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**Chair**

**Mr. Barry Devolin**

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Wednesday, May 14, 2008

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC)):** Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the 29th meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

We are pleased to welcome the Honourable Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and officials, to our meeting today. Welcome, Minister.

I think members are familiar with our routine. The minister will begin with an opening statement, followed by rounds of questioning.

With that, Mr. Strahl, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is a pleasure to be back before the committee, and I appreciate the work you've done since we last met. It's nice to see this committee working through its agenda.

[Translation]

I welcome this opportunity to discuss the Main Estimates of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

There are a couple of things I want to do in my time before you this afternoon. I want to discuss the main estimates, of course, but I also want to expand on some of our recent progress on issues of real importance to aboriginal people, and emphasize for committee members how vital it is that we continue to pursue our collaborative and results-based approach.

These main estimates reflect this government's determination to make tangible progress on aboriginal and northern issues through genuine collaboration and resolute action. We're working to address the fundamental obstacles that stand in the way of greater prosperity for aboriginal peoples and northerners. Our approach involves working with willing partners to design and implement fundamental solutions that reflect real results—for example, solutions for particular challenges such as unsafe drinking water and ineffective specific claims resolution processes.

This collaborative approach has already produced several important breakthroughs. Significant progress has been made in overcoming the challenges presented by the provision of safe drinking water to first nations communities, the improvement of

child and family services, and improvement in the supply of housing, to name only a few.

These and other results demonstrate the advantages of working in good faith with willing partners to formulate distinct plans, establish clear priorities, and dedicate adequate resources. The main estimates now before this committee are part of this government's practical approach to planning. They propose the strategic investments needed to support further progress.

Although the total amount in this year's main estimates is smaller than that of last year, year-over-year changes must be interpreted in the context of the entire budget cycle. As the first step in the fiscal cycle, the main estimates do not include resources to be acquired through the supplementary estimates. In fact, supplementary estimates A, tabled in the House yesterday, result in an increase of approximately \$483 million in my department's budget for 2008-09.

This set of main estimates does increase the funding allotted to Indian and Inuit programs and services such as education, housing, community infrastructure, and social support. This increase also includes funding for the family violence prevention program, the new first nations infrastructure fund, and a transfer from Industry Canada for Aboriginal Business Canada.

The north is also part of my mandate, so I want to touch briefly on progress made here as well. As you know, I am also responsible for leading the advancement of the government's integrated northern strategy. This strategy supports the government's vision of a new north by focusing on four integrated priorities: sovereignty, economic and social development, governance, and environmental protection, and since 2006 we've moved forward across government in all four areas.

In fact, to cite just a few examples, we've announced plans for a world-class Arctic research station. We're pursuing devolution in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. We are advancing the northern regulatory improvement initiative. We're also acting on Budget 2008 commitments that build on these priorities with key measures to protect and secure Canada's sovereignty and create more economic opportunities for northerners. Many of my cabinet colleagues are moving forward with their own northern initiatives, and that's good to see as well.

[Translation]

But there is more to the story than just numbers and spending.

I firmly believe that money alone—no matter how large the amount—will not enable us to achieve our larger goals.

[English]

Similarly, no single player acting alone can effect the changes needed. To make meaningful, sustainable improvements in the lives of aboriginal people requires broad collaboration, careful planning, and effective action. All three feature prominently in this government's strategy on aboriginal issues.

We formed productive partnerships to make headway on issues that matter to aboriginal people. We have worked with first nations leaders from across the country on water, education, child and family services, and settling claims. To cite a recent example, a few weeks ago I signed an MOU with the Province of New Brunswick and New Brunswick first nations to improve the quality of education for first nation learners in that province. I'm very excited about that proposal as well.

Let me talk a bit more about what we have been able to accomplish with our partners. As I think I mentioned the last time I was before committee, we've made considerable progress since 2006 in improving drinking water systems in first nations communities. Budget 2008 committed \$330 million over two years to the first nations water and waste water action plan, which I announced last month. This is the next step in ensuring that first nations have the clean, safe water they deserve.

We have also committed \$300 million to the first nations market housing fund, which is now open for business. This innovative program will provide first nations people living on reserve with more housing options so that people can build home equity while at the same time respecting the tradition of communal ownership of reserve and settlement land. Initiated in partnership with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the program aims to make home ownership a realistic option for first nation families who live on reserves. Over the next ten years the fund is expected to add some 25,000 new housing units for first nations communities. It was a pleasure to introduce the board members and make that announcement just a week or so ago.

This government has also launched a collaborative plan to overhaul the processes used to resolve specific claims. I know you are very familiar with that. We believe that the negotiated settlements of specific claims produce a wealth of benefits for all Canadians, not just aboriginal people.

The creation of a specific claims tribunal, proposed in Bill C-30, is the centrepiece of a larger plan to overhaul specific claims processes. The plan, designed in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations, commits Canada to resolving specific claims in a fair, timely, and open manner. I'm convinced that improvements to specific claims processes will benefit all Canadians, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike. I appreciate the committee's work on Bill C-30, and I'm looking forward to its swift passage through the Senate. I know that discussions with senators have already started to take place.

I'm also delighted that Bill C-47, the legislation to safeguard the matrimonial real property rights of first nations women and children living on reserve, has begun second reading in the House. I hope this committee will soon have the opportunity to consider this important piece of legislation.

We also remain committed to legislation to ensure that first nations on reserve are finally fully protected by the Canadian Human Rights Act. I look forward to that bill coming back here as well.

Bill C-34 is also before the House. This legislation proposes to enact the Tsawwassen First Nation final agreement. I hope that it, too, will be here before committee for its consideration before long. That landmark agreement is the result of another remarkable collaboration between first nations, Canada, and British Columbia, and negotiations that stretched over 100 consultative sessions with regional governments, community groups, and other interested parties. It was a real collaborative effort to put forward an excellent agreement, which I hope will go quickly through the parliamentary process.

Under the terms of the final agreement, the Tsawwassen First Nation acquires not only land and a financial component, but also a seat on the metro Vancouver regional board. This arrangement means that the first nation, municipality, and board will work together to create and execute plans that serve the interests of all residents. I trust that members of this committee will appreciate the significance of this collaboration once they begin their review of Bill C-34.

I would like to take a quick moment to provide an update on the implementation of the historic Indian residential schools settlement agreement. The Government of Canada has received over 91,000 applications for the common experience payment, and it has processed more than 81,000, totalling \$1.23 billion. At the same time, the important work of the independent assessment process has begun, and that's well under way as well.

As you are aware, on April 28 I had the great pleasure of announcing the appointment of Justice Harry LaForme as chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The work of Justice LaForme and the historic Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be instrumental in building a renewed relationship with aboriginal communities. It was a pleasure this week to announce the final two commissioners, Claudette Dumont-Smith and Jane Brewin Morley, who will complete that commission so they can begin their work on June 1.

● (1540)

The next step in the process of healing and reconciliation is an apology to former students of Indian residential schools. Preparations are progressing on that, on what I'm convinced will be a very fine moment, a very respectful, meaningful apology that will be great for our government, our country, and for aboriginal people across Canada.

I will depart from my text here for just a minute to express my appreciation to Peter Harrison, who has spearheaded the Indian residential schools settlement and the work that has been done to date in making sure we came to what I think is a very good moment. He's going to be moving on to other things. I think Queen's University may be in the mix. I'm not sure. This may be his last committee appearance.

I'm not just saying this so you'll have mercy on him. I'm actually saying this because I think the entire country owes a big debt of gratitude to Mr. Harrison. He has done his work in a way that's garnered the respect of successive ministers, but more importantly, or just as importantly, of the entire aboriginal community. I just want to say, if I can here, that I respect all these people here with me today, but I say a special thank you to Mr. Harrison for the fine work he's done, and I hope you'll ask him the right kinds of questions to reflect that as we move forward.

**Voices:** Hear, hear!

[*Applause*]

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Mr. Chairman, I think even this quick review of progress shows, pretty conclusively I hope, that the government is not particularly interested in theoretical solutions. We're interested in working with willing partners to make a difference, not at some indeterminate point of time in the future but as quickly as possible and starting with right now.

[*Translation*]

The investments outlined in the Main Estimates will enable Canada to follow through on its commitments to Aboriginal peoples and Northerners. This government will continue to accurately measure the performance of its programs and remain fully accountable to Canadians.

• (1545)

[*English*]

Our investments outlined in the main estimates will enable us to follow through on our commitments, and we're going to continually evaluate and measure our performance so that we can report not only to you, but obviously to Parliament generally, and remain accountable to all Canadians.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to take your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Minister. And by staying within the timeframe you have set an excellent example for our committee members today.

I have just a couple of small pieces of housekeeping, committee members. I'm going to stick closely to the seven-minute and the five-minute timeframes today so that we get as many turns as possible asking the minister questions, and I will again be giving you the one-minute warning to let you know when we're getting near the end. So I'd appreciate if you didn't ask six questions and ask all five people to answer them with a minute left, because that doesn't work very well.

I have one other quick comment, Mr. Minister. We haven't received final approval yet, but this committee would like to do a study on the opportunities and challenges of economic development in our northern territories. We're actually hoping to travel to Nunavut in June, if we can get the permission of all the people who have to give us permission to do that.

We see that this committee has spent much of its time over the previous years dealing with aboriginal issues, and that's certainly very important, but we also recognize that northern development is

part of the mandate of this committee as well, and we would like to dip our oar in that water as well.

Finally, Mr. Harrison, congratulations from all of us. I actually met Peter years ago when he was the deputy at Natural Resources Canada on a Team Canada mission in China, in Beijing. Congratulations on your career.

Now I'd like to begin the first round of questioning, for seven minutes. Ms. Neville, go ahead, please.

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being here today.

Before I begin my comments and questions, I too want to wish Mr. Harrison well. We know you've had a challenging job, and we certainly wish you well in the next career you move on to.

Minister, I've got a whole whack of questions here to ask, but I have to make a comment first, and I don't mean to be disrespectful.

I listened and I read carefully as you spoke. You gave us a lot of words and you gave us basically a history of what we all know. All of us around this table are pretty steeped and immersed in this file. What I'm profoundly disappointed in is that you haven't addressed the very real challenges we're grappling with.

As you know, the Auditor General's report has been out. As you know, we're dealing with issues of housing and of education. We have heard about shortfalls of money; you have said many times that money is not the answer. Clearly, from the Auditor General's report there seems to be a significant shortage of it, at least in the child welfare system. We know from your previous appearances here that moneys have been moved from capital projects to cover operating projects.

The words are nice. It was a nice summary of what has or hasn't been done, or of the perceptions of what has or hasn't been done. But to my mind—and I say this with respect, because I know this is a complicated file—we are not dealing with the real issues of the day.

As I say, I've got a whack of questions here, but I'm going to start with the Auditor General's report because it is so fresh and tangible and has such a profound impact.

First I would like to know what the department's response is to the funding of child welfare services. Are you willing to take steps to revise the current funding formula? If so, what are they?

We heard that you're funded at a 6% take-up. We know the pilot project in Alberta is funded at 6%, although the take-up is much higher. So are you looking at a new formula? If not, why not? When will a new formula be in place? Could you speak to that?

Is the department working in collaboration with first nations and the provinces on this? What I would like is a comprehensive answer. I can give you all the detailed questions, but I would like a comprehensive answer on how your department is planning to address what many of us view as a very serious issue.

I will just add one comment; I said it last week. We saw that plans are being rolled out in 2010 or 2012, and I've said this in other forums before: a year in the life of a child is very long time. To me it's an urgent issue.

• (1550)

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Well, I agree. Especially for child and family services, it's important to all of us, and extremely important to first nations, as the Auditor General has pointed out.

We accept the analysis of the Auditor General. It is important to note that spending for child and family services has basically more than doubled: it's gone from \$193 million in 1996-97 to about \$481 million last year, over that period of time. Much of it was under the Liberals, but certainly there's been lots of money spent on it. The problem is that the results aren't what they should be.

You asked about what we will be doing differently. We do now have the authority to enter into agreements to move to a prevention-based model for child and family services, something that wasn't in place before. What we inherited when we came into office was a system based on a 20-year-old model. That needed to be changed; it needs to move to a prevention-based model, as has been noted by the Auditor General.

We have the first one in Alberta. There is some concern that it might cost more money, and it might cost more money in the early years, but the whole idea of a prevention-based system is to spend the money and make the investments so that you don't have so many kids who have to be taken from homes.

There is more money in this budget to allow us to extend that model, and it's not way off; it's this year. We are hoping to have agreements with a couple more provinces again this year to extend that model, or something similar. We don't want to be too prescriptive, but we do want to move to a prevention-based model for child and family services. That's where we'll be going.

In my own defence, if you will, or the government's defence, some of the other things I've mentioned, such as specific claims, safe water programs, and so on, are not theoretical; those are important, big projects that will mean hundreds of millions and billions of dollars to first nations. So they're important too.

**Hon. Anita Neville:** I don't deny that they're important, but as we've heard and as we know, they're happening at the expense of other projects, notably education, and that concerns us.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Claims are completely separate.

**Hon. Anita Neville:** Claims are different, I'll grant you that, but water is certainly not.

You speak frequently about the fact that money is not the issue. The Auditor...

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Hon. Anita Neville:** I don't want to get into a debate. I want answers.

I want to know how you will adequately fund the child welfare system. We've heard that you're funding it on the assumption that 6% of children are going into care or needing assistance. We've heard that in many communities the numbers are well beyond that. Are you

prepared to put more money in to address their needs and to have a prevention program?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** If I could have a minute, Mr. Chairman, again, not only is the money for specific claims all new money, but so is the money for water. There is \$330 million—

**Hon. Anita Neville:** I'm talking about child welfare.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I'm just answering. You said that the water was not new money. The water is new money. It is \$330 million in new money specifically for the action plan on water. So it's new money, and I'm happy to answer questions about that.

Again, on child and family services, we do have more money to move with provinces as necessary or as possible to negotiate new deals and to do it in a way that moves to a preventive model.

Again, I think it's worth saying that the problem on-reserve, as you mentioned, is sometimes a multiple factor for kids that are in apprehension or are taken out of their homes. The number is not appreciably different off reserve. That means that even in provinces where you have.... What it points to is that we collectively have to look at bigger issues than just the model. There are other issues at play here besides simply the reserve model or the type of child and family services we have.

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

Monsieur Lemay, *vous avez sept minutes.*

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** We will leave some time for the minister.

Minister, you have been in government now for a few months, even one or two years. I am extremely disappointed. I would like you to explain three things to me.

To begin with, the community infrastructure programs are being reduced from \$1,265,276 000 to \$1,031,544 000. This is serious business. It amounts to \$230 million being cut. I want to know what will go by the wayside. I need all the details: where are the cuts going to be made?

The social development budget is going up from \$1,400,481 000 to \$1,451,851,000. That is a marginal increase of \$51-million. Where will this extra money be spent?

Moreover, the budget for education is being increased \$1,667,197,000 to \$1,719,351,000, a slight increase of merely \$53 million.

As you will recall, Minister—in case you do not remember, I am reminding you—I asked you questions on March 5<sup>th</sup> about whether there would be investments in the education of young people.

Why are there no computers in the schools? In schools on a reserve just one kilometre from a school for white children, there is no library and there are no computers. Why has no one paid any attention to that? I would like a detailed answer.

You told me, and I quote you with respect:

It may well be—and it's my hope—that as we move ahead, whether it's with Quebec [...] those arrangements will become mutual [...] or something else to put children first.

I do not see that in the budget, Minister. I do not see that you are going to be putting children in Aboriginal communities first. I do not want you to tell me about situations off reserve. The current problems are really on reserve, in Aboriginal communities.

I do not see anything in 2008-09 that will improve the situation in Aboriginal communities. I have looked long and hard and studied every word, but there is nothing there.

The real insult, Minister, is that spending increases today are still capped at 2% per year, whereas Aboriginal communities need an increase of 13% per year. Why is that cap still in place?

Minister, you can have all of my remaining time, but I can assure you that it will be hard to convince me, especially since you are asking us to pass Bill C-47. I have to admit that this is a problem for me.

[English]

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** I hope this doesn't take up Mr. Lemay's time. It might have been the translation, but he referred to some stats in the beginning. I am wondering if he would refer to the pages and I'll try to follow along as a new member.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** It is in the estimates.

[English]

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Okay. I thought you referred to the page number, and I was trying to follow along.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** It is page 3-7 in French. In English,...

[English]

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** That's okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

We'll restart the clock. You have three minutes, Minister.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Yes.

[English]

I am listening carefully.

[Translation]

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Thank you, Mr. Lemay. Do you have your ear piece? Are you ready to go?

[English]

I will try to answer in English, I think, to try to talk a little quicker.

On community infrastructure, to compare apples to apples it's important to understand what happened in 2007-08; that with the expiration of the old water infrastructure plans and the introduction of the new ones, the amount we're going to be spending on water this coming year has to be added to the infrastructure spending allocated there, in order to talk about the same thing.

It was included in the overall infrastructure numbers last year—I believe I'm right on that—and this year it was separated out as a stand-alone plan, the safe drinking water plan. That money has to be added to it, and when you add that money, there's actually an increase in infrastructure spending overall from last year.

On education, I'm going to stand by my words, really, from the last time. Since we last met, we've signed a memorandum of understanding with New Brunswick. Just as another example, we have the one in B.C., which is quite specific. It talks about everything you mentioned in your remarks: it talks about standards, curriculum development, services for children, culturally sensitive material, expectations from both provincial, federal, and first nations governments.

It put it in legislation. It's a very specific program in B.C., which was signed off just this last fall—November, I think it was—and which will be proceeding. I'm very excited about that prospect.

In New Brunswick, it's a different deal, but again a tripartite agreement. In that agreement, the provincial government chose a different route with first nations. We were all there a little while ago to sign an agreement that the provincial government is going to augment. We're going to do a bunch of work on assessment and a bunch of other things to help make the system work better. In return, the New Brunswick government's going to fund it to the tune of 50% of the money we're investing, putting it back into first nations specific programming.

It's a great MOU, and we're really looking forward to it. My hat's off to the New Brunswick government for taking that approach.

I believe the best way forward is with willing partners. It's really the theme of my speech, that in working with the provincial governments, really the only way to do it is to meet provincial standards, with provincial expectations, with willing partners both in first nations and with the federal government. We're showing our commitment to do that.

I think it is the way forward. That old schoolhouse model, where we might have a school on a reserve in isolation that doesn't have the support networks every other public school around it might take for granted—the sharing of library services, sharing the mobility of teachers, ability for curriculum development, or at least for bringing that curriculum development to a reasonable expense.... All of those things are possible when you work together. It's an extremely expensive, and I think a less productive model, to have a schoolhouse model wherein, in isolation, everybody tries to recreate the wheel.

I think the model, if I can be so blunt, must be federal-provincial agreements with first nations to move forward. It is, as Bob Nault said a while ago in the national papers, not just about money. I didn't make up the phrase; he was talking about the Kelowna accord, and he just was convinced it wouldn't work. You could pour a bunch of money into it, for example, in child and family services. We doubled the amount of money in child and family services. The results are just no good, because the model's wrong.

You have to go to a prevention model, and that means we have to work with the provinces, because the provinces have all the tools in child and family services to do prevention work. They've been doing it for ten years already. It's time we got on that boat and worked with them in a willing partner way.

• (1600)

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

Ms. Crowder, you have seven minutes.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for coming.

I have three question areas. I will ask the three questions and then get out of the way.

One question is about the north. I noticed in your speech you did talk about the economy. On page 34 in the report on plans and priorities the amount of money that is actually allocated on the northern economy is allocated this year but then is reduced substantially in the two years after that.

On housing in the north, on pages 8, 15, and 30 to 34, program activities around the north are all mentioned and housing isn't mentioned anywhere there, so I wonder what the department's plan is for Inuit housing.

On audit requirements, which of course is mentioned throughout this document, I would like to know what the department is doing in response to the previous Auditor General's report that said that first nations are required to produce 168 reports per year. I would like to know what's being done in terms of reducing the paper burden on first nations and making it more effective so the department gets what it needs. As well, I would like to know what the department is doing in terms of providing more substantial information around both the committee and the public being able to track actual department expenditures in various program activities like family violence, post-secondary education, and so on.

My third question has to do with elementary or K-to-12 education and has to do with the band operating funding formula. My understanding is that the educational authority has simply been renewed at the same level, despite the department's own information that the average annual rate of growth was 4.7% from 1996 up to 2005. I point to the fact that, for example, in New Brunswick the province is paying \$8,700 per student per year, and if all first nations students in New Brunswick were turned over to the province, the department would pay \$8,700 per student per year. This is according to an e-mail exchange with Gail Metallic.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** That was New Brunswick?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** That was in New Brunswick. I know you mentioned an MOU, but the BOFF formula has been extended at the same rate.

If you could deal with those three questions, perhaps you could start with the north and then go to the audit.

• (1605)

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** We'll go north to south.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Perfect.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** On housing in the north, certainly, as I mentioned in my remarks to the polar shelf group this morning, housing in the north is an important issue, and that's why we specifically started in 2006 with some programming that was specifically targeted to the north. We announced the northern housing trust, some \$300 million specifically for affordable housing in the territories.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** I'm sorry, Minister, but that is not targeted specifically for Inuit housing. It's for all of the north. That is my understanding of that \$300 million, and it isn't mentioned anywhere in the priorities document. I wonder why it's not. I know what you've done in the past, but I wonder why it's not in the plans and priorities document.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** The plans for the north are the kinds of things we do with the provinces, but they are an agreement with the Government of Nunavut. I realize it is not exclusively Inuit, but it targets that money for where they think it's necessary and where it's prioritized. So it's working with the Government of Nunavut to make that happen.

For example, \$200 million was specifically for Nunavut, and Nunavut allocates that money based on what they see as their priorities. It is not an Inuit-specific program, but certainly the majority of recipients will be Inuit, given the demographics and the socio-economic conditions. So the majority of that will go to Inuit, but because it is a public government, it's not targeted specifically for Inuit in that way.

The program is predicted to create some 1,200 units, over 700 of them in Nunavut alone, where the needs are particularly acute. We are obviously working with this market housing initiative that we announced the other day. It is something that will be useful for some people. Again, it's not supposed to solve all the problems, but it will be useful for some people in some parts.

You've caught me off guard because of the Inuit-specific part of it, but, again, it's not targeted for Inuit. It's targeted for Nunavutians. I don't think that's the right word. Anyway, it's for the people of Nunavut generally.

On economic and social development, of course the big push up north, I read Premier Roland's speech that he gave here only last week. His number one priority, as is ours, is the Mackenzie Valley gas pipeline. If you're looking at that particular part of the world, that is certainly a big one there. In that agreement there's a potential \$500 million—

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** My question was, why in 2008-09 is the direct money \$23.2 million, while in 2009-10 it's \$1.9 million? That's my question. Why the huge drop year over year? This is on page 34. It's an enormous drop.

**Mr. Michael Wernick (Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** The program sunsets March 31, so it can't appear in estimates as applying to future years.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Thank you. That answers my question.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** If it's renewed, when it's renewed it will show up in next year's estimates.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** With respect to producing reports and reducing paperwork, this is something that was raised when we introduced an audit clause. It was a concern raised by some people who said we already produce a lot of reports. The Auditor General certainly suggested that there may be too many reports. So how do we reduce that paperwork? Is this audit provision going to force us to do more?

The answer is no. It's not a requirement for more paperwork. It will allow us to do audits of many of the reports that are already done. In other words, the concern is that reports are done and nothing is done with them, no proper evaluation. So it's a report for reporting's sake.

We want to get value for money and make sure that we're doing a better job on program design. If we're going to ask people to produce reports, it's only right that we audit and evaluate them properly. I think many of them are just reports for the sake of doing reports.

• (1610)

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Mr. Chairman, perhaps we could take that up after the minister leaves. Mr. Yeates is leading a reporting burden initiative.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming in this afternoon. We appreciate the time you've given to us and to this file.

Minister, this last number of months we've watched as the spring thaw has happened in many of our communities, including in my own. We've had concerns about water quality in some communities. I've been able to provide upgrades in some of my communities, and we're thankful for that, because concerns about water quality have gone down in some of these communities.

One of the things that spring brings for some communities is flooding concerns. I'm wondering if you could address the issue. CBC and Global ran reports on Kashechewan and the flooding there. It looks similar to the flooding that happened in past years.

I'm wondering if you could update us on the infrastructure in Kashechewan and how it affected the evacuation, the flooding, and the return of the people.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** It has been an important thing. There are ongoing problems there and in Attawapiskat. But it's important to remember that the communities and their leadership have done an excellent job in working with emergency experts from the Province of Ontario, who are in charge of actual safety and evacuation. They've done a good job.

As water rises, concern rises. The problem always lies in deciding when to take precautionary steps. If the entire community is flooded, you have a real problem, because there's no way to get to the community. Even the airport goes under.

The truth of the matter is that we did quite a bit of work after the flood of 2006. We did a lot of work on the diking, the pumping

systems, and the weirs. We also trained operators on updating and protecting the water systems, the safe-water drinking systems.

Unfortunately, what you saw on TV was not actually what was happening. I was none too pleased with this. I guess the television networks didn't have enough good coverage, enough inundation, because the communities never flooded. They never flooded.

Both Global and CBC ran old footage from 2006. The communities were not flooded. The dikes did their work, the money we invested in infrastructure and training paid off, and the safe-drinking-water systems never went down.

What you saw on TV was a preventive measure to make sure no one got hurt. You don't want someone stuck in a hospital in case a flood comes, but the community didn't flood and the diking did its work.

I think it is bordering on irresponsible to heighten the concern all of us had by running old footage of old floods. That was not helpful.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** It was presented as if it was going on at that point, so I appreciate that.

Can you inform us if the folks have been able to return, the people who were evacuated?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Yes, for Kashechewan. They were out for a very few days. They went out the early part of the week and were back by that Sunday, I think.

I mentioned there are ongoing concerns at Attawapiskat. It comes in phased evacuations. In phase one you take out elderly or sick people, people who would obviously have mobility issues, and so on. Then it ups as the danger increases. So they're halfway between a phase one and a phase two, if you will, but things are encouraging there.

The latest reports I've had today indicate the river's increasingly open. There's a small ice jam in the middle. Ice jams are the big problem in that territory, but everything seems to be progressing, and we're hopeful that people will start to be able to return shortly.

• (1615)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I appreciate that, Minister.

Minister, I'd like to move on to a different issue. It's with regard to the common experience payment. I just got an e-mail from one of my constituents who recounted the story of her father, who lived through the horrors of a residential school situation. Maybe you can give us an update on the numbers of the take-up on the payment. The interesting story was that the father wasn't aboriginal. He was of English descent, but hadn't been given or hadn't accessed the information. He had mistakenly understood that the common experience payment and the work that's being done on the residential schools is simply for aboriginals.

I'm wondering if you can give us some information with regard to the take-up on the payment and also the outreach to communicate to people who were involved in the residential school system. What's being done to inform people they can access this program?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I did mention some of the numbers in my speech. I think there have been some 91,000 applications.

I'm going to punt this so Peter gets on the record on his last day in committee.

Certainly more people have applied than was originally predicted. We thought we had a ballpark number. It has exceeded that. That's good. That means the message is getting out. People are applying in good numbers, and a good number of them have already settled and the common experience payment has been made.

Maybe I could get Mr. Harrison to give us a few numbers on that.

**The Chair:** You have one minute, Mr. Harrison.

**Mr. Peter Harrison (Deputy Minister, Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Mr. Chair, we follow this on a daily basis. The report today is that Service Canada has received 92,480 applications since September 19, which is 30 weeks ago. We have paid out 64,572 payments to individuals; 17,814 have been ineligible for a variety of reasons, including not having been to the school, been a day student, and so on. The amount in the 30 weeks, Mr. Chair, is \$1.25 billion.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** If there are specific questions you want to chase down with him, you could do that in subsequent rounds as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you all.

That completes the first round. Now we will begin the second round.

Ms. Keeper, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

I only have five minutes, so I'm going to get right to my questions.

The Auditor General's report has indicated and does discuss the Alberta model. You, Mr. Minister, have been on the record as saying, and you said it again today, that more money is not the answer; it's about fixing the system and addressing the systemic issues.

However, at the same time, the Alberta model has a significant increase in funding, which will be 74% by 2010 in the new formula. There's a significant increase in the funding in that model, and I hope this is going to be across the board in terms of other communities.

In the report, the Children's Special Allowances Act had a directive from Treasury Board to the Department of Indian Affairs to cut the children's special allowance, which will have a significant impact on communities and first nations agencies, child welfare agencies that have a lot of children in care. I'm a little perplexed by all of these confusing messages and confusing strategies. I want to know about the children's special allowance.

The impact will be really significant, especially when children are being forced into care to access health care services. Many of them are going into child family service agencies. Could you speak to that

directive and why first nations child welfare agencies haven't been formally informed about that cut?

• (1620)

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** First I'll address the general issue, which is funding.

It may well be that it would be more expensive to fund a preventive model. That's why we've allocated more money going forward, specifically for tripartite agreements. In the short term, there may be more money required, and that's as it may be. But again, it's to change the system.

It started in 1996-97. It has more than doubled. It is two and a half times as much. We have way too many kids in care. So the model is not working.

In this case, the model is wrong, and the funding formula may also be wrong. But it can't be done by simply saying that we should keep doing what we've been doing and put more money into it, because it's not—

**Ms. Tina Keeper:** Then how could cuts possibly help?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** There aren't cuts. We've added more money.

**Ms. Tina Keeper:** No, that's just for Alberta. Right?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** No. We've added more money for moving forward. As I mentioned, we were hoping to add a couple of more provinces this year through negotiations, and we have more money to do that.

**Ms. Tina Keeper:** Could you tell me where that is in the estimates?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Yes, it's in the budget numbers. It won't show up until the supplementary estimates because—

**Ms. Tina Keeper:** Will there be a directive, then? Is this special allowance cut going to take place? And will the increase make up for that shortfall? You're saying that the status quo doesn't work, so I don't understand how a cut could possibly be helpful. It's in the Auditor General's report under section 4.61.

In fact, it states that the money is used "to supplement INAC funding for its operating and administrative costs. When the special allowance is no longer available for that purpose, the resources for this agency's operations will be reduced by approximately 30 percent".

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** INAC has not yet defined the reasonable comparability with provincial systems and so on. That is part of the negotiations that have to take place as we move to this preventive model.

The concern, as I understand it, is that as you move to a new model, the model will be done in a culturally sensitive way to replicate what the provinces are already doing. I think every province is basically on a prevention model.

As we move into those negotiations, whatever the numbers are, whatever those negotiations are and have to be, what you can't have is stacking of old programs on new ones. You can't say that you're going to have this program with this provision, which is based on an old model, and then move it over to the new model and cherry-pick parts from the old model to add to it.

**Ms. Tina Keeper:** This is not about that new model, though. This is about the—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, we are well over the five minutes.

We'll go to Mr. Clarke.

**Ms. Tina Keeper:** It's section 4.58 and 4.61 in the Auditor General's report.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I don't have the Auditor General's report in front of me, so I'll have to get that answer for you.

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

Mr. Clarke, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Strahl, I have two small questions. This is based on past experience working on first nations reserves as an RCMP officer. While stationed on first nations reserves, and living there, I had numerous people come up to me and ask about the accountability of first nations. That's just basic to the audit system. A lot of first nations residents were wondering about the accountability of the first nations. That is one question I have.

Also, another interesting question, or my own personal.... Coming from the Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River riding, I'm wondering how much land entitlement my riding has received.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I'm not sure. I'll have to look up the answer to the last one. In a general sense, of course, we've been busy on the treaty land entitlements on the prairies. We promised 150,000 acres a year in Manitoba. We met our numbers last year, and we're going to meet them this year. So we are on course to add 150,000 acres a year, as promised, but we'll have to get the actual numbers for your riding. We'll do that.

On the accountability of first nations, you're always trying to find the balance—this was raised by Ms. Crowder—between how many reports you fill out and whether they are actually doing any good, as the first thing, and then secondly, whether you can audit them, whether you can get to the bottom of them. It's one thing to say.... For example, someone says "There was \$10,000 for painting a school, and I show an expense of \$10,000", but how do you know for sure whether somebody actually painted the school? There was an invoice in and out; an audit allows you to chase things to ground and say what was actually done. There might be paperwork, but when you audit it, of course, an auditor can express an opinion as to what actually went on.

I must say that in my own experience in my riding—I have 42 first nations in my riding—it's the same sort of thing. I've had people in my office from first nations communities saying, "I expect to see an audit, just as I do from the City of Chilliwack. I want to see an audited statement that I can go through line by line, and I expect to get it, as a member of the community."

By extending the audit provision I mentioned earlier to transfer agreements with first nations, we're hoping for more transparency in the system, so that first nations members at large, or chiefs in council, as far as that goes, can say—I think it cuts both ways—"Here are the books; they're open; you can all have a look at them." It cuts both ways then: the chief in council can say, "See, this is exactly what we did", and members can say, "I want to know exactly what you did", and they can back it up with the documents.

We all know that transparency protects all parties, because it allows people to say, "I was falsely accused of doing something with the money." You see that. I'm sure you've seen cases as well where someone accuses a chief he didn't like of doing something nefarious, and the truth was that it was all good.

You have to get those numbers out in front of people. It's important for first nations leadership to be accountable to their own citizenry, and this will allow that to happen in a way that—we're not picking on anyone—is across the board.

We'll get those other numbers on your riding. You sprang that one on me. I'll get that, though, shortly.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Is that it, Mr. Clarke?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for welcoming me to your committee as a new recruit.

Good afternoon, Minister.

On March 5<sup>th</sup> last—I was not here, but I read the blues from the meeting—my colleague, Mr. Lemay, asked you whether there was a tripartite agreement with Quebec for child and family services. You gave some sort of bureaucratic answer that seems to me to add up to no.

I want to ask you the same question. What is the status of negotiations among the Québécois nation, the first nations and the Government of Canada? Do you believe that an agreement will be signed? How many moons will that take?

[English]

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I'm not sure how long it will take. When there's a tripartite agreement it's not just up to me. It's not just me. The province has to be comfortable with it and first nations have to believe it's going to work for them too. When you're having tripartite agreements, it's up to three parties to come to a conclusion. But I think it's going well. There's a work plan to go through the issues that are at stake. Not just in Quebec, but in other provinces they're pursuing that. Admittedly, people are being careful, because it's a big issue. It's a big issue to provinces like Quebec that have control of child and family services, and they don't want the federal government interfering in that.

First nations understandably want a system that's sensitive to their concerns as well. Again, I can speak from experience in my own riding, where you're trying to provide child and family services through the province to first nations that, in my case back home, may not be comfortable with a child and family service arrangement that is not administered by their own band.

You can't have 600 separate child and family service agreements in the country. They have to be grouped with the province and grouped with significant numbers of first nations so that it's a system that will work. So these things are complex. I wish it were as simple as just a template that would work everywhere, but it's proven to be difficult.

I don't know if you have anything to add. It's difficult, because everyone is different, every province is different, and first nations within the provinces are also different.

•(1630)

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron:** Mr. Chairman, I will let my colleague, Mr. Lemay, continue to put the heat on the minister.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Minister, I asked you a question earlier, which gave me 17 minutes to go over things. The community infrastructure budget is \$230 million lower this year. I am choosing my words carefully.

You told me that funding for the whole water program, etc., had to be considered and that this was part of a special program. But I have a problem for you.

When I look at the Supplementary Estimates, on page 93, I see an amount of \$137 million for the Fund to implement the Potable Water Management Plan. So that means \$100 million less than what used to be provided for infrastructure. There was \$100 million kept back this year.

I would like an explanation of that. I know that there is funding for water issues, which is fine, but there is a gap of \$100 million and the communities have pressing needs.

Could you explain that to me?

[English]

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

I don't mean to disturb Mr. Lemay's round of questioning, but perhaps he could just slow it down a bit. The translator is having a

hard time keeping up. It will just make it a little easier for us. I respect his passion.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Mr. Chairman, with respect, regarding Mr. Storseth's point of order, he has just experienced what happens so often to us francophones when our anglophone colleagues speak too quickly. Since I feel very strongly about this, if you give me 30 seconds...

Did you understand my question, Minister?

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have one minute, Mr. Minister, to answer his question.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I'm not sure if I'm looking at the same pages as the member. Sometimes when we're dealing with the estimates, we're dealing with the estimates, but then we have the supplementaries and then the supplementary Bs. So when you add it up through the year, we're dealing with what we have in front us, I realize that, and it does show less than what there was last year, but there are other shoes to drop on this front.

I think Monsieur Lemay deserves a fuller answer than this, and perhaps my officials can do that later, and certainly I'll get it for him later.

In front of me here, I see we have another \$138 million on infrastructure that will be added on the supplementary As, and likely more than that will be in the Bs and the Cs. The trouble is that we're comparing what was spent last year in total. When you do the main estimates, supplementary As, Bs, and Cs all added up are one number. Today we're just dealing with the main estimates. The main estimates are less then, because they don't include the other numbers that will be rolled out as they're approved through the year. So I don't think we're comparing the same thing at the same time of the year. That's the trouble.

If we went back and looked at the main estimates for last year compared to the main estimates for this year, that would be a different thing. I think we're talking total budget expenses versus just the main estimates, and I think that's a significant part of the difference. I see the number here now that you're talking about it, which does show that \$230 million difference, but that is based on the main estimates only, and not on what will come later on in the budgetary cycle.

•(1635)

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

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** Monsieur Lemay, I'll give you a more complete answer, either personally or in written form. You deserve a better answer than that, but I think I could say in just broad terms, that's what we're up against here.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Merci.

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

With that, Mr. Minister, I think your time is up. We thank you for being here today, and we look forward to your deputy and officials remaining with us for the second hour, so I'm not going to formally suspend the meeting.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I'll take my leave.

I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and all the committee members. Again, I thank you for your work on Bill C-30. I know we've had some differences on Bill C-21, but I'm hoping we can resolve some of those differences as well.

I continue to be impressed. Even though we're in a minority Parliament, and even though it gets cranky from moment to moment, this committee continues to get things done, which is a tribute to all of you, and I just want to thank you. In between, I'm sure, some tense moments, you're getting some good work done.

I look forward to your economic development trip up north. I plan to be there myself this summer once or twice, not in June but later on. So we'll compare notes when it's over, and I'm sure we can get together and discuss that as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Could you possibly do one more thing, which is to introduce the officials you are leaving behind? We didn't do that at the beginning.

**Hon. Chuck Strahl:** I would, absolutely.

Michael Wernick is my deputy minister. Of course Peter Harrison needs no introduction. He'll be here to answer anything to do with residential schools settlement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and so on. Michael Wernick can answer pretty much anything about anything. Jim Quinn, our financial guru, will be able to answer financial questions, I'm hoping. Neil Yeates is associate deputy and man about town, who can fill you in on everything from specific claims and so on, right through it.

They're all excellent people, and I rely heavily on their support. The professional civil service in Canada is second to none.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, sir.

Next on our list of questioners is Mr. Warkentin. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To those gentlemen who are remaining with us for the second hour, we appreciate the clarity that you bring when you come.

We as the committee have been working for some time on Bill C-30, which is this committee's effort and the government's effort to reduce the specific claims backlog. Of course we know right now that there is a backlog that has continued to grow over the last number of years. I'm wondering if you could give us an update as to the situation when it comes to the backlog, how many resolved claims have developed over the last year, and what has traditionally been the case in terms of the number of claims that have been settled year after year. What is traditional or what is a norm, and how have things been progressing in the last 12 months?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** I will try to get some of the specific numbers.

We had a process that had pretty much congested and ground to a stop. When claims came in they had to be assessed in terms of historical research. Then you had to get a legal opinion as to whether a breach of a lawful obligation took place. Then you entered into a negotiating process, which was essentially an out-of-court settlement model. You spent time in negotiation, with no particular clock on that. Some were being settled. There were 15 or 20 a year, maybe 10.

We came to the conclusion with the government that a tribunal would be more expeditious, not just because it would deal with a lot of claims. The existence of the tribunal as a path forward would change behaviours for both us and first nations, and make negotiated settlements more likely.

Minister Prentice at the time, responding to concern that we would drop our tools on claims while waiting for Bill C-30, pushed us to speed up the process of research and offers of settlement. We moved 54 claims through last year, in terms of settlements or clear dispositions. We will continue to try to keep up that pace this year. They vary from a claim the size of a couple of hectares, to the claim in northern Alberta, the Bigstone, which is \$250 million with very large acreages, and so on.

One quick point is that accompanying Bill C-30 in the tribunal is a re-engineering process between ourselves and the Department of Justice to make sure we increase the through-put on settlements and offers. They will be reporting regularly to Parliament on progress on that. We'd be happy to give you progress reports.

•(1640)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** That's very interesting. I guess in the last number of months your department has put through five times what would traditionally be the case. You're talking about a number of things.

Have additional monetary resource been allocated, or is it a different way of handling things? I guess we're all looking for that glimmer of hope that something can continue; that there might be an action or behaviour that will give us all the assurance that there will be this continued expedition of the processes moving forward.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It's a combination of two things.

One is process engineering. I think we had a very step-by-step linear process. We're trying to do things more expeditiously and be a little more aggressive in getting offers out, and so on. Some of it is simply how the work is organized, and we'll continue to look for improvements there.

We have been given a cabinet authority for some resources for ourselves and the Department of Justice. The front-end window will be improved and enhanced with more staff and lawyers. I'm just trying to wrestle that out of Treasury Board now. We'll be happy to report on that. Some of that will come up through supplementary estimates to this committee.

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Of course we're concerned about moving specific claims forward. Is there any assessment out there of how many specific claims exist or could exist in the country? Every time you turn around, another community is talking about another claim they're proposing or sensing might be developed. I'm wondering if there is any research on what might be coming down the pipe. We know what the backlog is currently. Do we see an end point or a resolution? Have any assessments been done thus far?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It's a bit speculative. These claims are very specific—no pun intended. They deal with a breach of a lawful obligation in either the management of money or land transactions, so we should know the universe of how many times that has happened.

There is an onus on the first nation to bring a claim forward, so I can't promise you that there aren't claims lurking out there that haven't been filed. But we've been at this for many years, and you would think we had seen most of them. It's possible some new ones will come out of the woodwork. We've worked very closely with the Assembly of First Nations and regional aboriginal organizations in going to Bill C-30. We're confident that we have a pretty good fix on how many are out there, because we know where the railways were built, where the canals were built, and so on. It's unlikely that we're going to see an awful lot of new business related to land issues or Indian moneys issues. I think you're seeing a growing number of claims about consultation and economic development, which are a different animal. They're not specific claims.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wernick.

Ms. Crowder, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a comment and then a question. I don't want to deal with the accountability at this point, but I do have a comment.

Given the minister's comments that transparency protects all parties, and given the confusion around main estimates—supplementary As, Bs, Cs, and all of that stuff—we can't even track what the department is spending. I would say that the transparency process needs to work both ways, because we often can't tell from specific programs where money is being spent and how it's being moved around. We often can't compare year over year either, because the reporting process continues to change.

The question I'd like addressed is around education, and there are two pieces. I didn't get a response on the extension of the band operating funding formula remaining the same, despite what we know is a growth in educational costs and despite the fact that band schools don't have the capacity to operate with libraries, special education, speech therapy, computers, and so on.

Then with regard to the B.C. education agreement, I see Ms. Cram has joined us, and I know that Ms. Cram will probably be able to answer this question. There is confusion over funding for the First Nations Education Council and the FNFA. It has been unclear where the funding is going to come from for those two bodies. They were an essential part of getting that agreement to that point.

The other piece around the B.C. agreement is that it keeps being touted as a great agreement, but we know it takes two to three years to actually get things on stream with that. There are 13 nations

willing to sign on, but because the process is so lengthy, we're not clear that the funding is going to be in place. I notice that there's \$600,000 in grants to participating first nations in the main estimates, but I wonder if you could address both the BOFF—the band-operated funding formula—and the B.C. first nations.

• (1645)

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Mr. Chair, if you agree, I'd flip the question to Mr. Yeates and perhaps to Christine. Christine Cram is the assistant deputy minister in the area that covers education, social services, water, and a number of topics.

**Mr. Neil Yeates (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'll start off on the general funding issue.

It is the case that the K-12 funding is still part of the 2% funding cap, and that is a challenge, as I think the member has noted. Off-reserve costs have been increasing faster than that, and a significant portion of first nations students attend off-reserve schools, so that's a challenge for first nations and for us.

The situation varies quite a bit across the country. This is a bit of a segue into British Columbia, because our region, British Columbia, over the years has been able to allocate additional funding for K-12. As the member has noted, this issue of comparable funding and comparable services is a key issue in the development of education reform in British Columbia. We've gone a fair way to get to that level. It's not quite there yet, but it's within the ballpark in B.C.

I'll just turn it over to Christine on the funding for the two organizations in B.C.

**Ms. Christine Cram (Acting Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Socio-Economic Policy and Regional Operations, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** I'll just mention the 13 first nations that are negotiating. At a meeting about two weeks ago, Canada came forward and presented a financial offer. First nations are taking that away to consider how they want to respond to it.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Would that offer include comparable funding for the province of B.C.?

**Ms. Christine Cram:** Well, they presented an offer to them, in terms of... I can't say what the amount is. It's up to those 13 first nations to determine whether it's sufficient to be able to carry on. They agreed to take it away and come back with it.

In terms of the two organizations that will be created as a result of... The way the legislation worked is that as soon—

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** They're already in place now. The First Nations Education Council and the FNFA are already in there.

**Ms. Christine Cram:** There's one of them, though, that... It comes into effect as soon as the first first nation has concluded its jurisdictional arrangement. It will be up and running, so they are there. When I say the two, FNEESC is there and the authority will be there. Its funding, the funding for it—because it will have a role in the legislation—was included in the request for funding related to implementing these education agreements.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next is Mr. Schellenberger. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** I'd like to share my time, if I could.

I'd just like to say, regarding the flood evacuees from Kashechewan this year, that my riding of Perth—Wellington was a recipient of those evacuees, and we were very pleased to do that.

There was an article in the paper in which one of the residents who had been evacuated stated that the only thing that saved the government was the dike, but the dike was made of stone and mud, or gravel. It was my understanding that the diking was a two-year program.

Seeing that the dikes held, are there going to be more upgrades to that diking so that this evacuation doesn't have to happen every year?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Ms. Cram.

**Ms. Christine Cram:** Thank you.

Yes, indeed, the plan to fix the dike is a multi-year project. Certain investments were made this past year for this year, but there are further investments that will need to be made to improve the dike, so we're working with the community to have that done.

The challenge in evacuations is that when you have a fly-in community, you have fewer options to move people at the last minute. What we're hoping is that the dike will be improved so it will withstand any flooding. That's not to say in future years we won't still need to make some precautionary evacuations, because you don't want to put people's lives at risk. But we are certainly hoping the dike will protect the community from ever flooding. We would need to evacuate only if we were concerned that there was any risk to individuals.

• (1650)

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** I'm quite sure that a two- or three- or four-day evacuation is a lot less expensive than a two-week or three-week evacuation. I know when they came to Stratford there was talk that they could be there for a week to two or three weeks, so we were very pleased to have been hosts to those fine folks. I hope the dikes do hold, but it's reassuring to find out that they did hold quite well this year. Thank you for that.

Those are all my questions.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Clarke.

**Mr. Rob Clarke:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What criteria did you use in making major capital decisions as part of the long-term capital plan?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** I'll again turn that over to Ms. Cram, if it's okay.

We have a four-part ranking scale, as we've discussed with the committee on more than one occasion in past appearances.

We have a pot of money, we have a whole bunch of pressures, and then basically the job every year is to allocate it and try to get as many projects squeezed out every year as possible and not leave any money on the table.

Perhaps I can turn to Christine on the ranking criteria.

**Ms. Christine Cram:** The first one is protection of health and safety and assets. The second one is health and safety improvements. The dike would be a health and safety improvement, for example. Third is recapitalization and major maintenance, which is to extend the useful life of an asset. The fourth is growth. As folks in this room will know, there is a lot of pressure on growth, because first nations have the highest growth rates in the country. You run into situations where you have schools or other facilities that need to be expanded.

That's the four-part categorization that's used in assessing which capital projects will be undertaken.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next is Mr. Russell. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I want to go back to a question raised by my colleague, because I find it profoundly important. It was on the report the Auditor General came out with on child and family services. I thought the minister wasn't clear in terms of his response.

Item 4.6 on page 22 of the Auditor General's report says that under the current Treasury Board authority, starting April 1, 2008, INAC has to deduct special allowance payments from its funding for the maintenance costs of first nations children in care. Is that true or not? So there's a Treasury Board authority?

**Ms. Christine Cram:** There is a Treasury Board authority that says that. However, because of provinces, particularly Alberta, talking to us and first nations talking to us about this and our looking at this issue, we are not implementing that this year and we're looking into the matter further.

We are seeking the extension of that. I don't know that we've conveyed that to every first nation and every province at this point, but we have certainly conveyed it to some. So it's not our intention to implement that this year.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** That's definite, across Canada?

**Ms. Christine Cram:** That's definite, across Canada. This has been conveyed to Alberta first nations and we've conveyed that to the province. I just can't confirm whether we've conveyed it to all provinces and first nations.

• (1655)

**Mr. Todd Russell:** Thank you very much.

That's very clear.

On community infrastructure, away from hypotheticals and the fact that we might have A, B, C, D, E, F, G supplementaries, have you looked at what you've spent on infrastructure and what we had on infrastructure last year and what you told us black-on-white? It's less. Is that not right? To date, you're going to spend less on community infrastructure? Right now, today, looking at what we have in front of us, you're going to spend less on community infrastructure this year than you spent last year. Is that not right? There are just two figures.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** No. I don't believe that's right, if you add in the budget money for water, and we'd be happy to provide you with a table comparing the two years.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Those were together last year; now they're separated.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** I never asked Mr. Warkentin the question.

It's a common theme that ministers don't answer in the House, but I didn't think it pertained to committee.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** We'll provide you with a written comparison, year-to-year. If you include the budget money, which is being passed by Parliament in the next little while, it will come up to almost exactly the same amount this year as last year.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** Well, we're going to have to wait a little while to see if that proves out.

On relations, the Office of the Federal Interlocutor is going from about \$35 million down to \$29 million. Why is that? Because there's no evidence across the country, it seems, that there's been any type of agreement or real agreements based on section 35 and the Powley decision that deal with Métis groups. Is there one agreement with one organization across the country, a section 35 agreement?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** I'm not sure what you mean by a section 35 agreement.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** Rights agreement. A rights agreement, a constitutional agreement based on the Powley decision.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** These are sunseting funds for Powley discussions, which were renewed, so they will again show up in supplementary estimates, and I'd be happy to give you a written update on the work on Powley. The OFI also does work on the urban aboriginal strategy.

**Mr. Todd Russell:** My last question is this. Comprehensive land claims are also very important. There have been many concerns raised about the government meeting its obligations under modern treaties, like some of the Inuit agreements. I think about Nunatsiavut just recently, in 2005. Is the department doing anything to improve that, and can you just tell me what the department is doing to improve it?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Thank you, Mr. Russell.

I was questioned about this at the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples and by the House Standing Committee on Public Accounts, so I can certainly provide full answers.

We are trying to be more diligent in tracking what the obligations are in the agreements and putting some traction under workplans for implementation. We're trying to clear up a backlog in reporting to Parliament. We'll be happy to update you on that, and specific issues

pop up on each one. The centrepiece on implementation this year, which you would know, is the James Bay agreement, which is the first of the modern land claims agreements, the subject of a lot of dispute and litigation about its implementation. We've reached a settlement with the James Bay Cree, which we hope closes those issues and allows us to move forward with the Cree of Quebec.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Warkentin, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Our government has been working aggressively across the country to resolve outstanding and ongoing concerns with regard to water quality within aboriginal communities, within first nations communities.

I'm wondering if you could give us some type of analysis of where we stand today. Obviously there were a lot of goals in terms of how many first nations we'd be dealing with, and I'm wondering if you could give us some idea as to whether we've seen a decline in the number of communities that are experiencing water quality issues.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** One of the things we've done under the direction of the ministers is to prepare a report to Parliament and to Canada on implementation. They've been tabled in Parliament every few months. I think we'll be headed for another one fairly soon.

Perhaps I could ask Christine to give some of the highlights. It's about capital. It's about inspection. It's about training. It's a multi-faceted plan.

**Ms. Christine Cram:** Thank you very much. In March 2006 there were 193 high-risk drinking water systems, and this number has been reduced to 85 systems now. Also, there were 15 priority communities that have been removed from the list of 21. There were initially 21 priority communities that had both high-risk systems and drinking water advisories in place, and those have been reduced from 21 to 15, and work continues on the remaining six communities.

Also, we have implemented what's called a circuit rider training program to ensure that water operators are certified, to increase the number of water operators who are certified, and to provide support to those who don't have the necessary certification level. So the number of operators who have achieved the first level of certification or greater has increased from 418 out of 1,177. So that's a big increase.

● (1700)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Obviously water quality issues run the gamut...the reasons for water quality issues. I'm wondering if you can identify for us some of the problems that have been identified. Are there a number of things that you see on a regular basis within communities, or are the issues all very different from one to another? Obviously training of the personnel is one issue, and that could be a simpler issue to address than actually a huge infrastructure expenditure.

Could you give us some idea of the theme in terms of water quality issues and how we might be able to be assured, moving forward, that this list won't be increasing and that we won't be seeing fluctuating lists again? The training is one issue, but is there ongoing assessment of the infrastructure, ongoing assessment of the other contributing factors that lead to water quality issues?

**Ms. Christine Cram:** Thank you.

The best way to reduce risk is by having trained operators, because then you remove any operator errors. So we've found that investing in the circuit rider training program and things like that is the best way to reduce risk.

We are also initiating a complete engineering assessment of all the water and wastewater systems across the country. That will be commencing in a number of months. We've prepared the RFP and it will be contracted. It's a big job, so engineers will be going into each first nation community across the country and assessing the water systems. That then is going to give us a very good idea of what we need to do in terms of addressing the water issues.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I'd like you to comment briefly on the issue of children in care, per capita, in aboriginal communities. Obviously they're funded on a percentage basis, and that percentage would differ, I'm imagining, from one community to another. Is the department looking at flexibility to be able to move resources from one area or one community or one province to another in the event that there's a higher number in one region compared to another? Or do you find there seems to be a consistent percentage of children out of family care?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** As a general statement, Mr. Chairman, nobody is going to be left without care. Nobody will be stranded. Bills will be paid. Services will be provided, and if money has to be moved, we'll move it. Part of the issue that a community is always interested in is where does money move from one thing to another.

That's a general statement. The rates of kids in care vary enormously from province to province, community to community. We try to predict them, but it's a case management that is done by the agencies in terms of their practice and how closely they work with the provinces.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Warkentin. Your time is up. You're over time already. You might get the next turn.

Monsieur Lemay, *vous disposez de cinq minutes.*

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** I need to understand something. Mr. Wernick—I am reading this and trying to understand it—my liberal colleagues capped spending increases for core programs at 2% in 1996. Is that right? There has been a regular outcry about this. Who has set that 2% cap? Was it Treasury Board or the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development?

• (1705)

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It was the Finance Department of the day.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Who manages this spending increase limit of 2% today, in 2008? Does Treasury Board impose the 2% cap?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** The budget guidelines are set by the Finance Department and implemented by Treasury Board and our department.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** It seems that only the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is affected by this. Am I wrong or are all departments affected?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** My colleagues will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that the cap also applies to Health Canada for its health care programs on reserves.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** A lot of things are starting to make sense. So, Mr. Wernick and all of your team—I do not really want to blame you—have to work within limits. The larger the aboriginal population on reserves gets, the less it can get in the way of services, since spending increases are capped at 2%. That is what I understand. I must not be too far off the mark.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It is a spending increase cap for an envelope of services. They are basically the services that come under Ms. Cram: education, social assistance, child care services, housing, community infrastructure. It is like a box, and the volume of the box increases by 2% a year. Even in terms of the estimates, you can see that \$91 million is equivalent to the 2% increase.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** That is really the crux of the problem. You have explained everything—all the programs. If we want to make a recommendation, who do we need to have come before us to get an explanation? The Finance Department, Treasury Board? Who? We will have them come before the committee. I want a proper explanation of this.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** You are putting me in a difficult position. This is a budget decision. We are talking about the government's fiscal framework, and that is decided by cabinet. It is a government decision, and it really is linked to the budget and the finance department.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** And you get the money from Treasury Board.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Treasury Board plays a role in implementation and oversight, but the amounts under the framework are part of the government's fiscal plan.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** So it is the finance department.

I have been here for four years, and I have watched the Aboriginal population grow by between 3.5% and 5% every year. The needs are growing by about 10% a year, but your budget is allowed to increase by only 2% a year. It is impossible to pull off miracles. You don't have to be a star-student to understand that.

The only thing we can do is to call on the finance department to remove the cap. It makes no sense because you will always be limited.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Just by way of information, my colleagues at the finance department have probably explained that this applies to the core funding and that in both past and recent budgets, there has been additional funding for housing and, in the latest 5-year plan, for safe-drinking water, etc. Those amounts can be calculated.

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** But it does not add up to 13%. The needs are increasing by 13%, according to what we were told by Grand Chief Phil Fontaine and the Quebec Assembly of First Nations. All of our witnesses told us that. It is around 13%. So there is a gap of 11% a year between 2% and 13%.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Yes. Neither the demographic changes nor the inflation rate are reflected in the equation. There is also compensation to the provinces that must be paid. So we do end up working miracles from time to time.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're at a point where I can continue with the roster, or at this point... I know Ms. Crowder has another question, and I know Ms. Neville would like to ask another question. If we can agree, they would complete our third round. If that is acceptable to members, this would finish the third round.

Ms. Crowder, you have five minutes.

• (1710)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of quick questions.

Going back to the British Columbia First Nation Education Agreement, was it with new money, or was that money diverted from any existing funds?

**Ms. Christine Cram:** I believe it was new money. When I'm speaking of the organizations that would be created as part of the legislation, I believe that is with new money.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** What about the \$600,000 that is in the estimates? There's \$600,000, on page 15-7, in transfer payments.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** I believe it's new, but we'll correct that—

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** So none of the money that went to the B.C. First Nation Education Agreement came from any other source?

**Ms. Christine Cram:** No.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** It was not diverted from capital?

**Ms. Christine Cram:** No.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Okay.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Not for setting up the infrastructure of organizations and—

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Was there any money that went to B.C. that was diverted from somewhere else around this education agreement?

What I'm learning is that if I don't specifically ask the right question, I don't get the right answer.

**Ms. Christine Cram:** No.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** No money?

**Ms. Christine Cram:** Not around the implementation of the agreement. The money that was put in the offer for interim band funding came from the regional budget.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** It came from the regional budget, which would mean that people would have had to make decisions, then, about... If it came from the regional budget and wasn't brand new money, it would have meant, as Monsieur Lemay was pointing out,

that because of the 2% cap they would have had to make a decision not to fund X because they have to fund Y out of the regional budget.

**Ms. Christine Cram:** Over a number of years, they have been providing additional funding for education. In British Columbia, they use something they call an IBOF, an "interim band operating funding" formula, which—

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Yes, I'm familiar with it.

**Ms. Christine Cram:** You're familiar with it. They now have, essentially, established that as their base amount of funding for education in British Columbia.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** I have a quick question on water. It's a bit deceptive to talk about water operating systems, because there are a significant number of houses on reserve that simply are not hooked up to water systems. Garden Hill is a good example of that. My understanding is that there's a functioning water system, but a significant part of that community isn't hooked up.

Can you tell us how many homes on reserves are not hooked up to water systems?

**Ms. Christine Cram:** I don't know—

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** It would be a lot, because a lot are on wells and septic systems. Part of the strategy we want to use is that if they deliver clean, safe water, they may be the appropriate thing. We may not want to put pipes out to the back part of a community.

The test is whether safe water is available, not whether houses—

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Can you tell us how many of the wells that are serving the communities are safe?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** That's what we're working on, with more rigorous inspection of wells and safe small systems—

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** I have limited time.

In places like Garden Hill, there have been horror stories of elders having to go out and chip holes in the ice to get water in the wintertime. I think it's really important that we have a good handle on what the houses—

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** We'd be happy to provide a written response, Mr. Chairman.

One of the reasons we're doing an engineering assessment is to say what the right sizing response is for a particular community. Some are more distributed; some are more clustered. If we can do work with wells and small systems, that might be better than a big plant. Doing it properly, with engineers, will probably give us a better set of answers.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** I think that's a reasonable approach. It's just that when we're talking about water operating systems, there's a completely—

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** The test is health and safety, just as it would be in any other community.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Absolutely.

The last question I have is around both post-secondary education and the K-to-12.

The Auditor General issued a report on the K-to-12 part. My understanding is that there was a whole review happening. I wonder what the status of it is.

I understood there was a review of the post-secondary happening as well. The committee submitted a report, *No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-secondary Education in Canada*. In part, it called for funding for aboriginal institutions. I wonder what's happening with it.

**Ms. Christine Cram:** Okay. Thank you.

On K-to-12, indeed we have been actively looking at how to improve K-to-12. Some of that work resulted in \$70 million over two years being identified in budget 2008. It's for two essential purposes. One is to look at introducing student testing and things like that so we have a far better idea of the outcomes. That's one aspect. The other aspect is to work in partnerships with the provinces. That's why the minister was speaking about the MOU that was recently signed in New Brunswick.

That's what we're doing on K-to-12. We're continuing to look at what's needed to bring us into 2008, to look to the future, and to have better education results. That work will continue, and we would hope to see more we could roll out into the future.

In terms of the post-secondary education review, we're certainly actively looking at post-secondary education. We're also looking at how aboriginal people, as well as first nations, may be able to take advantage of announcements in budget 2008 in terms of student financial assistance, which HRSDC is working on. We will continue to look at post-secondary education.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Our last questioner today is Ms. Neville. You have five minutes.

**Hon. Anita Neville:** Thank you.

This race against the clock is always somewhat of a challenge.

I have several questions, but I'm going to start with a number of disparate ones.

Mr. Wernick, is it possible for you to give us a global picture, and probably a more specific picture, of how moneys have been reallocated? I'm particularly interested to know where moneys have been reallocated from education projects to water projects and from other capital projects to operating dollars. We've talked a lot about the movement of moneys. So that's one question.

Second, the Auditor General, in her report, has indicated that the government, through the department, has provided a plan in response to her report. Would it be possible for you to table that plan with the committee? I would be interested in seeing that.

My third question is not connected. We have been dealing with Bill C-47, which is currently in the House. We know that there will be an effort to bring back Bill C-21. Are there additional funds in the budget for the implementation of these bills, or will we be looking again at reassignments of dollars?

My fourth question, which we're not really going to have time to do justice to, is about the whole issue of housing. Clearly, the

government has announced twice a \$300 million fund for first nations market housing. I wonder if you could tell us why the department has made this a priority. Is there an expectation that this approach will address the existing housing backlog? Will it replace existing housing programs, and what's the implication?

Again, when we talk about Bill C-47, inevitably the issue of housing comes up.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** Thank you. I'll try to be very quick and to do justice to your questions.

We don't have any new implementation resources for Bill C-47 or Bill C-21. You'll be able to question us further on that when the bills come forward.

On child and family services, I'd be happy to provide the plan and the response. What the minister said and what we tried to convey was that we went and got new authorities, which will allow us to move into a prevention model. We're arm wrestling over the special allowance. We will be moving forward on the implementation of this prevention approach with as many provinces as we can sign up as they come forward. I'd be happy to put some detail under that and come back, if that's the committee's wish.

On housing, there was money in the area of northern housing, which was discussed earlier, and the First Nations Market Housing Fund, the centrepiece initiative on reserve. That's on top of the A-base funding we provide and that CMHC provides. CMHC is about an equal partner. We do about \$130 million and they do about \$130 million in terms of on-reserve units. We could provide you with a bit of a progress report on that.

On the policy behind the market housing, you might want to bring in Chief John Beaucage, who is now the chair of the board of trustees of the new fund. It's not an instrument designed to solve all the housing needs on all the reserves. It is designed to deal with those communities where there is income and the possibility of outside borrowing. To the extent that this levers cash dollars to get more housing units, it will take pressure off social housing. It's obviously not going to fit the needs in all communities.

• (1720)

**Hon. Anita Neville:** Could I just follow up on that?

Do you have a scan in the department of the housing needs in the communities?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** We can provide our best sense of it, but you have to go out to the communities, and it's a bit subjective as to what's a need and what constitutes overcrowding and so on. But we can certainly try to provide some information to the committee on that. CMHC does a lot of work in terms of data gathering in a sense. I think you get very widely disparate numbers on what is a backlog in this area. But we'd be happy to provide some information to the committee.

I'm not ducking your question on reallocation. If it's within the pot of community infrastructure funding, what we get has to deal with schools, water systems, electrification, internal roads, and a number of things. It's not just a matter of planning. It's also the availability of contractors and tendering in a very tight market, especially in western Canada. Sometimes we'd like to do a project, and the first nation isn't ready. Sometimes the first nation is ready, and we can't get anybody to take the bid on the contracting, and so on. So our regional people try to jockey these lists, and something may move forward because another one yields the traffic. We can provide you a snapshot. We're trying to get better at tracking and predicting what we will do this year and what's on the list for next year. If it would be helpful, we could share that.

**Hon. Anita Neville:** Where there are shortfalls in operating dollars, and it's necessary to go into capital allocations to—

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** That's a different reallocation issue, which I think was in the comment on this side of the table. Since we're not going to leave kids stranded, and we're going to pay our bills to provinces for tuition, and we're going to meet the needs of child and family services, we may have to dial back each year on what we can put—

**Hon. Anita Neville:** But can you show where you're doing that?

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** That's the \$100 million number, which I think Monsieur Lemay was getting at. We pulled back at the beginning of the year, knowing we'd have to pay the bills in child and family services and education. And to be very candid with the committee and with Parliament, we won't be doing as much infrastructure as a result, and that's because it's all inside this one box that's only growing at 2% a year.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Michael Wernick:** I don't know if I was clear there, but obviously we will pay our bills and we will meet our needs. The children come first.

**Hon. Anita Neville:** But you won't put a roof on the house.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wernick and your associates.

This concludes our questioning for today.

Ms. Crowder, did you have a question?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Chair, the research staff did a very good job of putting together the potential questions. I wonder if there's any possibility that those questions out of the package that weren't answered here could go to the department, and the department could provide a written response to those questions. There were some very detailed, complex questions, and given the limited time we have here, it was difficult to get answers to all of those good questions.

Secondly, I know the committee talked about having CMHC back here concerning the estimates. It's clear from the number of questions that we had about housing that having CMHC here for at least an hour so we could come back to estimates would seem like a good plan.

**The Chair:** Okay, we have two issues.

First of all, we can provide a list of the written questions that we had to the department for answers. We can provide that to you, Mr. Deputy Minister.

Secondly, this gets back into the agenda of what we will be dealing with the week we're back. This is a bit of committee housekeeping business, but on the first day back, which is Monday, May 26, I will not be here, and I know that the other two co-chairs of the committee are not going to be here that day.

The next item on our priority list was the.... Was it the census or the housing?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Bonnie Charron):** I understood that it was Stats Can, only if the Auditor General could not have appeared prior to the minister appearing today, and the estimates were the priority for the following week.

**The Chair:** Right. There's also some speculation there might be something else happening in Ottawa that day. So it was my intention, quite frankly, to cancel our meeting on Monday, May 26, and that priority then will roll over and we will try to get that done for Wednesday, May 28.

Anyway, thank you very much again. We appreciate your being here today, and I'm sure we'll see you again in the near future.

The meeting is adjourned.







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