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Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. It's great to see everybody out on a rainy afternoon.

Welcome to the 39th meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. We're glad to welcome, for the second week in a row, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Mr. Duncan.

This afternoon the orders of the day are the consideration of the supplementary estimates (B). I think we'll start right off. I believe the minister has at least an hour with us and officials are here for the remainder of our meeting this afternoon.

I think we'll go straight to the minister. Perhaps we'll leave the formal introductions of the officials to the second hour, and then we'll have more time with Minister Duncan, which I'm sure all members will appreciate.

Mr. Duncan, you have the floor for the customary initial comments. Then we'll go directly to questions from members.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemay, you have a point of order ?

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Yes, Mr. Chairman.

According to our minutes of proceedings, the minister was supposed to appear before our committee for two hours today. I have prepared questions for two hours. You will remember that the last time the minister appeared before this committee, it was about a specific issue. We had agreed to keep our questions until the two-hour meeting scheduled for December 1.

Today is December 1, and I would like the minister to stay with us for two hours.

[English]

The Chair: I don't know that this is a point of order at all. Certainly the minister is on the orders of the day. We know that ministers' time pressures can be significant. I'm sure the minister will indulge us as long as he can.

Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): We're in camera again.

The Chair: Pardon me?

Ms. Jean Crowder: We're in camera again.

The Chair: Oh, dear. There are technical glitches, perhaps, with this new room.

Members may be aware as well that this afternoon's meeting is not televised, just to let you know so that you can govern yourselves accordingly. There were some hitches with another committee that required one of the two television crews to do their meetings.

We'll get that corrected, Ms. Crowder. Thank you for that intervention.

Let's go to Mr. Duncan for his presentation.

Mr. Duncan, we're glad to have you back with us.

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency): Thank you very much.

I realize how much Monsieur Lemay likes my presence—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. John Duncan: —and I appreciate the fact that he likes me so much.

An hon. member: Me too.

An hon. member: And us.

Hon. John Duncan: I was here last week, and I was before the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights this week, so this is my third committee appearance since last week.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to appear before the committee today.

[English]

This is, as you know, my second appearance before this committee, and while I'm happy to discuss the supplementary estimates (B) of my department, I'll also take this opportunity to touch on some important other issues.

In the four short months since my appointment as minister, we've seen some significant developments that underline the government's commitment to making real progress on the issues that matter to aboriginal peoples and northerners.

I was particularly proud that one of my first actions as minister was to apologize for the relocation of Inuit from Inukjuak and Pond Inlet to Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay in the High Arctic in the 1950s, and for the hardship, suffering, and loss they experienced as a result of that relocation. Our government is working to renew our relationship with the Inuit, and to support social and economic development in the north as part of the northern strategy.

Also as part of the northern strategy, I was honoured to be in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, with the Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, Minister of Health and minister responsible for the north, to announce the location of the new Canadian High Arctic Research Station in that community.

[Translation]

The Northern Strategy is, of course, only one component of our government's plan to improve the quality of life for aboriginal peoples and northerners. The main estimates, for the first time, included \$61 million in funding for an important part of the government's Northern Strategy.

The Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CanNor, was created in August 2009 and is the first ever regional development agency for the north and the only federal agency headquartered in the north.

In little more than a year, CanNor has made great strides. The agency has established regional offices in all three territorial capitals and is developing its headquarters in Iqaluit in a new office facility being built by a local, Inuit-owned enterprise.

In May of this year, CanNor launched the Northern Projects Management Office, based in Yellowknife. This service works with the proponents of major development projects, federal departments, and regulators in the north to help improve the timeliness, predictability, and transparency of regulatory processes. It is a key part of the government's work to improve northern regulatory systems.

As you know, CanNor is the lead federal agency for the delivery of Canada's Economic Action Plan in the territories and its investments in the northern economy and northern communities have doubled as a consequence. To date, CanNor has supported 307 economic development projects in the north and has allocated over \$66 million to strengthening the economies of the three territories. In this way, CanNor is not only fulfilling the vision of the government's Northern Strategy, but also is helping northerners and northern communities to manage the impacts of the global economic downturn.

The investments included in supplementary estimates (B) support this commitment and enable us to address our priorities. Take child and family services for example.

● (1540)

[English]

Earlier this year, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Canada, and Manitoba negotiated a framework to improve on-reserve child and family services. Included in the estimates is \$17.6 million, which is part of a five-year commitment of \$177 million to implement the framework in Manitoba. As I explained when I appeared before this

committee last week, a similar framework was completed three years ago in Alberta, and the preliminary results are very promising.

The key to success, I believe, has been working in partnership with first nations groups and provincial governments. Manitoba is the sixth jurisdiction to start implementing the new preventive approach. This government hopes to complete frameworks in the four remaining provinces by 2013.

Also included in the supplementary estimates is \$295 million for the funding of awards to claimants resulting from the independent assessment process and alternative dispute resolution related to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The process is designed for former students who suffered serious physical or sexual abuse while attending an Indian residential school. The additional funds are needed because the number of claims filed and the average settlement per individual are higher than originally forecast.

● (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, we are also working with first nations and provinces in the area of education.

[English]

As we all know, access to quality education is essential to long-term, sustainable improvement for communities, as well as personal success. Together, we've been working to ensure first nations children receive the education they require to prepare them for the future.

Since I've been minister, we've signed two more tripartite agreements with the provinces and first nations. There was a sub-regional agreement in Saskatchewan and another in Prince Edward Island. So there are now seven agreements in place across the country that give first nations communities greater control over education and, most importantly, first nations students a greater chance for success.

Settling claims is also important to ensuring that first nations have the resources they need to prosper. Through claim settlements, the relationship between Canada and first nations is strengthened, and first nations can access the lands and resources they need to allow their communities to prosper. For instance, in October, I was pleased to join community members to celebrate the final settlement of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation's Brant Tract and Toronto Purchase specific claims.

Included in the supplementary estimates is the department's request to re-profile \$308 million from the previous fiscal year to fund specific claims settlements. This amount was originally set aside for specific claims during the last two fiscal years but was never spent. Re-profiling this money makes it available to fund specific claims settlements in the current fiscal year.

[Translation]

These initiatives are but a few examples of the concrete actions that support the department's goal of improving the quality of life of aboriginal peoples and northerners.

[English]

Canada's economic action plan invested a total of \$1.4 billion over two years in programs for aboriginal peoples. This includes programs and initiatives led by many government departments. Significant amounts are going to skills development and training programs for aboriginal peoples. Most of this investment, however, is going to infrastructure projects in first nations communities: water and waste-water treatment facilities, schools, and housing.

The provision of safe drinking water, the effective treatment of waste water, and the protection of sources of drinking water in first nations communities are critical to ensuring the health and safety of first nations people. The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that significant progress is made in improving water conditions on reserves across Canada.

[Translation]

These investments are very much in keeping with our ongoing priorities. Furthermore, INAC currently has four bills before the House and Senate which seek to address these same priorities.

[English]

Bill S-11, the Safe Drinking Water for First Nations Act, will enable the Government of Canada to continue making tangible progress on its commitment to improving water conditions on reserve. This bill is currently being considered before the Senate.

Bill C-25, the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act, will ensure clarity, consistency, and legal certainty with respect to land use planning and environmental assessment processes in Nunavut.

Bill S-4, the matrimonial real property act, proposes legislation to resolve the long-standing issue of on-reserve matrimonial real property.

Finally, Bill C-3, the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act, is an important piece of legislation that provides for movement toward the elimination of discrimination in the Indian Act.

Mr. Chairman, this government recognizes that money alone cannot address the issues facing northerners and aboriginal peoples. This is why we continue to seek and expand partnerships with groups that share our larger goal of ensuring that all Canadians, regardless of where they live, can participate in and contribute to this country's prosperity.

Every specific claim settlement, every tripartite agreement on education and on child and family services, and every aboriginal employment training partnership program brings us one step closer to this goal. I'm confident that the investments included in the supplementary estimates will lead to further progress.

● (1550)

[Translation]

Thank you. I'll do my best to answer any questions that members of the committee might have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I will now recognize Mr. Russell.

You have seven minutes.

[English]

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

Thank you, Minister, for appearing before us once again.

Thank you to each of the officials who have taken the time to be here.

Let me first of all say Happy Nunatsiavut Day to all of the Inuit, the Inuit descendants in Labrador, who are celebrating the fifth anniversary of their land claim and self-government agreement and the implementation of that agreement, which took place five years ago, of course, on December 1.

It was a historic time in Labrador and a joyous time. They're facing many challenges in terms of implementing self-government, but at the same time, they're also celebrating successes. I just want to say Happy Nunatsiavut Day to all the people in Labrador who are celebrating—and there are celebrations right across the big land, as we call it—and hopefully they'll have a fine time.

Mr. Minister, when it comes to specific claims, I remember being around this committee table when there was an urgency to move forward with the Specific Claims Tribunal Act, which I believe came into effect in late October of 2008.

There were allocations made. I believe there were nominal amounts approved and set aside by cabinet for claims, but to date there has not been one claim that has gone before the Specific Claims Tribunal.

Apparently there are some swanky offices in some prime real estate in Ottawa, but when you go there, you can hardly find an official or person associated with the Specific Claims Tribunal. I'm wondering where this is. Your government urged us to pass this—I think you were the parliamentary secretary at the time—so what action has been taken?

My second question is, how many claims do we have that are over \$150 million? I believe that is the limit of the Specific Claims Tribunal Act in terms of what they can hear. At the time that we passed the Specific Claims Tribunal Act, there was this other process that was going to take place to settle claims over \$150 million, so how many of those claims are there? What is the process that has been put in place by the government, in an urgent fashion, to resolve these?

Mr. Chair, if I may, I want to ask all my questions up front.

There has been much talk in the media around transparency and accountability, as you know, and many stories that have surfaced around salaries and things of that nature—and this is an exercise, one would think, in transparency and accountability. Can somebody point out to me where I can go to find the salaries of all of the executives in your office, sir, like the deputy minister, the assistant deputy minister, and all these people?

Where can I go to find the exact amount—not the salary ranges, but exact amounts—of their salaries, how much they get in bonuses, and how much they get in per diems, travel, and accommodation? Is that all calculated in one place where I can go to find it?

I'm saying that, sir, because I think if we're going to have standards of accountability and transparency, they need to be consistent throughout the system. If taxpayers' money is going to be spent when it comes to either executive salaries or chiefs' and councillors' salaries, and if transparency is the principle, well, let's comply with it.

Thank you.

Hon. John Duncan: Do you want me to answer now?

•(1555)

Mr. Todd Russell: Yes.

Hon. John Duncan: I'll try to remember all your questions.

As for how many claims there are over \$150 million, specific claims, the original anticipation was four. Those I think were included in the Senate report, the Senate study done on specific claims. I believe that's where the number came from; I think that was in the previous Parliament. I don't think I was here.

In term so the Specific Claims Tribunal, we try to settle all of these outside a tribunal. That's sort of the last resort. The roster of the people who are going to be on that tribunal has now been announced by Minister Nicholson. As you know, it's an independent body. They have been provided with the funding. It would be a conflict of interest for me to be directly involved, so I'm not.

I'm not sure of the when or how or what of the start-up, but I can say that we've settled a lot of claims. Irrespective of what the tribunal is up to, we have been settling a lot of specific claims, some of them quite large, and some of them a lot smaller. I am proud of how we've been moving things along and settling grievances that have been out there for a long time, many of them since the early 1990s.

As to the salaries you were talking about, which I think you are probably asking about in relation to Bill C-575, my salary is posted and your salary is posted. We're elected officials. The people who work for elected officials are in a different bailiwick and—

Mr. Todd Russell: So I can't get that information...?

Hon. John Duncan: Pardon me?

Mr. Todd Russell: I can't get that information, you're saying.

Hon. John Duncan: Well, you can get the range, but it's protected under the Privacy Act. The same would go for any other sector. What we're talking about is elected officials—

The Chair: Excuse me, Minister, if I can just interrupt you momentarily, the members may notice that the bells are ringing. There's a 30-minute bell. This is on a motion in the House.

Minister, each time you come to see us, we unfortunately seem to have this interruption.

Mr. Marc Lemay: You can stay with us for two hours—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Members, shortly before 4:30 we're going to be voting, so if there is agreement to continue for another 10 minutes, or no more than 15 minutes, we can continue. However, the Standing Orders do prevent us from continuing at this point once the bells have begun.

Is there agreement to continue for another 10 minutes or so?

Ms. Glover.

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

I know the bells are ringing, and I note that it was difficult for members to get here on time. It is very difficult in this weather and in this traffic to get back on time, and I would hate to be late for a vote. So unfortunately, this time, because of the weather and because two members weren't even able to get here on time, I would say that it would probably be best if we left now, got the vote done, and came back to finish our work.

The Chair: Okay. That's fine. It requires unanimous consent to continue once the bells have begun, so there is no consent. We will have to suspend the meeting at this point.

Minister, depending on your availability, you may not be able to make it back. That's your call, but we welcome the officials to come back and join us as soon as possible after the vote.

Members will know there is another vote scheduled for 6 o'clock this evening.

We'll do our best to fit in what we can this afternoon.

Thank you for your attention. The meeting is suspended.

•(1555)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1655)

The Chair: Okay. We are going to proceed under our reduced quorum rules, which require that there be at least one government member and one opposition member, and we're actually moving to Mr. Lemay's question.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Did we finish ours?

The Chair: You had 35 seconds left, Mr. Bagnell, so that will go to you on the next round. You will have an extra 35 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemay, you may if you want pursue your question.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Am I to understand that the minister will not come back?

The Chair: That is right. The minister will not be available until the end of this meeting.

Mr. Marc Lemay: In that case I will say at the outset—and I am addressing the parliamentary secretary specifically—that we would appreciate to welcome the minister at another meeting. I am willing to ask my questions to the departmental officers who are here today, but I think the minister will have to come back before our committee, so that we can ask him directly more questions.

As I am aware you will not have the answer to my question, I will ask you to send it in writing, and I will tell you why.

We were told by Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada that the government has allotted funds for the Family Violence Prevention Program run by Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada. There is a specific project that is of interest to us. We enquired about it and we were told that an amount of \$881,918 was given to an organization under the name of Three Eagle Wellness Society. However, if we look at all the amounts which were disbursed within this program across Canada, we see that they do not usually exceed \$25,000.

Yet, the Three Eagle Wellness Society received \$881,918, and we cannot find the reasons behind it. I am not even sure this organization exists; if it does, it keeps a very low profile. We could send you pictures of its premises. It looks like in the old movies: there is nothing there. We made some enquiries at the High Prairie Municipal Library, which is situated right across these premises, but nobody seems to know anything about it.

Mr. Deputy Minister, would you please give us some details about the \$1 million loans which have been granted to the Three Eagle Wellness Society? I know you cannot answer today, and I appreciate that.

Even more important, I would like to get some information about the following.

I went through the 2010 Public Accounts of Canada, which is a very reliable source, I presume. After looking at the 2010, 2009, 2008, 2008 and 2007 documents, I noticed, lo and behold, that in 2009-2010, there was an amount of \$424,958,145 which had lapsed in your department's budget. In 2008-2009, this amount was \$351,878,532, and so on. In total, an amount of \$1,424,222,000 would have lapsed and would have been transferred to the Consolidated Revenue Fund. I am very concerned by this, and I hope my colleagues feel the same. I definitely need to understand what that means. I can give you all the figures, all the results of my research, everything that was done. I can tell you that these amounts went from \$185,344,325 in 2005-2006 to \$424,958,145 in 2009-2010, for a total of more than \$1 billion. I would like to know whether this money was really transferred to the Consolidated Revenue Fund.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Wernick.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Wernick (Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you, Mr. Lemay. We take note of your first question. We will make all the necessary research and will send the answer to this committee. It is indeed a

very serious issue, and we will enquire about it as diligently as possible.

As to the second question, it has to do with methodology and the way we present our financial data. If that is of any help, we can prepare for your committee a chart showing the estimates, the approved amounts and the spent amounts.

What you see in the Public Accounts of Canada is a snapshot of final results, that is the total amount of what has been spent, within about a dollar. The difference is often due to the fact that things were not completed, or there is an agreement or a project. We often ask Parliament's approval, through this committee, to do what is called "reprofiling", that is to carry over any money from a given fiscal year so it can be spent during the next fiscal year. Therefore, this money is not returned to the fund, in most cases, like the claims. It is spent during the following year. I think we can easily prepare a chart showing that almost all the allotted funds is probably spent during the following fiscal year.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I would very much appreciate to get all this information because the total is quite high over the years. We went as far back as 2005 and 2006, up to 2010. I would appreciate to get all this information because we need to understand.

So, in your opinion, none of these funds would have been returned?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Maybe a few, but in most cases, like infrastructure projects and claims, we ask for Treasury Board's approval.

There is a good example today. In the budget estimates, reprofiling is the single most important vote, with an amount of almost \$300 million. This means we were unable to complete an agreement during one fiscal year and it will be completed during the following one.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Fine. I will wait for the answers.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

[English]

Now we'll go to Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thanks again for coming to the committee.

I'm going to ask two questions. If I have time left, I'll ask something else.

At the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples on Tuesday, November 23, Mr. Borbey indicated on specific claims that the amount allocated, the \$2.5 billion over 10 years, included claims of \$150 million and under, as well as the larger claims. In the previous minister's appearance before committee on February 6, 2008, he clearly indicated in his statement on these large claims that actually the point of the large claims process was removing it from the specific claims. So I'd like clarification on whether that \$2.5 billion includes large claims as well as the claims under \$150 million. That's one question.

The second question follows up on Monsieur Lemay's. We, too, looked at the public accounts. Our estimate said there was actually \$1.4 billion over five years that had not been spent. What I'm hearing you say is that this money is rolled over to future years, but it's really quite odd that between 2005 and 2010 there's a rollover every single year.

In light of that question, we've been hearing rumours that there has been a freeze on capital programs for the next six years, and that basically INAC has been given direction that there will not be any additional spending. INAC's response has been that the capital plan has been fully booked until 2016. I wonder if you could confirm that, because there are rumours going around.

Around capital plans and infrastructure, I wonder if you could also tell us if any projects will be impacted by the March 31 infrastructure spending deadline.

I'll turn it over to you. For anything you can't respond to, we'd really appreciate a written response.

● (1705)

Mr. Michael Wernick: Sure.

Those are very good questions, so let me see if I can clarify them. There's a slight distinction between the jurisdiction of the tribunal and the fund that's been set aside for payments—and I'll try to answer Mr. Russell's question.

Basically, when the tribunal was set up—and you'll remember the legislation—we said—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Wernick, this is about claims over \$150 million that don't go to the tribunal. That's my understanding.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, I'm just trying to answer two questions in one. I'm aware of six, and these include the big Mohawk claims. So these are Caledonia Six Nations, Kanesatake Oka, Kahnawake, Akwesasne, I believe Siksika, and Coldwater. The process is that we will get a mandate from cabinet and we will settle them if we can.

Ms. Jean Crowder: And that is not to come out of the \$2.5 billion?

Mr. Michael Wernick: If we ever settle the Six Nations claim, it would in theory come from that fund. The fund was set aside to deal with awards from the tribunal and the extra claims, those ones above \$150 million.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay, so just on a point of clarification then, that \$2.5 billion set-aside, because there is some confusion around that, are you saying the claims that do not go to the tribunal are not included in that \$2.5 billion?

Mr. Michael Wernick: Sorry, no—the opposite. If we ever settled Six Nations, Kahnawake, or Kanesatake—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Right.

Mr. Michael Wernick: —they would go to that fund. For the payments, if there were ever payments, they would be spread over a number of years, and they would go against that account.

Ms. Jean Crowder: The \$2.5 billion.

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's right.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So any other claims that are not large claims are not booked against the \$2.5 billion?

Mr. Michael Wernick: It has to fall under the specific claims policy. You'll remember that specific claims are a very particular kind of claim about a breach of lawful obligation by the government.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay. Sorry, but there's some confusion, because Mr. Borbey is saying in his testimony that claims under \$150 million and claims over \$150 million all come out of that \$2.5 billion.

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's correct, if they're specific claims, yes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: If they're specific claims. So claims that are negotiated and settled before they go to the tribunal come out of the \$2.5 billion.

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's right.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Claims that go to the tribunal come out of the \$2.5 billion. Claims that go to cabinet for approval come out of the \$2.5 billion.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Yes, if we ever get to one of those.

Ms. Jean Crowder: But that contradicts the testimony the minister gave on February 6, 2008. On February 6, 2008, the minister said, "Removing these large-value claims from the application of the specific claims policy and the tribunal process means that the \$250 million per year of dedicated funding available on an annual basis will be available for the resolution of more specific claims".

So there is some confusion, because I think many of us who were involved in that legislation understood that \$2.5 billion was for claims of \$150 million and under, whether they were from the tribunal or from the process negotiated in the department. If you could clarify this for the committee, I would appreciate that, because that's a very serious matter.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I will double-check, but my understanding is the tribunal deals with the claims under \$150 million, but the fund is there for both, and the hypothetical scenario is that if we settle Kahnawake or Six Nations or Siksika, then we would go there.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I also have a letter from March 17, 2008, from Minister Strahl, which also indicates that claims of \$150 million are to be handled outside the specific claims process.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The negotiating mandates would be, yes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Again, I think many of us believed those large claims would not be out of that \$2.5 billion, because, as you rightly point out, some of those larger claims, once they're settled, wouldn't take very many claims to use up that \$2.5 billion. So when you have these hundreds of other specific claims in the process, I question how—

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's the amount of money that was set aside at the time based on what we thought the traffic would be through the tribunal, the inventory of specific claims, and the large claims we know about. If I ever get to go to cabinet saying that we've settled the Six Nations claim, we'll go to the Minister of Finance and say "this is what it will take", and I'm sure there will be a discussion about providing for it. We'll see.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So no large claims over \$150 million have been settled at this point. Mississauga Credit...?

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's a smaller one.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I mean, these are the really big, thorny—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Yes, the greater than \$150 million.

Mr. Michael Wernick: —difficult ones and we would love to settle them. I think they sometimes get confused for everybody. Sometimes there are other kinds of claims and litigation against the government, and when we can settle them, we settle them. They come from a different account, and I know that's not helpful to you as parliamentarians, but—

• (1710)

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm aware of that.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I've never had a problem getting financing for a settlement if we reach a settlement. We'll see; all I can tell you is what I've experienced. I'd be delighted to have settlements on those larger claims.

Now, sorry, but you asked a separate question about community infrastructure projects?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Any that are not going to meet the deadline—

The Chair: We are actually—

Ms. Jean Crowder: —and also the capital program freeze.

The Chair: We're out of time.

Mr. Wernick, maybe you could just give a 30-second snapshot.

Mr. Michael Wernick: All the projects we started under Canada's economic action plan will be finished and will be unaffected by the deadline. If there's any spillover, we will find the money from the department. I don't think that's really going to be a big problem.

Also, there's no freeze. We have a very constrained budget on a lot of projects, but you've seen our regional capital plans. We make adjustments when there are fires and emergencies, but we certainly have not put a freeze on decision-making.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

Let's go to Mr. Weston.

[Translation]

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome everybody. We are sorry you had to wait.

We heard a lot about the results of the Canadian Economic Action Plan, and it is an issue I am very interested in.

Ms. Jauvin, would you please tell us how northerners have benefited from this plan?

Mr. Wernick, would you please tell us how aboriginal peoples have benefited from it?

Ms. Nicole Jauvin (Deputy Minister and President, Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency): Thank you.

The Economic Action Plan is an important part of the programs that are managed by CanNor. For us, the most important ones are the Community Adjustment Fund, the Recreation Infrastructure Canada program, and additional funds for Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development.

Concerning the Community Adjustment Fund and the Recreation Infrastructure Canada program, we managed to get projects approved so that all these funds will be spent. The total is about \$30 million, which is a lot of money for the north. Some projects still have to be approved, but they are in the system. We do not expect any major difficulties.

Generally, these are projects which have contributed to job creation and improved the economic situation in the three territories. For example, with the Recreation Infrastructure Canada program, small amounts have been distributed but they really benefited the communities.

[English]

For example, if we fix a cement pad for an arena in Nunavut, that has a huge impact in the community. Replacing a pool liner in an isolated community also has a great impact. So over and above creating employment, there are community benefits that have been very important. We're very happy with the way these programs have been rolled out in the north.

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Wernick.

Mr. Michael Wernick: *Je vous remercie.*

On the aboriginal community side of things, you will know that there has been regular reporting to Parliament on CEAP, and we've always contributed to that. You can find maps and drill down on specific projects and so on.

So as the minister said, it's allowed us to accelerate and do projects we probably wouldn't have been able to do without the extra push from the stimulus spending. The highlights are, as the minister said, about 18 water and waste-water projects, 12 schools, 40 health facilities, 17 policing facilities, and over 500 housing projects. You can actually look them up on a map and see where they are.

We are now chasing, at the Auditor General's behest, the actual job and employment impacts of these projects and trying to do the analysis of that. One of the examples would be that a couple of schools in Saskatchewan—I'll just pick one example—generated over 50,000 hours of construction labour and support. So there are a lot of benefits, and I agree with my colleague about the legacy in the community of having a school or a water plant. Some of these were renovations and some were upgrades.

In the north, a great deal of science infrastructure was renovated or built that probably would not have got done as quickly without this initiative.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. John Weston: Thank you, Mr. Wernick. Ms. Jauvin just talked about the Community Adjustment Fund and the Recreation Infrastructure Canada program. I would like to know whether these two programs also benefited the aboriginal peoples?

[English]

Mr. Michael Wernick: There are several examples of recreational projects done on reserve communities. I don't have them at my fingertips. There were a couple in northern Ontario that were quite important. There were some that the provinces were quite keen to partner on. The community adjustment fund right across the country actually helped.

At the outset, we tried to make sure that these programs' terms and conditions and the design were open to aboriginal communities as sponsors and proponents, and we saw a fair bit of take-up. I wish we could have done more, but there's a pretty healthy list of projects.

[Translation]

Mr. John Weston: So this is really good news.

In this committee, we've talked a lot about education.

[English]

What we see in the context of education is the importance of partnerships. I wonder if each of you might comment briefly on how the education partnership agreements are actually progressing and whether they're having a good impact.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The approach is similar to one that we've taken in child and family services and in income assistance and to the one my colleagues from Health Canada have taken in health services. Most Canadians get these kinds of services from provincial governments. The delivery systems, the infrastructure, and the governance are largely in provincial ministries. The people who know how to run these things really well are in provincial ministries.

So what we have tried to get together, wherever possible, is federal involvement, largely as a funder; provincial involvement, because the provinces have a lot of know-how and expertise in these areas or their local delivery systems; and first nations involvement, of course, because they set the priorities for their communities, they identify what they need, and they're going to participate in these.

So we go at the pace at which we can get willing partners. Sometimes they're fairly detailed and sometimes they're relatively general. We've been able to do agreements in Alberta and Prince

Edward Island. We have a very detailed agreement in one part of Saskatchewan, and we're in negotiations to do a whole-of-Saskatchewan agreement in the new year. We have other provinces that are interested. We see more provinces willing to participate, and we see more first nations who are interested in these kinds of arrangements.

These are useful with things like teacher training, professional development, and connecting people who work in first nations schools to those networks in their provinces. This also is useful with student identifiers, so that when a kid moves to a reserve in another community, or from the other community's reserve, we don't lose them; we know where they are and can follow them up. Also, this is useful for teacher testing and assessment. There are many, many very practical applications of these.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Weston.

Thanks to our witnesses.

Now we're going to go to Mr. Bagnell, as Mr. Russell kindly gave up his remaining time when we suspended. His time will be added to Mr. Bagnell's time.

Go ahead, Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you, Todd, for your generosity.

Because he's mad that he's lost his 35 seconds—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Larry Bagnell: —could you actually get an answer in writing back to the clerk on his question about salaries? That was the question he asked before we adjourned.

I'll go on to my question. The first question is easy, because I told you what it was, but basically, as you know, the Teslin Tlingit Council is trying to go to cabinet with a justice agreement. They were told it would go forward last June, but it didn't, and now it has gone on to September. I asked the justice minister about it in the airport a couple of weeks ago, and he said to ask your department. But I had already asked your department, which said that Justice wasn't saying anything, so your department has been very helpful.

I'm just wondering if you have any idea when that's going to go to cabinet.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I can confirm that we have all of the federal approvals in place. This is going to sound like a runaround, but we're waiting for the Government of Yukon, and once we have that, we're done.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Oh, okay. So once the Government of Yukon approves it—and I understand that should be shortly—does that mean it can just sign the agreements? Or do there need to be any more federal approvals? Because it's been through cabinet and everything....

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's my understanding. All the federal approvals are in place, so we're just—

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay. So you can just have your ceremony and get on with it.

Mr. Michael Wernick: We would hope so. As soon as the territory gives us what we need, we're done. That's my understanding.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Did you want to look at that little note there?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's what it says here.

An hon. member: Larry...

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay. My second question—

• (1720)

Mr. Michael Wernick: That's what it says in my note, too, sir.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay, great. That's perfect.

I'm very happy. Thank you. Your department has been very helpful on that file for us, and of course, thanks also to all the staff for coming here. You've all been very helpful for me when we've asked for things.

Now, on my second question, apparently the five-year moratorium on development of the Horn Plateau—the interim protection agreement in place while the land claim is being negotiated with the Deh Cho—has expired. You have not renewed it and apparently the Deh Cho are not very happy about that. Could you explain?

Obviously the claim isn't signed yet. Apparently the plateau is slated to become a national wildlife area under the protected areas strategy, so the result of not renewing the interim protection agreement is that mining companies will go in and stake claims, making it much harder to have a protected area. I wonder why you're not renewing that interim protection.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I think I'm going to have to pursue that in writing, Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I don't want to get this wrong.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Sure.

Mr. Michael Wernick: There were land withdrawals of surface to subsurface in the area. I just want to make sure I have the right ones.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: That's fine. If you can get back to us, it would be great.

This is going to be harder for you to answer, but I'm wondering about the Inuit bill, Bill C-25, which is actually mentioned in the minister's speech. From my understanding, when it came here in June or sometime, I think, it looked like there was unanimous support and you could put the thing through in a day. And it's still not.... Where is it? Can't you just get that done?

Mr. Michael Wernick: We're ready to proceed. I think that's between committee members, the minister, and the parliamentary secretary as to how you want to schedule your business, but we'll be ready to proceed when the committee is.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Has it been through second reading?

An hon. member: No.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: No, it has to go to Parliament—

Mr. Michael Wernick: I think it's traffic control in Parliament. That's my understanding.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Do you have any influence with the House leader, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Absolutely none.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I'm wondering about the food mail program, the northern nutrition program. If a recommendation were to come out sometime in the future, now that everyone's seen it, and they've got problems with the concept, were they to go back to the old program and fix it up with some minor fixes, or were they just to delay for some time so that people could actually get ready? Because a number of things haven't even been announced in the new program. Would the department be open to discussion on that?

Mr. Michael Wernick: It wouldn't be my call. My instructions are to proceed with implementation of the program on April 1. I know that you have officials coming on Monday. I'd be happy to take questions specific to the implementation.

We're proceeding. You know about the eligibility list. The rate schedule should be coming out any day now. I think actually that it might be disruptive to people to slow it down at this point, but perhaps on Monday I'll take people who know the program inside out and they can answer questions on that.

It wouldn't be my decision. Our instructions are to implement the program that cabinet approved and to do it as much as possible in partnership with people of the north. That's why we have the advisory committee.

We know that in the first year it won't be perfect and there'll be feedback and there'll be a need for adjustments, as there is in any government program, and the advisory board will be helpful on that.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

I want to get my last question in here.

It's a given that there's a real shortfall for education and that the amount per capita available for aboriginal students is going down. The "capital money for schools" horror show has been brought up numerous times in Parliament. Underfunding per student compared to that in provinces has come up a number of times.

Given all those problems, why, in this speech on the supplementary estimates—whoever wrote the minister's speech—does it say, "Together, we have been working to ensure First Nation children receive the education they require to prepare them for the future". Also, the speech says "provinces" and doesn't include territories.

Why does it say that when there's not even the money in the supplementaries for any of all those needs? I would have avoided putting it in the speech.

The Chair: A short response, please.

Mr. Michael Wernick: Well, you'll know that in the main estimates the department will spend \$1.4 billion this fiscal year on K-to-12 education, elementary and secondary, for about 120,000 students. That's approximately \$10,000 per student if you want to use that as a metric, and that's very comparable to the provincial systems.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bagnell.

Our final question will go to Mr. Dreeshen. We have just a couple of short housekeeping items and then we'll wrap up.

Go ahead, Mr. Dreeshen.

• (1725)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

There has been some work undertaken and discussions held in certain regions regarding the current election system, so I just wondered if perhaps you could update us on the government's plans moving forward in regard to changes in the way the first nations elect their leadership.

Mr. Michael Wernick: The approach that we're generally working on with issues related to governance is that these will have to come from leaders of first nations communities and they will be the driving force on it. There were four previous attempts under governments of two different stripes to legislate on elections and governance and none of them passed.

So what we've seen is a lot of discussion led by first nations groups. The Atlantic Policy Congress, which is the group in Atlantic Canada, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and now the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations are all interested in reforming electoral law. What we have is the Indian Act, which is not terribly satisfactory, especially two-year terms of office, and then custom election codes, which are not very transparent and accountable.

So they're out there trying to fine-tune these and build support. If there's enough support, I think the government will probably choose to proceed. That's a decision they haven't taken yet. If there's not a lot of consensus, I don't know if it will happen in the life of this Parliament. You probably have more control over that than I do.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Could you expand on some of the specifics of the northern strategy thoughts for this upcoming year?

Mr. Michael Wernick: The northern strategy is out in public. It has been a very useful framework. It's not, as they say, rocket science. There's an emphasis on economic and social development, an emphasis on environmental protection, an emphasis on our sovereignty, and an emphasis on governance and institutions.

We've seen progress in all of those areas. There has been a lot of focus on the economic action plan, as the previous question alluded to. There have been investments in social areas. There are the regulatory improvements in Bill C-25, which we hope you will get to debate fairly soon, and a lot of investments in science under the International Polar Year, the commitment to the research station, and so on.

My expectation next year is that there will be a lot of focus on regulatory change in the north to make sure that the development takes place and takes place in a sustainable manner. We'll see a lot of

work in those areas and hopefully some progress on devolution to the Northwest Territories, perhaps Nunavut as well, and probably a range of initiatives across other government departments.

There are actually a lot of things that have been launched, like the research station, the Nanisivik facility, Cambridge Bay, and so on, where the main job the public service will have will be implementation.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Okay.

I'm just wondering if you could perhaps tell us something about your thoughts on the impact that the apology to the Inuit has had on helping with the federal Inuit relations.

Mr. Michael Wernick: I wasn't there. The minister was. But I did talk to him about it and with other people who were there.

I was there for the apology in the House of Commons. It's very difficult to overstate the impact these gestures of reconciliation have. I don't think people who work outside the field of aboriginal affairs understand how much it matters. It was very moving and meaningful for the elders and for the communities.

There are a lot of social and economic issues in those communities and a lot of things going on, but it just creates a reset of the relationships between people and their government, which is really important. It's hard to measure in public accounts or performance reports, but every account I've heard of that and of the 2008 apology is that they just make.... The reverberations will happen for years.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Dreeshen, thank you.

Witnesses, thank you as well. I dispensed with the formal introductions here this afternoon in the interests of time. It was great to have you all here this afternoon. I'm sorry that our meeting was interrupted. That of course, as you will know, happens some of the time.

I have two quick things for committee members.

First, I will just report back on our report on northern economic development. We can get 300 copies for about \$400. It ends up being a cost that's considerably less than what we talked about the last day.

The other is another reminder for next week. If the parties can have your suggestions in for witnesses for the study on specific claims by Wednesday of next week, there is a subcommittee meeting on Thursday morning and it would be great to have those suggestions in so that the subcommittee can begin to work up that witness list for our next study on specific claims.

We're back here on Monday afternoon. On both Monday and Wednesday afternoons, we'll be back into our study on child and family services. We'll see you back here then.

Thanks very much. The meeting is adjourned.

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