indigenous Languages Legislation. Welcome to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): A point of clarification, Madam Chair.

• (1640)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Nantel.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Given the short timeframe, and given that everyone participated in the list of suggested witnesses, is it possible to have a list of the witnesses scheduled and the date of their appearances? The deadline is short and I cannot help but notice that the people from Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami are not among the first witnesses we will be hearing from. I guess they also have busy schedules.

We usually trust you with the witnesses who will be invited to appear, but would it be possible to have a list?

The Chair: I can talk to you about it later and show you the list. Many witnesses were invited, but not all were available this week.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Of course. You'll keep me informed.

If necessary, we could discuss the work of the committee in the late evening or whenever you wish. Ideally, it should be before midnight.

The Chair: If everyone wants to discuss the witness list at 8:00 p.m. this evening, we can talk a little bit about it.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It's to sort of help us get organized.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll now give the floor to Mr. Long for seven minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Long: Good afternoon. Thank you for being here.

Bill C-91 is a profound bill that I think will do so much to revitalize indigenous languages, communities and culture. It will instill pride in different communities right across this country. I commend our government for moving this forward.

The bill would establish the office of the commissioner of indigenous languages, consisting of one commissioner and up to three directors. That is in clause 12(1). Clauses 13 and 16 stipulate that the commissioner and directors would be appointed by the Governor in Council after the minister has consulted with diverse indigenous governments, other indigenous governing bodies and diverse indigenous organizations.

Can you describe what level of consultation you foresee with diverse indigenous governments, other indigenous governing bodies and diverse indigenous organizations?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Thank you for the question.

I want to point out that Mr. Shields also pointed out the use of “diverse” indigenous groups in various places in the legislation. The joint intention that we had with the three main groups.... We did the bulk of the consultations with the AFN, ITK and MNC, the Métis Nation Council, but these groups were very conscious of the fact that there is a diversity of governments and organizations.

What we wanted to make sure of through the use of “diverse” was not so much to point to diversity but to really be clear that the minister, in various places, has to be very inclusive in terms of who they reach out to, and that it's not limited to the three main associations, the AFN, MNC and others. It's to capture the fact that it would be governments and councils that exist under the Indian Act, but other groups as well, like educators, friendship centres and a panoply of organizations that actually have an interest regarding the preservation of languages.

Mr. Wayne Long: Just for the record, what indigenous groups do you foresee consulting with for appointment recommendations?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: It would be a variety of groups, primarily governments and councils but other groups that actually are.... It could be indigenous school boards. It could be groups with whom we have an agreement and who have an interest in making sure that the various directors and the commissioner are representative of the variety of indigenous groups.

Mr. Wayne Long: I don't know if you can answer this, but in my province of New Brunswick, can you name other groups or organizations that would be consulted?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: In New Brunswick specifically?

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: A friendship centre, for sure.

Stephen?

Mr. Stephen Gagnon: I'm not as familiar with what's going on in New Brunswick, but in Saskatchewan, for example, you have the Gabriel Dumont Institute. They support Métis and Michif language and culture. You have the Louis Riel Institute in Manitoba. Yukon has the Yukon Native Language Centre. There are many language authorities.

I think what we're trying to say is, there are organizations that specialize in language support. You should be talking to them. There'll be self-governing and modern treaty holders that would also be interested in having discussions.

• (1645)

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: It is clear in New Brunswick, for example, that we would go to the Mi'kmaq, as a government, but their school council would probably be consulted as well.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay.

Obviously, my riding is in southern New Brunswick. It's Saint John—Rothesay, and there's not a high concentration of indigenous groups right in my riding. With respect to urban communities, how would you ensure that you reach them? How could they be included?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: They would be included, in the case of first nations, through the National Association of Friendship Centres, and other cultural groups that would be interacting with us for the purpose of preserving languages. In urban areas, it would primarily be through them.

In rural areas, it would probably be through governments that already exist, or band councils in the case of...but not strictly band councils.

Mr. Wayne Long: How would the department select which groups to consult with? Would it just be a good cross-section of different groups?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: We would probably do a call-out based on the bank of people we're interacting with. We would probably publicize the fact that we are consulting and would welcome suggestions.

We obviously would go with organized groups like the AFN, the MNC and others, but we would be as inclusive as we could.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: You're welcome.

Mr. Wayne Long: The bill will also provide the office of the commissioner of indigenous languages—the office—with the discretionary authority to undertake research and studies, in co-operation with Statistics Canada or Library and Archives Canada.

Would these studies be carried out in collaboration with indigenous organizations? How would that look to the department?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: The intention is to actually allow the commissioner's office to be able to respond to requests for research that would come from various indigenous groups. The idea is to preserve a form of independence on how the research is done. It would be through them, at the request of indigenous groups, that those studies could be done.

They would liaise with those independent agencies because we know that they have a lot of information. In the case of Statistics Canada, they have already provided a fair amount of information. The groups we consulted with told us that they would like to pursue having better granularity of the state of various languages. We wanted to make sure there was a placeholder and that it wasn't done through Canadian Heritage but rather through the independent agency.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: I'll now give the floor to Mr. Blaney for seven minutes.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciated the minister's appearance, but the number of unanswered questions he left us with is higher than I expected.

My question is for Ms. Laurendeau or Ms. Théberge.

In briefings, we were informed that \$90 million over three years had been allocated to promoting indigenous languages.

First, I would like to know whether those amounts are currently being used and, if so, how they are being used.

Then I would like to come back to what the minister told us. The bill is sort of like a grab bag. We lack information on the amounts involved and on how things will proceed. This leaves me a little puzzled.

If possible, I would first like some details on how much of the \$90 million has already been allocated.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: I will ask Ms. Théberge to give you more details on the projects currently funded through the program.

Like any other program that operates on a project-by-project basis, this program is quite specific and operates under quite specific conditions. We certainly put more money into it. We wanted to be able to set the stage for the coming into force of the act. We spread out the amount until 2020 because we wanted to make sure there would be some temporary funding. In this way, when the act comes into force, we will have all the funding related to the specific obligations of the act.

The program will allow two things: it will continue to support the preparation for implementation, but it will probably also serve as temporary funding to specifically fund the agreements under clauses 8, 9 and 10 of the bill.

I can ask Ms. Théberge to give you more details on the types of projects that are currently being funded.

• (1650)

Ms. Mélanie Théberge (Manager, Policy and Research, Indigenous Languages Legislation, Department of Canadian Heritage): I'm sorry, but I have no idea. I did not participate in the program. I'm really sorry.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: I thought it was within your purview.

Ms. Mélanie Théberge: No, not at all. I was looking after the bill.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: That's the sort of surprise you get when you're new.

That being said, we can send you a list of projects that have been approved this year. These are mainly very specific projects carried out by organizations that work in a very specific way to support languages. We will send you more details. I'm sorry I can't provide you with this information. I thought it was Ms. Théberge's responsibility.

[English]

I don't know.

Stephen, do you know what the types of projects are?

Mr. Stephen Gagnon: No.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: We will most certainly send you a list.

Hon. Steven Blaney: It would be nice if you could provide us, if possible, with a breakdown of the amounts invested.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Actually, I will send you the description of the program as well as a list of the projects and amounts that have been approved over the past year.

Hon. Steven Blaney: There is a consensus on the spirit and purpose of the bill, but sometimes the devil is in the details, or in the lack of details.

The minister talked about the project-based approach, which he did not seem to advocate for the larger envelope. However, again in a context of accountability and performance, if there is a beginning, a middle and an end, there is a greater chance that the money provided will help to achieve the objective of revitalizing languages, whether it's Cree, Innu or any other.

The minister refused to tell my colleague David Yurdiga how much it would cost. Without telling me how much it will cost, can you tell me how the money will be used? How will Canadian Heritage ensure that there will be results, that indigenous languages will be saved and that we will not be chucking money out of the window without results? That's a colourful expression and I'm being a little harsh, but I'd like to know what it looks like. We are being asked to approve the bill and the funding associated with it, but no one can tell us how much it will cost or how the money will be spent. This puts us in a tricky situation.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Thank you for your question. This is perhaps the most difficult part to explain. I will do my best to answer your question.

We had two options in designing the bill. We could have waited until we had all the data, all the details, for the 90 indigenous languages to come up with a funding formula. This is what we often see in the provinces when it comes to funding education. However, while we would have done that, the languages would have continued to erode. In addition, our partners had made it very clear to us that we needed to act now, even if it just meant establishing some kind of baseline to determine what the best practices were.

As we establish agreements, which will be defined according to the needs that First Nations, Inuit and Métis have presented to us, we will create the database. In partnership with the commissioner, we will use the database to establish, for example, during a five-year review, a more precise funding formula that can be based on the population in question.

So far, the data have been too variable and the needs too different for us to have been able to define them all in the bill. That is why we decided, with our partners, to provide the capacity for funding through funding agreements. These will be long-term, so that we can measure the results and determine the types of practices that work well. This will allow us to design a funding formula that can be incorporated into the legislation later. For the time being, we intend to do this by taking into account the needs as defined by our partners.

In addition, during our consultations, we learned that various groups had taken a number of very specific measures. Some groups focused on educating young people in school, while others created programs to promote culture. If we had tried to define the full range of measures and programs in the bill, we would probably have forgotten some. In addition, we may well have stopped funding things that deserved to be funded.

In partnership with our colleagues, we decided to do the opposite, that is, to commit to providing funding based on the needs determined by our partners. From there, the commissioner can help us determine which practices are most effective.

That is how the bill was designed.

I'm not sure whether Mr. Gagnon has anything to add.

• (1655)

The Chair: We are out of time.

[English]

We're going to Ms. Jolibois, please, for seven minutes.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Have there been any discussions with educational institutions across Canada, specifically relating to language retention, teaching languages and various educational institutions?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: We have had consultations with educators.

Stephen, could you tell us which educational institutions we consulted?

Mr. Stephen Gagnon: At the engagement sessions, there were people from all over the place. I think some of them were from indigenous organizations that teach, but are you asking specifically about school boards and things like that?

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: There are various levels. There are the universities and various departments within universities across Canada—the University of Manitoba and the University of Saskatchewan—and in the east and the west. There's that, and locally, there are the provincially run school boards. Where I come from, the Northern Lights School Division is one, and they offer... There are different levels that I'm looking at.

Mr. Stephen Gagnon: When we did the engagement, and Mélanie may know this better than I do, we didn't focus on groups. We focused on areas. We said, for instance, that we were going to have a first nations session in Winnipeg. People came, but I didn't always know where they came from. I do know that in Toronto, for example, there was a prof there from York University's linguistics section who made a presentation. I don't know specifically....

Mélanie?

Ms. Mélanie Thériège: During the early engagement, we were meeting with language experts, academics. They would have been invited. I would say that was from post-secondary education. When we reached out to the community in what we called the intensive engagement, this would have been at the local level, where the community could have chosen to have an educator to come and speak. Most of the people who were there were actually educators.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: What I hear in the funding formula, or the funding, is that we're leaving out the key piece, which is the post-secondary facilities where they're actually providing this. For example, at the University of Saskatchewan, they're offering Cree immersion, or there's the University of Manitoba and other language groups.

How were they invited? You're talking about the engagement pieces and those who came to be part of this process. How were they invited? Who invited them to come?

Ms. Mélanie Thériège: For the early engagement, we basically used lists. Every time we were reaching out in the community, we would reach out to the people in that region. For the community, it's the community that decided who to bring. We also were working with the three national indigenous organizations to help us in making sure that we had the right people at the table.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Again, it really makes me nervous, because there are so many key groups that are looking at language retention across Canada who don't necessarily look to the national political organizations. The friendship centres, yes, we've talked about them, but the elders groups, or be it prenatal groups at a local level or various....

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Yes.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Because with the formula to apply for funding, the way it's laid out, we would need partners in these various organizations, I would think.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: You're making a very important point, and thank you for making it. That's why, when I mentioned a little earlier how broad we wanted to be in terms of which organizations can be part of an agreement for the purpose of maintaining languages, it could also include provincial or territorial institutions, like universities or even school boards. The minister can facilitate and co-operate with those types of organizations, with the interested indigenous group in a specific region.

Those tripartite agreements would be possible under that to make sure we reach out to where language support and language revitalization happen. In cases where it happens in schools or in the school system, it would be possible to actually flow money to those organizations, provided that it is the choice of the indigenous groups that are concerned in that region.

• (1700)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Again, it's "look for". What do you mean by that?

There's the importance of, for example, the school boards. The Northern Lights School Division is an example. The majority of their board of directors are first nations and Métis. They provide the education. The school division would apply for funding for the schools so that their schools can teach and offer programming.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: That would be possible.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Okay.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: That would be possible. We wanted to make sure that we did not exclude those situations. That's precisely why we didn't limit it to self-government or band councils, as you mentioned earlier, and we made indigenous groups broader. For example, the school boards in Manitoba would be a prime interlocutor that, on behalf of the rights holder, could actually say, "We are a big partner in revitalizing languages because we teach it in school." It's part of the flexibility that we wanted to make sure was preserved, and it's in fact an underpinning of the legislation.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: That's right.

The other piece is on reserve, making sure that schools, bands and health care have funding sources available to them so that they can continue to teach their languages at the local level.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Or to use them, because you see, it's about reclaiming, revitalizing and promoting.

A big element of promotion is about using it in your services. A self-governing nation, a band council or a Métis government could say, "We want to promote the use of our language by having programs that will make sure that our services are provided in that language." That would be a perfectly acceptable reason to provide funding.

It's really the three big legs. The promotion can take various forms. It's not just about creating publicity to use languages. It can be through your own institutions. That's why we need to get out of the way and make sure that those things are defined by indigenous groups themselves. Then in turn, as the minister said, we support and make sure that we make it happen.

To be perfectly honest, we also need to track what the practices are that provide the most results, because people are at different places in their journey. Some of them want to reclaim, but eventually they're going to want to promote. They're going to want to look at the nations that have had the chance to have a bigger critical mass of speakers who are in the promotion business to say what works well.

When we have completed reclamation, we can take those best practices and make them multiply.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now continue with Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, witnesses. I'm replacing a colleague today. As this committee is not the one I usually sit on, I apologize in advance for any questions I ask that you may consider inappropriate.

I read the minister's speaking notes earlier and you may be able to answer my question. I see that various First Nations were consulted, such as in Whitehorse, Yukon, or the Métis in Manitoba. Reassure me: were the indigenous peoples back home, in the Maritime provinces, consulted?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Yes, we consulted the indigenous peoples of the Maritime provinces, particularly the Mi'kmaq.

Mr. René Arseneault: Did you consult all the Algonquin families and sub-families, including the Maliseet?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Yes, we also consulted the Maliseet.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you for reassuring me.

As a lawyer—

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Thériault has something to add.

Ms. Mélanie Thériault: I would like to add a small nuance. The examples that the minister gave are those of organizations we have worked with to do our outreach, such as the Council of Yukon First Nations. We did the same thing with MK in the Atlantic region.

• (1705)

Mr. René Arseneault: There are 90 indigenous languages, 75% of which I understand are at risk, in a multitude of communities across our beautiful and very large Canada. I am of Acadian descent, and I know what it is like to fight for your language. My generation had it easy, but it was different for my parents, great-grandparents and ancestors. French was the language of shame, of people who had little hope for a future. So I am sensitive to this whole issue.

In addition, I share Ms. Jolibois' concern about the objectives of the bill and the difficulty in achieving them. As a lawyer, however, I would like to focus on clause 5 of the bill, which sets out the purpose of the act.

Let me give you the example of the Mi'kmaq, who I meet quite frequently in my riding. There is a large reservation on the Quebec side, in Listuguj. On the other side of the bridge near where I live, not far from home, there is a smaller reservation called Eel River Bar. There are also the Maliseet of Edmunston. Among the Mi'kmaq, I learned in powwows that there are different ways of naming things depending on whether the Mi'kmaq come from the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia or even Cape Breton. They don't always agree on how to refer to something, and I'm not talking about accent, but vocabulary. The Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia are quite advanced. They have a dictionary, and there is even a mobile app that translates tourist questions into Mi'kmaq, including "Where is the airport?" and "Where is the bathroom?" It is incredible. It's well done, and a lot of progress is being made.

From a practical perspective, is there a common denominator for all these communities that represent the country's 90 indigenous languages, a denominator that could be used to achieve the purpose of the act? Has there been talk of a dictionary, a lexicon, a college, a school? What seemed to be rallying everyone?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Coincidentally, one of you asked the minister earlier what he had learned from the consultations. I had an answer to suggest to him, and I'm glad you gave me the chance to give it to you. In fact, the variety of needs and the diversity of indigenous languages are the real wealth to be preserved. It might be risky to try to unilaterally define the elements common to these languages, which could stem from their very long cohabitation since long before the Europeans arrived. However, there are indeed important variants, particularly for Inuktitut, the Algonquin languages and the other major linguistic families.

It would be difficult to target any particular common element, except—unless I'm mistaken—the fact that most of these languages are oral. Very few of these languages are written, which makes their preservation all the more urgent. During consultations, it was recommended that we ensure that we have technological support to record, safeguard and preserve the languages that are still spoken so that they can be resurrected should they disappear, as the written form of these languages barely exists at all. It is true that Inuktitut began to be written, but not uniformly.

So there are very few common elements, except for this great diversity. That is why the work must be very specific and very granular. One of the challenges we had in drafting this bill was not specifying in the bill all the details of what needs to be done and how to do it, otherwise we would have run the very real risk of forgetting some along the way. That's why we have decided to do the opposite, to establish principles and guarantee rights in the legislation, and to use specific granular agreements to ensure the preservation, revitalization and promotion of these languages.

[English]

I don't know, Mélanie. You keep on saying yes.

[Translation]

I would like you to add your comments on that.

Ms. Mélanie Thériège: During our discussions, it proved very difficult to define the concept of language rights. Everyone agreed not to limit this right, but rather to keep the interpretation broad.

However, we tried to identify examples of communities' efforts to maintain and revitalize their language. We talked about language nests, an expression that did not really exist in French. I'm still looking for a translation for it.

• (1710)

Mr. René Arseneault: Could we use “*des foyers de langues*”?

Ms. Mélanie Thériège: Yes, we could talk about *foyers linguistiques* or *apprentissage linguistique* in French.

So these are examples of what we have tried to do. However, one of the common elements was not to limit this right.

Mr. René Arseneault: I understand what you have tried to do and the concept of granularity, given the very vast richness of this linguistic diversity that we don't want to lose because it is part of our beautiful country's history.

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault, your time is up.

Mr. René Arseneault: Too bad.

[English]

The Chair: On that note, we're going to you, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate this extension from the previous hour of the conversation we're having.

Deputy Minister, as you know, I have some very specific opinions on clause 7, where you use the word “diverse”. It's a personal thing to me. You slipped into using another word. You said “diverse” a couple of times and then you said “variety”, and I said, “Bingo, I win.” When you use “diverse”, for me there's a lot of context around that word. If you use “variety”, I'm with you.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Okay.

Mr. Martin Shields: That's a problem for me personally, in a sense. It has some other contextual meanings to it, so it's a confusion for me. Sometimes words mean a lot of different things. That one is an issue for me.

You talked about universities. Would you see universities directly applying for money or would it have to be in a tripartite agreement?

Mr. Stephen Gagnon: I think we need to have further discussions with our partners on that. I can tell you that when we were doing the cross-country engagement this summer, there was a willingness, I think, for people to tap into the expertise that universities have, but there was also occasionally a fear expressed that if the indigenous organizations or communities aren't directly involved, they sometimes might not get the long-term benefits of the creation of a lexicon, for example, if things become copyrighted or proprietary.

I guess if you were to ask me where I think I would lean, I would say—and we were told fairly bluntly by some people—that it's not that we shouldn't be working with the universities, but that it should be the choice of the indigenous groups to do that and not be imposed by government.

Mr. Martin Shields: The other piece I would go to is about a different kind of funding. We talked about this a little bit in the break.

I have Siksika in my riding. There are 8,000 people in that band. It's very large and they do a lot of different things. I know of a couple of other very small bands. It's the same with the municipalities in the sense that the big ones have shovel-ready projects on the shelf. They have the manpower to put the paperwork to you. Those tiny ones don't.

How are you going to make up for that difference? They're not going to show up at your door with any kind of paperwork, because they don't have the ability to do it, but they need it.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: You're making a very important point that it's not an easy balance. I think if we work on perpetuating the project-driven type of funding, we will actually enhance that polarization between the ones that have less capacity and the ones that have more. We will of course cater to the ones that are actually already well structured and all that, but we will also make an effort to reach out to the ones that have less capacity.

From that perspective, this is where the NIOs can be very helpful. They can actually help provide the support to make sure that we can very quickly reach agreements with the smaller organizations in a way that actually is meaningful for them, because this is where the risk is the highest, quite frankly. The self-governing nations that are already well structured or the school boards that have already gathered together among various band councils already have a critical mass and a certain capacity, and I have no doubt that they're going to reach out to us, and we're going to be able to work with them and not have difficulty in having them define their needs, and then off we will go.

In partnership with the commissioner—because that's also going to be a role of the commissioner—we need to make sure that we don't perpetuate the handout of us, Heritage, going to them and telling them how to have their language survive. The partnership with the commissioner, from that perspective, will be very important, because they can play a very critical role in helping, maybe providing templates of things, or disseminating best practices so that in turn we can say, “Yes, this has potential; here's the funding; off you go,” either with the help of the NIOs, if that's their choice—those are the national organizations like the AFN and others—or with the help of the office of the commissioner.

• (1715)

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you. I think that is a piece, when we're talking about some of the rarer and smaller languages out there. If we don't find a way to do that, they're going to be lost in 10 years anyway.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: It could be less than that.

Mr. Martin Shields: You well know what my belief was about bureaucracy when I was a mayor and the CAO would say that we needed to expand a department. The answer was, “Which staff are you going to get rid of?” We wouldn't add on. They would have to make a decision. We'd say, “Here are the bucks.”

The last thing I want to see is more than 0.5% being spent on bureaucracy, or we're wasting this money.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: I can tell you that that was quite forcefully explained to us by our partners, and I'm saying that very humbly. You will have Mr. Bellegarde here, and you will probably want to ask him about the discussion we had about that.

We definitely were committed to actually implementing the calls for action, which included a call for an office of a commissioner. We were very clear in our conversation with the partners that we didn't want to create a ballooning bureaucracy through that. They told us that very clearly but, at the same time, I think they see the potential in having a third party that is not the government assisting particularly the more vulnerable communities in the journey of revitalization and promotion.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Hogg, go ahead, please.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Thank you.

I have gone quickly through the bill to get a better grasp of it, and I noticed the references to UNDRIP twice in the preamble and then again in the purposes of the act, in paragraph 5(g). Then, when you go to clause 6, under “Rights Related to Indigenous Languages”, it's not mentioned there. Is it intended to be there or should we be taking the title “Rights Related to Indigenous Languages” out so that there seems to be a stronger correlation between UNDRIP and the initiatives that are talked about in the preamble?

Maybe you could explain to me why it is separate.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: The UNDRIP is an international instrument, as you know, and it has very clear definition of a series of objectives that pertain to languages. As with any international instrument, it needs to be operationalized in domestic law.

The reference in the preamble and purposes of the act lay the groundwork to say that this bill is an expression of a segment of the implementation of UNDRIP. It doesn't pertain to the implementation of all the obligations in UNDRIP, because there are many others that don't pertain to languages.

The reason for the reference to section 35 is that it's another layer of fundamental rights that we and our partners felt needed to be recognized there. It's a bit like a funnel. You have the broad international obligations that are filtered through our Constitution and become *du droit normatif*, as we say in French, or specific obligations that are provided for in the legislation. It's a structure for going from the most general to the specifics of our Constitution, and then to the obligations that are laid out.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: So you feel it's accurately reflected in clause 6 as well.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Yes, definitely.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: If there is a conflict, they will come back to the minutes of this meeting to ensure that it's there. Hopefully, we'll be able to review that.

I have a second question.

Clauses 1 through 11 are about the values and the organizational structure. Clauses 12 through 30 are on the office of the commissioner of indigenous languages, and its operational part. There's an enormous amount that is vested in the commissioner's responsibilities. I think there can be three directors.

Can you tell us how the commissioner and the directors will be appointed? Who will have responsibility for that? As I read this, it seems to me they will have a profound impact in terms of the interpretation. The values are laid out, but they're the ones who make it all operational—the people they appeal to and all the challenges associated with that.

Then the final part, clauses 43 through 49, are a shared thing, where the minister puts out an annual report.

Clauses 12 through 30 are significant, and they all relate to the commissioner of indigenous languages and that office. Who will be in that office? How will they get there? How will they carry out their responsibilities?

• (1720)

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: They will be appointed by Governor in Council, based on consultations, as we mentioned earlier, with a variety of indigenous groups—I will not say “diverse”; I will say “a variety”—in order to make sure the commissioner is acceptable to indigenous people.

The commissioner will be supported by three directors who will also be appointed by Governor in Council to represent a distinction base: one that will be first nations specific, one Métis and one Inuit. They will each hold office at pleasure for five years, and they will act fully independently.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Sorry, my time is running out.

Will they be nominated from across indigenous peoples? Will each be putting forward a name and the Governor in Council will make a decision?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: The minister will be in charge of consulting to come up with a short list and a recommendation to the Governor in Council.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: There are terms of reference as to what those people's skills will be, their background, or the support of their communities.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: That's right, bearing in mind that the commissioner will be the CEO of that organization, while the directors will have the function of supporting, on a distinction base, the various groups—first nations, Métis or Inuit.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I'm assuming that the commissioner and the three others will be indigenous people. Or are you saying that's not...?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: I think that's probably a given.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: It's probably a given?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: I don't want to state that, because it's going to be based on the consultation. Some people may decide that the person doesn't have to be indigenous, but I think most likely they will be.

For example with the tax commission, from which some of the obligations have been borrowed, the leadership is all indigenous.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I have one really fast question. I'll go really quickly.

The Chair: You're still not going to get an answer to it, because you're out of time.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: There's a sense of urgency—

The Chair: We'll have time to get to Mr. Long's questions. Maybe he can share some time to get that one in.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Okay.

The Chair: We're going to Mr. Yurdiga now, for five minutes.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Once again, thank you Madam Chair.

Ms. Laurendeau, we understand that you went through a consultation process of some sort. Can you clarify when that process started? Obviously, it took some time. It didn't happen last week.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: I will ask Mélanie and Stephen to tell you that. There were two phases. In the first phase we looked at how we were actually going to proceed. That phase lasted from 2016 to 2017.

Ms. Mélanie Thériège: It started right after the Prime Minister announced in December 2016 that we were going to enact an indigenous aboriginal law. Following this announcement, I think, the department started working with national organizations to determine how we would go about engaging with people.

In June 2017, there was the announcement of how we would work. This is when the early engagement started. Canadian Heritage and each of the national indigenous organizations started to engage with indigenous language experts. One of the things we all heard through the engagement process was that we needed to go through an intensive engagement; more engagement was needed at the community level. Then it started. I think throughout these engagements, whether in the early days or later on, there was dialogue around self-government and modern treaty partners. There were invitations to make presentations at different conferences, there were different.... Any time anyone wanted to talk to us, basically we would be there. I wouldn't say it was at the end; it was throughout.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

We heard about first nations, Métis and Inuit, and all these people belong to a group. You did mention Métis government. To me, that's referring to the settlements where they are recognized as a governing body. Many of them are societies, so I'm not sure.... For example, the Métis Nation of Alberta is a society. There are a lot of people who are indigenous who don't belong to a society.

How much are the future consultations, when we're trying to develop guidelines, going to cost? How are we going to roll it out and so forth? What are your plans? What are the second steps? Who are you going to consult? What's the time frame? There's a large group that you guys are missing and that's the Métis. The Métis don't belong to any particular group because you have to be a member of a society and the only governing body, like I said, was the settlement. How are you going to address this?

• (1725)

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Part of it will be addressed with.... Earlier I mentioned that there are groups in urban areas that actually support various indigenous people. They're not necessarily doing it based on whether you're first nations, Métis or Inuit. They will actually support various groups, and within them, they often support linguistic programs or cultural programs.

Mr. David Yurdiga: I understand that.

Did you meet with the settlements yet?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: The Métis settlement? I don't think we met with them, no.

Mr. Stephen Gagnon: No, but we did hold sessions in Alberta specifically for Métis. I don't know if anyone from the settlement showed up. Certainly people from the—

Mr. David Yurdiga: They're a separate body, so a separate invitation would have to be made.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Nothing would prevent them from actually engaging with us.

Mr. David Yurdiga: If they knew about it.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Yes, that's true.

Mr. David Yurdiga: I don't get invited to some meetings because I don't know about them.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Fair enough. They would, however, qualify to sit down and make an agreement with us; that's for sure. Clauses 8 and 9 would allow for that because they are an organized group; they actually have capacity and they certainly would qualify for that.

Mr. David Yurdiga: The Métis settlements are large, the group and the land mass. That would be one of the groups I would have focused on.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: That's a good suggestion.

Mr. David Yurdiga: You're dealing with Métis societies but you're not actually dealing with the Métis government, which is a settlement. I think we missed an opportunity.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: That's a fair point.

Mr. David Yurdiga: You can get a different perspective, so I would really encourage that you reach out to the settlements. I think you'll get a different perspective on a lot of things.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: I think that's an excellent suggestion and I thank you for raising it. We will do that.

The Chair: That brings you to the end of your five minutes.

We get to go back to Mr. Hogg, who had two quick questions.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Mr. Yurdiga, I think your comments are very salient, but I also think that the office of the commissioner, as you've described it, is probably the place where that sensitivity will be found. They're the ones who can operationalize it, much more so than as part of the legislation. I think that's what their task is. That's what their job is, as I read the clauses. Am I correct on that?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: You're totally correct on that.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: The second thing I was concerned about was what it says in part of the preamble:

Whereas 2019 has been proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the International Year of Indigenous languages to, among other things, draw attention to the critical loss of Indigenous languages and the urgent need to maintain, revitalize and promote Indigenous languages;

I've been hearing there's a fair amount of consensus in terms of the urgency of this. Given what you've heard, is it your sense that this is something we could actually get through the House and get done in the next...? I don't think you're prescient enough to be able to say that, but based on what you're hearing from the committee, are you feeling you're pretty close to what is being asked for?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: It's not an easy question for me as an official to answer. It really depends—

Mr. Gordie Hogg: It's a technical question.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: To be clear, I think it's very doable. There's a high level of consensus in many places. Of course, I cannot presume to know the level of consensus among parliamentarians. That's why there are those discussions, but it's fair to say there's a high level of consensus about the urgency and the need to act.

We can always improve, through the five-year review, and look at how we could do better. The missed opportunity would be to wait even longer.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: The United Nations is saying how urgent this is and we're hearing it from the communities as well. There will be a review that happens every five years. That is contained within the legislation.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: That's correct.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I'm feeling some solace and hope that we can actually get this through, so that the aboriginal communities can actively make decisions for themselves through the commissioner, rather than having us sit here and do that.

• (1730)

The Chair: That brings us to 5:30 p.m.

Thank you very much to all of you for coming to help us with this legislation. It was really helpful to have your background on it.

We are going to suspend for half an hour, but I'll ask everyone to be back at the table at six o'clock, when we will continue with Clément Chartier, President of the Métis National Council.

• (1730)

(Pause)

• (1800)

The Chair: We're going to get started again.

With us now, by video conference, we have Clément Chartier, President of the Métis National Council.

Thank you for being with us. I know we had a little time change with you, but it's really helpful to have you here.

Mr. Clément Chartier (President, Métis National Council): Yes, thank you.

The Chair: Why don't we get started with your presentation, please.

Mr. Clément Chartier: Yes, thank you.

As you know, I've appeared before your committee in the past and I've given an explanation of the Métis nation and the people, our geographic territory and so on. I won't get into too much of that, other than, again, to reaffirm the Métis nation is a distinct people. We have a distinct language known as Michif, although many of our people still speak other indigenous languages. For example, in the Métis village of La Loche, the Métis there speak Dene. In the Métis village of Île-à-la-Crosse, many speak Cree. In other provinces, particularly Manitoba, many of our people speak Saulteaux. So it's not only that the Michif language is important to us, but Michif is the official language of the Métis nation. Our nation is located in western Canada.

I know the legislation also addresses the need to redress grievances or historic wrongs, and the Métis nation is no different. We remain to see reparations from Canada, particularly with respect to the relocation of our peoples within our homeland. We became internal refugees within our own homeland, dispossessed of our lands and resources. We're the subject of a unilaterally imposed system, which we dispute, which so-called extinguished our title and rights to our lands and resources and to our harvesting rights. So I guess we have reasons to celebrate this bill going forward.

In particular, we also suffer the consequences of residential schools. As I've mentioned in the past, I was a former student of the Île-à-la-Crosse boarding school. I was there for 10 years. We still have to be dealt with by Canada. Of course, many of us were severely affected by that experience. We were also victims of the sixties scoop and the exclusion of many federal programs and services provided to other indigenous peoples over the years. Finally, with the Daniels decision in 2016, and the federal government clearly being viewed as having a responsibility, or at least the jurisdiction, to deal with the Métis on a nation-to-nation, government-to-government basis, I think we're currently on a level playing field, and that's a good thing.

Over the past three years we've seen unprecedented growth in the relationship with the Government of Canada. Through the current Prime Minister, we have the permanent bilateral mechanisms, which for the first time in the history of the Métis nation led us to budget 2018, where we are now in a substantial way on a distinctions-based approach, provided programs and services to citizens of the Métis nation, services we did not have in the past. Of course, we're looking forward to budget 2019, where we are hoping we will have further allocations to the Métis nation.

We've waited a long time for this to happen, and it's finally happening. We're particularly pleased that this government has engaged us on a nation-to-nation, government-to-government basis through a partnership between us in areas such as co-development of legislation. This particular piece, the indigenous languages bill, which hopefully will end up being an indigenous languages act, was co-developed, as I say, with the national representatives of indigenous peoples and nations, the Assembly of First Nations, the

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Métis National Council, the national government of the Métis nation. I think this is unprecedented.

We have been engaged in a meaningful way, not just with consultations but actual co-development, at both the political level and at the officials level. I sincerely thank Minister Joly and Minister Rodriguez for the work they've done, and the Prime Minister for his accepting at the outset that he must deal with us in a distinctions-based approach, first nations, Inuit and the Métis nation, and also recognizing section 35 as a full box of rights and that the inherent right contained therein includes the right to our languages.

• (1805)

Over the last 25 years or so, the Métis National Council and its governing members, particularly Métis Nation-Saskatchewan through the Gabriel Dumont Institute, and the Metis Manitoba Federation through the Louis Riel Institute, have been working quite diligently on looking to recapture, revitalize and promote our languages to be spoken once again. Unfortunately, I would say we have less than 1,000 fluent Michif speakers in our homeland. The majority of them are over the age of 65. The Gabriel Dumont Institute has been doing a good job, as has the Louis Riel Institute, on capturing the language on video and through audio. They produce videos and printed materials to help promote the language.

I notice that member of Parliament Georgina Jolibois, from the riding where I live in northwest Saskatchewan, is present. She'll know that the Métis village of Île-à-la-Crosse has been very active in ensuring that the language is kept alive. This year they're celebrating their 20th anniversary of language in the school. It's a big year for them.

I believe this piece of legislation—this act—is something that will be of significant benefit to indigenous peoples and nations, particularly to the Métis nation. We know that it will enable us to be further engaged with promoting and preserving our language and having a space in the larger picture within Canada. The language and our cultures are so important.

This is where I come back to what I've said before. The Métis nation is not a people of mixed ancestry. Perhaps it was initially, but we evolved as a distinct people and nation with our culture, language and our political consciousness. We are a polity. We are a cultural group. We're not simply people of mixed ancestry, which is a notion we totally reject. Of course, we know there are others in this country now stepping forward claiming the label of Métis. We just want to ensure that this doesn't confound matters as we move forward.

In closing, I want to remind the committee that the Métis nation will be celebrating. I use the term “celebrating”, because over the past three years, we’ve had such tremendous progress with this current government that we can celebrate—not just mark—the 150th anniversary of the Métis nation joining Canada through the Manitoba Act as the fifth province of Canada. We can actually celebrate, because we have cause to celebrate. We look forward to celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Canada-Métis nation relationship next year.

With that, I'm prepared to respond to any questions that you may have.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you. It's good to have you with us again.

We will go to Mr. Long for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good evening to my colleagues. I can't believe I'm saying good evening, but it is good evening.

Thank you for your presentation.

I'm fascinated by this. I still feel somewhat of a rookie on heritage, but the study of indigenous languages absolutely captivates me. I tried to do some background reading. I learned that there are more than 90 indigenous languages, apparently, across this country.

I saw a quote from Armand McArthur from Pheasant Rump First Nation. He speaks Nakoda. He talked about his pride and passion and how he feels it has been his responsibility to teach others, to preserve his language.

I am thrilled that Bill C-91 recognizes the constitutional rights of indigenous people, including indigenous languages.

Can you touch on how important Bill C-91 is to you? What will it do to strengthen the culture, passion and history of indigenous groups and their languages right across the country? Perhaps you could start with that for me.

Mr. Clément Chartier: Yes. Thank you.

It is very important. Language is such a critical part of who you are as a people, and in this case, again, the Métis nation. The language, Michif, is such an important language to us, as are other indigenous languages, as I mentioned earlier, that some of our people speak.

Ours is a rich culture; however, like other indigenous peoples, we have suffered many years of oppression, of repression of our rights and, in the case of the Métis nation, of exclusion, including exclusion from the comprehensive claims processes; exclusion from the specific claims processes; exclusion from, for example, the first nations and Inuit health branch—there's no Métis there; and, exclusion from a lot of general programs and services that were provided to other indigenous peoples.

We were excluded from, first of all, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and from the Prime Minister's apology. We were excluded from the mandate of the TRC and, as I say, because of that, we were excluded from the recommendations, al-

though we do benefit from the recommendations, this being one example of that.

After all of these years of exclusion, marginalization and repression, still today we're persecuted or prosecuted for exercising our harvesting rights, our hunting and fishing rights.

When you have a government or a Parliament that is prepared to recognize at least part of who you are—and in this case, an important part, a language, that's so very important to us.... If we can't enjoy our own languages and our own cultures, in the end, while rights are important, they become meaningless if you cease to be who you are as a people. This is going to very much fortify the respective cultures and languages of indigenous peoples and nations.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you very much.

I also want to get your opinion on the funding. We did have Minister Rodriguez in here earlier. I asked him about the government's commitment to long-term funding over years to preserve indigenous languages. Can you give me your thoughts and insight as to how you would like to see that funding spent? How would you like to see it allocated? Potentially, it could be province to province or indigenous group to indigenous group. Can you give me any insight? Have you given any thought to that?

My background is business. I still like to call myself a bit of a fiscal conservative. There's always going to be that adage, can we afford to do this? I say that we can't afford not to do it, so I want to get your insight as to how you would like to see the funding roll out.

Mr. Clément Chartier: It's a question that I've been pondering for a while. The easy answer is to just put in several billions of dollars and we'll work it out, but I know that's not going to happen.

I know there are many languages. Some are endangered. Some are extinct. People are trying to revitalize some. It's going to take a lot of work. There's no easy answer to that.

Our past experience has been with the previous fund, which wasn't adequate. For various reasons, the Métis nation had a difficult time accessing it. We've been marginalized for so long in the federal system that when it comes to the Métis or the Métis nation we have a much more difficult time doing that.

About two years ago, I did write a letter to the then minister of heritage without really putting a lot of dollars and cents to what I was doing. I was basically suggesting that a Louis Riel institute or Michif institute be established with an endowment fund of perhaps \$80 million, and we would work from that in terms of doing the things that needed to be done. I don't know if that's enough money, but we need to start somewhere.

I believe this bill is going to set the foundation for us moving forward. The amount of monies that we'll eventually be able to get is something that still needs to be discussed, but it has to be substantial. How much, I don't know, but we all feel that our languages are important, and they are important to us, but how do you weigh that? What's the balance? We just need to work it out.

I think what we have right now with this co-development, this partnership, if I can use that term, will enable us to move forward on the issues of financing. I wouldn't want to see the issue of financing hold up the bill, because we do need a foundation. We do need the recognition that this bill gives us, but of course we need to find ways to move forward in the long run.

• (1815)

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you for that. We can't afford not to do this, and I'm very supportive. I thank you for your time tonight.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Blaney, you have seven minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Good evening, Mr. Chartier, and thanks for being with us via video conference.

I was outside as you made your opening remarks. Can you tell me a little bit more about the Métis language. I believe you call it Michif. Can you tell me a little bit more about its origin? Is it still spoken and if so, by how many? Where can we learn it?

I saw on the Heritage Canada website some basic words. Could you tell us a little bit just to get me started with Michif, if I can put it that way?

Mr. Clément Chartier: Initially, the genesis of the Métis nation was through the fur trade and basically the voyageurs from primarily the Montreal and Quebec area. Historically, the mixed ancestry people evolved as the Acadians further evolved inland as the Québécois, and it's only in the far reaches of western Canada where the Métis evolved as a distinct indigenous people.

Through time, we developed the language known as Michif, basically for simplicity. The nouns are French and the rest of it is primarily Cree. It's a new language developed within the Métis nation, the Métis people. The Gabriel Dumont Institute and the Louis Riel Institute have been doing a lot of videotaping and putting out materials to capture that.

Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in North Dakota was actually the first one to put out the Michif dictionary back in the late 1970s, I believe. A lot of the people on that Indian reservation still speak Michif, still play the music and still dance, but they are not recognized as Métis in the United States. You're either an Indian or you're not, but our nation still extends there.

There are somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 1,000 speakers left, but they are all getting older, like 65 and older. There are initiatives like the one at the high school in Île-à-la-Crosse. For the last 20 years, it has been teaching it in the schools.

It's starting to come back, but we certainly need assistance to enable us to go forward. We need to find ways and means to do that.

• (1820)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Absolutely. Of course, we support the bill and the spirit of the bill. As my colleague said, we are fiscally conservative about it.

We've been speaking of the past, but going forward, how do you see the promotion, the preservation of the Michif language? How can this bill help? Today, we had some presentations from the minister and the department, but it wasn't clear on how it will unfold. They say they are talking to their partners regarding the way to make it more concrete. What is your vision on what form it can take? How much is needed for the Métis nation?

Mr. Clément Chartier: Essentially, the Michif language is concentrated in the prairie provinces. We have our governmental infrastructures along with our cultural and educational institutes. I'm from northwest Saskatchewan and many of our schools are in our Métis villages. They are trying to deal with the language issue.

Given the fiscal capacity, our educational institutions would be able to begin enhancing what they are doing now. I would like to see our youth having camps, language nests, and actual exchanges with Québécois youth, because we share some common history and it's important that we continue having that relationship. French, while the pronunciation is a bit different, still has some roots with the Québécois.

There are just ways that we need to get to our people. We need our dances and songs captured and revitalized. I know our music has taken off with youth tremendously. We need to somehow replicate that with respect to language. We need to find ways to do that and to interest our youth once again to get involved in that.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I would like to ask one last question, if I may, Madam Chair.

You have mentioned that it is important to feel recognized as a nation by the government, which is a representative of the Crown. Can you tell me about the importance of that bill in terms of recognition of the Métis nation and its culture? You've alluded to it, but maybe you'd like to add something more about what it means to have the Parliament of Canada adopting this bill for the Métis.

Mr. Clément Chartier: Recognition is very important. We've been put down and marginalized for so long.

One big step forward was during the Charlottetown round in 1991-92. The Right Honourable Brian Mulroney came to Winnipeg during that process, and he recognized the Métis nation, which was good. Through that process also, with the Right Honourable Joe Clark we were able to have a side deal to the Charlottetown Accord. It was the Canada-Métis Nation Accord.

That recognition, then, was there. Also, Mr. Clark introduced in Parliament a resolution recognizing Louis Riel as a founder of Manitoba and recognizing the contribution Riel made to Canada; this was good. The Right Honourable Paul Martin picked that idea up during the Kelowna round. For us, those kinds of recognition are good.

This last three years particularly with the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau and the nation-to-nation, government-to-government relationship have really buoyed our people. We're looking to have that kind of recognition moving forward. It's very important to us. It's good for our psyche. It's good for our future. It's good for our children to hear it. We have very proud cultural activities in our communities through music, dance and also through our symbols—the flag and the sash, for example.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now be going to Ms. Jolibois for seven minutes.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you.

Mr. Chartier, do you personally speak any languages—

Mr. Clément Chartier: Yes, I speak English.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: —besides English?

Mr. Clément Chartier: I can speak Michif; I can speak Cree—not fluently, which is very unfortunate, because I'm one of those victims of the residential schools who have not been recognized. I was at residential school for basically eleven and a half of my twelve years in school. I then had another four years of getting my university, at another boarding school type of system, until I was 21. I'm basically not proficient in the language.

• (1825)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: You mentioned that in northwest Saskatchewan, there is Michif. Île-à-la-Crosse is a Cree community and La Loche is a Dene community. Then when you go into—

Mr. Clément Chartier: No, I would disagree.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Let me finish before I ask you a question, because I'm thinking Batoche has different linguistic groups who identify themselves as Métis. I want to know how, if they were to apply for funding for specific language retention, you would envision that process.

Mr. Clément Chartier: Thank you.

Of course, Georgina, you know very well that La Loche is a Métis community, as is Île-à-la-Crosse.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Yes.

Mr. Clément Chartier: It's just that La Loche happens to be Dene speaking—

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: That's why I say the community—

Mr. Clément Chartier: No, it's not a Dene community; it's a Dene-speaking Métis community.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Yes.

Mr. Clément Chartier: You were once one of us at Île-à-la-Crosse.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: That's right, but it's a Dene community.

Mr. Clément Chartier: If you go to Île-à-la-Crosse and tell them they're a Cree community, they'll say, “No, we're a Métis community, but we speak Cree.” They used to speak Michif when I was younger. They spoke Michif in Île-à-la-Crosse. Even in La Loche they spoke Michif at that time, before your time.

The way I see it happening is that there will be a Michif language fund and Île-à-la-Crosse certainly will take advantage of it, because they teach Michif in the schools.

You called it Cree. That's fine; you can take it up with them—they're your constituents.

I would see Cree and Dene speakers and Saulteaux speakers within the Métis nation applying for those funds as well.

Basically, there is room for everyone. There's no point in denying your Métis ancestry because you speak a Cree language or a Dene language.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: It's really important. We have to clarify, because elders would say otherwise. It's so important to validate what the elders say. I have heard elders from Pinehouse to Île-à-la-Crosse who said “a Cree”, and then they used Michif.

How do you foresee educational institutions such as Gabriel Dumont Institute having access to funding?

Mr. Clément Chartier: I would say that my preference would be that the federal government enter into dialogue with the government of the Métis nation, and that we have an allocation for the Michif language, or languages, and that we would ensure then that our governments—in the case of Saskatchewan, the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan—have the monies to allocate to their institutions. The Gabriel Dumont Institute, which is the forefront of the language in our province—and you know GDI very well—would have, I think, the lead in this language initiative. But places like Île-à-la-Crosse, which is celebrating their 20th anniversary of Michif language—and you could say, no, you're wrong, it's not 20 years of Michif; it's something else; but that's up to you.... They're celebrating their 20th anniversary this year, so we see the mechanism being that those on the ground would be instrumental in moving forward. In fact, it must be primarily or initially through Métis governments. We deal with our institutions in the same way that the federal government would deal with its institutions.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Is the Métis government the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, the area directors, the local presidency office and then the settlements? When you say Métis governments, is that who you're thinking of?

Mr. Clément Chartier: Yes, primarily.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I have seen some documentation talking about the Métis population. Anyone east of Ontario having the identity of Métis is still an issue, or not identified within the Métis National Council or nationally. How do we solve that issue, especially if they identify themselves as Métis and want to apply to teach a language?

• (1830)

Mr. Clément Chartier: All we can say is who we are. The historic Métis nation, of which you are a descendent, is based in western Canada. We extend into northwestern Ontario, northeast B.C., the Northwest Territories and the northern United States. That's our geographical homeland. We are a distinct people, not anything else. There are people in other parts of Canada who are saying they're Métis and using the dictionary definition of mixed ancestry. Now, what they would apply for, I don't know. Perhaps they want to learn Haudenosaunee or Mi'kmaq. I don't know what they'd want to learn, but they certainly would be applying there. They wouldn't be applying to a Michif fund, because Michif is the language of the historic Métis nation.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I'm looking for clarification on that, as my colleagues here would also require clarification on it, I would think, especially when we're talking to some of our colleagues, our MP friends from out east. They would require clarification. We would look to you to provide that for us and with us.

The Chair: That is the end of your time.

We'll now go to Mr. Hogg for seven minutes.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Thank you, Mr. Chartier. You've been a little more articulate and you've filled out a little more on the issue of the impact language will have on the overall community well-being than a number of the other witnesses who we've heard.

Could you articulate that a little more broadly? The legislation talks mostly about language, language being the foundation, but as you've described it, I think you're referring to the whole well-being of a community, and you've talked about dance and song, youth and children, future, symbols and all of those things. Can you kind of wrap that up in terms of how you would see the language impacting or providing a foundation for a number of other senses of well-being within the Métis nation?

Mr. Clément Chartier: Basically, it's a holistic approach that's needed. This is just one of the pieces.

With this current government we've been engaged in the permanent bilateral mechanism which deals primarily with programs and services. In last year's budget we had somewhere around \$1.5 billion in terms of early learning, child care and housing. In this upcoming budget we're looking at allocations for health and education.

That's one piece of it. We also have section 35 rights and reconciliation tables that Minister Bennett is engaged in with our five governing members. We're hoping that leads to dealing with section 35 rights.

We also have, of course, the co-development of legislation, this one being one of them. We also have the child and family services potential legislation in the works. That was co-developed as well. Unfortunately, it's very sad that the framework legislation on the

recognition and implementation of rights framework is not proceeding. I'm not sure; perhaps it is, but I haven't heard much about it.

For the Métis nation we require something like that because we've been excluded from the comprehensive claims process. We've been excluded from all these processes. We need to have a process that engages the Métis nation. We would have hoped that would be in place.

Now, in terms of this particular bill, the "whereas" clauses are quite favourable to the Métis nation. It recognizes that languages are one of the rights that are protected by section 35 of the Constitution. It makes it clear that the indigenous peoples who have these rights are those who are contained or mentioned in subsection 35(2), which of course includes the Métis nation. So, it's incremental.

It also recognizes that it's based on the principles contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and in the 10 principles that the federal government brought out last year.

We're moving forward, in a way, on a holistic basis. Again, this is only one piece but it's such a critical piece. Language is so important. You've heard that over and over again from everyone who comes forward. If we could get this building block accomplished at this time, and if we can get other building blocks brought forward as well, eventually we will get to a place where we can truly say within Canada that we have a country where everyone is accommodated; everyone is helping to build this nation, or these peoples, and we're moving forward.

I've been engaged in international—

• (1835)

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Can I interrupt you there?

Mr. Clément Chartier: —indigenous politics for many years, since the 1970s. I've seen the conditions in other countries, particularly South America and Central America, and other parts of the world. When I travel, I'm proud of Canada. There are a lot of things I don't like about Canada. There are a lot of things that Canada has done particularly to the Métis nation, but when you look at it from the perspective of the reality of the world, Canada is a leader in the world.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: May I interrupt you?

Mr. Clément Chartier: But the more that Canada can do the better.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Sorry, I have two more quick questions.

One, I think I heard you say that this bill will set a foundation for going forward. You didn't want to see budgeting holding up the bill. You wanted to see some sense of urgency. You made some references to UNDRIP, which I think has done the same thing. Did I hear you correctly in terms of your sense of urgency with respect to this?

I'll ask you my second question while I'm at it. I can pick up on Madame Jolibois' comments.

I see that some of the participants in the consultations indicated a need for each distinct language group to be represented: one commissioner for first nations languages, one for Inuit and one for Métis languages. Others stated that this was not adequate and preferred a model that had regional indigenous language commissioners, which I think you started to articulate a little bit.

Do you have a preference between those two?

There's also the issue of a sense of urgency on the foundation going forward.

Mr. Clément Chartier: Well, the sense of urgency is from the perspective that here's a piece of legislation that's positive. It's urgent only in the sense that it's needed to protect our existence as distinct peoples. That's the only urgency I see.

In terms of the mechanics of it, well, that's something that can be worked out into the future. We have these long debates. At this particular time I wouldn't want to see the bill held up because of how the commission should be made up or who should be on it.

As far as we're concerned, one commissioner is fine, with three members. Now, how those three members are picked, who they are going to be, I don't know. I would hope that it is reflective of subsection 35(2) and reflects first nations, Inuit and the Métis nation. That's something we'll deal with when we get to it.

Again, I wouldn't want to see this held up because of the mechanics of that, because that can always be changed.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Mr. Yurdiga for seven—no, for five minutes.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was hoping for seven minutes, but I'll take five.

I'd like to welcome our guests.

It's a very interesting conversation we're having. I thought I had a good grasp on who is Inuit, first nation or Métis, but I'm more confused now about the Métis, because during the conversations, not all Métis are Métis unless they're registered through some registry. Can you clarify that?

For example, I know a brother and a sister and one has membership in the Métis organization and the other does not. Does that make one Métis and the other not? We need to clarify that, because it's a real struggle for most people. People who identify as Métis may not be classified as Métis in your eyes.

Mr. Clément Chartier: Let me put it this way. The government of the Métis nation has adopted criteria as to who is eligible to be registered as a citizen of the Métis nation, not who is of mixed ancestry—we have no control over that. Pretty well all indigenous peoples in this country are of mixed ancestry, but they're not Métis.

In terms of us, we do have registries, yes. The Métis Nation of Alberta has a registry, and of course you're from that province. Those who meet the criteria are registered as citizens; they have that right. If they don't meet those criteria, then they're not registered, because they're not part of, or citizens of, the historic Métis nation. They may be people who have moved—in the case of Fort

McMurray—from Newfoundland, for example, or somewhere else in the east. They would not qualify.

When you say a brother and sister, I don't know the exact circumstances of that, but it seems strange to me. Either the one should not have been registered or they both should have been registered.

Basically, when we talk about the Métis nation, we're talking about a distinct people based in western Canada, although some now live in other parts of Canada, and they're entitled to be registered as citizens of the Métis nation. If you're in Australia, you're entitled to be registered. It doesn't matter where you live in the world, as long as you're a descendant of the historic Métis nation, as long as you're entitled to be a citizen. We're going on the basis of nationhood as a sociopolitical group and as a historic people.

● (1840)

Mr. David Yurdiga: Just to clarify, I'm looking at this and wondering is it more registry over genealogy, or genealogy has nothing to do with it, and it's all registry?

Mr. Clément Chartier: In order to be registered as a citizen, you do have to have a genealogy that provides evidence that you're a descendant of the historic Métis people, Métis nation. You do have to have genealogical evidence, or evidence that you are a descendant of the historic Métis nation. In my case, the scrip documents are a help, because my grandparents and my mother, who was two years old in 1906, received half-breed scrip, or Métis scrip. You can use those documents to prove that these people were part of the historic Métis nation, but there are other ways and means as well, through census and so on. In the late 1800s people were registered Métis and first nations who were under the category "R", I guess for red, so there are ways to prove it.

We demand that there be proof, though. People can't just come up and say they're Métis without having proof that they are.

Mr. David Yurdiga: The point I'm trying to get across is a lot of people do not choose to register. They're still Métis; their parents are Métis. If they want to register....

The way I understand it is the Métis nation is a society. Correct me if I'm wrong. It's a society, and people register to the society. What do we call the people who aren't registered? Are they Métis? Are they some other identity?

I think we should put more emphasis on genealogy than registry, from my perspective anyway. If they self-identify, they have Métis lineage, mother and father are Métis and they're registered, but the children decided not to go that route.... We have to make sure we don't alienate a person who identifies as Métis and who is Métis through bloodline and now we're saying they're no longer Métis because they're not registered. We have to be careful on drawing lines in the sand and not acknowledging people who are Métis but choose not to register.

The Chair: Okay, well that brings us to the—

Mr. Clément Chartier: I'm not sure where you're getting that from. We've never said that. If you're Métis, you're born Métis, you're always Métis.

What we're doing is registering our people. We have registries, so if you want to register as a citizen of the Métis nation, you're free to do that. If you don't, well, you're still Métis. You still have the language, if you have it. You still have the culture. You can still participate; it's just that you're not registered as a citizen of the Métis nation, and about the only thing that won't give you is the right to vote in the elections. Other than that, you're still Métis.

I don't know where the confusion is coming from.

The Chair: That brings us to the end of Mr. Yurdiga's five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Breton, you now have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank our witnesses today.

Your testimony is greatly appreciated. I have a few questions about the Aboriginal Languages Initiative.

I don't know if you've had an opportunity to read the entire bill. Clause 11 stipulates that federal institutions may request translation and interpretation services. Could you tell us which departments or documents should be given priority for these translation and interpretation services?

• (1845)

[*English*]

Mr. Clément Chartier: That particular provision is of less significance to the Métis nation, because we don't have the mass that speaks the language, and so I would see that provision being more for the Inuit, for example, who currently have translation services in many instances.

The only place where I would see need for interpretation services is in the court system, and basically provision is made for that already when some of our elders need to be witnesses in court cases.

Other than that, that really does not fully apply to the historic Métis nation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton: That's very good. I understand that this doesn't necessarily apply to you.

Under the Aboriginal Languages Initiative, the department obviously manages the program and supports projects and activities that promote these languages in the communities. Has the organization you represent already benefited from this program and, if so, can you describe its advantages or how it could be improved?

[*English*]

Mr. Clément Chartier: Our governments and their institutions do try to take advantage of the program that's there, but it's such a small amount. My understanding is that we were lucky to get a few thousand dollars over the past number of years until just recently. This is why there is such a need for this languages legislation, such a need for Canada to give the importance and the weight that are not only desired but also deserved, in terms of preserving the languages.

In terms of how much is necessary to revitalize these languages, this is where our experts are going to need to be able to make that assessment, but I know it's going to take a substantial amount of money, at least at the outset, if we're going to capture revitalization of all the indigenous languages that are currently under threat of extinction.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton: I have one last question. In your opinion, which are the various indigenous governments, other indigenous governing bodies and various indigenous organizations that should be consulted in the process for appointing the commissioner by the Governor-in-Council and on recommendation of the minister, in accordance with clause 13 of the bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Clément Chartier: My position, the position of the Métis nation, is that there are three national representatives of indigenous peoples and nations, and these are the three that the Prime Minister invites to first ministers conferences. We believe that we should be dealt with on a government-to-government basis on these intergovernmental relationships and that, at the end of the day, we, Métis nation government, have the responsibility to consult our people to come up with solutions that will benefit our people.

I would believe that the way to do it is to work through the respective governments or representatives of indigenous peoples and nations. We have the mechanisms, and those mechanisms should be used. We should no longer not recognize section 35 and the inherent right of self-government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Breton.

[*English*]

It is now Mr. Shields' turn for five minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's great to have you here at committee again. I appreciate your knowledge and your passion.

One of the things that you have talked about is the consultation that did occur prior to the legislation being drafted. You've alluded a little bit to the consultation that comes after. For my part, what might you think of the process afterwards, in particular the financial aspect? How do you see the system working in the sense of, three years from now, how do you think that system would look in the sense of financially working? What would be the process? How would it get to where it needs to be? Could you describe what you think might happen three years from now as far as the financial aspect goes?

• (1850)

Mr. Clément Chartier: Of course, a lot depends on the outcome of the election this year and who the people are controlling the Commons, but I think we have a process currently in place, the permanent bilateral mechanism, which I would hope will become permanent regardless of which party is in power.

We have agenda items that we deal with. This process has brought us to the stage where the Métis nation, through its governments, has been able to access monies for programs and services in the budget, and we're looking at this year's budget for education, for health and a few other things.

There's no reason that same process cannot be used in terms of languages. For the Métis nation, it's much easier because we're one people, one nation. We have one government, national government and five provincial governments. We have the infrastructure. Everything is in place that needs to be in place. I would hope that in three years there will be a substantial amount allocated to the Métis nation in terms of language preservation.

Mr. Martin Shields: That money and the need for it... You describe yourself—and I understand—as one body. Would you identify the need, or would somebody else bring that need to you? Would the money flow to you and then to others, or would it flow directly to those who established the need specifically?

Mr. Clément Chartier: The need is by our people, by our nation. We have a system. We've been meeting on this for at least 25 years, and we've had some pretty good conferences. That was cut back to practically nothing during the previous administration, and we're rebuilding once again. What we see is our governments—and these are governments—getting the resources. We would then, within our governance infrastructures, our systems....

In Saskatchewan, as I say, we have the Gabriel Dumont Institute, which is a champion of the language. You have different initiatives like the Île-à-la-Crosse school. They work together. They know where the need is. They know how to get things done.

We wouldn't want to have 100 places all acting independently. We need to have a national approach that is carried out on the ground, the same way as Canada does. We have national programs or the provinces have provincial programs. We have the infrastructure. We just need to implement that. We know best where the services are required.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You still have two minutes.

Mr. Martin Shields: That's good.

The Chair: That will bring us to the end because we're going to need to have a bit of time to set up for the next group.

I would really like to thank you for appearing before us once again and helping us out with this legislation.

Mr. Clément Chartier: Thank you.

The Chair: We're going to suspend for a couple of minutes, because it's going to take us a little while to get to the next panel.

• (1850)

(Pause)

• (1905)

The Chair: We're going to get started. Thank you, everyone, for being here.

We have with us today, from the First Peoples' Cultural Council, Tracey Herbert, Chief Executive Officer; and Suzanne Gessner, Language Manager.

We also have with us Marsha Ireland and Max Ireland. I'm going to try signing "welcome". I think that was welcome.

Ms. Marsha Ireland (As an Individual):

[Witness spoke in Oneida Sign Language, interpreted as follows:]

Thank you. That's awesome.

The Chair: We will begin with the First Peoples' Cultural Council, and then we will go to you.

Thank you.

Ms. Tracey Herbert (Chief Executive Officer, First Peoples' Cultural Council):

We acknowledge the traditional territory of the Algonquin people. We thank you for the invitation to discuss this important bill.

I am Tracey Herbert from St'uxwtews First Nation of the Secwepemc Nation in B.C. I have the privilege of being the CEO for First Peoples' Cultural Council, and I'm here with my colleague, Dr. Suzanne Gessner, to offer recommendations to the standing committee for consideration.

Let me start by saying that for many years, indigenous peoples have had a strong desire for legislation to protect our languages. I'm so happy to be here today with you to discuss how we can work together to strengthen Bill C-91 so it can support the work we need to do as Canadians to revitalize the languages that come from this land we now call Canada.

The First Peoples' Cultural Council is a first nations-led provincial Crown corporation with a mandate to support the revitalization of first nations languages, arts, culture and heritage in British Columbia.

The organization provides funding, resources and training to communities. We monitor the status of first nations languages. We also provide technical advice and policy recommendations for first nations leadership and government.

The introduction of Bill C-91 is a concrete step towards reconciliation by the Government of Canada. We're very pleased to see this bill. We support legislation for languages.

I'm going to speak to a few key amendments that could strengthen the bill to make it more responsive to the needs of indigenous communities and languages. A full list of amendments has been submitted to the committee in writing.

I want to start with the preamble, which states:

Whereas the Government of Canada recognizes that all relations with Indigenous peoples must be based on the recognition and implementation of their right to self-determination, including the inherent right of self-government;

In contradiction to this recognition, the bill specifies that powers, duties and functions resulting from the act will be carried out by the minister or the commissioner. We therefore recommend the establishment of a national indigenous language organization governed by indigenous experts at arm's length from the Department of Canadian Heritage and the office of the commissioner.

This organization can support this work and would develop a national strategy for indigenous languages. I'll underscore three main reasons for its creation.

An organization is needed to provide broad, comprehensive management of the bill's implementation. A national organization can protect funding and programs into the future if government changes, for example, based on the model of the tri-agency, the CBC or the Canada Council for the Arts. I also see the development of an organization as a strategy for ensuring ongoing investment in indigenous languages.

As well, it will keep the implementation of Bill C-91 at arm's length from government, political organizations or the commissioner, and empower language experts and technicians to lead the work.

First Peoples' supports the creation of a commissioner to raise the profile and the value of Canada's indigenous languages, modelled after the Commissioner of Official Languages, with primary roles of ombudsperson, auditing and reporting.

While these roles are already specified within the bill, it seems that the commissioner is also meant to play a role in supporting efforts to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen languages. In order to effectively monitor the work, the commissioner needs to be independent from those supporting and carrying out the work.

The commitment to providing adequate, sustainable, long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of indigenous languages in clause 7 is crucial. However, this clause currently describes a non-specific consultation process to be undertaken by the minister in order to meet the objective of funding. This denies indigenous self-determination, and the process as described will prevent effective and efficient distribution of funding.

- (1910)

As we see it, the biggest challenge with Bill C-91 as it's currently written concerns the provision of funding. Bill C-91 creates only an obligation for the Minister of Canadian Heritage to consult on the subject of funding. It does not create any obligation for any amount of funding to be provided. We want to see long-term financial sup-

port for our languages. Our elders, knowledge keepers, speakers, language teachers, learners and those with expertise and commitment must have access to resources. Ultimately, the bill must guarantee investments that respond to the needs of indigenous communities and are protected from shifting government interests.

We recommend that the minister must fund a national indigenous language strategy in order to meet the objective of providing adequate, sustainable, long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of each indigenous language in Canada. The proposed national organization could work in collaboration with the minister to develop a strategy and funding framework.

First Peoples' also wants to shed light on some omissions.

First, indigenous languages in Canada include sign languages, which have been marginalized even more than spoken languages. They must be given explicit recognition.

Second, more than 50% of indigenous people in Canada live away from home communities. Indigenous peoples have the right to their language no matter where they reside. This point needs to come across strongly in the bill. Urban-based programming must be included in a national strategy.

Third, the ownership of intellectual property rights of each language must be protected. For example, clause 24 of the bill discusses research activities that may be undertaken by Statistics Canada or Library and Archives Canada. We do not support this clause of the bill. No non-indigenous entity should hold or curate indigenous knowledge. We recommend that the principles of ownership, control, access and possession with respect to indigenous languages be clearly outlined in the bill.

Finally, what are the indigenous languages being given recognition? A schedule should be added that lists the languages to which the bill applies. Regulations could set out the criteria and processes for adding languages to the schedule.

We support legislation to recognize and revitalize languages. We respectfully ask that you consider our recommendations to strengthen Bill C-91. We have outlined several key points for consideration of amendments. Our two main arguments are that the implementation of Bill C-91 must be led and directed by indigenous people, which we suggest could be done through the creation of a national organization. The wording of the bill must obligate adequate, sustainable, long-term funding. It is not enough to consult about funding. We need a commitment to funding to make this work happen. In our experience, working in partnership with community, we know that language revitalization is entirely possible when supported by sustainable long-term funding.

Kukstec-kuc for listening. First Peoples' has a web page with multiple resources on legislation. We also have research providing detailed costing estimates. I know that there was some discussion about how much this is going to cost. We're very happy to assist the standing committee and the minister in any way we can.

Thank you.

● (1915)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Marsha Ireland, please.

Ms. Marsha Ireland: *Shekoli*.

[*Witness spoke in Oneida Sign Language, interpreted as follows:*]

I am Teyuhuhtakwiku. I am Haudenosaunee. I am Oneida Nation, and I am Turtle Clan.

I have been working with the Oneida Language and Cultural Centre in revitalizing Oneida Sign Language.

I will share with you that through colonization my language, my culture and my identity have been lost. Our language, our culture and our identity have been strengthened through the revitalization of Oneida Sign Language. We live here on Turtle Island and we need to consider all of the languages of Turtle Island, including sign languages. Through decolonization, I'm able to reclaim my identity, reclaim my people and reclaim my cultural ties as an Oneida person.

When we work within the two row, there is respect given for each other and we don't cross each other's paths, but respect that each brings different things to the table and also that we move along through this journey side by side.

I will share with you in comparison some of the differences between American Sign Language, which is used with the majority of deaf people in Canada, and Oneida Sign Language. The first one I will give you is "a celebration" or "a ceremony" in ASL, which is like so. However, in OSL, it is identified by showing a fire, the people around the fire and calling to the Creator, which really is what identifies with our culture.

I've jumped ahead in my speech, but I'll come back a bit and share with you our thanksgiving address. In our thanksgiving address, we give thanks for Mother Earth and for the strawberries and medicines, sacred tobacco, the water, trees, animals, the birds, and Grandmother Moon, the sun, the stars, the thunders and the four beings. We give thanks to the Creator.

● (1920)

We need to encourage all those within Turtle Island to develop their indigenous sign languages and work together.

Again, we come back to that two row wampum, where we work together side by side, but our paths do not cross.

Thank you for inviting me here today to share with you my experiences.

Yaw^ko.

Mr. Max Ireland (As an Individual): Good evening.

Marsha's father was a chief in a longhouse. When she was a young girl, she would attend a lot of ceremonies, when she was available, because she went to the school for the deaf in Milton, Ontario, but that's another sad story.

When growing up in that society, as she showed you, the celebrations would carry on, much to her chagrin and her non-understanding because there was no person there to explain to her what was going on because it was spoken in the Oneida language. Even if—much like with Debbie today—there were an interpreter there, when the Oneida language was spoken, her hands would just drop and then wait until English was spoken again. That part of being that close yet so far removed from our language, our culture, our traditions, our songs and our dances has impacted Marsha a great deal.

We have five children who are deaf: three girls and two boys. We have nine grandchildren; seven are deaf and two can hear. When Marsha was a child growing up, there were many instances when she was alone. She was the only native girl at Milton, so you can imagine the treatment she got there. She was never good enough and always was looked down upon.

Look where she is today. I asked her the other day, "When you were a little girl, did you ever envision coming to show the Oneida language to a standing committee on Parliament Hill?" She said, "No, never." But we are here today, through her commitment, her effort, her being an elder within the deaf community who is looked up to, and her strength to keep going on this route, to walk this road that no one has ever walked before.

We've travelled across Canada. Marsha is the eastern Canadian representative for indigenous deaf women in Canada. That honour was granted to her two years ago in Edmonton because they've seen the qualities that she has shown here tonight: her commitment and her love for the language and for her people.

It's like when she said *shekoli* a while ago. It's not evasive. It's not in your face. It's down and it's away. It's a sweeping hand gesture. A lot of our gestures are like that. We've taken from the natural world and incorporated it into what we do to be non-offensive, to encourage you to come, look and learn. We've provided those opportunities for ourselves and our family.

Our family has driven this because, like I said, the number of our people is 14. However, in our community, it might add up to 20. The Oneida has a high number of deaf people, and we've been encouraged by them. Now the hearing population of Oneida is coming through, as well, with its teachings of the language. People are saying that they can remember more easily when they use sign language, that it helps them. We can see a definite improvement in the revitalization, in the fire, the rekindling of our flames for our language.

• (1925)

What I was saying earlier was that *shekoli* is like that. That's "hello", and the next words, when you meet someone, are *skana'kó: ká*, and that means, "Are you well?" That's the beauty of our language. The love in our language is that almost immediately you ask a person how they are, truly, and not just how are they doing and walk away. No, it's "How are you? Are you well?" In return it is asked of you, "Are you well?"

We have come to a point where our youth are picking that up again. For a period of time I got mad at my dad, when I was younger. I said, "How come you never spoke the language to us, to my brother and me?" We had to go with our grandparents to really get an understanding of our language. I was really mad. He said, "I never wanted to teach you something another man could beat out of you." After he said those words, I wasn't mad anymore.

That's the direct effect that colonialism has had within our people, within our families, within our structure.

Now we're regaining that back to the point that whenever anybody talks about youth, not only our youth, but other youths as well, having no respect, well, in learning that language and learning to put those words together, that teaches you respect right there. You carry that out. Elders respect you and they encourage you to learn more, because that's the way they were brought up. Their first language was Oneida. That's why it's so important that we can carry this on and Marsha can share that with her grandchildren.

I say that because she was such a lonely little girl. Now, together, we've made our own little tribe where she is not alone anymore. The strength, the compassion, the understanding, and the caring that are in our language we try to incorporate into our signs.

She showed "animal". An animal will paw for its food, and it will paw at the ground. In American Sign Language a bear is this way; ours is this way. He will leave his mark on a tree and you'll know he's there, so you'd better watch out unless you want to meet him.

Insect, bug, in American Sign Language is this way, and ours is like this, because that will draw your immediate attention: "Oh, there is a spider on me, there is something crawling on me, and it's probably an insect." We have tried to take our natural world and combine it into our gestures, into what we can present to *Kwan ni'y'oht*, the smallest, to *Kwan ni'y'oht*, the biggest of our people.

I hope with the demonstration we have put on here today we will help you to understand that.

Yaw^ko Thank you.

• (1930)

The Chair: Thank you.

We are now going to begin our period of questions and answers.

We are going to begin with Mr. Hogg for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Thank you very much.

I'm not going to ask, "Are you well?" because by your actions and your words, you sound very well.

Mr. Max Ireland: It's just my throat.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Is it?

We're honoured to have you here.

Mr. Max Ireland: Thank you.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Marsha, your commitment and love for your language and your people come through clearly. You said your culture and identity were lost, and through the strength of language, they are coming back. Through decolonization, you're reclaiming your identity. Clearly that's what all of us hope for, being able to reclaim identity for those who have been lost, so thank you so much.

Ms. Marsha Ireland: [*Witness spoke in Oneida Sign Language, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Tracey, you said that implementation must be led by aboriginals and certainly we've talked about this through the course of our testimony. We've talked about the principle of policy-making, that it must ensure that those people the policy will impact have the majority, if not all the say, with respect to it.

The legislation lays out the appointment of a commissioner and people who will sit with him who are appointed directors, and they will be given the authority to carry out the responsibilities. Can you define how that would be different from how you would see the organizational model going forward?

Ms. Tracey Herbert: Yes, thank you.

We see a difference between the work that needs to go on to support making revitalization happen and the work of a commissioner. Again, they're the ombudsman. They take the complaints. I don't think they necessarily are the best option to support communities to deliver language revitalization programming across Canada.

First Peoples' is more than a grant-maker. We also provide training and a lot of support and work in partnership with communities to gather language data. We publish the status of languages report every four years. We've trained 475 people on language revitalization this past year alone because of the \$50 million in funding that we received from the Province of British Columbia. We work with our advisory committees, our indigenous Ph.D.s and specialists, to develop plans and strategies that create outcomes that are going to result in language revitalization, strategies such as immersion through the mentor apprentice program and language nests.

It's complicated work and it can't happen without support. You don't solve the problem just with funding. There also has to be collaboration. As my elder, Marsha, just said, we have to walk side by side and collaborate over tribal areas where we share a language. Individual first nations need to work together, and we need to share our resources and support each other, and first nations people who have a desire and a passion for their languages should be supported to learn those languages no matter where they live.

I see the national organization as a strategy to have the opportunity to invite indigenous experts in revitalization to guide the work to support people across Canada as they're revitalizing their languages, similar to First Peoples'. We have a limited role, not taking up a lot of money, because I think that's what we had discussed in our consultations. People weren't keen, and I certainly wasn't keen at first because I thought we have what we need in B.C. We're taken care of. But there is a huge value in coming together across the nations and collaborating and sharing and supporting each other in this work, and I think that's only going to happen if we have a national entity.

• (1935)

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I'm going to share my time with Randeep Sarai. Do I have time for one more question?

The Chair: No, you only have two minutes and 15 seconds.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: I'll accede to Randeep.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you to all of you for coming.

Indigenous language and language itself is a subject very dear to me. I pride myself on learning the language, and it's probably because of multiculturalism when I was younger. Similar to what Max said, people like my brothers, who are much older than I am, originally didn't want to learn the language and neither did I. When you're younger, you want to assimilate—not even integrate; you want to assimilate—as fast as you can and shed any differences, but later you realize those differences are awesome, and they're what makes Canada great.

I feel one of the challenges with this bill has to do with the number of languages and the small number of people who speak them. Recording, revitalizing and maintaining them will be the biggest task, and I think we're going to have to look at some very innovative and modern ways to preserve them. It's not going to be your conventional professor or teacher. You're going to have to digitize in a very interesting way because there are a lot of dialects. I hadn't thought about sign language before.

I want you to be aware of that, and I think your point that the indigenous should not just be consulted but that they should spearhead this is very important.

Why do you have a great concern that the data itself should not be in the hands of StatsCan, but in the hands of indigenous handlers themselves?

Ms. Tracey Herbert: Thank you for that question.

I just want to address diversity first. In British Columbia we have—

The Chair: I just want to give you a heads-up that you are already almost over time. Could you keep just to the data and work in the other information in other answers?

Ms. Tracey Herbert: Okay, sure.

There hasn't been a great experience with partnering with linguists and universities with regard to data. A lot of academics have worked with indigenous communities and copyrighted materials and then not made those materials available back to indigenous peoples. It's a huge problem. We have dictionaries. We work and provide all the data and then have to buy the dictionary from a non-indigenous linguist.

Library and Archives Canada got \$20 million off the top of the new aboriginal language initiative money that came out. I honestly think that money should have gone directly to communities. If someone is going to curate and hold data, it should be indigenous peoples. At First Peoples' Cultural Council we have the FirstVoices.com program. It's software that allows indigenous communities to archive and collect their data. They maintain all the control and ownership of that data. Then it can be manipulated, pulled into curricula and apps, and all kinds of really innovative things because it's online.

To say that our language is safe in other people's hands is something that causes us great concern. We can't lose the control of our languages. We've lost so much already in terms of land and children.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Blaney, you now have the floor.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Ireland, I enjoyed your speech very much. It is the only time we have all had to put our smartphones down to listen to you.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: There is no translation.

Hon. Steven Blaney: What I said, Martin—

Mr. Martin Shields: You can say it again in French now.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I will say it in English this time.

We didn't need an iPhone when Madam Ireland was speaking because we had to really pay attention. That's certainly big progress for all of us.

• (1940)

[Translation]

My questions are for Mrs. Herbert.

What you are presenting to us is really a model of what we want to do on a national scale, an entity that promotes indigenous languages. Can you tell us a little bit about your experience, your organization and how you support communities in various ways? You used the word “revitalization” a lot. Can you give us some details on this process and the financial aspect? Today, we agree in principle, but we are wondering how to proceed. I think you can shed some light on that.

Mrs. Tracey Herbert: Thank you.

[*English*]

The model I was thinking would be similar to First Peoples', and we have really gone into the role of what that organization would look like in our full publication which we have made available, but we do see the role of the commissioner as separate from the role of the national organization. That organization could be governed by a board and also an advisory committee.

Hon. Steven Blaney: I want to hear from your organization about where you started and what you did. This is actually what I believe you are doing at the smaller level than what we would like to do. Can you tell me about your model?

Ms. Tracey Herbert: Sure. We started in 1990. We're a provincial Crown corporation. We have a board of directors of 13 directors and then we have an advisory committee made up of a representative from every language in British Columbia. Our mandate is to revitalize language, arts, culture and heritage, so it's a holistic approach to cultural revitalization.

In early times, we supported cultural centres and found, though, that in order to support the languages we needed to support more organizations, more types of organizations, and shifted to supporting and prioritizing language revitalization. For many years we had a very limited budget. We were supporting 32 languages and 90 dialects with about \$1 million a year. We acted as a non-profit, raising money, bringing in resources from multiple sources. In some years we could have up to 11 different funders.

Over time we worked with communities to identify the types of strategies that worked to revitalize languages. We decided to focus, in 2006, on immersion types of activities and focused on creating speakers in the community through early childhood development and language nests, through mentor-apprentice. We are now, in the last few years, really focusing on supporting communities to develop language plans where they collaborate with other communities that share the same language and focus on investments that are in multiple domains. One could say we have a school, that we're teaching the children, and revitalizing the language, but in fact, one needs to invest in multiple domains from baby all the way to elder in order to revitalize the languages.

We're really trying to shift with the \$50-million investment from the B.C. government. We were able to share the story of how languages could be revitalized through a business plan that talked about the different areas we would invest in. Again, all these ideas and programs come from this reciprocal relationship with the community, because communities are the experts. We'll try something and they'll say that it doesn't quite work and we need to make a shift.

Hon. Steven Blaney: One difference I see is you mentioned this holistic approach and the link between language and culture. Do you see that in what is proposed and is it important? It seems that language is always linked to a culture.

What are your thoughts on the fact that we need to link language and the culture? Do you take that into account in your approach?

Ms. Tracey Herbert: In our approach in British Columbia?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Yes.

Ms. Tracey Herbert: Yes, though, as a small organization your priorities reflect the funding that you have. I can say yes, we try to take the holistic approach but, for example, we have a mandate of heritage and we currently don't have any funding for heritage.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Okay. This \$50 million, is it over a year or is it multi-year?

Ms. Tracey Herbert: It's for three years.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Okay.

I will turn to Ms. Ireland and Mr. Ireland.

How do you see that this policy, this law, could support in particular your initiative of the Oneida Sign Language? How would you see it materialize specifically?

• (1945)

Ms. Marsha Ireland: [*Witness spoke in Oneida Sign Language, interpreted as follows:*]

When we recognize indigenous sign languages, then we encourage language and culture, but when we also look at accessibility one of the issues that has been there, as Max, my husband, spoke to earlier, is that interpreters would come and not know the language. We have access but we don't really have access, it's this facade of it. If we start to roll it out, it's revitalizing sign languages within each tribe or each language within its own dialects and it would be throughout Turtle Island.

There are many people who are still suffering in that colonization state. When we're looking at our future, I don't want our future children to have to go through the same things that I've had to go through. I don't want them to be confused. I don't want them to feel a lack of identity or a loss of culture. I want them to feel strength and identity in their culture and language.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Max Ireland: On your earlier comment about language and culture, you have to have one to go with the other, in my opinion. I'm from the Haudenosaunee, as was mentioned earlier. In order to open the doors to our longhouse, words have to be said before we can even go in. If those words aren't said, those doors aren't opened.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: We are now going to Ms. Jolibois, please, for seven minutes.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I want to validate our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Ireland.

Thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for reminding us that for the indigenous languages from first nations, Métis and Inuit across Canada—the big Canada that we live in—we have to do some work with those languages across Canada to make sure that they have.... You reminded me about the people even in my riding, the people from the Cree, the Michif and the Dene to the other people. It's really important, so I really appreciate your doing that.

From the B.C. perspective, thank you for providing that perspective. It's given me a sense of hope in terms of what B.C. is doing and the work and the suggestions, even the suggestion around the legislation we're talking about, to strengthen it, and I'm pleased that the government is open to strengthening it and looking at the funding. It's a good direction. Thank you.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Do you want me to keep going?

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I echo everyone's testimony by saying how fascinating this presentation was.

Mrs. Herbert, as I understand it, you find it problematic that amounts are not specified in the bill. You would like to be able to determine the importance that will be given to this bill and these measures. There is talk of opening an office for a commissioner and three directors, but until the approach of this office is clarified, it will be difficult to associate an amount with it. This leads me to say that we may be putting the cart before the horse.

Would you have liked to have seen more details on the type of actions that communities want to see happen in their communities? I apologize for being a spoilsport, but I have a feeling that this is a rush to introduce something before the next election.

• (1950)

[English]

Ms. Tracey Herbert: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Those are good questions. We are working with the AFN on a structure for the budget, so I'm not too concerned about that. I think that piece is going to come together quite quickly.

What I'm concerned about is the legislation not saying that it's obliged to have that funding in it. Also, part of the idea of having the national organization is that the organization could come up with the plan for the distribution of the funding and how to support

communities to have successful projects, and how to take a community development approach with training and for coming together and having a national conference. There are all kinds of fantastic things that organization could do and that really need to happen.

I really want the legislation to go forward. I would hope that we could make some amendments to strengthen it. Part of the idea is that it seems to me that currently all the decision-making about who gets funded and how much money there is rests with the minister and the commissioner, and in British Columbia that's really delegated to the First Peoples' Cultural Council.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Blaney mentioned this earlier; I would like to know what kind of actions this office could sanction and support. Couldn't we draw inspiration from your structure?

Tonight, it was your interventions on the bill that seemed to me to be the most concrete. I find that a relief. Heaven knows we have mistakes to correct. There are three principles of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that we must apply. I believe we must be as efficient as possible.

Should we be inspired by the way your organization operates?

[English]

Ms. Tracey Herbert: The national organization and the office of the commissioner need to be separate.

What would be great to emulate from our model is to bring indigenous experts and technicians together, give them the opportunity to influence the type of programming that happens, and enable them to be the voice for the languages across Canada.

I do feel that our political organizations play a role in developing policy and legislation, and they've done really great work to get us this far. However, the implementation needs to stay with our indigenous experts from across Canada. There are many of them, and they are the most hard-working and committed people I know. I have never worked so many weekends in my life since I started in this job because of those people. They have been committed to working toward this their entire lifetime.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Even evenings like tonight.

Ms. Tracey Herbert: Yes, even evenings like you.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will now move on to Mr. Breton.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will share my time with Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. and Mrs. Ireland, thank you for your heartfelt testimony, which expressed a lot of passion from the heart. I was very touched by your testimony. Could you tell me how this bill affects you? There is, of course, a direct impact on Canada's indigenous languages.

Mrs. Ireland, could you give me your opinion first? Mr. Ireland could speak after that.

[English]

Ms. Marsha Ireland: [*Witness spoke in Oneida Sign Language, interpreted as follows:*]

We see in Canada it is a bilingual country, so there are opportunities for English and French everywhere. However, indigenous languages have been left on the sidelines and sign languages have been even further left behind.

This process is really about bridging relationships and allowing people to have their identity and strength within their own language, instead of looking to the majority who are speaking either English or French.

This has become quite a barrier for us, for sign languages and deaf indigenous people across the country. They are even further ignored or put on the sidelines and forgotten.

This really is about our country honouring the truth and reconciliation process and allowing us to have our identity and culture.

• (1955)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Breton: Go ahead, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, dear colleague.

Mrs. Herbert, I am a francophone from New Brunswick, so I am of Acadian descent. The battle for languages and the identity of culture through language touches me very much. It is my reason to be, and I imagine it is the same for you.

We heard from some witnesses earlier. We talked about a lot of things two hours ago. There are at least 90 indigenous languages in Canada, and 75% of them are at risk.

The purpose of the bill before us is to support indigenous peoples in the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of their languages. You said earlier that you didn't think that clause 7 is strong enough because it talks about consultation.

I'm not going to have a legal debate with you. The first two sentences may not be strong enough, but the minister really insisted that the bill is based first and foremost on what the indigenous communities have argued. The primary purpose of the bill is to meet the needs of these communities, and not the other way around, meaning that it is not the government that imposes its vision.

Correct me if I'm wrong or if you disagree, but clause 7 states that the minister must consult the diverse communities. It states the following:

[English]

in order to meet the objective of providing adequate, sustainable and long-term funding for the reclamation, revitalization, maintenance and strengthening of Indigenous languages.

[Translation]

Doesn't this second part reassure you?

[English]

Ms. Tracey Herbert: The consult just isn't strong enough. I feel there's still no obligation to fund it. All they're saying in that clause

is that they're going to talk to indigenous peoples about the funding and about what might be required.

Mr. René Arseneault: It says “in order to meet the objective of providing”. Well, okay. Maybe we disagree on that point.

Ms. Tracey Herbert: I did have that question, and I did consult a lawyer, in fact.

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm a lawyer too.

Ms. Tracey Herbert: His advice was that I was right, that there is no obligation to fund. That is a concern. I'm just saying it needs to be strengthened.

Mr. René Arseneault: I have only one minute. We didn't hear from Ms. Gessner.

In what field is your Ph.D.?

Ms. Suzanne Gessner (Language Manager, First Peoples' Cultural Council): Linguistics.

Mr. René Arseneault: That's what I thought. My question is specifically for you.

We have a French academy in France. I'm not from France. I'm not from Belgium. I'm not from a Franco-African country. I'm an Acadian from New Brunswick. There is that big institution called l'Académie française. Sometimes they move on with new definitions, new words, and we're not necessarily in accord with that or happy about the way it evolves.

Do we have something similar to this, on a smaller scale, obviously, for all the 90 and more languages in Canada? I'm asking because I'm from eastern Canada, and I know that Mi'kmaq, like sign language, has many ways to say one word. Mi'kmaq is in the communities surrounding Quebec's Gaspesian coast, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, etc., as well as in northern Maine, and they seem to have some difficulty in all those communities in agreeing on certain words.

Could there be a tool financed through the act? Would that be a great idea—or maybe not at all—to fund an institute like l'Académie française?

• (2000)

The Chair: Unfortunately, that really brings us through the seven minutes.

If you have a yes or no answer, or if you want to provide an answer in writing, that would be great. Thank you.

Ms. Marsha Ireland: [*Witness spoke in Oneida Sign Language, interpreted as follows:*]

Can I jump in?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Marsha Ireland: [*Witness spoke in Oneida Sign Language, interpreted as follows:*]

I have a question for all of you.

I can see that this standing committee has representation from a variety of people. If you included indigenous people within the process, and indigenous deaf people, it would become an excellent tool to resolve all of the issues that you've stated.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm trying to learn a couple of bits here.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, everyone.

[*English*]

That brings this panel to an end.

Mr. Nantel, you had shown verve to continue on with discussion with the committee. You have all of the witness notices until the end of this week. The clerk can tell you all of the people who have agreed and been scheduled, just so you have a list, but there are a lot of invitations that are still in the process.

Would that satisfy you just for tonight?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It would, just for tonight.

Thank you.

The Chair: To the witnesses, thank you. I appreciate your being here.

The meeting is adjourned.

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