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# **Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, March 20, 2018**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk**



## Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Before I get into the technical things, I want to welcome everybody back. We were away for two weeks in our ridings. We have the opportunity to be here with the minister, and that's always special, so I really appreciate everybody rushing and getting back into order.

Before we start, we always recognize, especially now, through a process of truth and reconciliation, that we're on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), study of the subject matter of the supplementary estimates (C), 2017-18: votes 1c and 10c under Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and votes 3c, 7c and 13c under Department of Indigenous Services Canada.

Welcome again, Minister. We can begin with your opening remarks.

[Translation]

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for your warm invitation to this meeting, which we are holding on the traditional territory of the aboriginal peoples, on this International Day of the Francophonie.

[English]

Before we begin, Madam Chair, we want to thank you for the recent report on indigenous land rights, which you tabled yesterday. As you know, this is very relevant to the ongoing discussions we're having with first nations to identify fair and practical measures to improve the claims process.

[Translation]

We are currently reviewing the committee's recommendations to help inform our efforts to reform our approach to claims.

[English]

I can already point to the fact that, as recommended in your report, the government will be replacing the use of loans with non-payable contributions to fund indigenous participation on the negotiation of modern treaties and specific claims, which was in the budget.

More broadly, our government is committed to creating a new recognition and implementation of rights framework, which is currently being codeveloped through a national engagement. Your report is extremely helpful in the context of the new recognition and implementation of rights that was announced by the Prime Minister on February 14.

Also, in terms of your ongoing study of Bill C-262, we are also wanting to ensure that federal laws are consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, so it's all very timely. As you know, the government is supporting this bill, and we believe that the comprehensive study that you're undertaking will also inform this broader work on rights recognition and implementation.

I'm appearing today to discuss crown-indigenous relations and northern affairs, lovingly now referred to as CIRNA, our supplementary estimates (C), and, for the first time, the interim main estimates.

These estimates (C) show a net decrease of approximately \$46 million, which reflects \$63 million in net transfers of existing funding to the new Department of Indigenous Services.

[Translation]

We know that relationships built on colonial structures have contributed to unacceptable socioeconomic gaps.

[English]

That is why, in August of last year, the Prime Minister announced the dissolution of INAC, as recommended in RCAP 21 years ago, to create two new departments, Indigenous Services Canada and CIRNA, so following the order in council last fall, there was a transfer of resources from our department to create the Department of Indigenous Services Canada.

The final structure of these two new departments will be determined in partnership with indigenous people, and we've been meeting with our partners from coast to coast to coast about how, as they say in architecture, form follows function, and how we can make sure there is a distinctions-based approach in design and processes of these two new departments.

Together, we will chart a path forward that advances reconciliation and builds a stronger future for indigenous people and all Canadians alike.

Supplementary estimates (C) also includes new funding of approximately \$17 million for initiatives, including the Canadian heritage rivers Inuit impact and benefit agreement, the Nunavut devolution agreement-in-principle, the Anishinabek nation education agreement, and indigenous tourism.

● (1535)

[Translation]

I would be happy to discuss these important investments in more detail during the question and answer period.

[English]

Supplementary estimates (C) also re-profiles approximately \$600,000 of the nutrition north program funding to this year, which is less than 1% of the annual budget. This is related to our government's investment of \$65 million over five years to expand nutrition north Canada food subsidies to 37 additional communities. Re-profiling this money will ensure this funding is preserved for our government's ongoing support for northern families to have affordable, healthy, culturally relevant foods; however, we know much more needs to be done. That's why the government is also continuing to work in partnership with northerners to overhaul the program to ensure it better reflects the needs of northerners.

Our appearance today is in the context of an evolving estimates process, as our government moves to increase transparency and modernize how estimates are presented and approved. Parliament recently approved a change in the main estimates approach in which the 2018-19 main estimates will be divided into two distinct exercises: interim estimates and main estimates. The interim estimates will provide the department with funding for the first three months of the fiscal year, while main estimates will provide the remaining funding for the entire fiscal year as well as incorporate some budget 2018 approvals.

[Translation]

This will better align the federal budget and the main estimates.

I am pleased that we are able to review these documents in the context of Budget 2018 investments. This will allow for a much more comprehensive discussion about my department's planned spending in the coming year.

[English]

Budget 2018 invests an additional \$5 billion over five years to close significant socio-economic gaps, move towards recognition of rights, and build capacity for indigenous self-determination.

This is our government's third budget. I believe it's important to highlight that it builds upon the historic investments of \$8.4 billion in budget 2016 and \$3.4 billion in budget 2017, for a total commitment to date of almost \$17 billion of additional funding for the priorities of indigenous peoples, a commitment recognized by our partners.

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde commented on budget 2018 saying, "the long-term investments in First Nations governments and infrastructure sets a strong foundation for re-building our nations."

Manitoba Metis Federation President Chartrand said that budget 2018 "finally addresses the needs and aspirations of the Métis Nation."

The president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Natan Obed, characterized budget 2018 by saying, "That is a game changer, if you will, for self determination."

[Translation]

Budget 2018 outlines new steps the government will take to increase the number of modern treaties and self-determination agreements in the context of a recognition of rights approach.

This is at the core of my mandate.

[English]

Since 2015, approximately 60 discussions on the recognition of indigenous rights and self-determination have been launched with over 320 communities—a total of over 700,000 indigenous peoples.

To date, 19 negotiated agreements have been codeveloped and signed through the discussion process, and others will follow in the coming months.

Budget 2018 commits \$51.5 million over two years to support these discussions and the codevelopment of agreements that advance a recognition and implementation of rights approach.

Budget 2018 will also help nations rebuild and accelerate self-determination and self-government with investments, including \$105 million over five years to support the capacity-building efforts of indigenous groups that are seeking to rebuild their nations in a manner that responds to the unique needs and priorities of their communities; and \$74.9 million over five years to provide permanent funding to support the permanent bilateral mechanisms with first nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation.

These sustained investments over multiple budgets confirm our government's ongoing commitment to reconciliation and to renewing Canada's relationship with first nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

I look forward to discussing these issues with you and welcome your questions.

● (1540)

**The Chair:** MP McLeod.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** I understand, because of changes in the dates, the supplementary estimates (C) have been deemed adopted. I just want clarification in terms of the process for interim estimates. Have they also been deemed? Is the process for interim estimates the same as for the main estimates?

**The Chair:** I'll turn to the clerk.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson):** The interim estimates were deemed reported back on Monday as well. The main estimates are separate.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I should have introduced, of course, Associate Deputy Minister Laflour, and the CFO, Paul Thoppil.

**The Chair:** All right.

Questioning moves first to MP Mike Bossio.

**Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.):** Minister, as always, it's a pleasure to have you here today. Thank you so much for taking the time out of your incredibly busy schedule to visit with us, and for your speech and your statements.

Last month, the Prime Minister delivered a speech to Parliament in which he announced that the Government of Canada will develop in full partnership with first nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples a recognition and implementation of rights framework. He made it clear that while the results of consultations with indigenous people will guide what the final framework will look like, the government believes it should include new legislation and policy that will make the recognition and implementation of rights the basis for all relations between indigenous peoples and the federal government. Budget 2018 has significant investments targeted at moving towards a recognition of rights framework and building capacity for indigenous self-determination.

Sorry for the long preamble, but in terms of questions, can you update us on how the consultations are going in regard to the recognition and implementation and that work?

As you noted in your remarks, the committee is currently studying Bill C-262, which seeks to ensure that federal laws are in harmony with UNDRIP. In your opinion, is that bill consistent with the government's new approach to rights recognition and self-determination? How can we expand upon Bill C-262 to capture all of that?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Yes. As you know, we are supporting the private member's bill, but we do believe, as a government, we need to actually be very clear about the unique way forward that Canada has to take in a distinctions-based way, but also for us to be able to right the wrongs and be able to move forward in a way that deals with the realities of colonization, the Indian Act. There are some very distinct things that we need to do that will accelerate the progress to self-determination.

As we've heard at this committee many times, there are not 634 nations. We have to help those nations rebuild themselves in a way that really got, as Lee Maracle says, "villagized" because of the Indian Act. How do we allow those communities to have the kind of conversation to build their governments and to build the control over their land and their people?

This journey to self-determination is very much one where, in some of the consultations—which we started the next day with the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet in Atlantic Canada, and we have been to British Columbia, and last week in Saskatchewan and Alberta—some of the comments have been that this is a conversation that should have happened 150 years ago. Another comment from a chief was, "There is hope that we will have our say."

We are really building on the kind of goodwill that is, about now, a door open to self-determination, to undo the effects of colonization, but we know there's cynicism out there. There's no reason that, all of

a sudden, people would trust what the Government of Canada would do, so we are working very hard to rebuild that trust and to be able to get back to that journey of self-determination, as it says in my mandate, and accelerate the process of self-determination. I think it has begun well.

A lot of people are saying that it's all there in volume 2 of the RCAP report, so just dust it off and get on with it. There's a fair bit of that, as well as people saying, "We want our say."

Because we have taken extinguishment off the table, surrender off the table, and going forward with loans and obviously the previous decision on the own-source revenue moratorium, people are feeling that this is different. We actually have to deal with the idea that these are termination tables or that we're extinguishing peoples' rights. That's exactly the opposite of what we're trying to do. We've begun well, but we're going to need everybody's help.

● (1545)

**Mr. Mike Bossio:** I know that Bill C-262 deals with the legislative piece, the laws of the land, but we're trying to also look at how we expand it around policy and program implementation as well. Can you maybe talk to that, as to how receptive that is, to just the different stages at which different communities and nations are moving in this direction, and to how we can help them move there more quickly?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think one of the things that we have heard is that in the 21 years since RCAP, a lot of community members have moved to urban centres. How do we make sure that their rights are recognized and implemented? Obviously, the Inuit already have their rights recognized in their land claims. They are very concerned about the implementation of those rights. We are also hearing that the role of women, the role of women in governance, and the kinds of checks and balances that were in traditional indigenous governments are going to be important as we go forward. We're also hearing about traditional legal practices and customs. How do we make sure that there is that space to allow indigenous legal practices and customs to be part of reconstituting nations and their governments?

I don't know if any of the members heard Val Napoleon on Michael Enright's show on CBC on Sunday morning. It's totally inspiring to hear what's happening at UVic and to hear the kind of research that's taking place in her unit on Cree governance, on the Gitksan, on all of the ways that these tough decisions were taken in the past, and on what we can learn in terms of Canadian law, from more collaborative, restorative approaches to justice that were there long before the settlers arrived.

**Mr. Mike Bossio:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** The questioning now moves to MP Cathy McLeod.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Madam Chair, I would hope that when the mains come we actually hear from the minister before they're deemed adopted in the House. I think we're negligent in our responsibilities if we're not voting on these significant dollars. If we can make sure that our timetable in the future is appropriate, I think that's important, and it's one of our fundamental responsibilities.

I'm really glad the issue of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has come up. Of course, it's a private member's bill, and we aren't able to have the normal time that we would have with the minister in terms of this piece of legislation. I think that this is absolutely critical, and it was in your comments, so it's certainly very appropriate to the discussion today.

I'm going to go to the really important area of the issue. Certainly, on this side, we recognize that this declaration is an important road map, but we've also indicated that changing the laws of Canada... perhaps there are some areas of concern. As you know, free, prior, and informed consent is probably the most prominent area of concern.

• (1550)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I've already turned to the page.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** First of all, you're a physician. You know that when you get approval for a medical procedure, if you don't get informed consent, you don't go ahead with the procedure. In criminal law, consent means that if you don't get consent for a sexual act, it is deemed a sexual assault. In the definition in the dictionary, it's "permission for something to happen". As Pam Palmater says, "In what alternate universe does consent not require you to say yes or no? In every other context in society and in law, and in contracts, consent means you get to say 'yes' or 'no'."

If you say no, something doesn't move forward; it doesn't happen. Are you definitively going to tell us today that consent, in terms of the UN declaration, is going to have some brand new meaning that no one's ever had before in legal, medical, or many other terms?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Obviously, as a nurse and as a doctor, you would have been very interested in a conversation that I had with James Anaya, who was the rapporteur on exactly that. His view was that you couldn't and shouldn't take a medical approach to this.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Whether it's a criminal approach or a dictionary approach, there is nowhere that consent does not mean yes or no.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** What we are saying is "Whose consent?" What we are trying to do, in rebuilding nations, is say that in the present way that the country is organized in Indian Act bands, we have situations where four Indian Act bands say yes, and they're closest to the project. Others may have concerns. The approach of free, prior, and informed consent means that you have to do the work upfront as early as possible to be able to achieve consensus in order to green-light a project. That is what free, prior, and informed means.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** I don't disagree—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** It means we're building consensus to be able to have the social licence to move forward.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** I absolutely agree that the work needs to be done up front. In many of our legislative tools the work needs to be done up front. We currently have the Kinder Morgan pipeline, where you have 51 communities that have signed benefit agreements. Clearly, when we were asking Mr. Saganash, when he was a witness here, in terms of... Would his bill change things...that the 51's rights would be outweighed by the one or two that were against? He said that clearly you need consent from everyone.

This is what the people who are supporting this bill understand about this bill. That is a huge concern when you have 51 communities and this bill is perceived as taking away their ability to move forward with an initiative because there are one or two communities that might say, no, they don't give free, prior, and informed consent.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** The reason that Minister McKenna and Minister Carr codeveloped the new policies on big projects and environmental assessment was to avoid exactly that; to start at the very idea of a project and then be able to build consent throughout, and consensus throughout, the process of a new project.

Cathy, I think what we want to explain is that in the north, we already have a process for land use planning. It's a tripartite arrangement between the rights holders, the territory, and the federal government, but we would only appoint a federal government representative if the rights holders...and therefore, good projects are approved and questionable projects are not approved.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Minister, in those bills that were put forward in Parliament, Bill C-68 and Bill C-69, the language around free, prior, and informed consent was specifically not in there. This is language you're committing to that will be committed to in law. That would actually change even the work that's been done in Bill C-68 and Bill C-69. If you're committed to the implementation and putting that language in, why is that language of free, prior, and informed consent not in Bill C-68 and not in Bill C-69?

• (1555)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think we have said all along that we accept the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That was in our platform. It's exactly what we're doing, going forward, on the recognition and implementation of indigenous rights. That is where we're going.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Clearly, when the justice officials were here, I believe that by supporting this particular piece of legislation without having total clarity around what free, prior, and informed consent was.... Certainly, from what I understood when the justice officials were here, it was very puzzling and confusing. They couldn't say who we get consent from. I asked them, if it's something like the marijuana legislation, who do you get consent from? In article 19 with this UN declaration, you are committing to laws of general application and free, prior, and informed consent around laws of general application.

How are you going to get consent? Who are you going to speak to?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think that is the issue and the reason it's so important to rebuild nations, and that's what we're doing. If a nation takes a decision, it's different from individual Indian Act bands. We are also working within a parameter of a new law. How do individual communities apply the law in their own communities? That is very much part of self-determination.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The questioning moves to MP Charlie Angus.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a real pleasure to be back at your committee.

Madam Bennett, it's always a pleasure to discuss things. Even though we sit across from each other, we don't get to talk—except maybe when we're shouting at each other, off record.

Last week I was at Ontario Superior Court with former Chief Edmund Metatawabin and the survivors of St. Anne's residential school. They brought forward an appeal on non-disclosure of sworn evidence that's in the hands of the Government of Canada. That evidence comprises the sworn testimonies from the survivors of Indian residential schools—relating to child abuse, sexual assault, and other crimes—obtained by Canada prior to the settlement agreement of 2006. The surprising thing that's come out of the St. Anne's hearings is that the government is in possession of documents relating to 14,000 civil actions that were brought by survivors, some of them from St. Anne's but also from across Canada.

Can the minister tell us if those transcripts of examinations for discovery from plaintiffs suing for institutional child abuse prior to 2006 were disclosed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission before it was extinguished?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** As you know, there were concerns about documents that hadn't been disclosed. Our government has disclosed and Justice Perell has said that everything has been disclosed now, and he has said that Canada is holding up its side of the bargain now, and so it—

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** We're talking about different documents. We're not talking about, sorry—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Yes.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** —just so we don't go down the rabbit hole, St. Anne's had to go to court because the government suppressed the 12,000 pages of documents of crimes—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** —the previous government—

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** —at St. Anne's residential school.

Your government went the whole distance and they still.... I'm talking about the documents relating to the 14,000 cases that were brought for civil action prior to 2006. It became apparent during the St. Anne's hearings that the government has those documents, but apparently, it has not turned them over the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. That's a separate set of documents, with 14,000 cases of civil action. Were they turned over to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Is the government sitting on them? Why?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** My understanding is that the Government of Canada has turned over any documents that the court has asked for and we have now, as Justice Perell said, held up our... "Evidence shows Canada has kept its promise and continues to keep its promise."

That's the problem, but Charlie, I think that the issue—

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I'm talking about different documents. I'm not talking about the suppression of the evidence of the crimes committed to the children of St. Anne's. I'm talking about all the cases that were brought forward for civil action that the AFN then signed on, thinking that all these prior cases.... What happened to them?

Before Justice Perell, your lawyers argued that none of these 14,000 cases could be brought to the IAP and he agreed. The government declared settlement privilege and said that those were separate documents and Justice Perell certainly agreed with you. However, when I was at the court of appeal, the judges asked your lawyers whether they had any proof that there was settlement privilege posted on these 14,000 documents and they said no.

Therefore, Justice Perell was told a falsehood about settlement privilege. Why would you claim settlement privilege on these 14,000 cases that are evidence, that are proof, and that, in the case of Angela Shisheesh, could help other cases? Why would the government claim settlement privilege?

• (1600)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** In these individual cases, you obviously are there...and I believe Ms. Shisheesh has received a settlement. I think the issue is that there is an integrity to the IRSSA process that needs to be maintained. Otherwise, it will all go tumbling down.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I think that's the concern.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** What we are trying to do is that, for anybody who has not been properly served by that, we're trying to get them whatever they need to be properly compensated and then—

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Yes, but Madame Bennett, that's not true. You went to B.C. Superior Court with your factums that are still under secrecy, which stated that the right of procedural fairness did not apply. You're not saying whether someone was denied rights. You're saying they don't have the right to come back because the government suppressed evidence. That's not a process of integrity. That is a fundamental undermining and that's why St. Anne's won't go away.

However, I am talking about the documents and all the evidence that your government claimed recently to Justice Perell. He accepted your argument about settlement privilege, when settlement privilege is not applicable because you don't have settlement privilege.

Why would you say that?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think that we have said that if Ms. Shisheesh or anybody wants their documents with the TRC, that is absolutely their right to table them with the TRC.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Then it's individual choice.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** As you know, our concern is that certain...the Supreme Court has now decided that some of those, or they will all be destroyed, if people don't give individual permission

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** But the Supreme Court wasn't informed about these 14,000 cases that were settled prior to 2006, were they?

**Ms. Diane Laflour (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** I just wanted to add one clarification. The pre-IRSSA documents are covered by settlement privilege, but if the claimants want us to waive that privilege, we will waive that privilege.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Okay. That's interesting because I was pretty sure what I heard in the court of appeal was that they asked your lawyers, "Do you have any proof that any of these are under settlement privilege?" They said, "No."

You claim settlement privilege to deny access to St. Anne survivors, so if you say you've got settlement privilege, you have settlement privilege. If you don't, you're undermining the process.

**Ms. Diane Laflour:** If the claimants want us to waive it, we will.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** That wasn't the question. The question was if you have proof that the settlement of privilege was applied, and it wasn't.

I want to move on from this. Did you get any advice from the nine supervising judges on the superior courts about the legal obligations to disclose these sworn testimonies that were gathered in the cases prior to 2006? There's an enormous amount of evidence and documentation there. That should have been part of the IAP, and should have been part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It seems to be sitting in someone's drawer at the justice department. Did you get any legal review or advice?

**The Chair:** You have just a couple of seconds.

**Ms. Diane Laflour:** The IAP doesn't apply to every case of abuse. We have worked and continue to work to address the cases of abuse that are not covered by the IAP. It was never designed to cover every single instance of abuse. Which is—

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** It was designed to follow the law.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Except that 98% have been resolved, and we're working very hard on the 2%, which are obviously the most difficult.

**The Chair:** I'm going to move the questioning over to MP T.J. Harvey.

**Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.):** Thank you, Minister, for being here with us today.

In our recent study on indigenous land rights, we heard from many witnesses that the government needs to reform how negotiation mandates are established to make them much more flexible and malleable. We also heard that the successful agreement should represent an ongoing relationship between crown and indigenous peoples. Our committee drafted a recommendation to reflect what we heard on these points: in budget 2018 invest \$51.4 million over two years to continue to support federal and indigenous participation in recognition of rights of self-determination discussions.

Can you explain how this new approach and the new money will be spent to support it, as you claim, accelerate, and transition to self-determination?

• (1605)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** One of the reasons we've needed this sum of money is that in the past we really only had the authorities to either fund an Indian Act band or a self-governing nation. If communities wanted to come together to start to talk about reconstituting a nation, they'd have to take out a loan. We weren't able to really fund that conversation.

That's what's exciting now, that people have the money to be able to fund those kinds of conversations. Ktunaxa band, four Indian Act bands, had to actually incorporate as a society for us to be able to send the money for them to have that conversation. This new money and the authority allows us to fund those conversations for communities to come together. Incurring a debt is an impediment to communities coming together. I've been in communities in British Columbia where 20 years later they're \$30 million in debt. It inhibits people's real interest in actually going down that road. Obviously, lots of people in the community aren't sure it's worth either the time or the money. That's what's exciting about this new approach.

**Mr. T.J. Harvey:** We also heard from government and first nations, Inuit, and Métis nation leaders about the importance of a distinctions-based approach to your work, looking at them through a different lens independently. We've also heard comments from a number of first nations, Inuit, and Métis leaders about how pleased they were with the fact that budget 2018 seemed to adopt a far more distinctions-based approach.

Can you explain why you think this shift is so important and how you believe it will lead to better outcomes?



**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** As we began, obviously a distinctions-based approach is hugely important to first nations, Inuit, and Métis. Métis had felt that they'd been left out in the shadows as the forgotten people for a very long time. Inuit had their land claims, but a lot of what was in the land claims, whether that's language or some of the other things that they've been very concerned about, has not been implemented. You end up with the first nations being at various parts in the continuum towards self-determination, and we need to be able to have different approaches depending on where they are, from totally self-governing to not even beginning.

The key is culture and language. Without culture and language, without a secure personal cultural identity... That is your resilience, your self-esteem, and your ability to go forward. Whether it's health, education, or child welfare, there needs to be that cultural safety that allows a child to grow up to be a proud first nations, Inuit, or Métis person. A distinctions-based approach is very important, as we've learned from pan-aboriginal approaches that just don't work. That's why, whether it's housing, indigenous health, skills and training, post-secondary, or particularly early learning and child care, they want a separate fund that will make sure that their people do well in a culturally safe way. Again, as we look to the urban issues, that is becoming really telling as to the kind of distinctions-based approach that we will need in urban strategies.

**Mr. T.J. Harvey:** Through our committee's work, we heard quite a bit of testimony around the move towards non-repayable contributions in the model for participation in modern treaty negotiations. This is something that I know you've been very supportive of. Can you explain why the government's perspective on the move to non-repayable will accelerate the settlement of historic claims in modern treaties?

• (1610)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** As we were saying, people didn't necessarily want to incur debt, and I think the other piece that really is different is that we want to avoid the old denial-of-rights approach and move to a straight recognition of rights. It used to be that communities would have to claim their rights and then go prove them in court, which cost a lot of money. We are trying to say let's not do that anymore. As we said here at this table many times, it seems ridiculous to spend all that time and money for Canada to lose in court. Let's just get to the table and find out the kinds of things that these communities want to assert in terms of jurisdiction.

Obviously right now child welfare is very important. A lot of communities would want to have jurisdictional control over the wellness and rights of their children. We are no longer saying that you have to embark on a huge, comprehensive claims policy that we know didn't work. The inherent right policy didn't work. At these 50 or 60 tables, they start with a blank piece of paper and ask, "What are the priorities for your community? What would you like to work on first in terms of drawing down"—or really not drawing down because the rights are there—"asserting the jurisdiction on these things?" For some of the coastal first nations it's their fishery. The 23 Anishinabek nation on an education system... We are working through the priorities of that community and that makes people want to come and do it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Questioning moves to MP Kevin Waugh.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** Welcome back.

The last time you were here a few months ago, I had the privilege to ask you for the cost, and you did say that you now had kind of two departments. If you don't mind, since it's seven months into this, could you give the committee an indication of how much more Canadians are investing with this institution of two separate departments? You did talk about two separate departments; we did hear that. How many more jobs have been created? Maybe the most important one is what's the increase in administrative costs? If you can, do it quickly, because I have a lot of questions to go through here. Can you give me an update?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Maybe Paul will do this.

Basically, we are sending a whack of money from our department over to indigenous services. We now have money to begin the—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** How much more?

**Mr. Paul Thoppil (Chief Finances, Results and Delivery Officer, Indigenous Services and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** In terms of this fiscal year, the incremental costs so far have been \$3 million. That is the beginning—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** For the first three months?

**Mr. Paul Thoppil:** Since the order in council came out, which was November 30. That is the beginning. The costs associated with the transfer over of the first nations and Inuit health branch from Health Canada will have to be taken into account. You should expect to see a transfer in the main estimates of that portion of the internal services of Health Canada over to indigenous services. Discussions are also evolving in terms of what the incremental cost would be in administration in order to support two stand-alone departments. Those discussions and the amounts outstanding to implement those haven't come to fruition as yet.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Next time you come we'll ask the same question—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Kevin, what we are hoping, as you know, is that eventually indigenous services won't exist anymore.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Yes.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Eventually that will move to indigenous self-determination and indigenous-led institutions. That department disappears.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I just spent eight days in Nunavut. It's your lucky day. I went to nine communities last week. Of the infrastructure spending since you took office in 2015, not one community has received a dime. I was in one hamlet called Naujaat. Robert Hedley told me they haven't received any money. In the 2017 budget, you made the big splash: \$650 million on northern and rural infrastructure over five years. Now we learn that \$450 million of that is going to be postponed until 2022. What happened? I spent last week in these communities. Every community has had no money. They're waiting.

•(1615)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Minister Philpott will be better able to explain that.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** We'll leave that to her then.

Here's the other question I have for you.

**A voice:** It's Northern Affairs.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** In terms of housing and the distribution, we made a decision that Inuit wanted control over Inuit housing, so last year some went to Inuvialuit—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** You haven't done a very good job.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** —the Northwest Territories. This is a distinctions-based approach...Nunavik and Makivik corporations building all kinds of housing....

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** There hasn't been much built. You promised \$240 million over 10 years, which is \$24 million a year. That equals 60 units. We already know they need 3,000. They're that far behind.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** This budget is for \$400 million more.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Okay, good.

Let me ask you about this nutrition north program. I was up there: 12 Spartan apples cost \$11.69. Tomatoes are \$10.39 a kilogram. Then I go to milk which is not bad; two litres are \$6.39. The big kicker is this Tropicana orange juice, two litres for \$17.29. We have a bag of chips at \$6.09. Five kilograms of Robin Hood flour would be \$21.29.

The Auditor General found that the present system with subsidized retailers in Nunavut is not working. You know the two I'm talking about, Taqqut and Northmart. There's no auditing of this. There is none. Retailers get \$100 million. They're going to increase it to \$120 million. There is no way of verifying that these stores are passing on these subsidies. I just gave you the prices. Do you know what the price of this orange juice is in Ottawa? It's \$6.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I don't drink orange juice.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** It's \$17 up north.

I visited eight communities in nine days.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** All of that is all we did, and I think Paul can tell you that. It's the reason we want to overhaul the nutrition north program. We also want to be able to support hunters and harvesters in country food and fishermen with the kinds of things that they want—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** —to be able to feed their families in their traditional way. There's no question that the program.... Nellie Cournoyea is the chair of the advisory board to nutrition north—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think it is a very revered Inuit.... But there is an audit, and Paul will tell you—

**The Chair:** All right.

Questioning now moves to Gary Anandasangaree. I understand he will split his time with MP Danny Vandal.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):** We won't be splitting time, Madam Chair.

Minister, welcome back, and welcome to the panel as well.

I know you have appeared here a number of times since being appointed minister in 2015. Your level of confidence and enthusiasm today is quite different from what I think it has been in the last two and a half years. I'm reflecting on a lot of the things that have been done.

Can you maybe give us your top three in terms of what you feel confident about in your new role, but also where we've come from since the beginning of 2015?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Obviously the most important thing is the relationship. I think people see that our government is committed. It's the fact that the Prime Minister has been very clear that this is the most important relationship, I think from his speech at the UN, to the Finance Minister and us having been able to deliver on the two things, improving the quality of life, but also the understanding of self-determination.

I think our fight, with Dr. Philpott, for control over child welfare.... To me, that is what eats away at the heart of all indigenous people, that their children are being taken into non-indigenous families. It is a millennium scoop. I think the fight we're doing right now to have indigenous children— first nations, Inuit, and Métis children—raised as first nations, Inuit, and Métis is going to be the way we feel proudest of having turned this around. It's gone on for way too long.

In our progress on the truth and reconciliation calls to action, the fact that we can get going on our federal or shared.... There is also the way that there seems to be a movement now in terms of schools and universities. There is an understanding about the need to learn what we didn't learn in school, and I think Canadians are really coming with us.

There is still horrible racism that we have to deal with. There is horrible child abuse that we have to deal with. I think the fact that people see we are speaking out loud about these things and being able to move forward is what I feel proud of.

It's the young people who can see their way out of the colonial ways. They don't want to be part of the status quo. They can see that just being consultants and lawyers to communities instead of building capacity within their communities.... I think it's very exciting. For me to go to a convocation at Laurier University, with 23 indigenous students graduating with MSWs, those are the things that make me feel pleased. I won't take credit for it, but I am pleased to see the movement we're getting on this path and journey of reconciliation.

• (1620)

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** With regard to the things that Kevin spoke about with respect to nutrition north, and other concerns that we still hear from time to time, how do you justify that? How do you reconcile that with the new departments, as well as the relative progress we've seen in a number of different areas?

We understand we have a long way to go, so how do we reconcile that gap?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think, again, it's about getting rid of paternalism and moving to partnership. These programs need to be codeveloped with partners. We are trying to get out of the business of delivering programs and being able to build the institutions that will look after themselves in an indigenous-led way.

I think particularly around country, food, and respect for traditional ways of feeding families, that is work in progress. I think we are going to see food security as very much a part of the new Arctic policy framework, and that we will see, as Mary Simon's report said, focusing on people and communities, and listening to what their needs and priorities are.

It is about a different way of working.

**The Chair:** Questioning now moves to MP Arnold Viersen.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for being here.

Minister, Loon River First Nation is located just outside of Peace River in my riding and it did not submit an application for the Canada summer jobs grant due to the discriminatory practices in the attestation. Chief Bernadette Sharpe wrote me and she said, "We hold to the values taught by our elders, and will not compromise for a few dollars."

As you know, the Canada summer jobs programs provides training and skills training for students across Canada, especially in the first nations communities in my riding.

On behalf of Loon River First Nation, I'm seeking your explanation as to why first nations in my riding are expected to choose between honouring their elders' values and respecting traditional values and funding for their communities.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I'm sorry to hear that because I think that in terms of the way forward this is about—in my understanding—traditional values and being able to honour the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and being able to make sure that everyone is looked after. Two-spirited people were very much part of indigenous culture and very important people in their community. I think that there are real problems with the way...and with some of the organizations that had

been funded before that were discriminating and so that this.... I think that if there were great jobs that could—

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Do you not see her point, though? She's not willing to sign this attestation due to her own conscience or the band conscience or whatever the decision was made there. She can't sign that attestation. They lose out on the funding that they normally receive through the Canada summer jobs program.

Are you suggesting that they're being discriminatory, that particular nation is being discriminatory?

• (1625)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** No, I'm saying that the attestation wasn't meant for, and had no intention of, discriminating against people. It was about making sure that the jobs that the young people were being asked to do were not undermining charter rights.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Yes, and I don't think that the jobs they provide there with the first nation...but the problem is is that with her own conscience or the conscience of her band council they couldn't check that particular box.

Do you not see that as discriminating against that particular band?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I believe that the interpretation that they have taken is not the interpretation that was intended. I think it is about us ensuring that the young people in this country are not distributing abortion flyers. That is what has been the problem in the past.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Yes, but the wording of your attestation was terrible. You didn't communicate that whatsoever if she had problems signing that. Would you not agree with that?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think that this is, again, an issue that has passed the vote yesterday and the people of Canada understand why that was necessary after the abuse that took place after a number of summers.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Can your department fill in the gap in the funding that they've now lost out on because they couldn't sign that?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I don't know of the situation, but I think that there are obviously lots of summer programs that Dr. Philpott's department funds, and so do Project Venture and some of the other programs from a number of different departments. I think everybody would want to make sure....

The on-the-land programming, the kinds of things that really matter in the summers, that's what we want.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Switching gears a little bit here, 10 people sit on the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee: a farmer, an emergency room physician, two public health experts, a tourism lodge president, a women and girls advocate, a sports enthusiast, a survivor of the 1989 École Polytechnique massacre, a former police officer, a former Supreme Court judge, and a second-generation competitor. None of these people are indigenous.

As the Minister for Indigenous Relations, are you not concerned that there's no indigenous voice on that particular committee, given the fact that firearms play a large part in every indigenous community's sustenance, in how they lived, all these kinds of things...? Are you not concerned that there's no indigenous voice on that committee?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I certainly would be happy to look into it, Arnold, and if you have some suggestions of people, I would be happy to give it to the ministry.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That concludes our time available today with Minister Bennett. We appreciate your coming out; it was certainly lively. I see we have lots of energy.

• (1625) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1630)

**The Chair:** We are so pleased to have you here, Minister. We're going to try to move along because we'll be having the bells at 5:15 and we want to have an opportunity to go through a couple of rounds of questions. First, I want to recognize that we're on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people. We welcome you here to the INAN committee and over to you for your presentation.

**Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Indigenous Services):** Good afternoon, colleagues.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to spend some time with you this afternoon.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for already acknowledging that we are meeting on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people, and obviously we're all very grateful for the opportunity to gather in this place.

It is a pleasure to be before this committee to spend a moment to thank you again for the important work you are doing on a number of critical studies. I want to particularly comment on how I'm looking forward to the upcoming report on wildfires and fire safety on reserve.

[*Translation*]

I understand you have recently completed your study, and will bring forward a report with recommendations that we will give the utmost consideration.

[*English*]

Today I want to briefly outline our department's supplementary estimates (C), interim estimates, and explain how, along with new investments in budget 2018, we want to continue to work to close existing socio-economic gaps and to ensure that indigenous peoples have control over their services and programs.

[*Translation*]

As I have stated before; ours may be the first government department ever created with its own obsolescence as a goal.

[*English*]

With this in mind, I strongly believe, as demonstrated through Minister Bennett's ongoing work—as she's probably discussed with you—in the development of a recognition and implementation of rights framework that not only the recognition but the implementation of inherent indigenous and treaty rights is essential to address the broad socio-economic gaps that exist between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians.

My job as Minister of Indigenous Services is to improve the delivery of services in a distinctions-based fashion in partnership with indigenous peoples.

[*Translation*]

Together we will advance indigenous self-determination and over time transfer the delivery of government services to indigenous communities.

[*English*]

Indigenous Services is working toward a renewed relationship with indigenous peoples, based as you know on a recognition of rights, and on a relationship of respect, co-operation, and partnership with first nations, Inuit, and Metis.

We have selected a focus on five interconnected priority areas where Indigenous Services plays a critical role in advancing the agenda. They are health, education, children and families, infrastructure, and economic development, including a new fiscal relationship.

At the centre of these five priorities is of course people. These are individuals whose well-being depends on undoing the damage of more than a century of paternalistic policies that have led to broken families and communities and have damaged the trust of indigenous peoples in their relationship with government.

[*Translation*]

I am talking about people like Gerry, who has paid a high price for those policies.

• (1635)

[*English*]

Gerry is a 25-year-old Métis youth who I met some time ago. He was a youth in foster care from the age of eight to the age of 14. During that time, he lived in almost 40 different homes. Gerry suffers from dyslexia and ADHD. His mother was not able to care for him because of her mental health issues and her experience with residential schools. His grandparents wanted to take him in, but couldn't afford to do so. Gerry said to me, "It's not that I lost my identity in foster care. My identity was stripped from me. They see us numbers, not people. You get lost. You slowly lose everything that made you."

[*Translation*]

Gerry's story is one of intergenerational trauma, poverty and disconnection from his culture.

[*English*]

It's a story about people who were denied control over their own lives, factors that are directly linked to these broad socio-economic gaps and poor health outcomes in indigenous people's experience.

I'm pleased that budget 2018 takes bold steps in supporting a new approach to closing these gaps. For instance, it proposes an additional \$5 billion over five years to ensure that indigenous children and families have an equal chance to succeed in life.

[Translation]

This builds upon already significant investments made through Budgets 2016 and 2017.

[English]

As some of you know, we were particularly delighted to see in the budget \$1.4 billion in new funding over six years for child and family services. This investment will enable concrete progress on the federal government's six points of action, which we announced at an emergency meeting on indigenous child welfare in January, as well as allowing us to fully implement the orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

This is the first time that budget investments will go directly to communities for prevention and early intervention, a major step in child welfare reform. Together with our partners we're working toward reducing the number of indigenous children in care and supporting children growing up with strong connections to their language and their culture.

As well, the budget provides an additional \$173 million over three years to support the work on clean and safe drinking water on reserve. This is in addition to the \$1.8 billion provided in budget 2016.

These investments are going to allow us to accelerate the pace of construction and renovation where possible to pay for repairs to high-risk water systems and to prevent additional long-term drinking water advisories.

[Translation]

These investments will also be used to assist efforts to recruit, train and retain water operators under first nations-led service delivery models.

[English]

We're on track with our commitment to lift all long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserve by March 2021. Since November 2015, now 54 long-term drinking water advisories have been lifted.

Equally important, funding has been provided to support the implementation of three distinctions-based housing strategies. A total of \$1.5 billion is earmarked to improve housing conditions and support the codevelopment of a first nations housing strategy, an Inuit-led housing strategy for the regions of Nunavut, Nunatsiavut, and Inuvialuit, as well as a Métis Nation housing strategy. This is in addition to the \$240 million over 10 years that was announced in budget 2017 to support housing in Nunavut through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

[Translation]

We all know that adequate housing is a key determinant of health. Overcrowding is a crucial factor in the transmission of diseases such as tuberculosis.

[English]

To keep indigenous families healthy, budget 2018 has announced \$1.4 billion over five years and \$145 million ongoing for health. These monies will be helping with acute health problems such as

tuberculosis in Inuit communities as well as matters like opioid addiction in first nations communities.

In the meantime, we continue to require immediate funds to continue to deliver our mandate. The interim estimates for 2018-19 will be approximately \$2.9 billion. This funding will ensure that Indigenous Services can carry out its activities in the first three months of the fiscal year until the main estimates are approved in June.

The total of the supplementary estimates (C) for Indigenous Services Canada is \$359.6 million. This reflects new funding for emergency management service providers, non-insured health benefits for first nations and Inuit, as well as the Indspire and post-secondary student support program.

● (1640)

[Translation]

This also reflects transfers with other government departments, including a transfer from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada for Urban Programming for Indigenous Peoples.

[English]

These funds are an important step forward as we replace the previous colonial-era department with new organizations that are committed to reconciliation. These investments, coupled with the infusion of billions of dollars in budget 2018, will go a long way to closing the gap between the living conditions of indigenous and non-indigenous people. This will help us to realize our shared goal of building fully healthy, prosperous, self-governed communities that offer indigenous children, youth, and families a bright future.

[Translation]

I would be pleased to take your questions.

Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The questioning will start off with MP Vandal.

**Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Minister Philpott, it is a great honour to address you this afternoon.

In Canada, 2018 has been an exciting year for the Métis nation. I know that the Manitoba Metis Federation in my province appears to be very happy.

Budget 2018 states:

These investments in Métis Nation priorities reflect the Government's commitment to apply a greater distinctions-based lens to Indigenous funding decisions and support the Métis Nation's vision of self-determination.

My question is twofold. First, can you speak to the importance of the development of a distinctions-based approach, and why you've included it in your programming pillars? Second, can you comment on the specific investments in the Métis nation across our country?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** You are right to point out that this was a well-received budget from the point of view of the Métis Nation of Canada. I certainly received positive feedback, and I think, as you indicated, that part of that is that this is a distinctions-based approach.

One of the things that I think has been quite successful over the past two and a half years is the development of something that we call the permanent bilateral mechanism. This is a format where the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers meet on a regular basis, a minimum of three times per year, with our counterparts who are leaders in first nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. Through that Métis-Canada permanent bilateral relationship, they have come forward very effectively with the kinds of priorities that they want to work on, and you see that reflected in the budget. They didn't necessarily want for our relationship going forward to be exactly like it would be with first nations or exactly like it would be with the Inuit. Again, that's reflected in the investments.

There were significant investments in the budget for the Métis nation. Probably the largest of them would be the investment in housing of \$500 million over 10 years. It is an incredible opportunity to have long-term housing made available.

I've had the opportunity to see the things that happen when indigenous organizations have access to resources like this. The Métis Nation of Alberta, for example, has done some incredible housing projects that have made a real difference in addressing homelessness for families, so this will be very helpful. They've already done a lot of the work in preparing a housing strategy.

In other areas, the investments are more modest. They are, in a sense, a down payment in areas like education and health. There's more work to be done to understand exactly what that relationship should look like going forward in the future, but there were certainly investments in those areas that were well received.

I might add that outside of my department, with Minister Hajdu, as you may know there's an investment in employment and skills development.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Good.

I also know there was some investment in nation capacity building. That was not with you, that was with....

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** That would fall under Minister Bennett in terms of the relationship.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** There was a sizable amount that was invested there through the MNC.

The other issue that's very important in Manitoba is the whole issue of child welfare. I believe that at one point you labelled the child welfare crisis in our country a humanitarian crisis. I agree with you. Ninety percent of the children in Manitoba who are in care, or a very high percentage, are indigenous, unfortunately.

You mentioned the investments that the government is making in child welfare, but I'm wondering if perhaps you can give another overview of what we're doing relative to child welfare, and what other possible reforms we will consider to actually change the system itself, which is not only a financial issue. We know that most things lead to more investment, but how do we actually change the

system to make it more responsive to indigenous needs? If you can, maybe talk about the Manitoba situation.

• (1645)

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I will try to be brief, but it's a very big topic. You mentioned the fact that I had described what I learned about the overrepresentation of indigenous children in child and family services in this country as a humanitarian crisis. I was perhaps teased a bit afterwards that I was being overly provocative in using terminology like that. However, since I said that, I can't tell you how many times indigenous leaders have thanked me for drawing attention to this issue, which they've been trying to raise for some time. It's something that was highlighted in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The first five calls to action relate to child welfare.

You're absolutely right that in Manitoba the circumstances are very severe, but they are also quite dire across the country. I already mentioned the money, and you're absolutely right that that's extremely helpful, not only to meet the requirements of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, but to get money that will support prevention. As you know, there are these perverse incentives, in which, in many cases, funding flows according to the number of children who are apprehended from their families, yet there's no money that flows to families who say, "Could we get some support to keep the child with us or with an aunt or grandmother?" Changing those funding policies has been shown to be very effective in a number of places.

At our January meeting we outlined some of the things that we felt the federal government could do. We put it out as a six-point plan, which has been well received, and it speaks to that, changing the funding mechanisms and channelling them more towards prevention. One of the things we've also talked about is whether there is perhaps a role for federal legislation. This is a sensitive topic, and we are having ongoing conversations about that. It was something that was a call to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, so we're having conversations with first nations, Inuit, and Metis about that possibility and whether it might support the work to draw down jurisdiction on child welfare to communities that want to be able to control child welfare services themselves.

The other thing I'll say—again, we could go on at some length on this topic, but I know there are other things you want to bring up—is that in each part of the country we've established tripartite working groups because every province is a little bit different. The provincial legislation is different in different places, the way that money flows is different, and we're trying to deal with those regional differences.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** The questioning now goes to MP Cathy McLeod.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's interesting, with the split of the department, some things are very obvious in terms of which goes to who, and others, to be quite frank, are confusing. When you go to the website, it sort of says it's changing, so as the opportunity goes, I would encourage providing better clarity to this committee as those things are decided upon.

I have a quick question in terms of moving health. Is that effectively under your jurisdiction now even though the money has not transferred yet?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Thank you, it's a great question, and thank you for your comments and recommendations in terms of work on the website, which I know the deputy has already taken note of.

Yes, the first nations Inuit health branch, which was previously with Health Canada, was moved over in November, I think, into Indigenous Services Canada through an order in council.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** The budget hasn't moved yet?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I believe the budget, for the largest part, is now in our department, and maybe the officials can clarify some of that.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** I want to go into the tuberculosis crisis in the north. You alluded to it in your notes. We know there was a 15-year-old Inuit girl who died in January. I understand the rates are about 10% and obviously, completely unacceptable in Canada. What are you going to do about it?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Well, thank you for raising this really important issue.

It happens that world tuberculosis day is this Saturday, which hopefully we will all acknowledge. We, in Canada, have a shameful story in terms of the severe rates of tuberculosis among Canada's Inuit. In fact, if you look at 2016 data, if you compare the rates in Inuit to the non-indigenous Canadian-born population, they are 300 times higher, and as you described, these teenagers are dying.

What are we going to do? This has been one of the priority areas of our Inuit-crown partnership relationship, so I'm working very closely along with my officials and my other colleagues, like the Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, with the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami on a TB elimination task force. We have put together a plan that is still being finalized to work on the elimination of tuberculosis. Some of that work has already begun. In fact, very recently in Qikiqtarjuaq Nunavut a clinic took place that screened almost everyone in the entire community. I can get you the data in terms of the number of active tuberculosis cases and latent tuberculosis cases that were detected.

There's a very broad-based plan that involves screening, addressing, obviously, using new medical treatment, as well as things like housing and so many of the other social issues.

• (1650)

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** I remember when Harold Calla was before this committee. On this side we support investments in terms of education and child welfare. Obviously we're going to be watching very carefully to make sure these are effective investments and that you're actually getting the outcomes you want. I remember Harold Calla coming here and saying that there will never be enough money to deal with the housing issues and that economic development is absolutely critical. I would say reconciliation requires economic

reconciliation. I can see there is a whole lot of focus on programs and support, which I think are important and necessary, and very limited mentions of anything around the economic...creating the opportunities for communities to create their own future. I don't see any focus from your government in that area, or very minimal.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Thank you for raising that.

I think housing is perhaps one of the best examples of that. You're right that we're not going to address the problem simply by putting more money into building houses all the time.

We obviously need money to address the housing gap. When it comes to first nations on reserve, there's \$200 million a year for the next three years. We gave that in a time-limited way because we've said we want to work with them over the next number of months to develop a specific strategy to do exactly what you're saying, to ask how we can build homes in different ways, make better use of local resources, build skills for local individuals to be able to design and construct those homes effectively, and even look at innovative methods of land tenure agreements and ownership over homes.

I will acknowledge that there's much more work to be done in that area. It will take that kind of innovation to be able to close those gaps.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** The new fiscal relationship, is that under you or Ms. Bennett?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** That is under me.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** One of the things you indicated in your joint statement was the importance of accountability to communities, that there be an accountability structure required nation to nation but also between nations and communities.

I am so hugely disappointed that after two and a half years.... You said you didn't like our financial transparency act. You've spent two and a half years at a table and you still say that you need to talk, that you really don't have anything that's going to help people like Charmaine Stick. You noticed Thunderbird; they decided to give him the information rather than go to courts. How can you justify that was a priority?

It's two and a half years and you've had a lot of talks, a lot of fiscal tables. It obviously isn't a priority if the tables haven't come up with something that's going to be accountable. There are significant dollars going into communities. Those community members need to know that those dollars are effective. It's a principle of democracy. Two and a half years later, there is nothing. You didn't like what we had, but there's nothing.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Thank you very much for giving me a chance to clarify what is happening in that area. It is, in fact, the area where there has been a lot of work done. People like Harold Calla and others who are associated with some of the first nations financial institutions have actually done a lot of work on this. We also worked with the Assembly of First Nations and the department on putting out proposals around what this new fiscal relationship would look like. I announced that at the special chiefs assembly in December. It was extremely well received.

I think the first point that I need to emphasize is—you're absolutely right—that transparency and accountability are essential. There is no system of governance amongst any people in the world, be they indigenous or non-indigenous, that doesn't think that good governance involves excellence in accountability, governance, management, and reporting to the people you serve.

• (1655)

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** It's not there.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** It is there. In fact, it's growing all the time through the work that organizations like the First Nations Financial Management Board have been able to do. There are now well over 100 first nations across the country that have received—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** —certification through the FNFMB. It's growing all the time.

**The Chair:** Questioning now moves to MP Niki Ashton.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague, Georgina Jolibois.

I would like to raise two key points, ones where we're very concerned that the government isn't going nearly far enough.

First of all is the crisis that is housing on reserve in particular. While we recognize that there's some fancy new language around distinctions-based housing strategies, the reality is that the funds simply aren't there.

Last week I was at Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. I was told that there are 500 people on a waiting list for housing, yet this is a community that is moving ahead. They have an innovative program to build housing in the community. It brings folks on board to be able to gain their apprenticeship training, and it uses some new technologies to build these homes. However, they haven't received one cent of federal funding. This is a problem.

This is a crisis that impacts every single first nation. The money that has been committed—around \$600 million a year—could translate to possibly one house per first nation, but the reality is that the further north you go, the more expensive it is to build housing. Certainly, we would like to register the inadequacy of federal funds.

What is the federal government planning to do with respect to this housing crisis on first nations? Why is it ignoring the reality and also ignoring innovative programs like the one NCN is pursuing right now?

Second, I had the pleasure of joining you in Cross Lake a couple of years ago where you announced the funding for the new health centre project that, unfortunately, has not moved forward. I was just there a few days ago. People are very concerned. Obviously, the demand for health services is huge, and we would like to move forward as soon as possible. We would like to see your department show leadership right now, given that this project has stalled.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Thank you for those two questions. I'm going to address the housing one. Then, in terms of Cross Lake, I'm going to ask my associate deputy to give the latest update on what's going on in Cross Lake because he may be better updated. I know how much they are looking forward to that new facility moving forward.

I absolutely agree with you on what you have raised about housing. There is a massive gap, and it's not going to be met with the kinds of dollars that we've put into it. It's not even going to be met if we were to increase the dollars tenfold. It's going to take innovation.

I really would love to hear more about the group that you're talking about. I would love to hear the specifics about why they are not getting dollars flowing to them. As you know, there has been significant money—in the hundreds of millions per year—going... We've continued that. The data shows now that in the last couple of years, about 13,000 units have been built or are almost built.

It's going to take creativity. It's going to take things like building opportunities for access to capital, giving the people the opportunity of rent-to-own for example. In fact, one of the things the deputy did as soon as this department started was put together basically a new power team within the department by bringing in outside experts who have done housing both on and off reserve. We look forward to working with them and with anyone you would like to introduce us to who has great ideas on how we're actually going to close that housing gap.

Did you want to give us an update on Cross Lake?

**Mr. Sony Perron (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Yes. For sure.

Initially, when the minister announced the funding for the Cross Lake nursing station replacement, the estimate for the project was around \$40 million. When the first nations partner started to do the assessment and the design of the work, it came to the conclusion that \$40 million would not be enough. It came back with an additional funding request, which was to increase the funding by \$15 million. We have confirmed that this money will flow and will be part of the project, so the project should advance now.

Between the initial commitment and the design phase, the costs increased, so we needed to secure the resources. Now after receiving confirmation, we will be funding.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I appreciate that. My message to you is that people are waiting for this to be done, urgently, as you can imagine.



• (1700)

**Ms. Georgina Jolibois:** I want to ask a question. You laid out a really good plan, but for me, as an indigenous woman from a riding, I know for a fact that the wording doesn't meet the needs of northern communities and indigenous communities on and off reserve.

Do you agree that youth suicide is a problem?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Georgina Jolibois:** Then why is it that in your budget there's no mention of youth suicide? If your department is addressing youth suicide, why is it clumped in with mental health, and why is there no breakdown for provinces as well as territories? With regard to indigenous youth, we are losing. It is very rampant. We are losing indigenous youth across Canada.

I feel—and I know that young people have said to me too—that the government isn't doing enough.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** You've raised a very serious matter. There's no question—I don't think any Canadian would deny that the rates of suicide amongst first nations, Inuit, and Métis are at crisis proportions. I would argue that while I accept your dissatisfaction with the number of times it appears in the budget, almost every single thing we're doing speaks in one way or another to mental wellness and to addressing suicide.

**Ms. Georgina Jolibois:** I'm sorry, but I disagree with you on that, because I know for a fact that the way the budget is broken down, if it's for housing, it goes into housing infrastructure; if it's for other means or the Project Venture, it specifically goes into Project Venture. It doesn't necessarily address the needs of a particular problem.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I will go back to that in a minute. There are significant investments in mental wellness and suicide prevention. I look to programs like Choose Life, and we're now \$100 million into that program in northern Ontario, for example. We've quadrupled the number of mental wellness teams across the country, and now we have the mental wellness helpline running in the country. There are many ways that we've tried to increase the direct services, and with due respect, because I accept that you are much better informed than I am on the depths and contributors to youth suicide, when we invest in housing, child welfare, health, and education, that actually—

**Ms. Georgina Jolibois:** Obviously on the ground, the realities as such—

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** In the day to day, yes, but in the long run—

**Ms. Georgina Jolibois:** The young people who need supported services need mental health therapists or counselling, and it's not available on reserves or off reserve. How can you say that when you don't know exactly what's on the ground?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Jordan's principle is one of the things that the deputy has mentioned to me, and a significant amount of the funding for Jordan's principle has gone specifically to mental wellness. We have to continue to provide those immediate responses and to provide programs like Choose Life to provide more mental wellness workers to support programs like the We Matter campaign, which is doing fantastic work.

**Ms. Georgina Jolibois:** Yet we continue to lose youths across Canada.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I accept that.

**The Chair:** Questioning now moves to MP Will Amos.

**Mr. William Amos:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister and officials, thank you very much for your presence here. It's important for our committee to have this opportunity to have fulsome discussions. The frankness is very appreciated as well.

I want to split my time between two issues. One is long-term drinking water advisories, and the other is the department itself and your experiences in that aspect.

There are two first nations reserves in the riding of Pontiac: Kitigan Zibi and Barriere Lake. These are two communities with very contrasting profiles, but in particular, Kitigan Zibi has had some major drinking water issues over the course of many years. Early on in our mandate, I was pleased that we could announce approximately \$5 million in drinking water infrastructure. That was a big deal, but there's more to go.

With a significant sum of money—\$1.8 billion announced in the 2016 budget and you mentioned the additional funding in the most recent budget of \$172 million—there's good news in the lump-sum category. However, at the end of the day, this has to hit the ground. Could you give us some specifics on how this gets prioritized, how the work is unfolding, and where you're finding the challenges? I appreciate that there have been some successes, but there's a long way to go. Maybe you can go into that a bit, please.

• (1705)

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Thank you for raising the issue. You're right that it's not without its challenges. In fact, many Canadians find it incomprehensible and obviously unacceptable that Canadians can't turn on their taps and drink water. This is one of the most important promises we've made. The Prime Minister said that all long-term drinking water advisories in public systems on reserve would be lifted by March 2021. People don't always understand why that can't happen tomorrow, but in fact, these are sometimes very remote communities. Until the money in budget 2016, there wasn't long-term funding. Some of these communities require a year or two to plan and design a very specific water system that's going to take into consideration the geography and environment where it takes place.

Thankfully, we have the long-term funding and a unique plan to address every single one of the long-term drinking water advisories. I have spreadsheets that I study on a regular basis, that the department follows up on in real time, tracking how far along things are, whether we're going to meet the target dates that have been set.

Oftentimes there are surprising things that are challenges along the way. Some of it is around the actual physical infrastructure, but sometimes it's getting agreements with local municipalities to attach up to water systems. Sometimes it's agreements between neighbouring nations that have to take place. When you look underneath at what the challenges are, I think you'd be surprised, but we are fully determined to address every single one of those. Some of it is around the training and retention of water operators, and making sure that there's also an operation and maintenance plan in place so that you don't fix systems and then find them once again lapsing into a drinking water advisory.

I feel very confident, and it's something that I track very closely. Of course, we have officials who are working on this on a daily basis to make sure that we meet those targets.

**Mr. William Amos:** Thank you.

As a short follow-up on that, what are some of the indicators of where greater success can be achieved in communities where long-term drinking water advisories have occurred in the past? What will give Canadians greater assurance that the significant sums invested are going to yield long-term results? We all know, for example, that sometimes communities will lose the staffing, the people necessary to maintain systems. A series of issues can come up. What are some of the things you're noticing that will help us get to a better place?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** That's a great question, and by asking those questions we really get to the roots of the crisis and why this has never been solved in the past. Some of the things you've hinted at there. One is the human resources necessary. They need to be trained properly, but they also need to be remunerated properly. We find in some places that there are big gaps in what a person will be paid for being a water operator on reserve versus what they might be paid if they work in a local municipality off reserve. Addressing those issues is still a bit of a puzzle, but we've seen in communities where they've been able to close those gaps that actually it has meant fewer long-term drinking water advisories.

The operation and maintenance piece is another thing, whether there is the appropriate funding and appropriate support and plan in place. Our teams are now working with each of these communities to make sure that they have what's called an "O&M plan" to make sure that we get these beautiful new systems.

I was in Slate Falls last week and they have the most spectacularly beautiful system. One of the first questions I asked was that I hoped they had a really strong operation and maintenance plan and trained water operators. They're training local young people who are moving up through the levels, and they have all that figured out.

**The Chair:** MP McLeod.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** On a point of order, Chair, when the bells go at 5:15, do we have unanimous consent to go to 5:25? That will give us 20 minutes to get up to the House.

**Mr. William Amos:** That sounds reasonable to me.

**Mr. Mike Bossio:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** I understand there's consensus to go to 5:25.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** All right. We'll be quick getting back to the House.

**Mr. William Amos:** Madam Chair, adding the 35 seconds that ticked off, how much time remains?

**The Chair:** You have about a minute.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off.

**Mr. William Amos:** No, not at all.

[*Translation*]

I would like to ask a question in French.

I thank Mr. Thoppil, Mr. Tremblay and Mr. Perron for being here, and I would also like to thank all of the public servants who work in their department.

Gentlemen, those are the people who support you and who help us to meet all of the challenges we are discussing.

I would like to know what you have learned concerning your department, in the five interrelated priority areas you mentioned. There are a lot of people in my riding of Pontiac who would very much like to know.

• (1710)

[*English*]

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I don't know if the deputy wants to speak to this as well, but I have to say it's been a delight to work in this new department. I think people always like things that are new and fresh, and the deputy comes with lots of great experience. Constituents will tell you whether we've been effective in this or not, but we have been trying to put in place a culture within the department that's a real *cando*, positive, get to yes if you possibly can, and find a way to not constantly be denying people who have been denied for many, many years access to the kinds of things that make life better. We see that reflected in the attitudes of our staff, who are absolutely thrilled that they are hearing from our government that we are determined to close these socio-economic gaps.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Questioning now moves to MP Kevin Waugh.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Thank you, Minister, for coming here today.

I'm going to give you credit for the 54 long-term drinking water advisories having been lifted, but what you didn't add was that 30 have been added to the list. You didn't mention that, so we've gone two steps forward and one back. Why didn't you mention the 30 that have been added?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I am totally open about the number that have been added, and this is all publicly available on the website.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I see it.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I didn't talk about them in my notes, but this is actually one of the important discoveries that we made early on. In fact, under Minister Bennett's leadership, it was understood that you have to look at addressing not only the drinking water advisories that are there but all of the others that are about to slip into a long-term drinking water advisory.

Our plan now includes not just the approximately 80 that we are still working on but also another 20 that we are worried will slip into that. We're hoping that "two steps forward and one step back" will start to close over time, but it's absolutely an issue.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Okay. I just wanted to bring that up on the record, that 30 have been added.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I'm absolutely happy to acknowledge that.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I had the opportunity last week to go to nine communities on an eight-day trip to Nunavut. I've talked to Minister Bennett about certain things. One of the things we talked about was Bill C-45, the marijuana cannabis bill.

They really haven't been consulted up there. I know that Natan Obed always has his door open to you, but let me tell you this, because I went into nine schools: they're scared as hell. There are addictions up north that you know about, family violence, and a shortage of homes. They're crowded.

Let me say this: there is not one addiction centre in Nunavut, not one. You send them to Selkirk; you'll send them to Winnipeg; you'll send them to Montreal. You'll send them everywhere but their own land. What are you going to do about that? I heard that. They don't want to leave Nunavut.

Do you see what I'm saying? You're coming with this bill. Everybody is scared up there because they're going to be shipped out. Many of these, all of these, are dry communities, and now you're going to add this marijuana to them but you don't have one addiction centre in Nunavut.

What would you think if you were living there today? If you were at Rankin Inlet today or Chesterfield Inlet today or Baker Lake today and I said to you, "We don't have an addiction centre available. You have to get on the next flight. I don't know when you're coming back, and I don't know where you're going?" What do you say to those people?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Well, the first thing I would say to those people is to acknowledge the challenges that are involved in delivering health services in a territory like Nunavut, but I would also very happily say to them that our budget of 2018 has \$200 million of new money for addictions. This was something—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** So you're going to have a new centre up there, are you?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Well, there is work being done on developing work towards a treatment centre in Nunavut, and this is something my officials have been in active discussion with them on—

• (1715)

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Do you know the concerns. Or are we going to ship them off?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** —but you don't always require a physical building for treatment, especially for treatment of substance-use disorders. Often it involves traditional healing practices, for example, learning from elders, and—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Yes, but traditional healing doesn't happen in Montreal. It doesn't happen—

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Absolutely not, and that's why our \$200 million will be distributed across the country.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** That's why they want it in Nunavut. You can see what they want there.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I agree with you. In fact, some of the very best work that's being done right now around addictions and mental wellness treatment is taking place in the territories using traditional practices. I totally agree with you that, wherever possible, it needs to be delivered close to home.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I'm very passionate about the education of first nations. I have asked for a study that we can do. In October you were in Manitoba at Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. Instead of \$8,000 per student, you've gone to \$18,000. We all know graduation rates in the country, especially on reserves, are at 30% at best.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Twenty-four percent.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** According to my quote here, it's 30% in Manitoba. So you've picked winners and losers, because when I get to Saskatchewan, they're asking, "Where's our \$18,000 per student on reserve?" You've just given this one a special one, right? You went from \$8,000 per student to \$18,000. When I go back home, "Where's ours?"

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I'm very happy to answer that question.

First of all, there are two things you've brought up that I want respond to. One is the Manitoba First Nations School System, that did get additional resources, in part because it's a school system. This is exactly what's going to drive change, not just getting the funding to equity plus, but seeing systems that are designed by, led by, and delivered by first nations for first nations, something they've been asking for for a long time.

The other thing I'm very happy to tell you—and you can report back to people in Saskatchewan—is that with the money, the \$2.6 billion that Minister Bennett acquired through budget 2016, we are in the process of ramping up that money across the country so that very soon we will reach a point where the funding for first nations' education in every province of this country is going to be as good as or better than what's happening at the provincial level. That's never happened before.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Questioning now moves to MP Anandasangaree.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thanks, Minister Philpott, for being here, and your panel.

I want to just pick up on the same theme that Mr. Waugh was talking about, and that's with respect to self-determination of child and family services. We're looking at a \$1.4-billion investment over the next six years. I know one of the things we've grappled with is whether we infuse that money into the existing system or we develop a new system. To me this almost looks like a stopgap, intermediate approach that will allow child and family services to evolve. But how does this fit into our overall framework of self-determination, while at the same time ensuring that some of the social issues we've highlighted over the last few years are addressed in a meaningful way?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** You've raised a really challenging issue, and that's how to improve things as they are, knowing that the entire system needs to change. This could be applied to any one of these particular areas. An example of the kinds of things we're seeing in child and family services is a huge appetite to draw down jurisdiction but be able to then get the support to do it well. I could tell you stories across the country of places, be they in a specific first nations community or sometimes in a broader area, where they have said they would like to run their own child and families services. Instead of that money flowing either to the province or through agencies, are there ways that money can flow to communities to either run their own child and family services or to delegate themselves to a local agency?

As I said, there is not a one-size-fits-all solution across the country that's going to make that happen, but we're seeing examples where it's been very successful. Yukon has had amazing success, in part just by changing their policy. One of the things they've done in Yukon, where they have many self-governing first nations, is change the policy to say that the funding support didn't have to go to foster families, it could go to a grandparent, an aunt, or another family member who could care for the child. Just by doing that alone, I believe they dropped their numbers in a dramatic way. I don't want to quote the exact number, because I can't remember it, but they got kids out of foster care and back into their own culture.

• (1720)

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** Minister, I know earlier last year this committee released a report on suicide. One of the major issues—and it was presented to you in your former ministry as the Minister of Health—was the issue of social determinants of health and how that affects levels of suicide. Can you speak to how this budget and your work develop the issue of social determinants of health, how people's lives are improved, and, ultimately, the theory that will it reduce issues such as suicide?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I'll try to be really brief.

I think it goes back to what I was speaking to MP Jolibois about. You have to be very sensitive about this. Of course, when people are facing a crisis, they need those mental health workers immediately, and they need mental health workers who understand the culture and can help people in their own culture and community.

But unless you fix the other things, like education and economic and employment opportunities, kids will not have hope. Unless you address the trauma that people have dealt with over many years related to things like the child welfare system that's stolen people from their culture, we will not, ultimately, solve the suicide crisis.

We have to be sensitive to, yes, addressing those critical, acute needs but also say that these kids need to have a decent education that's equivalent to or better than what their provincial counterparts are getting. At the end of the day, they need to know that when they graduate from high school there will be a job waiting for them. We have to deal with those social things. We have to fix the housing or else we'll never solve the suicide crisis.

**The Chair:** The questioning moves to MP Arnold Viersen.

You'll conclude at 25 after.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Thank you, Madam Chair. As well, thank you to the minister for being here.

I guess it doesn't matter. I'll just start my timer this way anyway.

Minister, Loon River First Nation is a first nation in my riding near Peace River, Alberta. They recently wrote to me that they were not applying for the Canada summer student jobs program due to the discriminatory attestation that was on there. Chief Bernadette Sharpe wrote to me and actually said, "We hold to the values taught by our elders, and will not compromise for a few dollars."

As you know, the Canada summer jobs program provides valuable training for, in this case, first nations youth. On behalf of Loon River First Nation, I'm seeking your explanation as to why first nations in my riding are expected to choose between honouring and respecting traditional values passed on to them by their elders and important funding for their community and youth.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Thank you for raising this issue.

We would be happy to work with the community. At this point, I believe the deadline has passed for the applications. It's unfortunate that we couldn't have explained to them a bit more about the attestation so that they would have been comfortable with responding to it. Perhaps there are other ways we can look for any job opportunities that would support the young people in that community.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Is there another avenue for this kind of funding through your department?

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** I am not aware of the specifics of the location and what kinds of opportunities might be there, but I will certainly ask for some work to be done to see if there are ways we can support the young people there.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Earlier you mentioned that you're looking forward to our report on the fire study. I was advocating that we title our fire study, "Don't Take the Kids", but I don't think that's what we settled on.

I noticed recently in news reports that basically you've come out with a policy titled that—or right around—as well. I was just wondering if you could give us a bit of a heads-up on what your government is doing in terms of "don't take the kids".

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Are you speaking about child and family services?

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Yes. There was a news report recently about how children will not be removed from their communities just because they're living in poverty.

**Hon. Jane Philpott:** Right.

This goes back to some of the things we talked about earlier. There are a bunch of reasons why the number of indigenous children

in care is so high. Some reasons that children are apprehended are reasons that, really, most of us would agree are not adequate reasons—poverty, for example, or inadequate housing. It strikes most human beings that you solve the poverty or you help solve the housing; you don't take a child from their family. Or look at issues like substance use disorders. In fact, if you take a child away from someone, it often makes the addiction worse. The answer is to get treatment for the person who has the addiction, not to rip their family from them.

We're trying to deal with prevention and are hoping that will make a big difference.

● (1725)

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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