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Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina



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• (1420)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)): I will now call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number six of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. I'd like to start by acknowledging that I am joining you today from the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabe and Chonnonton nations.

Pursuant to the order of reference of April 20, 2020, the committee is meeting for the purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. During this meeting, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

In order to facilitate the work of our interpreters and ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. As you are speaking, if you are planning to alternate from one language to another, you will also need to switch the interpretation channel so that it will align with the language you are speaking. You may want to allow for a short pause when switching languages. That's the icon in the middle bottom of the screen, which on mine now says "English". Unfortunately, it has an American flag, but we'll change that. That's the one you will click on to the language that you're speaking and if you're going to change to French, then change the origin language there.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can either click on the microphone icon to activate your mike or you can hold down the space bar while you are speaking. When you release the bar, your mike will mute itself, just like a walkie-talkie button.

I remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. Should members need to request the floor outside of their designated time for questions, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order. If a member wishes to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member, they should use the "raise hand" function. This will signal to the chair your interest to speak. To do so, you should click on "participants" at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see that you can click on "raise hand" beside your name on the participants button.

When you're speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. The use of headsets, as we have discovered, is strongly encouraged. If you have ear buds with a microphone, you should hold the microphone nearer to your mouth when you are speaking to boost the sound quality for the interpreters.

Should any technical challenges arise, for example, in relation to interpretation or if you are accidentally disconnected, please advise the chair or clerk immediately and the technical team will work to resolve them. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, can everyone click on their screens in the top right-hand corner to switch to the gallery view? With this view, you should be able to see all of the participants in a grid. This will ensure that all video participants can see each another.

During the meeting, we will also follow the same rules that usually apply to our normal meetings. Once again, we will have witnesses for two hours, but I'm going to ask the clerk to make a comment before we start.

In view of the fact that it is now 2:23, will we have an absolute deadline at the end of the meeting? Can you give us an indication, Madam Clerk, of how the timing will work today, in view of the delay with the technology?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Evelyn Lukyniuk): Maybe while we're receiving the statements by the ministers, I can double-check with our technical teams to see if we would have more time.

The Chair: That would be great. Thank you very much.

Now I'd like to welcome our witnesses, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations; the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services; and the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs.

Minister Miller, my information is that you will begin this round, so please go ahead. Welcome to the committee.

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services): Thank you, Chair.

Kwe. Tansi. Ulaakut. Boohzoo. Good afternoon. Bonjour.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that I'm here, very close to Canada's Parliament, on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to join all of you, including my colleagues, Ministers Bennett and Vandal, virtually. With me as well to answer your questions from Indigenous Services Canada are Jean-François Tremblay, my deputy minister; Valerie Gideon, senior assistant deputy minister for the first nations and Inuit health branch; Dr. Tom Wong, chief medical officer of public health for FNIHB; Mary Kapelus, assistant deputy minister for education and social development programs; and Chris Duschenes, director general, lands and economic development sector.

On behalf of all of us, I'd like to thank the committee for this opportunity to provide an update on how our government has been working with first nations, Inuit and Métis leaders, indigenous organizations and communities, as well as provincial and territorial governments to mitigate the threat posed by the global pandemic of COVID-19.

• (1425)

As of April 30, we've seen 131 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in first nations communities on reserve. We're also tracking one confirmed case in Pond Inlet, Nunavut.

[*Translation*]

To support indigenous communities in preparing for and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, our government has allocated over \$740 million to meet the public health needs of first nations, Inuit and Métis communities. To date, more than \$59.8 million in funding has been used to purchase equipment for medical personnel and to support communities' preparedness measures. That funding is in addition to our government's budget 2019 investment of about \$80 million to support preparedness for public health emergencies like this one. That investment was used to develop a network of regional coordinators and strengthen first nations communities' ability to deal with public health emergencies and pandemics.

Indigenous Services Canada continues to maintain stockpiles of personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer for use in first nations communities during public health emergencies. The stockpiles are available to first nations communities that may require personal protective equipment to ensure the safety of health care workers and others supporting the delivery of health services during a public health emergency like this pandemic.

To date, we have provided communities with 167,000 surgical gowns, 200,000 surgical masks and about half a million vinyl gloves. That is in addition to equipment already provided by the provinces and territories. It is very important to note that this is a collaborative effort. We continue to respond quickly to requests and assess them within 24 hours.

[*English*]

It's important to underscore that many community and service providers are adapting their operations to respect the requirement for physical distancing. National indigenous organizations, such as the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation and First Peoples Wellness Circle, have developed a series of resources related to COVID-19 that are available online. One of our supports has been to financially assist the First Peoples Wellness Circle in developing an online

platform for its network of local multidisciplinary mental wellness teams that are currently offering services to 344 communities.

Also, working with the provider, we've increased the number of crisis intervention counsellors on shift at the Hope for Wellness helpline, which is now receiving more than 100 calls and chats a week linked to COVID-19. The experience of self-isolation and physical distancing and having family members who may be at higher risk or who fall ill can have significant and real impacts on mental health. We recognize this and are engaged with partners to support solutions to address and bolster mental health, particularly for youth.

Supporting indigenous youth is another key area of our focus. The department is working with indigenous partners, including youth organizations, to support and promote indigenous resources for youth. For example, We Matter is an indigenous-led youth organization focused on life promotion and messages of hope and resilience. They've developed tool kits, which are available for youth, teachers and support workers to help youth and those who support youth.

Similarly, the Canadian Roots Exchange has set up the creation community support fund to support youth mental wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic with local solutions.

Members of this committee may recall that on March 18, the Government of Canada allocated \$305 million towards a new, distinctions-based indigenous community support fund to address immediate needs related to COVID-19 in indigenous communities and amongst urban indigenous populations. This funding is part of the COVID-19 economic response plan and is in addition to the needs-based support for first nations and Inuit health and emergency management.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

We recognize that post-secondary students are facing an unprecedented situation because of COVID-19.

A week ago, on April 22, the Prime Minister announced nearly \$9 billion in funding for post-secondary students and recent graduates, including indigenous students. We know that many indigenous students face unique and special situations related to financial stability, employment opportunities or just the ability to continue their education as planned.

That is why \$75.2 million will be provided to support first nations, Inuit and Métis post-secondary students while they deal with COVID-19. This is over and above existing funding for financial assistance programs for indigenous post-secondary students. It could cover the cost of technological equipment as courses move online, allow for summer school enrolment, and cover expenses related to food, child support, housing and transportation. In the event of delayed graduation, it could cover an additional academic year and associated expenses.

Ultimately, this funding is meant to ensure that indigenous post-secondary students are able to continue or start their studies as planned despite barriers posed by COVID-19.

[English]

We're also taking steps to support indigenous-owned businesses during this crisis. The Government of Canada will provide up to \$306.8 million in funding to help small and medium-sized indigenous businesses through the network of aboriginal financial institutions that offer financing to indigenous businesses. This measure will help an estimated 6,000 indigenous-owned businesses endure this difficult time and will hopefully provide the stability they need to persist.

Indigenous businesses, including indigenous government-owned corporations and partnerships, are also now eligible to apply for the Canada emergency wage subsidy to support them in their efforts to retain and rehire laid-off employees and weather the current challenges. Taxable indigenous government-owned corporations are already eligible for the wage subsidy. We've adjusted the eligibility for the wage subsidy to include indigenous government-owned corporations and partnerships to support them to retain employees who are still on the payroll and to rehire workers previously laid off. I know this is important to committee members, because it's been raised by a number of you, and I appreciate your advocacy, which made a difference.

The government has also established a business credit availability program to provide \$40 billion in additional support through the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada, which are working together with private sector lenders to coordinate credit solutions for individual businesses, which some indigenous businesses may be able to leverage. This is important.

Finally, I'd like to bring attention to the positive progress we have seen in our support for first nations indigenous people off reserve and in the urban indigenous populations generally.

We recently concluded a proposal-based process to distribute \$15 million to organizations that provide critical services to first nations off reserve and indigenous peoples living in urban centres. This funding is part of the government's indigenous community support fund, which I referred to earlier. To date, 94 proposals have been supported through the indigenous community support fund. This includes support for friendship centres as they continue their important work to serve urban indigenous communities in the face of this pandemic.

Again, thank you for the advocacy of members on this committee who pushed so hard.

We know that friendship centres, for example, are playing a crucial role, with their key support ranging from delivering food to families, young people and elders; responding to calls for assistance and support; to providing crucial mental health and cultural support for urban indigenous community members.

As our response to the COVID-19 pandemic continues and adapts to new data, we ask indigenous communities and partners to continue to assess their evolving needs. We ask them to reach out to their regional departmental contacts so that we may assist them in supporting community members. At the same time, we continue to focus on longer-term goals such as housing, employment and ending drinking-water advisories.

[Translation]

We are determined to respond to the evolving needs of first nations, Inuit and Métis communities and their members and to respond to requests from Indigenous communities themselves.

That is why, for example, the Canadian Rangers are currently helping to distribute food and supplies and to provide medical assistance not only in Nunavik, but also in northern Saskatchewan, northern Ontario and northern Quebec. The Canadian Armed Forces and their Ranger detachments have extensive experience with assisting communities, sometimes their own communities, and everyone in Canada.

We have seen Rangers and Canadian Armed Forces members stand up and step up wherever Canadians need it most all across the country: in our long-term care facilities, in areas with acute resource needs, and in remote areas of the country. That is why we continue to work together to improve access to essential services for indigenous peoples.

• (1435)

[English]

Today our thoughts and prayers go to the military personnel who lost their lives earlier this week in the helicopter crash in the Ionian Sea, as well as to their families. Canada is grieving with them as well, as we all try to come to grips with this tragic incident.

The government has designed and supported a series of measures to provide timely and direct support to all Canadians and peoples of Canada in response to this crisis. These measures will help us to meet the needs of Canadian households and to ensure that Canadians can pay for essentials like housing and groceries during this difficult time. Further, these measures offer timely financial support to indigenous peoples in Canada, no matter where they reside.

On another note, I want to thank the members of this committee in particular who have reached out either directly to me, to parliamentary secretaries or to my staff to advocate for the continued health response to a health problem. This is not a partisan issue, and I want to thank you for parking that and moving towards ensuring we have a health response to a health problem, because at the end of the day, we're talking about the lives of Canadians, indigenous peoples living in Canada, and that is precisely the measure by which we will all be judged as we tackle this epidemic we are all confronted with on a daily basis.

I want to thank everyone on this committee who has reached out, talked to my parliamentary secretaries and done amazing work to advocate for the people reaching out to them. We are taking a number of measures and putting them forward in record time. Obviously, mistakes are made and when you point them out we do our best to adjust. I want to thank you all for that. I want to highlight the non-partisan nature of the outreach, and highlight your character as humans in having done that. I appreciate that deeply. My staff appreciates it, and indeed I believe everyone on the committee appreciates it.

Again, working together, we can save lives and we can flatten the curve. *Meegwetch. Nakurmiik.* Thank you. *Merçi. Mahsi cho.*

The Chair: Thanks very much, Minister Miller.

We'll continue now—

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): I apologize. Can I call a point of order, Chair?

The Chair: Please.

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq: Has a time been established for each speaker? It's a very important discussion, and I'm sure we're all eager to get to our questions, so it would be great to have clarification on that.

The Chair: Yes, thanks very much.

Our speaking allocation or allotment went to about 10 minutes, which was roughly the case for Minister Miller, and then shorter interventions from Minister Bennett and Minister Vandal for the reasons you just stated.

We have a five-minute intervention now with the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is an honour to appear virtually before this committee for this important study on COVID-19 in indigenous communities.

While the House of Commons is on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people, I am joining you today from my constituency in Toronto, on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. We honour all the indigenous people who paddled

these waters and whose moccasins walked these lands. I would also like to recognize the traditional territories from which all of you are participating today.

Our officials—Daniel Watson, Ross Pattee and Jeff Moore—will be on the next panel supporting us, but I, like Minister Miller, want to thank our parliamentary secretaries, who meet with us every morning at 9:15. Pam, Gary and Yvonne have done extraordinary work, which has been spread out, and important suggestions have been brought to us.

We know that from the beginning of the threat of this pandemic, all Canadians were concerned that first nations, Métis and Inuit would be disproportionately affected by COVID-19. We know that long-standing social and economic inequalities and inequities mean that indigenous communities are more vulnerable to COVID-19 and that the impact of an outbreak in indigenous communities would be greater.

We continue to be impressed with the impressive response of communities that since H1N1 have worked hard to develop their pandemic plans. They have now been able to execute their plans and keep their communities safe. Our hearts are with those whose communities have lost a loved one, particularly the 'Namgis First Nation, which recently lost a beloved elder.

Our primary focus has been to ensure that we all work in partnership with indigenous communities, as we know they are the best placed to act on the needs of their members so they can ensure that everyone is safe and healthy.

We are seeing community-driven solutions that are working. We were very proud to support the initiative of Dene Regional Chief Yakeleya in the Northwest Territories. Families there chose to return to the land as a way to protect themselves from the virus and promote healing and mental health.

Having strong leadership and strong collaboration and coordination across the board is how we have been addressing this pandemic. Indigenous leaders have demonstrated their tremendous resilience, innovation and leadership, and they must continue to be involved in decision-making at all levels to ensure that the supports the Government of Canada provides to address COVID-19 meet the real needs in their communities. We have worked the First Nations Financial Management Board, the First Nations Tax Commission, the First Nations Finance Authority and a broad range of indigenous organizations that are developing the measures they need to support communities.

Protecting women and children from domestic violence during this pandemic has also been an important issue that needed to be addressed. We invested an additional \$10 million to support shelters in first nations communities during this pandemic. I am working with Minister Monsef and her provincial and territorial partners to further the work on the shadow pandemic of violence against women and the need to address the calls for justice on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, two-spirit people and those who are LGBTQIA.

COVID-19 underlines the importance of reflecting on the difference between the medical model, in which I was trained, and the medicine wheel. It is time to reflect on achieving more health—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually—so that we reduce the burden on our health care systems. That's what flattening the curve means. It is the knowledge keepers and healers focused on the well-being of all in a very holistic way. It's time that we listen to them.

Tommy Douglas stated that the goal of medicare was to keep people well, not just patch them up when they get sick. That's what the pandemic is teaching us as we stay home, wash our hands and physically distance. Flattening the curve means reducing the number of those who get sick so that we can stay within the capacity of our beloved and cherished health care system. It means more health so that we need less health care.

● (1440)

COVID-19 has finally convinced all Canadians that health promotion and disease prevention must be our priority.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for all you are doing in your communities. You set the example of coming together while remaining apart for everyone's good during the COVID-19 pandemic. I look forward to your questions and your advice. We are indeed stronger together.

Meegwetch. Marci. Nakurmiik. Thank you. Merci.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Our final speaker in this round is the Honourable Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs.

Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and everyone online, for this important meeting.

It's a great pleasure for me to appear before the committee today. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that Canada's Parliament is on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people, and I am speaking to you from my office in Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, which is in the homeland of the Métis nation as well as Treaty 1 territory.

Today, I'd like to give you an update on the situation of COVID-19 in the north. Since the beginning of the crisis, I have been in regular contact with territorial partners, premiers and first nations, Inuit and Métis partners across the north. I know that the only way we have any hope of preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the north is by taking an approach informed by northerners. They have the ideas, the innovations and the solutions we need to imple-

ment in order to prevent and stop the spread of the virus. We are committed to listening and doing everything we can to support territorial governments in preventing and responding to COVID. Territorial governments have done a tremendous job of protecting their communities and keeping people safe, and I support their efforts and continue to work with them throughout this pandemic.

Canada is directly addressing these unique territorial needs with more than \$130 million of funding toward four key priorities: health and social services, essential airline services, supporting small and medium-sized businesses, and ensuring access to adequate nutrition and essential goods.

To support health and social services, the Government of Canada has provided \$72.6 million to the territories, which builds on the \$15 million in funding to provinces and territories through the initial Canada health transfer. It is helping territories to address the critical priorities they have identified to minimize the spread of COVID-19. The government is helping territories to put in place solid measures in order to prepare and respond to COVID-19.

To support essential airline services, which are a critical link in maintaining the supply chain for the movement of essential goods, services and medicines to the north, Canada is providing an initial investment, covering a three-month period, of up to \$17.3 million among the territories.

● (1445)

[*Translation*]

This investment, along with investments by the territorial governments, will help northern air carriers to maintain a basic network of routes and services. These services are vital to ensuring that people living in remote fly-in communities have continued access to food, medical supplies, and other essential goods and services.

Like in the rest of Canada, many businesses in the north are already struggling with the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. To assist businesses with operating costs not already covered by other Government of Canada measures, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency will provide \$15 million in non-repayable support for territorial businesses through the northern business relief fund. The fund will provide up to \$100,000 to businesses struggling to cover their operating costs.

[English]

As the COVID crisis continues to evolve, we also recognize the increased costs of many essential goods in the north, and the increased financial pressures that families are facing. That's why we are providing an additional one-time investment of \$25 million to nutrition north Canada to increase the federal subsidy rate for essential items such as nutritious food and personal hygiene products. This makes these essentials more affordable for northern families, including indigenous families in the north, during these very challenging times.

We've also, as you know, implemented the harvesters support grant, which has been allocated to indigenous partners, and we are working diligently to flow the next wave of money very quickly. This grant, which was codeveloped with indigenous partners, helps northerners who return to traditional harvesting and food-sharing practices by alleviating the high costs associated with traditional hunting and harvesting of foods.

Furthermore, we've announced a distinctions-based funding of \$45 million through the \$305-million indigenous community support fund for Inuit-designed and implemented community-based solutions to prepare for and react to the spread of COVID-19 within their communities.

The Government of Canada is committed to supporting the health, the safety and the well-being of northerners through the COVID-19 crisis and beyond, to ensure that they are able to recover and thrive in the future. That means that we will keep listening carefully to and working closely with our territorial partners, our provincial partners, our indigenous partners and others to determine the best responses and approaches in our ongoing efforts to fight COVID-19.

Meegwetch. Marci. Nakurmiik. Thank you. Merci.

• (1450)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We're now going to a round of questions, and our first round will be six minutes. The speakers in order will be Vidal, van Koeverden, Bérubé and Qaqqaq.

Mr. Vidal, you are up for six minutes.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to all the ministers for appearing here today. I know you're very busy in the midst of all the challenges we're facing.

Minister Miller, according to CTV News yesterday, northern Saskatchewan has become where there is the most concerning outbreak of COVID-19 in indigenous communities in Canada. There have been two deaths of elders in the care facility so far, and the spread has been dramatic and rapid. Many active cases now are in neighbouring first nations communities, and there was a positive test of a worker at the Beauval gas and grocery store. For anyone who understands the area, the Beauval gas and grocery store is the hub of everybody moving around in northwest Saskatchewan, so you know the fear is real.

Minister, beyond my role as critic of your file, even beyond my role as a member of Parliament, this is very personal for me, as this is my hometown. This is my area. These are all the kids and families I coached in hockey. These are all friends and direct connections, so this has become very personal for me suddenly.

I guess my challenge is that it's too late for reactive measures. Now is the time for a major proactive response from ISC in northern Saskatchewan. This has become a very dangerous situation for all of us in northern Saskatchewan.

My question is quite simple. What actions are being taken today to provide the capacity to proactively respond to this crisis? I'm thinking along the lines of health personnel. I'm thinking of PPE. I'm thinking of testing and tracing, and I'm also thinking even of the military. We have a military base within a couple of hours of this crisis, so could you just clarify for us what's being done today on the ground?

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, and thank you, Gary, for the passion in that question. It is something that I'm worried about as well, and indeed all Canadians should be. I am going to spend very little time speaking in general terms. This is very important, and I think you deserve specific answers. I will pass it over to Tom Wong to speak to the specific actions that we are taking.

You should know that ever since we've had news of this outbreak, we've been engaging with the Government of Saskatchewan, working in particular with the Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority and the Saskatchewan Health Authority to ensure that our responses are not only appropriate but coordinated. You may have heard recently of some of the surge support that we have provided in terms of getting PPE into the community. There's a lot of active work being done on contact tracing and making sure that communications are heightened so that people are isolated and we are controlling something that could become precisely as you describe it.

On that, I would ask either Valerie Gideon or Tom Wong to speak for a couple of minutes about the specific actions that are taking place.

Dr. Tom Wong (Chief Medical Officer and Director General, Office of Population and Public Health, Department of Indigenous Services): Thank you very much, Minister.

We are working actively with the Public Health Agency of Canada as well as the indigenous communities, both off reserve and on reserve, together with the local public health department and the province. Of course, off reserve, the lead is the province, but on reserve, the lead is Indigenous Services Canada.

As an example, we are mobilizing testing capacity to the area. The area needs point-of-care testing so that testing can be done rapidly. As a matter of fact, as we speak, the Public Health Agency of Canada is working with us, and the provinces are moving rapid point-of-care testing equipment into the area so that point-of-care testing can be done there.

In addition to that, as Minister Miller said, we have made arrangements for PPE to be moved into the area. As well, we've been asked to provide surge capacity to the area, including health professionals, nursing. In terms of our staff in the region, we have a network of medical officers, coordinators for health emergencies, as well as nurses. We're fully behind the communities in providing those supports, including public health measures such as isolation, physical distancing and contact tracing.

Thank you. Maybe I'll turn it over to Valerie—

• (1455)

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you, Dr. Wong. I would like to get one more question in. My time is going to be short, so I'm going to move on to a new question.

Minister, I thank you for your announcement about the support for first nations businesses through the limited partnerships through the CEWS program. As you said, that's something we've been advocating for, and I appreciate that it has come to fruition.

We are hearing about the \$306 million you talked about today for indigenous small businesses. We're hearing concerns that we're still waiting for the PMO to sign off on that program. We're also hearing that this funding is still weeks away, and that the actual flow of money is still somewhat down the road.

Minister, actions speak louder than announcements, and the lack of detail and swiftness of action following these announcements is creating uncertainty and anxiety for many indigenous businesses. Can you identify for me when the money is going to be available to these AFIs through NACCA from this program?

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you, Gary.

Speed has been perhaps one of the most important factors in a lot of the decision-making processes. We have compressed into literally hours what sometimes takes weeks. I know that you, as an experienced member of Parliament, have seen how quickly things have moved.

Again, this package was approved in record time, working with NACCA and the 59 AFIs that have identified the needs and have the established client networks to establish a series of partially forgivable and partially interest-free loans for medium and small businesses that are indigenous in nature. That is critical, and we expect it to be deployed within the coming weeks. It isn't a question of being jammed up at a particular instance of government. It's just a question of being able to deploy the funds, assuring those companies that they do have the financial backing of the Government of Canada. We know how pressing that need is, and we are moving to get things out at a speed that is pretty remarkable for any government.

To give you that reasonable expectation, we believe that it could be a question of a couple of weeks, but again, we'd have to revert to the institutions that are providing those within their network of well-established contacts. Again, I'd note that the CERB is available, the wage support is available and the clarification with respect to indigenous proponents is also out there, so that is also one of the options available in addition to the specific supports.

The Chair: Thanks, Minister. Thanks, Mr. Vidal.

We will go on to the next six-minute round. Go ahead, Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Before I start, I'd like to thank everybody in the department for all of the hard work being done to quickly get to solutions on this. It's been remarkable. The speed at which you've moved has been commendable, and I just want to thank you on behalf of my community, my staff and myself. We are grateful.

I understand that in addition to the emergency supports available to all Canadians, the government will provide incremental support for indigenous peoples and indigenous organizations in urban areas. Indigenous peoples living in urban centres, on or off reserve, require special supports in order to allow them to prepare for and react to the spread of COVID-19.

Minister Miller, could you please provide an explanation of the \$15 million for regional, urban and off-reserve indigenous communities and groups across the country, and how the eligibility process was developed, given that it was done very quickly? Did it take into consideration the vast, diverse nature of the commitments and communities, and the flexibility required in order to deliver these services in such an expedient manner?

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you, Adam. This is an important question.

First, I want to take a second to recognize the important work of off-reserve indigenous organizations and local community organizations across the country that are supporting indigenous peoples. It's most often in an urban context and most often some of the most vulnerable, and this is a compounding factor in someone's susceptibility to getting COVID-19.

It's why on March 18 our government announced the funding through the COVID-19 economic response plan that included a \$15 million fund channelled through the indigenous community support fund. This was the most expedient way to address a crying need that exists throughout Canada, frankly at any level of government, that has not gone fully satisfied and fully funded.

We streamlined—and this is important—the application process to about a week period, asking community organizations to submit what their requirements were. There was a screen of criteria that my team mobilized to look through, specifically focusing on a health response to the health problem, to assess quickly a number of the crying needs that exist.

I will confess to members that beyond the 94 organizations that were selected, there were many more with very good applications that would be worthy of funding. We had \$15 million at the outset to disburse. I will say at the outset that this is not enough. Some great examples include the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association, which requested and was then recommended for over \$200,000; the Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre, which requested significant amounts of money and was accorded as much, \$87,000; and the Tahltan, Kaska, Tlingit 3 Nations Society, which was awarded \$22,000. These are all examples of organizations that are doing incredible work for vulnerable populations that aren't necessarily entirely served by their home communities, and that is something we recognized.

Again, these are service providers, so the network that we have with them in terms of governance is a bit different from if we were distributing funds to communities on the basis that we typically do. There was a process of request and response. Again, we are working hard to deploy additional funds.

Let me say this. This is a whole-of-government approach. The network of shelters that we have funded through the wage support, including \$40 million for shelters, a great number of them serve indigenous peoples. A number of the Reaching Home homelessness initiatives that we've deployed—over \$170 million—do serve indigenous people, but they are just not specific to indigenous peoples.

Again, I will acknowledge that this is not enough and we are working to serve more people in very vulnerable situations, and that's the work we will continue to do. Frankly, it's the result of the advocacy of people like you and other members of this panel that has brought this to fruition in such a short time.

• (1500)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you very much. Could I ask you or any of your colleagues to elaborate on the—

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Could I raise a point of order? Am I the only one who's having Internet problems?

I'm losing half of it. My connection was totally lost. Is it only me or is it everybody?

The Chair: I'm fine.

A voice: I'm fine.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I'll continue, if that's okay.

The Chair: Go ahead, Adam. It sounds as though Marcus is having his own personal technical problem, so please finish.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I'm sorry for any difficulties you might be having.

I'm curious to know if you or any of your colleagues could elaborate on the flexibility that will be accorded with these funds. I think it's really important that the money that is going out the door reaches these organizations in a tangibly flexible manner, so that they can help people without being hamstrung by any constraints or red tape associated with the funding.

Hon. Marc Miller: The answer, Adam, is yes. Part of the challenge we've had in getting the money out is that we're working with

currently existing parameters that may have more restrictive components to them. We've worked to expand the terms of conditions as a policy framework within our department, and indeed that's being done at repetition across government. The answer is yes. There are always parameters, particularly to request-based funding, but we have worked extremely hard to enlarge them to make sure that there is flexibility to adapt that culturally responsive approach to COVID-19.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you very much, Minister. I'll conclude my questions there.

The Chair: Thanks very much. You're right on time, Adam.

That moves us to Madame Bérubé.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being with us.

I am very happy to be participating in this committee virtually. My question is for Minister Bennett.

The Government of Quebec has a plan to gradually reopen the regions beginning in May. We are very concerned about the indigenous communities in my riding and elsewhere in Quebec. Do you have a plan to protect indigenous communities once restrictions are lifted?

• (1505)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Ms. Bérubé, I think Mr. Miller is the best person to answer your question.

Hon. Marc Miller: I'm happy to answer.

As the Minister of Indigenous Services and the member of Parliament for a riding in downtown Montreal, I am particularly preoccupied by these issues. You know as well as I do that the situation in downtown Montreal's long-term care community is catastrophic. The fact that people are dying—our seniors, the people who built this country—makes me very emotional. For the short term, we have to think about how the Canadian military can help these people in need. As a society, we also need to engage in a thought process about the long-term once the crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic is over, which won't be anytime soon.

First, I'd like to highlight the Quebec government's commitment to giving some indigenous communities the latitude to decide for themselves when their children will return to school. That being said, as a human being, I do wonder how we can ask indigenous communities to do what we, as non-indigenous people, are not doing. This question has been around for decades, if not centuries.

Regardless of which provinces and territories decide to lift restrictions, we have to think about how to adapt the supports provided to indigenous communities while taking into account the medical, public health and scientific guidelines that must be followed. It is possible to provide more support to the local economies of these communities, which serve regions, of course, and to provide them with medical assistance. As you know, these communities are already vulnerable because of unacceptable historical circumstances. That matters to me, just as it should matter to all Canadians.

We're not out of the woods yet. To flatten the curve, people have to follow strict medical and public health guidelines, and we expect everyone to do so. We can talk about lifting restrictions gradually at some point, but we have to make sure we don't overlook indigenous communities.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Miller. I have some more questions for you if you don't mind.

As you know, over half of all indigenous individuals live in cities, but less than 5% of the indigenous community support fund has been allocated to indigenous individuals living outside their community. Considering the financial support needs of indigenous individuals living in cities, is the department expecting additional funding to be made available? What can you do, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Marc Miller: Let me start by thanking you for your very timely question.

To go back to what I said earlier, we've allocated \$15 million to initiatives being carried out off reserve and in urban centres by 94 community groups that serve indigenous peoples. There's also the Reaching Home community program, an investment we made to support the homeless. Lastly, we've provided financial support to women's shelters. I'm sure you'll agree that we need to take a concerted approach, and our discussions need to include the cities, the provinces and the federal government.

Granted, the funds that have been allocated aren't enough. Our goal at first was to distribute the funds as quickly as possible, by using existing structures, while showing more flexibility. For example, we were able to get money to the National Association of Friendship Centres quickly via our usual funding mechanisms.

In addition, two weeks ago, we had already received more funding applications from various organizations than we were expecting. We are still processing those very relevant applications, some of which came from organizations in downtown Montreal, in my riding and the riding of Minister Garneau, that serve highly vulnerable indigenous groups, including many Inuit.

These are matters of direct concern to us all, as Canadians, as MPs and as human beings. We are going to keep doing this work, because it's not going to go away overnight, regardless of what lockdown restrictions are lifted. We know that we won't be out of the woods until a vaccine is available.

• (1510)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's time.

Ms. Qaqqaq, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

Hon. Marc Miller: Chair, I can't hear her.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): I think she might be muted, Chair.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: I'm sorry. My screen was saying I was unmuted and my headset was saying I was muted. My apologies.

For the information of the clerk, the chair, and the rest of the committee, I'll be splitting my time with my colleague Leah Gazan. For the first hour it will be me, and in the second hour it will be Leah Gazan. In my questions, I will be specifically speaking to and asking about my riding of Nunavut and the Inuit in Nunavut.

To date the Government of Nunavut has spent \$24 million in direct relation to the response to COVID-19. The Government of Nunavut requested \$42 million from the federal government, and of that amount, \$30.8 million was approved. The territory has not seen this funding yet.

Can each minister tell me simply if it's in progress, if there's a date to be determined, or if you have a date for when the territory can expect to see that \$30.8 million come through?

Hon. Dan Vandal: First of all, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the absolutely essential work that the territorial governments and the Government of Nunavut have been doing in response to COVID-19, and the leadership of Premier Savikataaq. Since the beginning of this evolving situation, I have been working in close collaboration with the premier and some senior ministers from the Government of Nunavut to ensure the safety and security of the residents of Nunavut.

We remain committed to supporting the territorial governments in their response to COVID-19. We understand that there are some unique circumstances in Nunavut—the remoteness, the quality of infrastructure, and simply the higher cost of living and of doing business—which is why we are—

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: My apologies, Mr. Vandal, but I have multiple questions. I'm just looking for whether it's in progress or if there's a specific date to see the \$30.8 million funding arriving to the territory. Thank you.

Hon. Dan Vandal: For sure the dollars are committed, and it's in progress. As to where it is in the administration, I could have one of the public servants speak to that.

Mr. Daniel Watson (Deputy Minister, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): If I may, Mr. Chair, it's Daniel Watson.

Very briefly, it's very much in progress. We're in more or less constant conversation—

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: That's great. That's what Mr. Vandal said. I got my answer, so thank you so much. I'll move on.

There was an announcement made on April 14, as Minister Vandal mentioned, from the federal government of \$25 million to contribute to the Nutrition North program to see that we make “nutritious food more affordable”. In an article released today by Nunatsiaq News, the North West Company said, “Many basics are well in stock, like Kraft dinner, Klik, eggs, lard and tea.” This article was published today.

Minister Vandal, would you agree that the items I just listed should be considered basic items?

• (1515)

Hon. Dan Vandal: Having consumed a lot of Kraft Dinner and Klik when I was younger, I know that they're not very nutritious. Nutrition North should be subsidizing more nutritious food than that.

Ms. Mumilaag Qaqqaq: Thank you, Minister Vandal. That leads me into my next bit.

We talk a lot about being healthy, being able to access healthy food and being able to keep ourselves and our homes clean. These are things we're seeing a lot more, especially with COVID-19, this global pandemic that we're all facing.

We still haven't seen the \$30.8 million promised to the territory. We had our first case confirmed yesterday in Pond Inlet, Nunavut. From what I understand, this community has been looking for assistance from anyone for its water issues and the challenges it is already facing. To access water, people need to drive onto the ice with their water truck. They drill a hole. They chlorinate the water by hand and then they test it to make sure it's okay and then distribute it to the community. This can't go on much longer; because of the spring melt, the trucks won't be able to drive onto the ice.

They have been asking for assistance since October, and now we are in a global pandemic. How can we expect people to keep safe? How can we tell them to wash their hands, keep things clean and stay home and take care of their children when we already see this crisis going on in the community, and now a global pandemic is layered onto it?

What is the plan for Pond Inlet in relation to COVID-19 and the challenges people are seeing with the infrastructure and being able to deliver water throughout the community?

The Chair: That's the time, so please finish with the answer now, Minister.

Hon. Dan Vandal: I have been working very closely with the premier on the COVID crisis. We communicated this morning. It's true Nunavut has confirmed a case in Pond Inlet. The Government of Nunavut has responded accordingly. Nunavut's rapid response team is in Pond Inlet now to provide care, to conduct contact tracing and ensure the community has the necessary supports in place to deal with this.

The premier assures me that the Pond Inlet Health Centre is well staffed and well prepared. I can only quote the premier in his press release yesterday, which said:

There is no need to panic. Nunavut has had time to prepare, and we are in a solid position to manage this. We ask people not to place any blame, not to shame and to support communities and each other as we overcome COVID-19 in Nunavut.

The Chair: Minister, thank you for your comments.

Thanks to all our questioners.

We're going to suspend our meeting briefly now to organize the next series of witnesses from the departments. We shall return.

Again, thank you to Minister Bennett, Minister Miller and Minister Vandal for joining us.

The department staff are next.

• (1515)

(Pause)

• (1520)

The Chair: Welcome back. We'll get started.

Welcome to our witnesses.

From the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, we have Daniel Watson, the deputy minister; Jeff Moore, the senior assistant deputy minister, policy and strategic directions sector; Serge Beaudoin, assistant deputy minister, northern affairs; and Ross Pattee, assistant deputy minister, implementation sector.

From the Department of Indigenous Services, we have Valerie Gideon, senior assistant deputy minister, first nations and Inuit health branch; Mary-Luisa Kapelus, assistant deputy minister, education, social development programs and partnership sector; and Dr. Tom Wong, chief medical officer and director general, office of population and public health.

We'll now proceed with our usual round of questions from members.

Are we okay to go ahead with questions, Madam Clerk, or are we going to have briefs from the department?

The Clerk: We do not have any briefs.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go right ahead.

The Clerk: However, Mr. Schmale and Mr. Viersen have raised their hands.

The Chair: Mr. Schmale, I saw you first. What's your intervention, please?

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Chair, I wanted to let you and the members of the committee know that at four o'clock the Conservative members do have to excuse themselves for another meeting. I'm glad there are no briefs so that we can go to right to questions. I just wanted to let you know

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Is yours the same, Mr. Viersen?

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Yes. I was just going to say the meeting has to end at two o'clock or four o'clock, depending on where you are, because we have another meeting.

The Chair: The six-minute question round starts with you, Mr. Schmale. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you.

I was going to ask this of the minister, but since we ran out of time, I'll ask the people within the department.

We've been hearing some disturbing news coming out of the Wet'suwet'en territory, with some very concerning statements from the Wet'suwet'en elected chiefs. This news was released last night, raising alarms about the MOU reached between hereditary chiefs, the province and the federal government.

I think everyone understood that after the agreement was drafted, the Wet'suwet'en people would have the opportunity for full and informed engagement on the document. Unfortunately, this hasn't happened, and due to COVID-19, the Wet'suwet'en elected chiefs have asked that this be put on hold until the people of the Wet'suwet'en can be safely included in this important dialogue.

Again, I will put this to the department. Since we're here to talk about COVID-19 and the government's response to it, is there anyone in the department who can at least relieve the fears of the Wet'suwet'en people and confirm that the department, the government, will not move forward on this until the Wet'suwet'en people and elected leaders have a chance to ratify and safely discuss the impact this document has on their lives and their community? Hopefully, someone might be able to provide a comment.

● (1525)

Mr. Daniel Watson: Thank you very much for the question. This marks the 33rd anniversary this coming week of the launching of Delgamuukw trial. That obviously was a very important one for the Wet'suwet'en people.

One of the things that has never been concluded between Canada, British Columbia and the Wet'suwet'en is how to ensure that the proper conversations happen within that nation. One thing that will absolutely happen as a part of this process is that we will conclude how best to have the Wet'suwet'en nation have its wishes and will expressed fully and completely in relation to the implementation of any of its rights.

The process of engaging others is one that we have been involved with in many other negotiations across the country. It will be very similar. The standards that have been set by the courts and the expectations for everybody around the durability of those agreements rely exactly on what you're pointing out. I can assure you that will happen over time and that the implementation and conversations about any substantive issues will very much require the full consent of the nation.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Watson, I just want to confirm this. The last time we met, the minister had travelled to British Columbia and had met with some of the hereditary chiefs, although not all, but met with none of the elected members. Have the department or any of the minister's staff that you're aware of reached out to the elected officials to talk about this agreement?

Mr. Daniel Watson: Yes. In fact, shortly after that meeting, we did have a meeting with one of the chiefs, and the minister is on the record as being willing to travel to the area and to meet with elected

chiefs as well. Obviously, she's willing and happy to talk to any chief in the country, very much so.

We will again, during the upcoming negotiations that flow from this, ensure that one of the topics is precisely that question of how to ensure that the full nation is engaged and involved.

The Chair: Okay. I've allowed that discussion for obvious reasons, but could we return to the study of the COVID approach, as mandated for our meeting? Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Chair, I think this is where it's relevant. According to the news reports that have come out and according to the chiefs who have released the statement, the fear is that the government is moving forward on this during a crisis, the COVID-19 crisis. I just need to assure these elected chiefs that there is a proper process in place. That's where the link is.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Just to reiterate, I think the purpose of the meeting today and the purpose of these meetings is to speak in relation to COVID-19 directly. While the questions that Mr. Schmale is putting forward are important, I think that for the purpose of this meeting, they are not relevant. I would invite any conversations on those questions to be deferred to a later time when we discuss matters including the Wet'suwet'en deal ratification that was done yesterday.

The Chair: Could you proceed under that direction?

You have less than two minutes. Go ahead.

● (1530)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Sure.

To the department, recently there was a list of organizations to meet with the minister regarding COVID-19 planning and consultations, organizations that were not actively consulted early in the process.

Can we confirm that the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples was consulted?

Mr. Daniel Watson: Mr. Chair, we've had conversations with the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples. I believe I have a meeting scheduled with them shortly on this front. There have been conversations, yes. I'm always careful when I use the term "consultations", because the indigenous groups themselves often want to be sure that we're not meeting in the sense of giving implied consent for others, but certainly conversations have gone on.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: How about the Native Women's Association?

Mr. Daniel Watson: We've had a number of ongoing conversations with the Native Women's Association on a number of topics. I can't promise at this point in time that the specific issue of COVID-19 was the original subject of the agendas of those conversations. We've talked about many issues on an ongoing basis.

The Chair: That's our time on that first six-minute intervention.

Now we go to Mr. Battiste.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): I just want to thank the staff and the ministers for their work over the last few weeks. I have heard from chiefs across Canada, and the majority have been satisfied with how our government has been proactive in keeping first nations communities safe during this pandemic and ensuring that the programs are also including them.

One of my questions—and perhaps, Dr. Gideon, you can talk about it—is on mental health. Mental health issues among indigenous people on reserve are overwhelming during normal periods. During COVID-19 there is a significant increase in despair, anxiety and depression on reserve.

To illustrate, I'd like to bring up two issues. The first is from my discussion with the Native Women's Association president, Lorraine Whitman, who talked about the vulnerability of women who are in toxic relationships, who feel trapped inside self-isolation, whereas otherwise they would be able to go out and get support. What are we doing to support indigenous women during this difficult time?

The other one is a little bit closer to home, and I spoke to the ministers about this. I was very saddened that in New Brunswick a young man named Brady Francis was tragically killed in a hit-and-run accident years ago, and unfortunately the man who stood trial was acquitted. Now, I don't want to talk about the case—this isn't the time for that—but one thing I really have to share is the kind of outcry from first nations youth across Canada at this time.

I have to read what's being tweeted and what is on Facebook, on social media: “I am fully and completely aware that I can be killed and there will be no consequence and repercussions because I'm first nations in Canada.”

Let that sink in a bit. This is a message being shared and received by first nations youth in our country during these already difficult times. This is not an isolated incident. It's been brought up many other times. Especially now during this COVID era, what are we able to do to help with those with mental health issues?

We've seen many inquiries and commissions that spoke to this issue.

How can we involve and inspire first nations youth so that instead of having despair, they have a sense of hope that they can be the change that we need to see by being judges, lawyers, and police officers? What steps can we take to give additional support on mental health for the youth during this difficult time and to let people know that our government is listening so that this despair gives way to hope, reconciliation and justice?

Wela'liq. Thank you.

The Chair: Could everyone please be aware of their mikes? Apparently translation is still getting a bit of muffled sound.

Mr. Watson, please go ahead with your response.

Mr. Daniel Watson: I think my colleague, Deputy Minister Tremblay, will have more to add.

I will start, but maybe with not as direct a response as my colleague, given the nature of the mandate of my department.

One of the important things here is that we've gone out of our way in this conversation to deal with indigenous governments as governments. In the past we would simply have spoken to provinces and territories, and maybe local health authorities. We've gone out of our way to make sure that part of the conversation has been with the modern treaty governments and with other indigenous representative organizations as well. That's in a world where, obviously, we're focusing very tightly on whom we're able to talk to simply because of time and the nature of the emergency.

Maybe that isn't a direct or specific answer to your question, but I think it's important for indigenous youth to see how the rest of Canada's governments are looking at how their indigenous governments are treated and to see that this is at least one part of the solution. Obviously, we're having ongoing consultations to hear what people are identifying as important.

With that, perhaps I will leave Deputy Tremblay to list some of the more specific programmatic aspects.

● (1535)

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay (Deputy Minister, Department of Indigenous Services): Thank you, Daniel.

Mr. Chair, this is a very important question. I don't think there's an easy answer. I think Daniel touched on a long-term solution to this issue, but in the meantime, what I can tell you is that with COVID as a crisis.... As you know, we spend probably around \$425 million per year in services related to mental health. Those are essential services, so we continue to deliver them.

We have also developed information that we are sending to all of the networks to make sure people know these services continue to be available, adding to them, of course, those based on Jordan's principle. We continue to respond to demands based on Jordan's principle.

Child family services is also considered an essential service, as you know. We even made an adjustment to the criteria to make sure that they would not be impacted negatively by COVID.

We've done everything we could to make sure that the offer or services that are there for mental health will continue to be there, but there will be a need for more and an adjustment in those services will need to be made. I think that was mentioned before. It's the same thing for the general population, but most significantly for the vulnerable population. The isolation has an impact on people, and we are looking at working with first nations, Inuit and Métis on how we can make sure that the services and the response will be there to support people, some of whom will clearly be affected from a mental health perspective in the context of this pandemic.

The Chair: Thanks for your comments.

That's the end of that six-minute round.

We go next to Madame Bérubé.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Miller.

Minister, at a press conference, you admitted that more financial support would be needed to help indigenous communities. What are the next steps in that regard?

More specifically, can you quantify the additional support that's needed? How will that figure be broken down?

If you can't provide us with that information today, when are you going to announce additional financial help?

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: Mr. Chair, since the minister isn't here, I'll try to answer that question, if I may.

Yes, financial support to help communities is important. As for the amount that's needed, I'm sorry, but it would be presumptuous to give you a number today. These times and circumstances are without precedent, and we're trying to meet the demand. The minister brought up the subject of issues in urban centres. We're trying to meet the demand, but the demand exceeds the response capability. So we're going to have to recalibrate from day to day.

All I can tell you is that we're responding to the requests from indigenous communities. We're not necessarily waiting months or weeks to get all the details. We're responding to requests as they come in, whether they're requests for protection or for security services. We're relying as much as possible on the Emergency Management Assistance Program, which offers plenty of flexibility, because it's a program that we use in times of crisis. We're using it right now during the COVID-19 pandemic to make sure that resources go where they're needed.

There will definitely be a growing need for resources, but we're going to recalibrate once we have more information, as the crisis evolves.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Tremblay. I'll keep going with questions for you, provided you can answer, of course.

As you know, there are currently 16 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Nunavik and one in Nunavut. Is Indigenous Services Canada monitoring the cases reported in Métis and Inuit communi-

ties and among first nations members living off reserve? What's being done to prevent the virus from spreading?

• (1540)

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: If you don't mind, I'll ask Dr. Wong to answer this question, since this is an issue he's monitoring on a daily basis.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: All right, thanks.

Dr. Tom Wong: Thank you for your question.

I'll start by talking about our department's program, and then I'll hand over to Ms. Gideon so she can provide more details.

There are no public health physicians from our department in Nunavut. To support Nunavut, we're working with the Public Health Agency of Canada, the communities and the Nunavut Department of Health.

As for Nunavik, we're collaborating with the Nunavik Commission, the communities and the Quebec government. Most of the time, the services have already been transferred.

Maybe Ms. Gideon can give you more details.

Ms. Valerie Gideon (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Department of Indigenous Services): I'll answer very briefly.

In Nunavik, public health is the jurisdiction of the province's Regional Board of Health and Social Services. The same goes for Inuit people in the territories.

In Nunatsiavut, Labrador, the Inuit government is responsible for public health, and it works with the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As for Métis people and indigenous people living off reserve or outside their communities, they are the responsibility of the province or territory, depending on where they live. We maintain a presence at the federal-provincial-territorial round table and work with these public health specialists to identify issues and challenges. We collaborate Canada-wide, but we're not directly responsible for public health in those communities.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you. I could continue on the same subject.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry, but that's all the time.

We will go on to Ms. Gazan. I believe you were going to share your time with Ms. Qaqqaq.

Please go ahead. You have six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chair, indigenous people make up approximately 5% of the Canadian population. If we look at the overall projected spending so far for COVID-19, it appears that only approximately 0.01% of all funds allocated to date are specific to indigenous people.

Given how COVID-19 has further compromised the safety of indigenous communities that are already suffering from ongoing human rights violations, I am wondering why the departments chose to continue to underfund indigenous communities at a time when it's clear that more is needed and when it's very clear that these decisions were not based on needs.

Could somebody answer that, perhaps somebody from Mr. Miller's department?

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: Yes, I can start.

I think you have to take into account, first of all, that the \$84 billion, or whatever the amount of money is now that is supporting Canadians, is for all Canadians, including first nations, Inuit and Métis. Everybody has access to the individual benefits and should have access to them, and we should encourage first nations, Inuit and Métis to make sure they access these benefits. It is the same thing for students and for PSE, for example.

The funding being provided is not supposed to be an allocation in line with the percentage of the population of first nations, Inuit and Métis. It's supposed to be additional funding to actually target populations to address where we think and perceive and know there are needs and gaps, and also where we have specific responsibilities.

• (1545)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Chair, I appreciate his response. However, the Public Health Agency of Canada has identified several factors that make people more vulnerable during COVID-19, including economic barriers, social or geographic isolation, and insecure, inadequate or non-existent housing conditions. PHAC also noted significant health inequalities and inequities, as noted as well by Dr. Tam, between indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Minister Bennett also acknowledged that today in her statement.

In light of these facts, again, why did the departments choose to disregard evidence from Health Canada and continue to underfund first nations, given the fact that they're already behind in the human rights that other Canadians enjoy?

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: Since the beginning of the crisis, the minister as well as the employees of the departments have recognized this issue. We know that the social determinants of health are particularly alarming in first nations, Inuit and Métis communities. We know that a pandemic may have and could have an impact that is quite significant in those communities, because they are a vulnerable population. We don't measure those actions necessarily at funding.

I would just turn to my colleague Valerie, who can explain to you the kinds of actions we have been taking at all levels—local, regional and national.

Ms. Valerie Gideon: I'll just say that we don't have a fixed funding envelope at the moment when it comes to providing additional

public health supports to first nations communities in particular. We are receiving requests on a continuing basis from communities across the country for what they require to ensure that their pandemic plans can be activated and that they have the surge capacity required.

We're filling personal protective equipment requests on a daily basis, seven days a week, and we are continuing to put in temporary health infrastructure supports, whether that's retooling the community infrastructure or whether it's procuring mobile medical units or temporary accommodation facilities.

We are spending as communities identify those needs that they cannot address within their existing funding allocations or their community support money.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you again for that.

Mr. Miller noted that several communities have asked for funding and did not receive it. He also noted that the funding is inadequate.

My final question is this: Since COVID-19—and I'm belabouring the point—we've witnessed the abhorrent failure of government to ensure human rights for all Canadians, specifically indigenous peoples. COVID-19 has certainly shone a very clear light on this failure. We cannot go back to business as usual. I'm wondering if the departments can inform the committee as to how they will ensure immediate action if unfortunately we should experience a pandemic in the future, so that we will not have another crisis as a result of the failure of governments to honour the rights and dignity of all Canadians.

One example I can share is that the Liberal government has promised all boil water advisories will end by 2021. We are seven months away from the target. Shouldn't this pandemic be an opportunity to address that issue immediately?

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: You are right. This crisis has shown us that the long-term social determinants of health that are due to historical reasons and that need to be addressed have to be addressed. It confirms that the investments made over the last few years are important and should continue in terms of addressing housing, addressing water issues and addressing all those elements that are related to the social determinants of health. That's what we need to continue to do. We hope Parliament will be helpful in addressing these issues.

Water and infrastructure are issues we have to look at. We want to continue to make sure all those long-term advisories are removed as soon as possible, but we also have to respect the fact that a lot of these communities are in isolation at the moment.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're out of time. Sorry.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I believe Bob Zimmer and Arnold Viersen were going to share their time.

Do I understand, Bob, that you have to leave the meeting at four o'clock?

• (1550)

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Yes. We still have 10 minutes, though, according to my clock, so we'll get it done as soon as we can.

The Chair: Okay. You are up for the next five-minute round. You can start and then share with Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'll be brief. I was in communication with Chief Theresa Tait Day from the Wet'suwet'en and also Chief Maureen Luggi, who is an elected chief of the Wet'suwet'en. They are both extremely concerned. There's a letter that I just received yesterday. The elected chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en nations have not agreed to, nor have they given their support to signing, a proposed memorandum of understanding on rights and title with Canada or British Columbia.

I think the troubling part of this—and I respect that Gary is trying to speak to this—but with respect to him, it is shameful that the minister would try to sign something at a time when the COVID pandemic has limited person-to-person contact—

The Chair: I'm going to have to intervene. We had this conversation earlier. We're mandated to do COVID. This is not a completely different topic, but any topic can be nuanced into the main one. If you have something directly on the COVID crisis—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I would like a response as to why the minister would implement or go through with a memorandum of understanding—

The Chair: That's not part of this discussion today. Do you have a question that relates to COVID?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: With respect—

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: It's my understanding, Chair, that it's not the job of the chair to censor the questions. It's Mr. Zimmer's time. He has his full five minutes to say whatever he absolutely wants. It's his turn.

The Chair: Well, that's—

Mr. Jamie Schmale: No one's had an objection from the other side. It's not the job of the chair, is my understanding—

The Chair: It is the job of the chair—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: I have a point of order. I think Mr. Bratina is responding to that. The issue here is that the scope of the study that we're undertaking is limited to COVID-19 and the government's response to it. There are a lot of issues that this committee ought to be seized with and should be discussing, including the issue that's been brought forward by Mr. Schmale and Mr. Zimmer, but this is not the appropriate study or the time to do that, and we would be glad to entertain those at a later date.

At this moment, what's important is that we continue the discussion limited to COVID, and I'm asking members and the chair to make sure that these conversations are limited to COVID-19.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: This is going on during COVID. This pandemic is happening, and these elected chiefs are trying to speak up.

The Chair: Mr. Schmale—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'll speak to the point of order, if I could.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I think this is exactly a COVID issue, because it's brought up at a time when COVID has limited person-to-person contact between the Wet'suwet'en people and the ministry, yet the ministry is trying to slide this under the door and get it done without consultation with the Wet'suwet'en people.

I was texted yesterday with urgency by Theresa Tait-Day, who, as we all know, is a chief who is very concerned about her community. The elected chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en also brought this concern to me with desperation that this has been again slid under the door under their watch, and it's going ahead without their approval. If this isn't something COVID-related.... It is exactly COVID-related, and the government shouldn't be doing this during this time.

The Chair: First of all, in response to Mr. Schmale's comments, the chair is in control of the agenda. If there is a disagreement, and chairs make rulings.... I was the mayor of the City of Hamilton, and this issue comes up often in council meetings when people take the matter in a different direction. If my suggestion or my ruling is not permitted, then you can challenge the chair, and we'll vote on it to see whether or not my ruling stands.

We've already used up very valuable time, and I'm not sure that.... The COVID crisis, in terms of the potential loss of life and destruction of the economy, is what we were asked to do when we came forward with this series of committee meetings, so I'm going to stand by the comment I made.

Do you have any other questions or comments outside of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs' issue? If you do, please go ahead.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I will pass the rest of my time to Mr. Viersen.

• (1555)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you, Bob. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I too have a question. The Sucker Creek First Nation in my community has suffered a loss due to COVID. Driftpile has its first case. Many first nations in my region have been in total lockdown, and now I'm getting reports that even getting food in there has been a bit of a challenge, particularly in north Tallcree. I just wanted to put that on the radar of the departmental officials.

Mr. Chair, given the fact that this COVID is going on, and we're all seized with it and overwhelmed with the COVID response, I would say that I think it's disgusting that today the Liberal government is doing a firearms announcement. This is outrageous, and I guess I have two questions around that.

Has there been a first nation response or consultation? Are there any indigenous exemptions that are coming with this firearms announcement today?

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I fail to see how this has anything to do with the government's response to COVID-19. It's similar to the previous question. There are a lot of issues we could have conversations about in other places, but the firearms legislation isn't part of the government response to COVID-19.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: It definitely seems to be, Mr. Chair, as the government spent most of the morning making this announcement.

I'd ask Mr. Watson if he knows whether there are any indigenous exemptions and whether first nations were consulted on this.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: We have critical issues to discuss around COVID-19, life-and-death matters, and I think we need to use the time we're all committing to—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I couldn't agree more, and that's why it's disgusting that the Liberal government chose today—

Ms. Leah Gazan: Excuse me; it's my point of order.

The Chair: You have the floor, Ms. Gazan. Go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I would argue that my respected colleagues are not respecting the discussion that we all agreed upon here. Thank you.

The Chair: I agree with that as chair.

Mr. Viersen, if you have another question, go ahead. I'm not going to entertain a response to that question, for the reasons stated.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Have the Métis settlements of Alberta been consulted at all? Have you been reaching out to them on the response to COVID-19?

Mr. Daniel Watson: Mr. Chair, perhaps I could turn to my colleague Jeff Moore, who has been engaged in many conversations with Métis across the country.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, please.

Mr. Jeff Moore (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Strategic Direction Sector, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, indeed we've had a number of conversations with the Métis settlements in Alberta in a few contexts. One context is within the \$305-million program that was initiated to support communities. With that portion of funding, we provided funding to the Métis nation, but there is also money that's apparently being provided through a \$15-million proposal-driven fund, which is a component of the \$305 million. I think the officials from Indigenous Services Canada can probably speak more to that.

From a governance perspective, we've been having ongoing conversations with the Métis about some of their preoccupations with the pandemic and how they're moving forward as a set of communities.

The Chair: We're at time at this point.

We'll go to our final questioner in the first round.

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was splitting my time with Mumilaaq, but I don't know whether she.... Maybe I'll ask the final question.

I heard Dr. Wong indicate that Nunavut does not have its own public health doctor. I find this concerning in light of the fact that they just found their first case of COVID. They are not being provided with the same support.

I see that you're smiling, Dr. Wong, but one case in our communities is not a laughing matter, particularly in Nunavut, where they're having a serious housing crisis. Does your department have plans to get the proper resources to Nunavut immediately, as not doing so could result in lost lives?

• (1600)

Dr. Tom Wong: I just want to clarify my comment from earlier. The Department of Indigenous Services doesn't have a medical officer in Nunavut. The reason is that all of the health services, including public health services, are transferred to the Nunavut government. The Nunavut government has a chief medical officer, as well as an entire team of health professionals. I was simply referring to the fact that our department does not have a medical officer there.

The services are provided, very importantly, by the Nunavut government and the Nunavut health department. They are doing a fantastic job in supporting the communities, including in prevention, control and isolation, and are preventing the spread of this disease.

I hope I answered your question.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, thanks very much. I don't know if Mumilaaq would like to add to that.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: *Matna*, Leah.

Chair, can you just give me the time I have left?

The Chair: You have three minutes left.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Oh, great. Thank you, Chair.

We saw a lot of discussion. I'm going to turn more to financial assistance for individuals, specifically again to Nunavummiut and Inuit in my riding. When we talk about small businesses, we're talking about these different kinds of funding assistance opportunities that are coming through. What we're seeing is a lot of people fall through a lot of different gaps and not everybody necessarily has the information that is needed in order to apply for things like the emergency response benefit.

In my case, in my riding I have so many artists and artisans who are completely out of work for the upcoming months. I'm talking about performers, musicians, carvers, jewellers. All of these people have been stripped significantly of their work and their ability to make money and provide for themselves and their families. For individuals like these, what plan does the federal government have to assist individuals who might not necessarily have the documentation, the resources to say they've made x amount, and they need that assistance from CERB? What is being done to make it more accessible, to recognize that not everybody can fulfill what is needed, but they still need this funding to pay for rent and to feed themselves?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Watson.

Mr. Daniel Watson: Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the question. Obviously, getting information to communities, particularly where there's a challenge with high-speed Internet, is sometimes difficult at the best of times. Certainly one thing that we sometimes do with some of our programs is to send people into communities to help, but that's not really an option at this point in time because of the lockdown. Having said that, we're using all of our available resources to make sure that people are aware of what resources and options are available to them.

Another thing that's going on is that we're staying in very close touch with the territorial governments in all three territories. This is true south of 60 as well, but speaking in the context of my northern affairs responsibilities, we're engaging very closely with the Government of Nunavut, which is very interested, obviously, in the well-being of artists and others who have small businesses that they sometimes operate less formally—

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq: I'm specifically looking for what's currently being done—and I think that might be time. If we could follow up afterwards, that would be absolutely great.

The Chair: Okay, and also we're having problems once again, Mr. Watson, with the translation. You need to get the microphone very close so that—

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, what is your point of order?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I have another meeting I have to attend as well, so I was wondering if we can wrap this up and then I can go on to that meeting.

The Chair: Well, we have two more speakers, so the wrap-up is going to be the conclusion of the speakers list.

The next speaker is Mr. Battiste for six minutes, and then Madame Bérubé....

I'm sorry?

• (1605)

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: On a point of order, what about me?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Marcus. There are too many interventions going on, so I'm losing track of the time and everything else, plus I had to evaluate the point of order times too.

Mr. Powlowski, please go ahead.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: No problem. You're doing great, Bob. I see why you were the announcer for the Hamilton Tiger-Cats for so many years. You have that melodic voice.

Okay, I'm going to go legal on you really quickly. I want to cite something from the Indian Act, from subsection 81(1):

The council of a band may make by-laws not inconsistent with this Act or with any regulation made by the Governor in Council or the Minister, for any or all of the following purposes, namely,

(a) to provide for the health of residents on the reserve and to prevent the spreading of contagious and infectious diseases;

(b) the regulation of traffic;

(c) the observance of law and order;

Totally in keeping with this, I know a number of chiefs have tried to take measures to protect the public health, for example by preventing people from coming and going on and off the reserve, to try to impose a curfew, but some of them—and this has been brought to my attention by a local chief—are having trouble enforcing their bylaws. Certain members of the community are unwilling to do so. They've asked for the help of the police force.

I wonder if one of the deputy ministers could clarify, for the sake of these chiefs, whom they can go to for assistance in enforcing the bylaws they're entitled to make under the Indian Act.

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: That's a very good question. I can try to answer. It is an issue that we're seeing on a daily basis.

Those chiefs have the right and the authority to pass bylaws to protect their populations. They're the ones who make decisions. For example, in the case of emergencies in general, they decide if and when evacuation is needed and so on. They have those authorities.

They are raising this issue of security and how to enforce it. They use, of course, the first nations force when they do actually have first nations police. When they don't, they can use private security. They can use other means. They have also been working with the RCMP.

This is where we are now. We're working with them. They can go to our regional office. On this, the answer is quite clear. They know who we are. They know where we are. They can talk to us. We are looking with them for solutions to that.

We're looking at how we can fund and how we can support those measures, and in general the security measures they're trying to put in place to protect their own populations. I must say that they have been quite successful, as you know. I think that one of the reasons we have low numbers at this stage is also that the first nations took action by themselves and are taking on the authorities they have. It is a growing niche that we're looking at, with them, on how we can respond to this in a coherent way and also an efficient way.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: My second question is on whether there is any further development on the issue of evacuation for many of the more northern fly-in communities in northern Ontario. For example, Kashechewan seems to get fairly regularly evacuated because of floods.

There's been some speculation as to where these communities would go now, given the concern about COVID-19, with a lot of those communities not wanting to go to a place like Thunder Bay because of the risk of coming to a place [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: Yes, it is a constant discussion, of course. It's not our purpose or practice to change the needs for those evacuations. When those evacuations are needed, they will happen. We're working with provinces, as we always have—for example, with the Province of Ontario—through emergency departments, and we are trying to make sure that we have the partners we need for the evacuations and that we also have extra measures that are put in place if an evacuation is needed to ensure the safety of the population.

The population is worried and concerned, as you mentioned, about going into those communities and maybe contracting the virus. It is something that we are fully aware of and are working very diligently on with the first nation leadership as well as the provinces.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I'd like to know whether the federal government has deployed more health professionals to remote indigenous communities to fight the pandemic. How many nurses or doctors have been deployed to my riding, Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou?

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: I'll defer to Ms. Gideon for the answer. I don't know if she knows the exact answer for your riding specifically, but she can give you more details on the efforts that have been made to increase capacity in professional services.

Ms. Valerie Gideon: We've implemented emergency contracts that can be used to provide additional nursing staff. These contracts also apply to Quebec. We've also asked for volunteers from [*inaudible*]. They include volunteers who can also work in the Quebec region. We haven't had to use those resources yet.

We hold conversations with the communities on a regular basis. In fact, there was a call today between our regional office and our partners about continuing to offer support as needed. Everything is in place to help if required. The communities, even the first isolated communities to report cases in Quebec, have been able to find additional resources through their own networks.

As you know, for first nations in Quebec, especially in Nunavik, all resources are transferred through the agreement. First nations have been managing the delivery of their primary and public health services themselves for decades, so they're very well equipped.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

Earlier, Minister Miller mentioned a budget of \$15 million to help indigenous people living off reserve, but that's not enough. It's peanuts, according to Tanya Sirois, executive director of the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec. I agree with her. Are you going to increase that budget?

Édith Cloutier, executive director of the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, says the problem isn't that the federal government is giving too much to the communities, it's that it's not giving enough to urban centres. I'd like to know what you're going to do about that. You also need to avoid causing friction among the organizations.

What are you planning to do for these indigenous communities and friendship centres?

Mr. Jean-François Tremblay: Regarding the organizations submitting more requests, we're still reviewing those requests. Some, if not all, of them are eligible for other federal programs. For instance, there are programs designed to help women who are being abused, by providing funding to shelters. Those programs can also serve indigenous people living off reserve. They're not excluded from those programs. The same goes for the food programs. They're open to anyone living in urban centres, especially vulnerable groups, including indigenous people.

We continue to work with the other departments, as well as the provinces, territories and municipalities, which are financial partners, especially in these kinds of cases, since these things are happening in the cities and provinces. It's vital for all levels of government to take a seat at the table and contribute.

We've contributed, but the minister said it wasn't enough. We're trying to maximize the use of all federal programs, and of course, we're always working on figuring out whether we could be doing more to address needs.

That being said, it doesn't matter whether a community is on or off reserve. You're right to say that sometimes, that can pit organizations against one another, and that shouldn't happen. We want to make sure there's help and services for all and that all the partners that should be at the table are at the table.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you for your intervention.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Bérubé, I'm sorry to say that we're out of time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for your intervention.

Just before I adjourn the meeting, there are a couple of bits of business to take care of.

We would like to have suggestions for witnesses sent to the clerk. The meeting will be held on Friday, May 8, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., as this one was.

Our technical group has advised us that today we need to be off this particular time frame at 4:15, which is upon us now.

With that, I would like to say thank you all. This meeting...

Mr. Zimmer.

● (1615)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, just to speak to the time, some of us have tight schedules all day. Because of a technicality, we just don't have the flexibility to stay on two meetings at the same time. I appreciate that there are technical issues. When the time frame is sent out, it should be understood that that is what it's going to be and that the end is going to be a crisp ending as promised. To have it extended is just unacceptable.

The Chair: I'm sorry for that, Mr. Zimmer. There's a brave new world going on here. We're all trying to resolve a lot of issues.

I take your point. We'll try to begin as quickly as possible and end with a proper two-hour schedule. We were really flying by the seat of our pants today. We should be much better the next time. That said, I do appreciate your comment. I hope we can start and run the next meeting efficiently as scheduled. I understand your concern. Thanks very much.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.

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