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The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

This is the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We are continuing our study on community capacity building on reserves.

We want to welcome our guests here on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people. Canada is in a process of reconciliation, and everyone here around the table is very cognizant that this is an important step in rectifying historic wrongs, and that the process will take an effort from all of us.

We will be hearing from Mr. Howard Grant, who is the executive director of the First Nations Summit Society.

Welcome, Howard.

You have up to 10 minutes to present. After that, we'll have questions and answers until the time is up, in just under one hour.

Whenever you're ready, you can begin.

Mr. Howard Grant (Executive Director, First Nations Summit Society): Thank you.

First, I want to say thank you to the committee for giving me the time to present to you today in regard to the capacity of first nations in Canada, but more particularly in British Columbia. I'd also like to say thank you to the Algonquin people for allowing me to have such an audience with you today.

Having said that, I believe we submitted a presentation to you. Rather than go through the presentation myself directly...

I should apologize first of all to say that Christa Williams, who was at one point the executive director of the First Nations Public Service Secretariat, is unable to join us today for health reasons. In B.C. we have bronchitis, pneumonia and whatnot and it's sad to say she's one of the people who have been afflicted.

I thought I would give you a bit of background on who I am. My name is Howard Grant, and I'm the executive director of the First Nations Summit Society. I'm also a member of the chief and council of the Musqueam First Nation in British Columbia. I've been on council for 37 years. I'm an ex-bureaucrat. I worked for Indian and Northern Affairs from 1984 to 1993. I had the opportunity to work within the federal public service for a number of years. I'm also an

ex-band manager. My whole life has been within the bureaucracy of government and first nations.

My traditional name is Qeyapalanewx VI. It was my great-great-great-grandfather who met Captain Vancouver in 1791 and Captain Narvaez in 1792. We have a long history in British Columbia, particularly our first nation, recognizing that we've had 300 years less contact with the European population and, therefore, having had the clear opportunity to maintain a lot of understanding of our complex governance system that was in place prior to the usurping of that with the European culture and the Indian Act. I was blessed and fortunate to have conversations with my grand-uncles who were 106 years of age in 1952, so 1848.... I'm talking about individuals who probably met the first Europeans. I'm only one example of a number of other people on the west coast to have such a luxurious background.

Having said all of that, I was a recipient of Indian Affairs program and service delivery as a young child, not knowing that government was there providing so-called resources. I also became a delivery agent as a band manager and also a policy-maker within the federal government in regard to how one would provide services to first nations.

In 1970, first nations started to take on program and service delivery, first of all, just handing out welfare cheques and whatnot rather than having to stand in line at a district or regional office. Then they allowed a salary level of approximately a CR-2 level. I don't know if you're familiar with government structure, but that CR-2 level was maintained throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, and from that period first nations and the federal government started to delegate more and more of their responsibility to first nations and their institutions, but again always looking at a CR-2 level, a very low clerical level position.

In the mid-1980s they decided they would give more responsibility to first nations to manage those programs, and asked for reports that looked at the management of those programs. Whether or not they utilized the information is not relevant at this point, but the significant point is asking them to manage something at a PM-5 and higher level, but still at a CR-2 wage scale. There was non-recognition of that balance.

In 1970 in British Columbia approximately 6,000 federal employees were delivering some kind of service to first nations. That also included teachers, etc.

●(0850)

Then the government, through Mazankowski, decided to downsize. With that came the fact that government downsized to where it is today with regard to about 300 people within the former department of Indian and northern affairs. There are about 8,000 first nation employees currently on staff at various first nations in British Columbia, but recognize that they are still at a CR-2 or CR-3 level salary base. Take those things into account, and recognize that those first nations people are still enjoying the luxury of having a minimal wage scale, if not less than that, but being asked to provide senior management with guidance, advice and reports. That's the back-grounder to what I have to say.

Then you also have a government policy that was established in the late 1960s and early 1970s. That policy states, "to provide...for status Indians living on reserve under the Indian Act...comparable to...Canadians..." in regard to services and programs; "to negotiate... forms of self-government...which increase Indian control and management..."; "to remove barriers and to facilitate Indian access to the economic expertise, capital and markets..." of the world; "to negotiate comprehensive claims..."; "to satisfy legal obligations..."; "to fulfill the terms of self-government legislation and associated formal undertakings..."

That is just a snapshot in regard to the policy of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada in the 1970s. We fast-forward to today and those policies now are what you call something new under the guidance of reconciliation, but they have always been there. The recognition of government as a whole—to recognize that they had that fiduciary—and a horizontal approach were non-existent up until most recent times.

Even today, that is still a fact. Most governments, most federal departments, acquiesce and say, "No. That's an ISC or a CIRNAC problem. Hand it over to them." Yet there is the realization that the Prime Minister sent a mandate letter to every federal department, and those departments still today are not acknowledging that recognition and relationship that is required.

Having said all of that, we have to look at how to build capacity. We in British Columbia, under the First Nations Summit, created the First Nations Public Service Secretariat, recognizing that there was a need for something more. This secretariat was created a number of years ago under the regime of Gordon Campbell, former premier of British Columbia. We came to the federal government and asked for their support in regard to creating a two-pronged approach. The federal government said, "No. Sorry, but we're not into that." That was 10 years ago.

We fast-forward to today. The federal government has come to a recognition and a realization to some degree that they need to re-aggregate, reposition, reconcile and work towards first nations self-determination, but under whose definition? Under whose definition do we define reconciliation?

True reconciliation requires the recognition of first nations governments under the Constitution, recognizing that there is a true nation-to-nation relationship that is required and, in order to have that relationship, to enhance the opportunity of first nations with their government structures. That's the requirement. So how do we

build those kinds of relationships? It's through reconstituting, rebuilding or building a first nations public service, to regain a better understanding in regard to their complex governance system.

Indian and Northern Affairs from 1970 to today has tried to impose a European style of governance. They say that public admin is public admin. That is not necessarily so. We have to recognize that first nations are unique. Their circumstances are different. Carleton teaches federal public admin and the University of Victoria teaches provincial, but we have to deal with federal, provincial and municipal. On top of that, we don't have the institutions that all of your governments have in regard to supporting Crown agencies and business development.

●(0855)

We have a responsibility as a first nation to look at how we maintain our fiduciary, and at zero risk, so a first nations public service is a full requirement. I'll conclude by saying that we clearly recognize that four pillars are fully required. The first is senior management; the second is financial; the third is human resources; the fourth is in regard to records information management. Those are the clear four pillars that we've come to realize are full requirements.

With that, I want to conclude by saying that we have to ask tomorrow's questions today.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Questioning will open with MP Mike Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Actually, I'd really like to give you the opportunity to expand a bit on the four pillars that you discussed and the way you see in terms of how we need to evolve into those four pillars. We've tried since the 1970s and it hasn't worked as well as we'd like it to. I'd like to see you expand a bit on how we can solve the conundrum the government has in trying to.... We apply the language of public administration that we've had for hundreds of years, and as everyone knows, indigenous communities are far different, and far different from each other across the country.

How do we take into account the uniqueness of the first nations experience, traditional knowledge and cultural background and build out a public service from that based on the four pillars you've just described?

Mr. Howard Grant: I'll answer your questions by giving examples of what has happened.

For me, as a band manager or chief executive officer of my first nation, I was there for 10 years. I left my community in 1997 to work for the First Nations Summit. From 1998 to today, in my community's case, we've had 11 band managers, or CEOs, or COOs, or whatever you want to call them. All of those individuals had MBAs, MPAs or commerce degrees, etc., but none of them fit into all of those categories, recognizing that when you're at a first nations level, do you completely understand public administration from a federal perspective, a provincial perspective and your adjacent municipal perspective?

On top of that is recognizing zero risk in regard to your Crown corporations that you've created under the land management taxation, etc., and then your business arm external to that, and most importantly, the subtle nuances of cultural activity within the community. When you're dealing with people, especially in British Columbia, whose populations range from 700 to 3,000, your constituents are right in your face immediately if you make an error in judgment. They'll question everything. You've had people make reports in regard to saying that first nations aren't transparent—absolutely wrong. When you make a decision as a councillor or a band manager or whatnot, they're right there, those people who ask these kinds of questions. You have an internal auditor branch, so to speak.

We recognize that those four pillars are so important, but the one that's absolutely missing is records information management. All records used to be held by the federal government. In the mid-1980s, they transitioned and said, “Okay, all these files, Indians, you have them.” You have files that are contained in chiefs' or band managers' houses, in attics, in basements and whatnot, but none of that is in a concentrated area. To get all of that information back into one building to access for daily operations and to recognize how we're moving forward is what's missing.

We need government to recognize those kinds of things. They've placed us into a far, far corner, and we're trying to get out of that corner now. Those four pillars that we've described are just the starting point, because then we have to build those institutions beyond that.

• (0900)

Mr. Mike Bossio: I guess what we're trying to get at here as far as the capacity building study goes, at least from my own standpoint, is what the most effective and efficient way is in order to build out that capacity and to retain that capacity, to retain those services. As you said just now, the changes happen so fast. You were there for 10 years, but since that time there have been 11 changes of management. How do we build out that capacity and how do we retain that? What kinds of retention strategies do we need?

Mr. Howard Grant: There is limited data being collected in regard to the right data. As an example, the government is applauding themselves, patting themselves on the back and saying, “Wow, look at this—from 1985 onward the graduation rate for post-secondary is on the rise.” Absolutely not. If you use the same factors prior to 1985 on reserve exclusively you'd see a decline, because all of the current investment for post-secondary in particular right now is going toward the more urban population, the so-called city Indians. They're taking advantage of that. You had Bill C-31, Bill C-3 and whatnot, and the new Indians and the self-identified natives, and all of those are put into your database, the government database.

Now, that rate looks like it's on the rise, but if you use exclusively on reserve, because those are the people who are going to stay at home.... They're raised there and they're culturally involved. When we send our children off reserve to communities, they lose that in the majority of cases. Imagine sending your children aged 7 to 14, who are living in rural and remote communities, to schools outside of your reserve because there are none there. It's a challenge, and the most important lesson of education is being lost. It's what I call the dinner table talk education. That's the important part. You have not

only the education that you learn from high school or post-secondary, but the cultural side of your community as well that's quite important.

I'll give you an example. We have an individual who is a forester, an arborist, and is trying to manage an economic development opportunity. He saw a grove of trees up on the mountainside and said that we should cut that down, invest and make an economic opportunity, but that was a very significant archeological and whatever site for the community. That resource was never to be touched, but just because the person who was the band manager of the day or the forester didn't realize those kinds of things, it may as well be a non-aboriginal person moving in.

• (0905)

Mr. Mike Bossio: Thank you, Mr. Grant, for sharing your story.

The Chair: Questioning will go to MP Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Grant. You've touched on a number of things.

Urban and reserve education are different. I see in your presentation here that for over 23 years you've had data. B.C., you claim, is the only region in this country that provides this type of in-depth accountability, so how is education on reserves? I look at this and see a lot of numbers, but they're not separated here.

Mr. Howard Grant: Yes, absolutely, and again, it's to recognize how we use that data. Economists are very bright and smart, and they'll use data to support and defend a rationale. Likewise here, it's to ask why isn't it working. The majority of our people, if you read into it, will tell you that the majority of people graduating under post-secondary are in the social sciences: health, education, social development, social work, archeologists, anthropologists, etc. None are in the more demanding areas of economics, finance, public admin and business admin. That's the missing element from a reserve perspective.

In my particular case, we have nine lawyers, and they're all in rights and title, but we need lawyers with tax law, and now we need lawyers under matrimonial real property in regard to divorce and property rights, etc. We're missing those kinds of things, those very on-the-ground substantive issues that affect us economically.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: What does post-secondary education look like in B.C. for first nations? Is there a university for them? We have one in Regina—

Mr. Howard Grant: No, there is no—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Should there be one?

Mr. Howard Grant: There is no exclusive first nations university, but government keeps providing money to these universities for us because they go in with a proposal and say that they're going to develop a curriculum for post-secondary. I'll give public admin as a very good example. Right now, that's the flavour of the day. They create the curriculum, but that's it. You spend \$200,000 to \$300,000 developing a curriculum, but nobody takes the course, so that's \$300,000 not well spent.

You know, the creation of institutions that are much more...and we can't do it online because there is no Internet access at this time for probably a quarter or a third of our communities in the remote areas.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: How are we going to fix this? It has been decades. You've been in the civil service from 1970 on. It hasn't changed much, I would probably say, in your 60 years or so. How are we going to change this when we look at capacity? There is no capacity on reserves, or very little.

Mr. Howard Grant: Yes. I say, take a step backwards. Asking tomorrow's questions today is so important. You ask, "Okay, how do we do this?" We build with tomorrow in mind. Capacity requires us to assess the current situation within the community: what we have, what we don't have and what we need. How do we train the current bureaucracy that's there? As well, then, we need to look at the future and ask, "Okay, how do we invest in that?"

That's how we did it pre-contact. We already knew a child when he or she was growing up, and we knew who was going to be the speaker of the house, who was going to be the artist and who was going to be the gatherer or the hunter and whatnot, because they demonstrated those skills. Society is no different, but what happens is that in society, if you're a doctor or lawyer or Indian chief, your child almost assumes that responsibility. We don't have that. We don't have role models in our community. We don't have a doctor. We don't have a scientist.

Let's be honest. For those of you who have children beyond the age of 21, you've helped them with their homework. You've taught them and you've talked to them every day of their lives. We don't have that. You parachute somebody in. Somebody goes in and says, "I'm going in for my cultural fix once every two weeks of the year." You can't just come home and say, "I'm part of your family", and then leave.

• (0910)

We have to look at those things. We have to invest in that and say, "Okay, which natives are going to live on reserve forever?" Let's invest in those and then, no matter what...because salaries are going to be very important. We lose a lot. I'm in an urban reserve, and a lot of people who have professional standing don't come and work for us because we can't compete in regard to salary.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes. I see that in my city of Saskatoon. They get scooped up.

Mr. Howard Grant: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Then the urban reserves, and we have many, are left holding the bag and they fall farther behind.

The urban-rural issue is a real issue in this country. As you mentioned, they leave the reserve, go into an urban setting and often come back, and we lose track of them. Also, retention of teachers... just everything. That's what we're studying here: How can we move forward on this?

Mr. Howard Grant: Well, you create those incentives, recognizing that salaries are equal. As well, it's to recognize that in the past.... I'll give you an example. Years ago, Indian Affairs, when they still did everything for aboriginal people, had teachers. They said, "Okay, we want you to go into that more rural and remote area." That salary

base was always the same, but they created incentives for those teachers to stay out in those communities.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's right.

Mr. Howard Grant: They had living allowances and those kinds of things. That's not happening right now. You start at that minimum wage for a teacher, and that's all you're getting, period.

The Chair: Thank you.

Questioning now moves to Rachel Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you so much for being with us today, Mr. Grant.

Could you tell us a bit more about the approach you talked about presenting to the federal government, the two-pronged approach around wages?

I hear what you're saying. A lot of the indigenous communities that I'm part of and that I represent talk about a couple of things. They talk about the challenges, as you said earlier, of being able to pay people a good wage. If they leave the community, they get better pay, so that's a challenge. They also talk a lot about the governance structure and the fact that there's been very little investment in helping them grow and develop that structure, because it has changed. Depending on the process of colonialism within their community, the actual impacts can be very profound.

I'm wondering if you could talk about what that two-pronged approach is. Also, how do we look at reconciling the fact that governance structures were attacked by the Government of Canada forever? What resources are needed to build that capacity within the communities?

Mr. Howard Grant: The governance structures.... Again, looking at the definition of the more colonial mindset, you've heard a lot of speeches with regard to this: reaggregation, reconstitution, rebuilding. East of the Rockies there was a formula that described and allowed first nations to have x amount of land, 250 acres per family. That's why you have large communities east of the Rockies of 5,000 to 12,000 acres. Then you move to the west of the Rockies, where the formula changed dramatically. In my particular case, it's 2.5 acres per family. We have the smallest reserve in all of Canada. In British Columbia, the sad reality is that we have 200 first nations, and people are saying, "Well, why don't you reconstitute yourself? You must have had the Coast Salish, the Kwagiulth, etc." No, we didn't.

People keep trying to place us into this category of linguistic groupings. We were more city states as opposed to a nation, and we always will be, so that governance structure has to be recognized with regard to who's defining it and how we build it. We had it before contact and we can have it again post-contact. It's just a recognition of that. Then we need to look at how we work it in a manner that will help first nations.

If you take a look at the federal government, you have institutions that support your good governance structures, the Department of Justice, the Department of Finance, etc. We have created some of those institutions as well, but sad to say, they have followed in the footsteps of government structure, of siloed.... We have the First Nations Finance Authority, the First Nations Financial Management Board, First Nations Tax Commission and the lands advisory board, but they're all siloed.

I took the opportunity four years ago to hold a dinner, and I said to all of those institutions, "Why aren't you working together? Why aren't you promoting and educating the first nations and making them understand so that they can access what you have to offer?" It came to them; a light bulb turned on. They had their first conference last year, and now they're having their second one where they're working together to do those things.

Those governance institutions are needed in every region.

Sad to say, the reality of government, especially federal, is nationalism, a national approach, a national policy. Currently, we've asked that the First Nations Public Service Secretariat be a pilot in British Columbia, but ISC is afraid. It said, "How do we go to Treasury Board and ask for something? We know we're going to get turned down." This is true because the mindset of Treasury Board is the bottom line: How is this going to save money? How is this going to be better?

If you went to a national approach right away tomorrow, it would not work because there's the uniqueness of every region and a complexity—some are matrilineal and some are patrilineal—and we have to allow them to rebuild based on that approach. We can't keep continuously imposing.

I hope I answered your question.

● (0915)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you. I appreciate that.

This is an interesting time. I know that we've seen multiple issues with discussions around who's in charge. Is it elected officials? Is it hereditary officials? I think this is part of capacity building, of understanding, and of how we bring those things together. I'm from B.C., too. A lot of those communities are very small, so they're dealing with the government in a nation-to-nation approach with very limited resources.

Could you speak about the challenge in those communities and what sort of resources or support they need to be able to do that nation-to-nation approach with the federal government?

Mr. Howard Grant: We're not unique in that manner of hereditary.

If you take a look at Canada today, how many of us still pay homage to the Queen of England? I just shake my head. You have the majority of Canada saying, "Well, we don't understand you guys. You have hereditary; you have this, and yet we all are willing to give part of our tax dollar to the Queen of England." That's no different. You can still have the hereditary system in place, and there is nothing wrong with that.

However, we've fast-forwarded to the 21st century, and sad to say, in the hereditary system, the chief is no longer the individual who provides for the community. Therefore, you need a more elected body of individuals who have the skill set, the knowledge and the tools to run a government. There's actually a recognition of that; it's just a matter of how do we communicate that.

The Chair: Thank you.

The questioning now moves to Will Amos.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Grant.

Please continue on that line of thinking. I feel that you had more to say, and I am interested in hearing it.

● (0920)

Mr. Howard Grant: Yes.

The majority of the hereditary system is on the west coast of British Columbia, as opposed to the interior and whatnot. It's working with those first nations. Right now in the news, you have the Wet'suwet'en who have the hereditary system, the elected system, and half of the hereditary chiefs are also elected as well. It does work. It's just a matter of defining it and then looking at who the people will take their guidance from.

We have a Senate. The Senate is very, very important. There are people who have on-the-ground intelligence, the knowledge and the wisdom, I'm hoping, in regard to looking at how we improve Canada and how we don't deface it. We're a country that is considered to be one of the best in the world. You have that responsibility to look at no matter what piece of legislation is coming through and you ask those hard questions.

Likewise with the hereditary system, if I were a hereditary chief, I would be worried about land loss, the environment and the future legacy for my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The oil pipeline is a clear and good example of that. The National Energy Board said it is good for all Canadians; therefore, let's proceed. Excuse me, but is it good for all Canadians? Is it good for it to come through my backyard? I don't think so. We're not getting any economic return on it. But we will have a legacy if the pipe ever bursts.

In my particular case, the Salish Sea, if one of those tankers collides and has an accident, the whole of the Salish Sea will be ruined for 50 years. That's my bread and butter. We won Sparrow under that. Right where we won Sparrow is where they are building Roberts Bank terminal two. Again, we're being denied the opportunity for ceremonial and food access.

So how do we engage with government? That's the challenge. We won Sparrow, and we're the second under conservation to access the Fraser River-bound fish. What did the government do? They negotiated with the Maa-nulth people for the first access of Fraser-bound sockeye. You look at those kinds of things and you ask questions as to how we create a reconciled approach by government looking at other pieces of legislation and other governments introducing legislation that will impact whatever we come to a conclusion on.

Under the hereditary system, I believe that's where the wisdom of hereditary chiefs and chiefs comes into play.

Mr. William Amos: Earlier in this study we had contributions from our Algonquin neighbours, whose territory I represent in large measure. Mr. Norm Odjick spoke specifically to the theme of tribal councils, the need to resource tribal councils, and the challenges they face, linking financing and the work necessary to link various communities within the Algonquin nation. You have proposed a particular set of approaches that would be helpful in terms of enabling access to federal institutions and resources that are used to quite successfully, or reasonably successfully, provide that substratum of government support for the nation of Canada.

What do you see as being the least cumbersome and most cost-effective way of enabling better access to resources that the federal government might have through its different departments and agencies to enable that kind of community support in our indigenous communities?

• (0925)

Mr. Howard Grant: I am sad to say that I am part and parcel of being the author of tribal council funding. Back in the early 1980s, tribal groups amalgamated...or worked together.... They didn't amalgamate; they worked together under a political umbrella. When we downsized in British Columbia, we looked at how we could help first nations. As we downsized, we recognized, okay, we'll create five advisory positions that were already existing within Indian and Northern Affairs. We transferred these five kinds of positions: band financial adviser, local government adviser, economics adviser, tech services and a planner. Within the bureaucracy, those five positions were all at a PM-5 or PM-6 level, but when we transferred those programs, we transferred them at a PM-3 or PM-4 level. What they were supposed to do under a tribal council was work with those member bands to help them develop under those five structures. That never happened.

Again we imposed a top-down approach as opposed to from the first nations side. It became an enhanced subsidy just to make the tribal council a political body as opposed to servicing.

The Chair: Thank you.

The questioning now moves into the five-minute round.

We begin with MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you for coming. Being from British Columbia, the weather here in Ottawa is a bit of a shock for us.

Mr. Howard Grant: Tell me about it.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Anyway—

Mr. Mike Bossio: Oh, suck it up; come on.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: —I have a whole number of areas I'd like to pursue.

First, though, you talked about the first nations-led institutions and how they need to get together. I agree that it's.... I've heard some people say that they need an infrastructure institute. Do you see gaps in terms of what that can look like? How do you see that fitting into allowing autonomy within the group?

Does that make sense?

Mr. Howard Grant: Could you repeat that?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: We have some first nations-led institutions, such as the First Nations Tax Commission and the First Nations Financial Management Board. You indicated there is an ability for them to work more closely together. Are there also some gaps in terms of those types of institutions that would be valuable in infrastructure, for instance?

Mr. Howard Grant: Absolutely. Clearly, one that is missing is data collection, real data collection. If and when we are able to move away from...and go more towards nationhood, nation to nation, somehow we'll have to create a vehicle that will come to Parliament and say, "Here's the amount of money we need." It gets financed and whatever else in terms of allocating those resources. It's defended and it's rationalized. How do we do that? What instrument will be in place for us to do that? Somebody has to go to Treasury Board. Somebody has to go to Finance and say, "Here is the amount of money we need, and here is the data to support our request." Clearly, that is a requirement. I know they tried it in Manitoba. That institution was there, but it became somewhat defunct. I don't know where it sits right now.

Again, we need to recognize that it has to be across Canada. Each region has to have that.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I don't disagree with that. I think there was an attempt, as you say, and it really had challenges. Do you really think there would be an agreement across the country to participate in that kind of...?

Mr. Howard Grant: You're asking a question that's beyond tomorrow's exercise, but yes. First nations have also asked for an institute called the auditor general's office. I don't agree with that. We have one Auditor General who holds Canada to account. You could have a subdivision of a first nations body, which they currently have, but it's not as structured as you would hope it to be. The Auditor General holds our government to account with regard to that, and I think that office does a fairly good job.

To your question, I'm an optimist, or else I wouldn't be here. I still believe that one day we're going to get rid of the Indian Act, but let's not do it until such time as we have something that is equally good to replace it.

As an example, currently, government is proposing 10-year grants. They're proposing a number of things. They say that first nations can become self-determining, but let's be honest; no matter what, most first nations can't. You can have a current funding resource from government, but if you don't have jurisdiction, it isn't going to work.

It's the same with you as a government. The oil industry is down, so what do you do? You raise the tax dollar or whatnot from other areas. We need to do the same thing if and when we enter a nation-to-nation relationship.

• (0930)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: What does “nation-to-nation” mean to you?

The Chair: You only have 30 seconds, so be very brief.

Mr. Howard Grant: It's a recognition of a third order of government. Reconciliation is to recognize that we have those rights and to deal with us in an honourable manner, as the courts have said.

The Chair: Thank you.

Questioning now moves to Yves Robillard. It will be in French, so you might need your earpiece.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Grant.

A number of witnesses have pointed out that the federal funding doesn't give first nations the opportunity to establish a long-term vision, given that the funding is annual.

Can you describe the challenges faced by indigenous communities with regard to the funding system and tell us how we can improve the situation?

[*English*]

Mr. Howard Grant: Thank you for that question because it's always concerned me.

Having been a bureaucrat, I know that all of the funding is basically done on an annual contribution agreement. When they went to what you would call block funding, or AFA, to five years, it was always at a very restricted amount. It had little to do with building capacity or training first nations. That was excluded within those kinds of funding formulas for first nations. Then, on a proposal-driven basis, you could apply for funds for capacity development. They call it PIDP, the professional and institutional development program.

Those programs only operate on an annual basis. The sad reality is that many first nations were on remedial management plans, so the majority of those dollars did not go towards professional development of first nations. It was provided to contractors such as Deloitte Touche and financial institutions that would parachute into first nations and help them get out of remedial management. I use that as one example.

Therefore, there was no long-term vision in regard to these contributions arrangements. As you're well aware, when you do it on a proposal-driven basis, and it's only on an annual basis, there is no ability to look at a five-year or 10-year strategic plan, because it's not there. How do you say to somebody that you want to move in a certain direction?

I will say that in the last five to 10 years, government has come to the realization that comprehensive community planning is a critical instrument, so they invested in it. With comprehensive community planning, three or four first nations got global attention and won a number of awards, and they updated the planning every two years. The sad reality, however, is that consultants have taken this situation, and rather than build on it from the ground up, they're once again imposing it from the top down and saying they're “cutting and pasting”. That doesn't help anyone. That's the reality.

More importantly, to answer your question, government is still operating on an annual contribution basis in the majority of cases. They're going to say to you that they're offering a 10-year grant. But if you look at it very closely, the 10-year grant is really in regard to statutory requirements, where there's discretionary and non-discretionary funding. Non-discretionary is the 10-year grant, and all others are still proposal-driven.

• (0935)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: In recent weeks, witnesses have told us that many members of indigenous communities are leaving their communities to take better-paying jobs in urban areas.

What steps can be taken to improve talent retention on the reserves?

[*English*]

Mr. Howard Grant: Again, it's a question where on-the-ground intelligence is required. Were the talent we're talking about originally from on reserve, born and raised there, lived there and then moved? Did they get their education and then decide not to return? If that's the case, we have to recognize that two things have occurred: one, the salary levels are probably far less; and two, the housing conditions are probably not there. Those two things are probably the most important.

In my particular case, in my first nation, we have a lot of talent and the majority of those individuals are non-aboriginal people.

• (0940)

Mr. Yves Robillard: Do I have time?

The Chair: No, you've run out of time. Sorry.

We are now moving to MP Arnold Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our guest for being here today.

You mentioned in your testimony what you call the dinner table education. That's an interesting term that you used there.

One of the things that was interesting when we did our suicide study a number of years ago was that we talked to young people and they said to fix their parents. That was a common theme. They said, "Can you help fix our parents?"

That's very important, that dinner table education. How do we build that capacity back?

Mr. Howard Grant: With me, I was blessed and fortunate that I didn't have to go to residential school. I was surrounded by grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles. I became the surrogate child, grandchild and nephew of every member of my community. I have six children. I made sure that my children always sat at the dinner table and we would talk about who we are and where we came from, as my mother and elders had always described to me.

That was important in regard to who we are: to know who you are. That is the missing element. That is one of the residual effects of residential school. A lot of those current parents whom you're talking about never had that opportunity.

How we get it back is, again, to develop the curriculum, develop the history books of first nations. People call it stories. We don't call it stories. We're not telling a story. We're telling you our history. That's the important aspect: telling what's important in life. Five TVs and a Cadillac are not important things. At the end of the day, you can't take it with you when you're going to heaven or hell. The important thing is how rich you are, how many people you have touched in your lifetime, and how many of you have created a legacy that you left this place better than when you arrived.

That dinner table talk education becomes so, so important to recognize what a child is and what they can learn about how to take care of Mother Earth.

It sounds so simple, but those of us who live in cities take for granted that the beauty is going to remain there, that the gasoline is going to always be there for us. It's not.

That dinner table talk becomes an expensive exercise that doesn't need to be expensive. We just need to regain and have those, which are an investment into developing within the first nation itself it's curriculum to say our history, who we are. We have role models. We have idols. We don't recognize them, you know?

My kids go to school, and they have Tecumseh and Hiawatha. Our greatest warrior was Giyepłénexw. There's nothing about him in the curriculum in the school system. If you went and asked my community members who the most important person is in their community, they wouldn't know that.

There's a need for investment in that dinner table talk. That's the missing element—for those parents, as well. I agree with you. You have to create a healthy community before you can have a healthy government.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: What levers do we have at our disposal to help you with that?

Mr. Howard Grant: Investing into that curriculum in both the school system....

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay.

Mr. Howard Grant: Right now, UNDRIP, the United Nations declaration, that many schools are now.... It leaves it to the teachers to teach a course or have an assignment on first nations issues. Even they will go to the library and whatnot, but they're not going to find something on the local history. They're not. They're only going to find something from east of the Rockies, because most of the authors are from the east side.

● (0945)

The Chair: That is a very good point. There's a lot of history not recorded.

I interrupted just to indicate that we've run out of time and to thank you for coming here and sharing with us your experience, both at the band level in B.C. and federally. You bring a lot of wisdom to us and we really appreciate your contributions.

Mr. Howard Grant: Thank you.

The Chair: *Meegwetch.*

We are going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes so we can switch over to go in camera for committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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