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Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good afternoon, members of Parliament and guests. This is the 26th meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Let's have a look at today's agenda.

[English]

Today we have committee business. We're going to go directly to discussing a motion by Mr. Russell.

After that, members, we're going to go in camera. We have a subcommittee report and some other committee business. After we finish that, remaining in camera, we will begin consideration of the draft report on northern economic development—barriers and solutions.

Let's go directly to the motion. The motion, of course, is admissible. It did meet the notice requirement so it is now on our agenda. We'll give it over to Mr. Russell for a brief explanation.

You do have the motion. I believe it has been circulated in both official languages.

Monsieur Russell.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon to my colleagues.

The motion is fairly straightforward. It does seek to have a study conducted by this committee on the Specific Claims Tribunal process. As most members would know, the Specific Claims Tribunal process has arisen out of the Specific Claims Tribunal Act, which was vetted by this committee and approved by the House approximately three years ago, I believe, if my memory serves me right, in 2007...?

The Chair: It was 2008.

Mr. Todd Russell: It was 2008. It would be nice for this committee to have an understanding of how that is proceeding, but there are related issues.

When we passed that particular bill, there was a political protocol agreement, or a political agreement, with the Assembly of First Nations that dealt with claims over \$150 million—or that was supposed to deal with claims over \$150 million. That was what the government and the Assembly of First Nations agreed upon as part of or as a condition of moving forward with the Specific Claims Tribunal Act. So we want to look at where that's at, and also,

certainly, to do this in the context of what's happening on the ground. In this regard, I note the case of the Six Nations of the Grand River and their particular situation.

That's basically what the study would be centred around. I think it's very focused. I note that in the work plan we have four meetings attached to it, I think, and that seems to be okay. We probably could adjust it, but four meetings seems to be what we could do in.

The Chair: That was all preliminary and very tentative, of course, depending on how the discussion went today. You'll recall that we're going to have a brief discussion about the anticipated length of the study on the child and family services issue as well, but we'll come to that a little later.

Was there anything else, Mr. Russell?

We have some questions, so we'll go to them now. Let's begin with Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I want to speak in support of Mr. Russell's motion. I know that for those of us who were on the committee when we were having testimony at committee...there have been a number of issues raised around the specific claims process itself for claims under \$150 million. I think it would be timely for us to take a look at what is happening with the tribunal and get an update from the department on the number of claims submitted and the number still outstanding—so it's for that process end of it.

With regard to claims over \$150 million, I know that the Six Nations of the Grand River are specifically mentioned in the motion, but there are many, many other specific claims over \$150 million that are simply not going anywhere. I believe that when we had the minister before us last year the minister indicated that they were being dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and they were having to go to cabinet and whatnot, but that's really cold comfort to the nations that have these very large claims.

I think it would be timely for us to take a look at some of these large claims and what some of the issues were. Some of them have been outstanding for a couple of decades, so I think it's timely for us to review that process.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

We'll go to Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just in regard to some further clarification from Mr. Russell, I understand that Ms. Neville also has a motion forward. I'm seeing your motion, and yes, I'd like to look at your motion as well, but I'm just wondering, on precedence, who would be going first in regard to the motion for study?

Mr. Todd Russell: Well, the chair can certainly speak to that as well, but in the work plan I think we have tended to deal with business as it comes forward and is approved by the committee. So it's my sense that the study on child and family services would be conducted first, and then this study, if this motion is approved and we move forward, would come after that.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Payne.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Russell, in the work plan you did talk about something like four meetings. I'm just wondering, in your view, is that sufficient, depending, obviously, on the number of land rights claims that need to be reviewed and witnesses. Are four meetings going to be sufficient?

Mr. Todd Russell: Well, depending on how the study gets scoped, four meetings may be sufficient. I don't think we want to delve into the negotiations, or lack of negotiations, I suppose, in the sense of what's happening, or the toing and froing between the different parties that might be involved.

We're probably going to be looking at process issues around large claims: why it is taking generations and decades for large claims to move through the process, and where is the political protocol or the political agreement that was signed with the AFN and DIAND.

I think the work plan calls for four meetings. We haven't approved the work plan yet, Mr. Chair, so there might be some flexibility, but I think four meetings might be sufficient to give some breadth to this issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Payne.

Ms. Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Thank you.

I want to take a moment, as we begin the session, to congratulate and thank the members of the committee who took part today in the Sisters in Spirit vigil. It was an important event. As a Métis woman, I take it quite to heart and am very thankful to have seen some of you

there to support our advancement of the missing and murdered aboriginal women in this country.

I am completely in support of what Mr. Russell is suggesting. As we move along, I think it's prudent, as he suggested, to maybe play it by ear, because, as Ms. Crowder has said, there are a number of other first nations who may want to address this issue as well. I think it's prudent for us to try to work toward how many meetings. Right now, if we start with four and then work toward it, it would be good.

But I do want to ensure that we all understand that if there is legislation that comes forward, of course, we all know that ought to take precedence. Nevertheless, we would support discussions concerning this issue and we'll support Mr. Russell's motion.

● (1540)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Do members have any other questions? No?

[English]

Okay. I guess we're ready for the question.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Russell.

Mr. Bagnell, go ahead.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): I just have a comment for the record. This is a great motion and I'm totally supportive, but just so we all remember for the future, dealing with unsettled land claims and the problems with the implementation of modern treaties and self-governments are also equally huge problems that at some time have to be dealt with.

The Chair: Very good.

At this point, members, we're going to suspend briefly while we roll over into an in camera session so that we can discuss some other committee business that does involve our work plan. We customarily do that in camera, so we'll just suspend momentarily, and then we'll get going as quickly as we can.

Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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