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Wednesday, June 16, 2010

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Chair

Ms. Candice Hoepfner

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1540)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

[English]

This is the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This is meeting number 23, on Wednesday, June 16, 2010. Our orders of the day are, from 3:30 to 4:30, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study of the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are very privileged to receive, from Nunavut by teleconference, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., with Mr. Natan Obed, director of the Department of Social and Cultural Development, as well as Mr. Alastair Campbell, senior policy adviser.

Unfortunately, Mr. Paul Kaludjak, president of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., could not be present on the phone.

We will proceed now with our witnesses.

Mr. Obed and Mr. Campbell, who will be the first to speak?

Mr. Alastair Campbell (Senior Policy Advisor, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.): This is Alastair Campbell speaking. I can lead off.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Campbell, you have 10 minutes.

Is Mr. Obed with you, Mr. Campbell?

Mr. Alastair Campbell: Yes, he's here.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Good.

Welcome to both of you, then, by teleconference.

Mr. Campbell, you start off. It's 10 minutes for both of you.

We'll start off with Mr. Campbell, we'll follow with Mr. Obed, and then I will indicate to you that various members of this committee will be asking you questions. That will go on until 4:30 Ottawa time.

Is that fine with you?

Mr. Alastair Campbell: Yes, that's good.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Very good.

Mr. Campbell, senior policy adviser with Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., please proceed.

Mr. Alastair Campbell: Thank you, and good afternoon.

There are a couple of points to make. First is that you would have received, I hope, some copies of the submission that we sent down to your committee originally. It was just to give you a first glimpse of the picture in Nunavut.

What I would—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Yes. We have the text in both official languages.

Mr. Alastair Campbell: Thank you.

So what I would like to speak about just very briefly is the importance of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement for the well-being of Inuit—economic, social, and cultural—in Nunavut.

The agreement was signed in 1993 and was taken to represent a major change in the relationship between Inuit and government. It took 23 years from the date the first proposal was tabled with the Government of Canada to get to the final signing of the agreement. It was seen by Inuit, when it was signed, as a very basic document for—and is still seen as that—the basis for future well-being, and a document that, after 1982, is protected in the Constitution of Canada in section 35.

In the view of NTI, the agreement has not been implemented fully in spirit and intent, or even, in some cases, according to the letter of the agreement. This view is supported by reports of the Auditor General of Canada, PricewaterhouseCoopers, a private consulting firm, and the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples.

In our view, a new approach is needed to the implementation of land claims agreements. In this context it would be worthwhile to suggest that you look at the report of the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples that was produced in 2008, which contains a number of recommendations that NTI and other signatories of land claim agreements endorse. Essentially, fundamental changes are needed in the federal approach to implementation of our agreement and other agreements.

To date, no measures have been taken to move in this direction. It really requires consideration at a senior level by the Government of Canada. The recommendations go beyond the powers of Indian and Northern Affairs, but only modest administrative adjustments appear to be contemplated.

I would like to remind you of or point out what is in the land claims agreement in the way of objectives. The preamble to the agreement says, among other things, that the objectives of the agreement are:

- to provide Inuit with financial compensation and means of participating in economic opportunities; and
- to encourage self-reliance and the cultural and social well-being of Inuit.

I'm sure that from some of the information Mr. Obed will give you in a minute or two, you will see that what is being accomplished is short of meeting the objectives set out in the land claims agreement.

The full implementation of the agreement is seen by NTI as crucial to the well-being of Inuit in Nunavut. And its full implementation in spirit and intent is essential if the federal government is going to be serious about ending poverty in Nunavut.

Those are my introductory comments. Mr. Obed will take over at this point.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Obed.

Mr. Natan Obed (Director, Department of Social and Cultural Development, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.): Thank you.

You did a very good job of pronouncing my name.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Mr. Natan Obed: I'll start with a linking statement about the land claim and how it relates to social indicators and federal responsibility.

Article 32 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement allows for participation of Inuit in the development, design, and delivery of any social or cultural program, policy, or legislation that affects Inuit in Nunavut, and this obligation extends to the territorial government as well as the federal government. We do not feel that article 32 has been respected or implemented in such a way as to allow full participation of Inuit in the design and the method of delivery of social programs.

If we're talking about reducing poverty and the federal government's role, one of the first parts to play is this open dialogue giving Inuit the ability to participate in the design of programs or services that affect Inuit in Nunavut, because the federal government does do quite a bit when it comes to social or cultural programs and services in Nunavut.

I'll get into a few social indicators. We can talk quite a bit about the discrepancies in health outcomes or social indicators between the population in Nunavut and the population of Canada, but I'm going to focus on just a few issues: health care, education, and housing.

In health care, virtually all the money that is expended on health care in Nunavut for Inuit and for the population as a whole originates with the federal government. Nunavut is not a territory with a tremendous amount of own-source revenue or a large tax base, so virtually all the money spent on essential services is federally funded one way or another.

Outside of the territorial formula financing, a number of programs related to social development are usually run through either Health Canada or the Public Health Agency of Canada. The design of these programs, how they are delivered, and the funding related to their

delivery have huge positive consequences for communities in the territory, because often the link is between the federal government and, say, the community that delivers the health program.

Most of these funds that are direct links between communities and the federal government are health promotion programs or prevention programs, but they go a long way in ensuring that people are living productive lives and living healthy lives, which then allows them to pursue economic employment or just ensures that they have a solid foundation upon which to live their lives in a positive and meaningful way.

Something that is related to health is food security. The 2008 Nunavut Inuit children's health survey, which was conducted in conjunction with the broader Inuit health survey that was an IPY-funded project, found that 70% of all households in Nunavut that had children between the ages of three and five were "food insecure". This means that at some point during the year families did not have enough to eat or did not have enough resources to buy food to eat to satisfy the nutritional requirements of their children.

• (1545)

As you can see, this is a major issue of poverty. And then we see other results of this, like different iron deficiencies, vitamin D deficiencies, or lack of nutrition, which then links to long-term health concerns and also to underperformance in school, or to just the inability of the family to function in a healthy manner if there's always the threat of not having enough food and if a lot of families live in poverty.

Then that links to housing: we at NTI have done quite a bit of work in the past on housing. We have been very complimentary about the federal government for its recent investments in the last four years in housing. That's as a start, because in our estimation there are in excess of 6,000 homes that need to be built in Nunavut to satisfy the emerging and current demand for housing. Right now we have severe overcrowding in a lot of the homes in our territory, which then leads to many other social problems that create barriers for people to reach their full potential.

On the social side, we see housing as a key to a better future. On the economic development side, housing in Canada has often been linked as being one of the foundations to creating and maintaining individual wealth. There really isn't a private housing market beyond just one or two communities in this territory. It has always been the federal government's wish for Nunavut that a larger private housing market would be established, but that just isn't possible at the moment due to poverty and due to the monopoly of social housing in a number of our communities.

The last thing I want to touch on is education. We have done quite a bit of work on education and the link to employment. We still fall well below a representational workforce in government, and that is extrapolated across all the different job opportunities in our society. Without a properly educated society, we will still continue to lose out on the majority of the opportunities that are presented to us through the emerging natural resources sector. We will continue to lose out on opportunities to work in government and in private business. We also will continue to lose out on opportunities to have a well-educated society, which then is a lever into many other different positive things in life.

I am cognizant of the time. I appreciate the opportunity to speak. Thank you.

• (1550)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you very much, Mr. Obed. You were very sensitive to time. Actually, you are exactly one minute over, so you obviously know something about time.

Thank you both so much.

We will now go into the first round. I will explain that the first round is seven minutes for each MP, and those seven minutes include both the question and the answer. We usually start with the Liberal MPs, then we go on to the Bloc Québécois, to the NDP, and finally to the Conservative MPs. Then we'll go into a second round later on.

We'll start with Madam Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a pleasure to be talking to you.

I was up in Nunavut in December and in fact met with some representatives of your organization—two fabulous, aggressive women. One of the things that you've just alluded to and that we discussed when I was there was that the staff of the territorial Government of Nunavut is primarily white, from the south. I got the impression...it was not an impression, actually, but was quite clear from the presentation made to me and my colleagues by the two women at the time that finding work within the government and keeping that work was quite difficult because of the attitude and the culture they found.

Could you expand on that for me a bit? You mentioned jobs in government. To what extent is that still a problem? This was only last December.

Mr. Natan Obed: At the risk of over-generalizing, we see this as an issue, but if we look at the different tiers of employment within government, we see that a lot of the senior level bureaucrats, the deputy ministers—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Excuse me. I'm just going to interrupt for a second.

Since we don't have any idea of who is speaking, when you do speak, could you tell us who you are? We won't recognize your voices easily. Who's speaking right now in answer to Madam Minna?

Mr. Natan Obed: I apologize. This is Natan Obed.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Please go ahead, Mr. Obed.

Mr. Natan Obed: If we look at the different tiers of the bureaucracy in the Government of Nunavut, at the deputy minister level, at the senior bureaucrat level, we see that it's more or less representative now, because of a rather large push by the Government of Nunavut to have Inuit in deputy minister positions.

Once you get down into the middle management level, that's where we see a huge non-Inuit workforce. In large part, the Government of Nunavut's work is powered by the thought process of non-Inuit when it comes to that middle management level.

Also, when it comes down to the policy levels or the program coordinator levels, there is still an under-representation of Inuit.

Then at the secretarial level, or the administrative level, we see a large proportion of Inuit, which is at or just below a representational level.

So if you see the different tiers, you get a better sense of some of the challenges that Inuit come into contact with when trying to work for government.

Often supervisors do not speak Inuktitut. About 80% of the population speak Inuktitut as their mother tongue, so that's a huge barrier, first and foremost.

Then we get into the world view or the common vision of Nunavut and how to do work, and that creates another barrier. A number of people are grounded in a southern-based education and work experience when they arrive, and so I guess in a sense their vision is limited to the experience they've had in the south. They're thinking about a different type of workforce or a different vision for the territory, which is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to articulate to non-Inuit staff.

We see it as a huge issue. We are trying to do what we can to ensure that there are more educated Inuit who are in positions of power within government.

• (1555)

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you.

I have a lot of questions, actually, on things I picked up while I was there. I'll share them with the committee.

You've just said 80% of the population speaks Inuktitut. I know that the region was somewhat ignored by the rest of the country until 30 or 40 years ago, and now things are moving very fast, but there are a lot of people who still speak only Inuktitut and who are not conversing in English or literate in English. They are having difficulty with education, with getting jobs, and also in being trained for potential jobs.

I wonder if you could tell us what kinds of programs would help in that area if that is the case. What could be done to actually assist with providing the kind of transition programming, if you like, for a lot of the people there? Of course, what assistance is there for seniors who probably will never become completely conversant?

Mr. Natan Obed: Well, it is our hope that in the future the Government of Nunavut will function in Inuktitut, so it isn't necessarily about trying to change the way Inuit interact with government. It's about trying to change the way government interacts with Inuit.

Inuit saw the creation of Nunavut as this expression of self-government through a public government, and there's a very real expectation that Inuktitut, or the Inuit language in general, in all of its dialects, would be the working language of government. We still maintain that it's possible.

It's going to take quite a bit of work and quite a bit of extra funding to ensure that the education system can function in Inuktitut from kindergarten to grade 12, and that there's a change in perception from the territorial and even the federal side as to the expectations of what it means to work in Nunavut and the expectations of working in Inuktitut.

Hon. Maria Minna: I just have one final question.

Again, when I was there, one of the things mentioned to me by both the mayor and the premier was the need for major infrastructure dollars to increase and assist the economy of Iqaluit and of Nunavut.

One of these infrastructure programs was the creation of a deep-sea port, the kind of infrastructure that we've built in other parts of the country over decades, over hundreds of years, but which is not there in your region. A deep-sea port would certainly assist you in being able to bring in goods and services and also with potential business. Right now you're limited to flying in things, and the season is very short.

That's one example of infrastructure. You may have others. Can you comment on that?

• (1600)

Mr. Alastair Campbell: Yes. This is Alastair Campbell speaking to you now.

I'm not a specialist in infrastructure and transportation, but it is certainly the case that there are not deep-sea port facilities here. There's sealift, which is not a very efficient way of providing materials needed for construction and goods for consumers.

When the hospital was being built, for example, a girder that was essential to it fell into the water, which presumably would not have happened if there had been proper docking facilities. The result of that, given the short construction season, was that it actually threw the construction off for a year.

There's a cost associated with these lacks.... A major centre like Iqaluit can certainly justify better port facilities. In fact, port transportation and unloading facilities, as I understand it, have been developed better in northern Quebec than they have in Nunavut.

One of the other things that's been mentioned—and here the contrast would be with Labrador and Newfoundland—is small craft harbour facilities. Every community in Nunavut is maritime—that is, on the sea—except Baker Lake, which is a little way inland on the lake. But they are all otherwise adjacent to the sea. Use of marine resources is an important part of the traditional economy and also the developing economy. There's a lack of small craft harbour facilities, which, for example, would facilitate fishing and that sort of thing.

So even though there is fishing potential and there is some fishing activity being carried out in Nunavut, the facilities are not available for unloading fish stocks, for example. The boats have to go elsewhere to get fuel or elsewhere to unload the fish.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you very much.

Mr. Alastair Campbell: Those are just some examples.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you very much.

I will now move on.

Monsieur Pomerleau, vous avez la parole.

Monsieur Pomerleau is from the Bloc Québécois.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also want to thank our two witnesses who agreed to testify by teleconference.

Mr. Obed, you are the director of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.'s Department of Social and Cultural Development. Could you please describe this corporation? Is it controlled by the Inuit people or is it a government or government-related agency?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: Nunavut Tunngavik is an Inuit representational organization. We represent the beneficiaries of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. All Inuit who are eligible to be beneficiaries of our land claim make up what is sometimes called the “birthright organization”. This department—social and cultural development—is responsible specifically for the implementation of one of our articles, article 32, which deals with social and cultural development.

In general, we are an advocate. We do not deliver programs or services. We're not a part of government. We are an Inuit advocate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau: Alright. You said earlier that Inuktitut should normally be taught in school up to grade 12. Until what grade is it presently being taught?

• (1605)

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: Thank you for the question.

The Inuit language is taught often in kindergarten through to grade 3. In grade 4 the curriculum is changed into English. It's a wholesale change in grade 4. If you can imagine, in grades kindergarten to grade 3 you're functioning, you're thinking, you're learning in Inuktitut, the mother tongue, and then in grade 4 there's an abrupt shift into English as the language of instruction. That language of instruction remains until grade 12.

Inuktitut is relegated to a language art, much as a second language would be taught in southern Canada—i.e., if you're in an English school and you go to French class once a day. That's the same way that Inuktitut is taught in, say, the high schools here at Iqaluit. Since the establishment of the school system in Nunavut, there has not been, I think, a single graduate who you could say was educated in Inuktitut through the school system.

All of the language is an in-kind contribution to the territory. We see it as a huge cultural resource, a link into greater opportunities. The first language is the language of strength in anything a person does. This is what Inuit have been advocating for since the 1970s, really, since our first foray into this area of representation and political mobilization.

One of the first things that was talked about was the right to educate our children in our mother tongue. We're still fighting for that. We see no end to that struggle. Even though the new territorial education act and the Inuit Language Protection Act set out timelines for the implementation of our right to have Inuktitut as our language of instruction, we still do not believe that will happen without a massive investment in new money.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Monsieur Pomerleau, you have two minutes left.

Mr. Roger Pomerleau: Yes, I will be brief.

Mr. Obed, you mentioned health care, housing and education as key factors preventing Inuit development. You also said that one solution would obviously be that Inuit people take more control over their own affairs. One of the specific solutions you referred to was that Inuktitut be taught until grade 12.

In your opinion, how would learning Inuktitut until grade 12 help the Inuit take more control over their own affairs when people—I mean Whites living in Nunavut—are increasingly unable to speak this language? How would this improve relationships or give more power to the Inuit people?

[English]

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes. Thank you for the question.

There's emerging evidence that the mother tongue unlocks other opportunities for learning and does so with increased efficiency. So the way that a person learns and how they make the transition between learning and practical use often has quite a bit to do not only with the language that's spoken, but also with the cultural environment in which the education is given. So we see culture and language as being the key factors that we feel should be strengthened in our formal education system to unlock the true potential of our students.

Right now our graduation rate in the territory hovers between 25% and 30% for the people who enter grade 9 and then graduate from grade 12. That is not Inuit specific; the Inuit-specific numbers, we would argue, are much lower.

For people to feel that they're a part of the territory, that they are part of some sort of larger community, there has to be a link back into the community. There's this big disconnect in the education system between the Inuit and what the Inuit want for their children and what southern Canada or the curriculum maybe want for their children.

When children go through the education system—often in their second language—the parents or the communities do not see the relevance of supporting or really pushing their children's education, because they don't have any link back to their own culture or language.

I wouldn't say that this is necessarily the key in the minds of a lot of business people as to how to unlock the potential of Nunavut, but in our eyes it certainly would create a foundation for a graduate who is confident and who takes in every new opportunity or every new educational opportunity from a point of strength, and it's not somebody who's unilingual in Inuktitut, but is bilingual. Because it

was never our intent to say that we would only want Inuktitut; we would like to be bilingual.

• (1610)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'll now give the floor to Mr. Martin of the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thanks for this opportunity.

I want to go back to some of your opening comments. You suggest that if the land claim agreement were being fully implemented in spirit and intent, the problems we currently face would be far less.

Could you expand on that a bit?

Mr. Alastair Campbell: Yes. I think there are a number of features of the land claims agreement, but I will just give you one example with which we've encountered some difficulties. That is article 24, which relates to government contracting.

Article 24 requires both the territorial government, that is, the Government of Nunavut, and the federal government to develop contracting procedures that would provide an opportunity for Inuit-owned companies to secure government contracts. Now, this has been done by the Government of Nunavut. The way it is set up, Nunavut Tunngavik has a registry of Inuit firms. Inuit firms are defined as those that are over 51% Inuit-owned or are Inuit-owned co-ops. So we have the registry. The way the Government of Nunavut does this is by giving a bid advantage to Inuit firms when awarding contracts, so if there's an Inuit firm it will for sure get a 7% bid advantage. In some circumstances, that could be as high as 21%.

The federal government, regrettably, has never done anything comparable to that. The one exception is perhaps a little surprising.

The one exception is the Department of National Defence, which negotiated an agreement with us relating to the cleanup of DEW Line sites. This indeed provides that when contracts are awarded for the cleanup of a DEW Line site, which is an old radar site with a lot of contaminants usually left behind, there will be a minimum Inuit employment level set for the work on that site, usually at somewhere around 70%, and a minimum dollar value for Inuit contracting, which is usually also at somewhere around 70%.

In the vast majority of cases, those objectives have been reached. One of the regional Inuit leaders told me that he thought negotiating that agreement was one of the best accomplishments of NTI.

In other words, this is an agreement that's consistent with the land claims agreement and provides jobs and opportunities to members of communities. It also has spinoffs and allows the development of Inuit businesses. That's one example I would give of how the land claim agreement is important as a tool in dealing with the issues of economic disparity and poverty in Nunavut.

For various reasons, the federal government seems to have been unwilling to take this approach across the board. Though we've tried since 1993 to get something in place that would be comparable or similar for other government departments, we have not been successful in doing so.

•(1615)

Mr. Tony Martin: So that's one example of how you feel the government isn't acting in good faith in terms of what was intended and in terms of the spirit of the agreement.

I note by way of the statistics you've given us here that you have a relatively high unemployment rate of 17.4%, which was for 2001-02. Also, compared to the other territories and Canada, you have a seriously high suicide rate.

The average family income is lower, and I'm led to believe that the cost of living in Nunavut is actually quite high. I'm not sure if it's higher than in the other territories, but certainly your average family income is lower than it is anywhere else, it seems.

Do you feel those statistics could be improved by the government actually acting in better faith and in the spirit of the land claim agreements? Or are there some other things that we could or should be doing to deal with those very troubling statistics?

Mr. Natan Obed: Generally the implementation of land claims takes on many different permutations because it is so complex. I guess the overarching comment or observation that Inuit have had is that the federal government has seen these land claim agreements more as one-time negotiated agreements that then are done with, rather than living treaties that require constant interaction and work with the other party. For Nunavut Inuit, that really isn't an exception.

With regard to some of the social issues that you mentioned, especially suicide prevention, Nunavut is in the final stages of creating a Nunavut suicide prevention strategy. There is no national suicide prevention strategy, which is unfortunate. There is some focus within Health Canada on aboriginal youth suicide prevention, which is a component of suicide prevention, but we feel that there is a larger role for the federal government to play within suicide prevention and within the area of mental health in general.

There is this concept called "historical trauma". It's only since the 1950s and 1960s that Inuit have lived in southern-style communities, with houses and a central administrative body run first from the federal government, or even from missionaries or Hudson's Bay. We've only had 50 or 60 years of this new way of living.

People of the first generation who grew up in these communities were exposed to many different things that have had a tremendous impact on all subsequent generations, things that have never been overcome. You've probably heard in the past of the sled dog slaughter, where the dogs that were used for transportation for Inuit were shot within communities, or of the residential schools, with the forced relocations. A number of things are barriers to those people fulfilling all the other things they could be doing in their lives.

We feel that there still is a lot of healing and a lot of mental health work that needs to happen in our communities in order to unlock our true potential, which is why it was so unfortunate that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation funds were cancelled. Especially in Nunavut, we had developed 12 different projects across the territory that were providing healing opportunities so that people could become more productive members of society, so that they could become more stable, so that they could have the mental grounding in order to be successful in life.

So I do believe there is a lot more the federal government could do to help.

•(1620)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you, Mr. Obed. I'm sorry to cut you off, but we do have one more person who wants to ask a question.

Mr. Casson, please, of the Conservative Party.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Obed, I'm Rick Casson. I'm the member of Parliament from Lethbridge in southern Alberta.

I have two questions, actually. Some of the documentation we have—it's years old—is on the disparity between the cost of goods in your area compared to costs in the rest of Canada. If there were proper port facilities and unloading facilities there, do you think that would be alleviated to some degree?

As well, you mentioned the lack of Inuit participation in policy development. One thing you mentioned intrigued me—the issue of learning your native language until grade 3 or grade 4 and then changing. Where did that come from?

More generally, in terms of participation, how could we better facilitate that and make sure that we have full Inuit participation on policy development? And what would be the end result of that? Do you see that as a pretty major step or is that just a small irritant?

Mr. Alastair Campbell: I'll answer the first part.

Yes, some of the figures we gave you were a little dated; however, things like the disparity or the great difference in cost of living between Nunavut and other southern regions of Canada are just no less than that. Although we don't have the documented information to back this up, in terms of experience I don't believe it would be any different. It may even be more.

Secondly, I think one of the other members of the committee asked if this was worse than other territories. I think if you were to compare Iqaluit, the capital, to Yellowknife or Whitehorse, yes, you would find it significantly worse. Compared to Iqaluit, Yellowknife is relatively cheap as a place to buy things.

In terms of port facilities and so on and whether those would make a difference, it is our belief that indeed they would, because there's a very short shipping season here and there are very high fluctuations in the tides. I believe Iqaluit has the second highest tides in Canada. The Bay of Fundy has the highest. There is only a certain part of the day during which the barges can operate to take the goods, so something that should take one day takes maybe three days.

So there are a lot of added administrative and transportation costs as a result of the lack of port facilities and, generally, a lack of ability to operate efficiently.

I'm not sure if that really answers your question, but hopefully it answers part of it.

Natan will make some other comments.

Mr. Natan Obed: To finish off Alastair's point, the sealift companies have to bring in their own heavy equipment and specialized machinery so they can off-load and load cargo within our community. That also displaces the potential for other goods to come up. The prices we pay for goods in our communities, especially for those that are sealifted in, I would say are much higher because of the extra cost associated with the specialized nature of off-loading, since there are no port facilities for off-loading.

I have a house up on the hill overlooking the bay, and it's really interesting over the summer to watch the goods going onto and coming off the ships and seeing the heavy equipment half-submerged in seawater going out, getting stuff, and bringing it in. It's just a different world, and I don't think many people outside of Nunavut have an appreciation for how expensive it is here, but also how difficult it is to get things in and out of our communities.

As far as language goes, I guess that in the 1960s and 1970s when the education system was established in the territory, there was a greater expectancy for non-Inuit to learn Inuktitut or to function in Inuktitut. There was this base level of understanding between students and teachers that has eroded over the years, so that now there really isn't an expectation that any non-Inuk who comes into any one of the communities will ever learn anything about Inuktitut or Inuit language, which is really too bad. It's a shift in mindset.

As far as the curriculum and the language of instruction go, I suppose there were more Inuit who could become certified as K through grade 3 teachers in the beginning of the education system and that made it possible for the delivery of that curriculum to be in Inuktitut. In addition to that, up until probably the 1980s, there were very few multilingual kindergartners. So if you were dealing with an entire kindergarten population that didn't speak a word of English, then there was some necessity of speaking Inuktitut as the language of instruction.

But by grade 4, there really weren't the curriculum or the teachers available to deliver the curriculum in Inuktitut, so I think that is why it started out that way, and hasn't necessarily gotten any better over time. Residential school happened until the late 1980s in Nunavut. It wasn't until the early 1990s that each community had its own high school.

So if you think of the education system in Nunavut and its evolution, we're still in the very early stages. I would argue, then, that we have a lot more flexibility or openness in regard to alternative models of education that would be more successful.

The final point on federal participation in policy-making and social programs—

•(1625)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Could I ask you to be fairly brief? We are coming to the end of our session.

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes, I will be very brief.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Thank you.

Mr. Natan Obed: This is something that we are very interested in. It isn't just a minor irritant. It is something that we would desperately like to resolve with the Government of Canada—namely, what our article 32 means practically and how Inuit can participate more and fulfill the obligation of our article 32 in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. It is something that we feel would unlock a greater potential for success of federal programs in the territory.

Mr. Rick Casson: Thank you, gentlemen. I appreciate it.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): Mr. Obed and Mr. Campbell, we've come to the end of this part of the session. On behalf of all the members of this committee, from all parties, I would like to thank you very much for having participated in this. I think we all have now, if we didn't have it before, a much clearer concept of the portrait of poverty in Nunavut.

You talked about historical trauma, and this is something I very much believe in. Really, we will do our best to incorporate your comments into our report on poverty. Nunavut is part of Canada, and the kind of poverty that the Inuk people have in Nunavut has to be included when we talk about Canadians.

Once again, Mr. Obed and Mr. Campbell, thank you very much for having participated in this discussion. We wish you all the very best.

Thank you.

Mr. Natan Obed: Thank you very much.

Mr. Alastair Campbell: Thank you.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): You have a great member of Parliament, too. She's on the same floor that Mr. Savage and I are on. She's doing a great job.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Raymonde Folco): I'd like to suspend the meeting so that we can do the transition to in camera. Then we'll move on very quickly to the second and third parts of our meeting.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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