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# **Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, March 10, 2016**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Andy Fillmore**



## Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

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• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.)):** Order, please.

Welcome, Minister Bennett, and thank you very much for joining us today.

Joining the minister are her departmental officials: Françoise Ducros, senior assistant deputy minister of policy and strategic direction; Hélène Laurendeau, associate deputy minister; and Paul Thoppil, CFO of the department. Thanks very much for joining us.

The minister and departmental officials are here pursuant to the motion we adopted at committee on February 23, 2016, to invite her and hear about the mandate and supplementary estimates.

I'm going to take a moment to describe the flow of the meeting today.

We are going to begin with an opening statement from Minister Bennett that will cover both the mandate letter and the supplementary estimates. The remaining time in that first hour, up until 4:30, will be used for questions from committee members. We'll follow the speaking order and time allotments as illustrated in the routine motion.

At 4:30 I will suspend the meeting for a moment, people can have a breath and a glass of water, and we'll resume within a minute or two with questions on the supplementary estimates. At that point we will return to the top of the order and start again with the same speaking order and time allotments.

Without wasting anymore time, Minister Bennett, I invite you to please share your thoughts today.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's good to be back to this committee, in a slightly different role, but it is important that we always acknowledge that we're here on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

We're here to present the department's supplementary estimates (C) for the 2015-16 fiscal year and to discuss my mandate letter.

I am joined by Hélène Laurendeau, the associate deputy minister for Indigenous and Northern Affairs, soon to become the deputy, for which I think we all congratulate her. It's very exciting. We also have the senior assistant deputy minister of policy and strategic direction, Francie Ducros. Many have seen her at this committee a number of times. We also have our chief financial officer, Paul Thoppil, who will take all the tough questions.

It's exciting. Andy, congratulations as the new chair, and congratulations to David as the vice-chair and to all of the new committee members. I'm particularly thrilled that Georgina and Romeo are here this afternoon. That makes this visit even more important to me. Thank you for bringing your knowledge to this meeting.

I look at the work of the other members. We have Don from Thunder Bay; Gary with Rouge River Park; Mike with Tyendinaga; Michael with the whole of Northwest Territories; and Matt, who, of course, has this huge responsibility of representing Fredericton, which was the riding of Andy Scott, whose big shoes I fill, and who is a mentor and my best friend here on the Hill. I thank you, Matt, for being here today.

The work of this committee is so important. You have an amazing job and a great responsibility to Parliament, to all Canadians, and to indigenous people and northerners. We know that parliamentary committees are the engine that drives democracy. I know first-hand that all of the activities and open debates that you'll undertake will help move the policy yardsticks further, but also, by shining a light on the work of this committee, we bring all Canadians with us as we embark on this huge job of reconciliation.

Your efforts go a long way toward advancing discourse on issues to the heart of our government, but they are issues that I think are shared concerns across all party lines. We understand that your job is to hold government to account. That's what Parliament does, and I welcome that.

As I was coming in, I was thinking about my five years as the chair of the subcommittee on persons with disabilities. We were able to do hard-hitting reports, unanimous reports, that actually moved the agenda on a lot of things that sometimes don't get the attention of cabinet or that you aren't able to move quite as quickly on if there aren't parliamentary committees shining lights on things.

I thank you all for being here and for your commitment to indigenous and northern issues. I want to thank you for the invitation to discuss my mandate letter, which is exciting because it's transparent and open. We are also happy to discuss the paragraph that's in the mandate letter of all ministers about renewing the relationship.

We think your scrutiny of these estimates is important, but it's also important as we look forward to the budget on March 22 and the main estimates. I look forward to coming back shortly after that, if we can, so we can help explain the choices that have been made. With budgets and main estimates, there are always choices.

As you know, the financial cycle of the estimates helps us to better understand the complex narrative of progress on important issues. It helps me provide a more complete and detailed performance story that links the efforts of the past with those of this government.

• (1540)

When the budget is tabled on March 22, because of the electoral cycle it will be a little out of sync with the estimates, and there were no supplementary estimates (B) because of the fall. We won't be able this afternoon to get into the details on the spending priorities. We have to wait with bated breath until March 22, but it's certainly not too soon to talk about our current efforts, my mandate, and some of the highlights of the estimates.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister has given me a significant mandate. He has stated quite clearly that no relationship is more important to him than the one with indigenous peoples. And the priority he places on that relationship is evident, not just in my own mandate letter, but in the mandate letters of all cabinet ministers.

[English]

As you know, one of the government's top priorities is to support and advance the work of real reconciliation with a vision that is positive, ambitious, and hopeful. There's an Ojibway word that many of you have heard me use, *Giniigaaniimenaaning*. It's the word for looking forward, with a deeper meaning of looking ahead to future generations. It's the title of the Métis artist Christi Belcourt's beautiful stained glass window in the Centre Block here on Parliament Hill. The artwork commemorates the legacy of Indian residential school survivors and their families. The window sits above the members' entrance to the lobby of the House of Commons. It's a reminder to all of us who enter this House, and again when we leave each weekend to go back to our ridings, to never forget and to work together for a brighter future.

Advancing real reconciliation in part means exactly that: collaborating in respect and co-operation to close the gap in quality of life between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. I happen to believe this is entirely possible. It's the work of every one of us as parliamentarians and Canadians.

Reconciliation means a new relationship between all sectors of Canadian society and indigenous people, not just with the government. In fact, I believe this renewal is necessary for a Canada that makes us proud.

Upholding the principles of recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership is a sacred responsibility, and it means an end to top-down approaches and a commitment to listen.

That paragraph that has recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership is in every mandate letter of every minister. It means that each of us must have those words really on the tip of our tongues: recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. It's only if we live those words that we will be able to realize the true work of reconciliation.

Mr. Chair, that's why I spent the first few months of my mandate listening and learning. I made it my early goal to absorb and take in as much as I can from indigenous communities across the country

and from northerners. As I have learned through my work on other indigenous issues, the phrase "nothing about us without us" must guide what we do as a government and as parliamentarians.

I learned a long time ago that what I once thought was feminist leadership is actually indigenous leadership. It is about asking, not telling. It is about inclusive decision-making. It is about the talking stick that goes around so that everybody's views are heard, and then you come to a decision together in terms of what's the best for the most people or the best for the people who need it most.

This is a journey for all of us to change what leadership looks like and feels like. It's not top-down, father-knows-best leadership. It is about listening to communities and experts and those with lived experience, listening to concerns and advice to understand how we can best help to close the gaps on long-standing issues such as housing, employment, child welfare, education, and infrastructure.

• (1545)

Together with my cabinet colleagues, we've launched important discussions with all partners, including in northern communities. One of our top immediate priorities has been the launch of the consultation on the design of the national inquiry on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and we thank you all for the all-party support for getting on with that work.

Since December I and my colleagues, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Status of Women, have met with nearly 2,000 people from every corner of this country. These 17 meetings were held specifically for families and loved ones of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and for the many indigenous women who have actually survived the violence. That was a group of people we hadn't expected, and we had to rejig the consultations to make sure those voices were heard and valued.

We're currently reviewing more than 4,100 online submissions and several written submissions. We have heard often raw and always heartfelt voices about the need to address the causes of indigenous women's and girls' vulnerability to violence: child abuse, poverty, lack of education and job opportunities, lack of affordable housing and shelters, the intergenerational effects of residential schools, and the many issues related to police and child welfare practices. In many ways, this experience has been a prime example of the major challenges we face in improving conditions and outcomes for indigenous people in general.

The enormity of these challenges has been clear to me throughout my time on this file, but I do believe that right now we are on the right path. We've begun consultations on addressing food insecurity in the north, meeting already in northern communities such as Norman Wells. We followed up on our commitment to regular meetings with the leadership of the new governments and indigenous leaders.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Already, I have met with the National Chief, regional chiefs and first nations, Inuit and Métis groups from across the country. I'm proud of the progress we've made in only a few short months together. But we have a long way to go.

[English]

One of the things that we've learned already is that what we had in the platform about a nation-to-nation basis is not the way the Inuit people would prefer to describe their relationship. They would prefer to describe that relationship as Inuit to crown. Again, we continue to shape what we need to do together in a way that reflects the needs of the people that we need to work in total partnership with.

Mr. Chair, the task ahead on other aspects of my mandate is both exhilarating and daunting, but I believe there's great momentum to push forward. We've committed, as you know, to implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and for that I thank my colleague Romeo Saganash for all the work he's done on it. We have acquired the parliamentary guides for each of you that Wilton Littlechild and the other commissioners have completed with the help of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and we have those bound copies there. There was just a bit of a glitch in presenting them at committee today, but they are available.

We will work with the respective ministers to enhance the role of indigenous groups in the environmental assessment. We have already demonstrated progress to help us deliver on that promise. As you know, in January my colleagues, Ministers McKenna and Carr, announced the first step toward enhanced collaboration and consultation with indigenous populations with respect to environmental assessment processes in order to best respect their rights and interests.

Mr. Chair, we will promote economic development, create jobs, and improve infrastructure, safety, and child care for indigenous people. We will also work collaboratively to establish a new fiscal relationship and to make significant new investments in first nations education.

• (1555)

As you can tell from the estimates process, it's very prescriptive. I think we're hoping the new fiscal relationship will allow a greater flexibility in terms of communities being able to set priorities and achieve the results they want for their communities. We expect to have more details on these commitments soon.

In all aspects of my mandate I've been clear that I welcome an honest and open discussion, as well as the advice and support of this committee as you are here today to do your important work on scrutinizing the supplementary estimates (C) that were tabled on February 19. I know you have the important work of voting on those at the end of this committee. I and my colleagues here at the table will try to get you whatever details you need in order to be able to vote properly at the end of the day. We also will get any additional information you need, Mr. Chair, in any format you would like in terms of a letter or something circulated to the committee.

I'd like to provide a few highlights before taking your questions.

The supplementary estimates (C) for 2015-16 provide the financial resources to take action on a number of key initiatives. The largest item in these is \$64.5 million for out-of-court settlements, most notably for a settlement related to alleged errors in the creation of a reserve and the setting up of reserve lands in the early 1800s. We have a lot of work ahead of us in settling wrongs that are over 100 years old in so many situations.

The second-largest item is the \$46.2 million required to reimburse first nations and emergency management service providers for on-reserve response and recovery activities. As you know, things from floods to fires are rightfully reimbursed by our government when there are these emergency situations.

The third item, which is \$40.7 million, allows the department to continue the implementation of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. We are well through that process, but there are still settlements to deliver. The department will continue to process and resolve the independent assessment process claims in a timely manner through the negotiated settlement process.

The fourth item, \$40 million, was approved through budget 2015 and will allow the department to continue supporting the education partnerships program as well as early literacy activities delivered through the first nations student success program.

The fifth item I'll highlight is the \$18.4 million that will support other implementation matters for the settlement agreement between the Inuit of Nunavut, the Government of Canada, and the Government of Nunavut. Mr. Chair, these funds are used to provide increases to the Government of Nunavut implementation funding, to increase Inuit employment in the Government of Nunavut, and to provide a Nunavut labour force analysis, which a lot of people feel is a very important next step in terms of achieving devolution.

The department will also receive renewed funding of \$16 million to continue its work on a proactive reconciliation and management of Métis aboriginal rights and management of Métis and non-status Indian litigation.

Before I close, I will highlight a number of transfers with other government departments. Overall these transfers net to about \$1.3 million, and the most notable transfers are for the remediation of federal contaminated sites. They amount to \$1 million. I think of contaminated sites in terms of my very first briefing. The extent of this is shocking in terms of a couple of big projects around mines and what happens when mines default. Then we, as the Government of Canada, have the responsibility to clean up those sites.

Also, there's a transfer you can see there for providing "mental health support during the consultations on the design of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls". That's \$1.7 million. We were truly blessed to have the expertise of the Health Canada support workers who had already done the work on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was amazing to be able to just step into that resource that already existed.

Mr. Chair, the government is committed to delivering federal programming that will play an important role in building strong communities while improving the quality of life for indigenous people and northerners.

Also, in the spirit of *Giniigaaniimenaaning*, moving forward, all ministers of the crown share the Prime Minister's commitment to advancing real reconciliation. I value your opinions, advice, and assistance as we implement an ambitious agenda in this regard. You can consider yourselves all deputized, and we hope you will go boldly forth and prosper amongst your colleagues in all parties, in your ridings, and with all Canadians.

[Translation]

I want to pursue further discussions on how we can work together on these issues, which concern us all.

My colleagues will join me now in answering your questions about these estimates and about my mandate.

[English]

As I said, on questions for which we don't have the responses readily available, we will get back either to you as the committee to circulate them to all members, or to the member directly, whichever you would prefer.

On behalf of my whole team here and the team back there—all these amazing people who support me—thank you very much for the invitation today to be with you.

As they say, I'll be back.

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you so much, Minister Bennett.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Before we get to the questions, I want to highlight a couple of things.

Committee member Charlie Angus is unable to be with us today and sends his regrets. He's dealing with a serious family matter. In his place today are Romeo Saganash and Georgina Jolibois, who will be sharing Charlie Angus's questioning time. Romeo Saganash will carry Mr. Angus's vote.

Moving up the table, Todd Doherty is not a committee member. He is joining Cathy McLeod, who is a committee member, and they will share their time as well. Cathy of course will maintain her vote.

Rémi Massé, you have returned. Welcome back. I know that you missed the first few moments because of another commitment. Are you sharing your time with anybody?

Is there any other time-sharing going on? No? Okay.

Of course, we welcome the other members who are at the table. We very much appreciate your presence.

We have 29 minutes to get through the next four questions of seven minutes each, so the timing is working out very well. Just as a reminder, these questions are on the mandate letter. We'll switch to supplementary questions after the first hour. These are on mandate.

The first question goes to Don Rusnak. Go ahead, please, Don.

• (1600)

**Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Thank you, Minister, for coming, and thank you for bringing your staff here.

It's very important work that you have in front of you. I know that a lot of the communities in my riding are very excited about this renewed relationship and the emphasis the government has put on it.

Grand Council Treaty No. 3 are chomping at the bit to get into a nation-to-nation relationship and what that looks like. I've been getting calls from Grand Chief Warren White almost constantly.

How do you intend to implement the commitment to renew the relationship with indigenous peoples on a nation-to-nation basis?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** That's a great question.

As we look forward, it really is about respect. It is about the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. It's not only what we do, but how we do it. I think that part of my job is also.... It's not only the nation-to-nation piece, because I don't think we're going to get there if there isn't the interpersonal understanding of all Canadians, so I see it as part of my job to also work on the 96% of Canadians who are not from an indigenous background as to how we move forward with them.

I think that's why the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have been so important in terms of changing curricula and being able to move forward to deal with some of the real problems associated with stereotypes and assumptions that deal with this as though indigenous people are an issue from the history of Canada or from the past, instead of an exciting opportunity for the success and future of Canada.

The individual nation-to-nation piece is about dealing with the rights holders and dealing with the ability to listen and find out how we can move with the nations that are ready. From land claims to self-government arrangements, it's exciting that this part of my department, which is run by Joe Wild, is out listening to what communities want and finding out how we could shape an agreement with them that will help them meet their needs.

That may be a treaty or it may be this side of a treaty, but it is again the nation deciding what it will take for them and what controls they would need to be able to set their own priorities and find success for their community.

**The Chair:** Have you finished?

**Mr. Don Rusnak:** I was going to say, if I have any extra time—

**The Chair:** You do have time. You're not even halfway through.

**Mr. Don Rusnak:** I can give it to Michael McLeod.

**The Chair:** Very good.

Michael, please go ahead.

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to thank you and Yvonne Jones, the parliamentary secretary, for coming to the Northwest Territories. You were very appreciated in your discussions in Yellowknife and Norman Wells.

I see that we have two challenges left as we move forward. First of all, there is the time. We only have 43 months, and less than that if you factor in an election in the last year, so by my calculation we probably only have 36 months. We also have to move past the old system of running the clock on negotiations and discussions.

I have four questions for you. My office is bombarded by requests to meet and to talk to people in your department, to you, and to Yvonne. Will you consider putting together an engagement strategy to start meeting with the aboriginal governments across Canada?

The second question is this. Is the settlement of land claims and self-government negotiation a priority for your department, and if it is, how are you going to do that? There are so many questions regarding settled land claims and the inability of dealing with the agreements that everybody thought were in place.

Fiscal harmonization is something that's new, something that wasn't part of the negotiations, but it was brought forward. How can you deal with that?

Also, I'm really curious as to how we're going to move forward on the Kelowna accord. That was something that was in the platform. Some pieces will need to be discussed, and I'm told by all the departments where we raised it that it's in this department's mandate. I'm really curious to see if we have a plan to do that.

Thank you.

• (1605)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** The engagement strategy is an interesting one, and we think we probably do need to do that. I must say that on my trip to the AFN in December, I found different regions had different approaches to the idea of an engagement strategy. I think there were a couple of nights that I was there until 11 o'clock, speed dating with each of the chiefs and councils. It was quite an interesting approach.

Again, part of the engagement strategy is knowing what people would like, and then we'll set something up. It is asking, not telling. It is about figuring out what that looks like, in that it's quite different coast to coast to coast, but I do think that if we have principles and values about moving forward on these things, Michael....

We also know that the job of the department and of the regional directors general is to be moving these things forward. Meeting with the minister isn't necessary in order to get progress every time. We are giving pretty clear directions as to how we want things to move, so the engagement strategy is about me and the department, and it is about this refreshment in the relationship going forward.

I would love your help on that, and we'll figure out how we can best do that coast to coast to coast as we try to get around to the

regional meetings and the places where I can meet with as many people as need to meet with me each time.

On the land claims question, I think you're quite right that the Government of Canada signed some things, and the reason we have a land claims coalition is that the implementation doesn't feel right. We're very keen that we do better in the implementation of these claims and that we meet to set some targets as to how we get this done.

I think we talked about a Kelowna-like strategy or process in the platform. I don't think that 10 years later we can just download Kelowna and implement it. We need to go out and consult. That's why the reconciliation framework is what we're aspiring to, and it means that we have to listen to first nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban aboriginals. How do we move forward on developing a framework for reconciliation that closes the gap in the outcomes, which was the real focus of the Kelowna accord, and how do we change not only the fiscal relationship but also the governance, which would have move to nation to nation?

**The Chair:** Minister, I'm terribly sorry, but we're out of time on that question, and you understand that we need to maintain fairness.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Okay, that's good.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The next question goes to Cathy, please.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Thank you for coming, Minister. Certainly you have a very ambitious and hopeful agenda ahead of you.

I notice that some of the top priorities in your mandate letter from the Prime Minister talk about implementing the UN declaration and also the 94 recommendations of the TRC. I presume when they say "implement", they don't mean it's an aspirational document. They mean "implement".

I think there are some excellent recommendations. I think there are some excellent pieces in the UN declaration. I also believe that some areas are going to be very problematic, and I want to start with section 26.

In the Canadian legal context, I've read the legal opinions of a lot of lawyers on this particular area, and they indicate that it might run directly in the face of state sovereignty and the ability of federal and provincial governments to move forward in their respective areas.

I think we need to look at the William decision, which did talk clearly to the.... There are rare times when the federal government ultimately has to make a decision. Can you align the UN declaration and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with that ultimate ability? I know you're going to consult more, but at the end of the day, will you still make the decisions as a federal government when you have to?

• (1610)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Absolutely. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action are, I think, spectacular. There's also the order. It starts with children and moves through the rest. It's a very good blueprint for my work.

On the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, I think there have been concerns about free, prior, and informed consent. Concerns have even been expressed by the special rapporteur that some people have taken it like a medical procedure, but it's about building a relationship.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Thank you, Minister.

At the end of the day, what I heard was that if the federal government had to make a decision....

I'm going to use pipelines as an example. Let's say it's the Kinder Morgan. I know we talked to National Chief Bellegarde, and through the interior of British Columbia, agreements are in place with the bands. They're very happy. Then they hit the ocean side, and it's "Whoa!"

What would consent mean? When you have 25 bands and 20 say yes and five say whoa, how are you going to deal with that?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** You have to start earlier when you're planning the thing. That's what the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples....

The Nisga'a people have already planned for an energy corridor through their territory and would love a refinery. It is about listening to people rather than planning something and then all of a sudden saying "You love it, don't you?" It isn't going to work that way.

We want people to be engaged very early. Then we can find the win-wins.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** I appreciate that.

You might have noticed some of my questions in question period. I have some significant concerns. The TRC report calls on the government to repudiate concepts such as Doctrine of Discovery, *terra nullius*, and the government is very reticent to defend private property owners' rights. Essentially all of British Columbia is under treaties that have not been settled, so really all of British Columbia is on the table.

Tell me what it is going to mean to the private property owner when you implement these different recommendations. What can I say to my ranchers and the people in my communities as you're going through this process, to reassure them that...?

I did like it when National Chief Bellegarde said we need peace in the valley. Many of these communities have worked side by side for years, and they're together. In many ways I think they could come up with solutions so much better than we could, but tell me what to tell these fearful people who are concerned about private property and tell me what some of these concepts in the TRC and the UNDRIP are going to mean.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** To quote Chief Bellegarde, veto is not utilized in free, prior, and informed consent in the UN declaration, but it's about collaboration and working together.

I think peace in the valley is what people want, but they want to have been consulted. When you talk about *terra nullius* or the Doctrine of Discovery, recognition of rights means recognizing that there were some people here first. That's what the Supreme Court said in the Chilcotin decision. These people have title. It is about

working together and recognizing that there were people here first who have rights.

I don't know of any first nation that wants to bankrupt the country or bankrupt a province or territory. They want to work together. It's not a divorce; it's a marriage. We have to work together to figure out how to do that.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** I think the people at this table recognize that we have to get there. We have a long way to go. We have a lot of responsibilities.

I love the B.C. cattlemen. What they're not hearing from the federal government right now is a commitment to avoid, mitigate, and compensate when there are other parties that have interests in an area, whether they be ranchers or private property owners. We should adopt that principle when dealing with third parties: avoid, mitigate, compensate.

• (1615)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think that there is concern when it's something that could disrupt the land and the water. I think people are most concerned when there is the prospect of a mine and tailings, the kinds of issues that could seriously affect a way of life. The people who were there first have a right to say, "Did you know that this is a caribou crossing where you want to put that highway? What are you going to do about it?" or "This will affect where we have fished for millennia." It is about talking together.

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

Thanks, Cathy, for that.

Next on the order is Georgina.

**Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP):** Thank you, minister, and thank you Chair.

January 22, 2016, was a very sad day for La Loche and for all of Canada. I appreciate your coming to visit us in La Loche, as well as the Prime Minister and other ministers who came to visit us.

There were some specific requests made when you visited regarding additional RCMP members to work with the schools on the reserve and in town, support for mental health and PTSD, and the reinstatement of the Project Venture youth initiative and other initiatives. What can I tell the people when I go home?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Thanks for that, and thank you for joining us at all the meetings. I think we learned a lot in that visit. It's really important as we go forward. We go forward together with the province, the first nation, the town, and the Métis community.

The federal government funds the tribal council to provide health support. Hopefully we will be able to help again with the friendship centre that ended up being exemplary—the best friendship centre in the country last year—as well as with things like Project Venture that we know work. We are working very hard. I think I told you my brother-in-law works in land-based healing in Alberta and thinks that Project Venture is fantastic. We're going to work together on all those.

As you know, in subcontracting the RCMP to Saskatchewan, they make those choices. We are working with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to try to make sure that your community moves forward in a good way. You and I can work together on ticking off each of those details.

**Ms. Georgina Jolibois:** It's really sad to hear that answer. I'm sorry, but it's really hard when I go back into the community and listen to the painful stories.

According to the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, since the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that Canada racially discriminates against first nations children, there have been 400,000 nights slept by first nation children in foster care, and health care denials continue. Canada has not taken any action to relieve the children's suffering, despite having recommendations for immediate relief on the books from INAC-related Auditor General of Canada reports dating back 16 years. Why are these kids still waiting for action?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** The system is broken and it needs to be fixed. We need the child welfare system overhauled. Regardless of the result of the tribunal finding, we are going to have to fix this.

We applaud the work of Cindy Blackstock and so many of the advocates. They tell us we have more kids in care now than at the height of the residential schools era. When those kids are dying by suicide, going missing, and getting murdered, it is unacceptable.

This is one of those situations in which the jurisdictions get in the way. We have to work with the provinces and territories, the first nations, and the municipalities to fix this system. I look forward to your help.

• (1620)

**Ms. Georgina Jolibois:** When you came to visit us, the Métis National Council of Canada, as well as the province and the regional board, were talking about the boarding schools. Have you had further discussions and further movement on that file?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement is for only a few of the many children who were affected by those policies. From coast to coast to coast, we are working very hard to deal with cases that didn't fit into that particular agreement. We are working with the Minister of Justice and trying to figure out how we can get out of court or stay out of court and be able to do whatever we can to do right by those children. The abuse and what they've lived through and the consequences to Canada are unacceptable. We have to understand what happened and learn how we can fix it.

**The Chair:** Thank you for sharing the question with Romeo.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Maybe, Romeo, you could give a tutorial on UNDRIP. Could you help with the answer?

**Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP):** Mr. Chair, thank you, and I want to thank the minister for being here today.

I want to go back to Cathy's question, because I think it's a fundamental question, not just for indigenous people in this country but for all Canadians. We need clear answers on some of those questions.

I want to start by asking a quick question. As early as 2004 in the Haida Nation case, the Supreme Court determined that in consultation with aboriginal peoples on serious matters there is an obligation for full consent of the aboriginal nation. The Supreme Court has not determined what "serious matters" meant, but it talked about full consent in 2004. The 2014 Chilcotin case mentions consent nine times in nine paragraphs. It mentions full control of resources and territories 11 times in that ruling.

Do you agree that free, prior, and informed consent is already in Canadian law?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** That's a great question. We have accepted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. We will implement it and it will include free, prior, and informed consent. We will work with all jurisdictions and all departments to help them to understand what free, prior, and informed consent looks like and feels like in respecting those rights.

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

Michael, this is hopefully the final question on the mandate letter.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Michael, but we have a point of order.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Mr. Chair, you talked at the beginning about taking a break, but we did start late. We don't get the minister here very often, so with the committee's indulgence, maybe we could flow straight through. That would be great.

**The Chair:** That provokes a follow-up question. Will we continue through the questioning order? Is there agreement from the committee to do so?

I see agreement. Thank you.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** If it's the will of the committee we can, but in the second hour, if people want to ask questions on mandate, that's fine too. This is your two hours, so do what you want.

The supplementary estimates (C) are pretty straightforward, I think, and the mandate is huge, so I'm happy with whatever you prefer to do.

However, I will be back after the budget on the main estimates.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** I see nodding heads there. I just wanted to make sure that members have the information they need to make their vote at the end on the supplementary estimates.

With that, we'll carry on through the order without a break.

Michael, go ahead, please. I beg your pardon for the interruption.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was pleased to hear that you recognize that the system is broken. I think you've also been quoted as saying that we need a change in the machinery of the government as we move forward. We also heard very recently from the AFN that the comprehensive claim policy is outdated and needs to be reviewed, and the national chief recommended that a review committee be established to review it and update it.

Is that something you would consider doing? Is that something in your plans that we can expect to see?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think even the words “comprehensive claim” bug a lot of people in terms of having to claim for something that's already theirs. Again, I think that the work of Joe Wild in the treaties and aboriginal government part of the department is innovative and creative. We're asking them to be as innovative and creative as they can in putting on paper what a reconciliation agreement would look like with regard to what were once called comprehensive claims.

We want to find certainty in a way that communities can go forward. We need the advice, but it's going to be different coast to coast to coast, and we have that new flexibility with the \$150 million. There were many linear boxes there that said “we can do this, but we can't do that”, and we are trying to erase those so that people can be creative and find something that will work for them.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Mr. Chair, a lot of aboriginal governments involved in negotiations are contacting my office and saying that the same players who were there under the Conservative government are still there in the negotiations. They're the same people with the same mandate, yet this government campaigned on real change. Has there been new direction provided to the bureaucracy, to the people? Have the mandates been reviewed and updated to reflect what was in the platform?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Absolutely. Particularly with civil servants, my experience over the years is that loyal implementation is exactly that. They take from my mandate letter what they have to do. Their job is to move forward what I've been asked to do by the Prime Minister. There may be situations in which independent negotiators are not making progress, and then that'll have to change.

Mainly the mandate is to be creative and innovative, but it's also about making sure that people have the clear direction that this is about a negotiation. This isn't about “take it or leave it” or “we'll see you in court”. That is, I think, a very distinct change that I hope will feel different on the ground. There is no question that the people working in my department know exactly what we want and how we will see success, which means getting some of these tricky ones done.

• (1630)

**Ms. Hélène Laurendeau (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** If I may add something, with the permission of the chair—

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** No, that's fine.

Mr. Chairman, I have another question.

I think the minister already answered this, but I still see issues such as the harmonization proposal on the table. That was introduced by the previous government, and I'm hoping it's not something we're going to honour as a new government.

We also heard from the AFN that there are 58 aboriginal languages in this country and that only three may survive. We need to do something about revitalizing aboriginal languages. I was hoping to see something in the terms of the Kelowna accord that would focus on languages.

I wanted to ask the minister if there are any plans to develop a strategy that will direct investment or work toward trying to do something very quickly.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Michael, I think you'll find that language is in the mandate letter of Minister Joly, and we're working together on that issue. I get to work on language and culture in early learning and child care, in K-12, and in pushing on the post-secondary institutions. We're thrilled when we can see even at La Loche one of the immersion Dene schools or what the Mi'kmaq are doing. We can see progress.

Minister Joly has the preservation of these languages that are at risk and is working on it, but it is something that we'll do together.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Is my time up?

**The Chair:** No, you still have a minute.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** I have one final question, and it's regarding being consistent in negotiations.

We have a lot of issues across the Northwest Territories on cross-border land claim negotiations on land on different sides of the borders. We have the Densuline, who have a claim in the Northwest Territories that was put forward. The federal government said we're going to carve out a piece without support or consultation with the Government of the Northwest Territories, yet we have the Fort Liard Dene and Métis, who are negotiating and have traditional lands on the B.C. and the Yukon side, but there's no consideration for them.

There's also the same issue with the Gwich'in on the northern part of the Northwest Territories, who also have rights in the Yukon side.

I'm looking to see how we're going to balance that out so that we can be consistent and not do one thing for one group and not do it for the other.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think that's the magic of hoping to go forward. I think we have some coming forward shortly that do deal with transboundary claims and I think you'll be happy to see those, because it means that people have been talking to one another.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much for that.

We're moving directly now into the five-minute questions. It had been our plan to move into supplementary estimates questions now, but as the minister has invited us, feel free to ask questions on either on her mandate or on the supplementary estimates.

We're switching to five-minute questions now.

Arnold Viersen has the floor.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the minister for coming here this evening. I really appreciate it.

In my riding and in David's riding we have a unique situation, in that we had a settlement with the Alberta government and the Métis people back in 1938, and it gave the Métis people their own land. I'm just wondering what, in your view, constitutes a Métis nation and how will it affect these communities that are in my riding?

•(1635)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** That's a great question.

It's basically up to the Métis people, not me, to sort that out. There have been many court rulings. It is, again, an opportunity we're seeing, with Manitoba Métis coming to an agreement. I think there's real optimism around what the Métis nation is looking for in being able to determine their rights and a new political accord with Canada.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** How do they fit into your framework of the nation-to-nation discussions? Are they their own nation, or are they going to be dealing with the provinces on this kind of stuff?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** It's a good question.

If you speak to the president, Clem Chartier, he will tell you the Métis Nation of Canada is the only nation that's already a nation in nation-to-nation negotiations. The AFN and the ITK represent the rights holders, so it's a....

As always, there's politics in people, but it is an exciting time, I think, for the Métis in Canada.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Thank you.

One of the TRC recommendations was to repeal section 43 of the Criminal Code. Repealing this section would essentially criminalize parents who spank their children.

Although I sympathize with the symbolism of this request, I guess that removing this section is disrespectful to Canadians from a vast array of backgrounds, faiths, and cultural communities who believe that non-abusive punishment is an important parenting tool. In 1979 Sweden repealed a similar section, and that had the effect of putting 22,000 children into the care of the government, so it's an interesting situation.

Will you commit to ensuring that the rights of all Canadians, including indigenous peoples, will not be undermined with this purely symbolic gesture?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** People like Senator Hervieux-Payette have been fighting for this for a very long time. Certainly people who want this section repealed come into my office on a regular basis. The fact that it ended up in the TRC's calls to action was surprising to some, I think, but it was welcomed by many others.

As you know, this is something the Minister of Justice is looking into, but as a family physician, I have to say there is a way of doing this that explains that in our society we don't condone people hitting one another and then expect them not to go out and hit other people. I think it's also up to the judicial application. That means that if you're stopping a kid from walking into traffic, or all of the examples that are used as to why we can't do this, we can find a way through that honours the TRC's calls to action but also puts it in a practical way so that children can be kept safe.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** I thank you for your answer. I would just consider consulting other groups, including the indigenous peoples, on this issue as well.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** The Minister of Justice will be consulting broadly. I think the justice committee will end up welcoming a role there as well, as they consult all Canadians.

**Mr. Arnold Viersen:** Do I have more time?

**The Chair:** I think you're out of time.

Thank you both.

Next up, for five minutes, is Gary Anandasangaree, please.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, thank you very much for your hard work and your long-term commitment to this issue.

It occurs to me that the child welfare system is not the appropriate authority to quote on assessing how we should be changing the laws. If anything, the recent case from the Canadian Human Rights Commission has outlined the complete failure of the child welfare system.

The TRC is fairly elaborate. It gives us 94 recommendations that we've committed to implementing. I know it's quite a grand commitment, but it's a very serious commitment.

How do we ensure we have a proper timeline for those recommendations to be implemented? In your view, what would be an appropriate timeline?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Again, we're just thrilled about things that are happening already. The provinces and territories have really picked it up. The interim report of the TRC did warn people that these changes to the curriculum were coming. The Northwest Territories and Nunavut got on with it. At the TRC hearing in Alberta, the minister committed to it. We've been seeing this happening.

The universities have been moving on the recommendations that apply to them around indigenous courses, and we're thrilled that both Lakehead University and the University of Winnipeg have already moved on those recommendations. It's just great.

We have a little guide that I'd love to share with you in terms of our little framework in the department for the 94 calls to action, and whose actual job they are, and how they can get on with them. I'm happy to table that with the chair in both languages.

It's exciting, because it's about partnerships. It's not that we can legislate everything. It's a matter of welcoming partnerships that will help us with these challenges.

The first section there on child welfare is one that worries me every day. We have to fix this situation. Apprehending children and taking them away from their language and culture is just inhumane. We have to turn this situation around. From the jurisdictions to the first nations to everybody, we have to figure out another way to do that.

•(1640)

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** Equally important, I think, is that for the first time in history we have surpassed the point where 25% of our inmate population is indigenous. What, in your view, is the toughest recommendation to implement? What are some of those hurdles?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I'm not sure the Pope's going to do what I want.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** This Pope may.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Other than myself, I know there are lots of religious people who will be pressuring the Pope.

It's hard to say, "Pick one." I don't think it's by accident that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission put the recommendations on children first. An example is the one around child abuse. The effect of child abuse in Canada is that it is responsible for addiction and it's responsible for the number of people in prison. Some of the numbers we see are at 80%. It's 80% of the people in penitentiaries and 80% of the people with addictions. This is huge.

I don't know what the levers are to stop this, but we have to do something, because hurt people hurt people. It's what we're hearing on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. It's what we're hearing in terms of violence, domestic violence, all of these things, from coast to coast to coast in both indigenous and non-indigenous communities. We have to begin healing the effects of child abuse and therefore the sequelae of residential schools and understand the links between child abuse and PTSD and addictions and incarceration. To help all Canadians understand those links is a project we need for Canada.

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

The next questioning goes to David Yurdiga, please.

**Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Thank you for being here today, Minister Bennett. I appreciate the opportunity to get your thoughts on a variety of subjects.

One of my biggest concerns and passions is food security and the cost of food in the north. Obviously I don't believe any child should go to bed hungry. It's a real concern of mine.

In the past, in 2012, you have called the nutrition north program a total failure and made suggestions that we go back to food mail, yet the government has committed to spending \$40 million more on the program.

Have you changed your opinion of the program, or was it just a lack of funding?

• (1645)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** It's not working, so what I've been asked to do is at least include the communities that weren't included in the food mail program. There was a view that the food mail program wasn't working because a certain number of communities weren't included, so we're including those and then we're going to spend a year figuring out how to fix it.

What I've been hearing, particularly in the remote and northern communities and in the territories, is that access to country food is one of the real issues. People are not able to afford to be hunters anymore. There's the cost of gasoline, ammunition, boats and motors, and snow machine repairs. The hunters are despondent. They're no longer able to feed their families. As a result, I've been interested in looking at what some of the land claims and some of the harvester programs have been. In the meantime, we'll have to include these other communities as we go out and consult.

When I'm in Nunavut, people keep telling me "There's lots of fish, there's lots of fish." There isn't a reason for people to be hungry, so if we're going to judge how this program's working based on hungry kids, we've got to figure out a different way of going about it. It's not by having cheaper sugar pops, even though that's not what the nutrition north program did, but fighting about what's on a list. We take diapers off the list, and then there's not enough money for other things.

We keep hearing the problems. Mainly we heard that northerners didn't feel that they'd been consulted, and that's where we have to start.

**Mr. David Yurdiga:** You just mentioned that you're going to be expanding the program to be more inclusive of other communities that are currently not on the program. Are you changing the criteria so they qualify, or are you just going to be naming communities?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I think there were communities that met the criteria of remote and rural, and I guess it's 15 more that we've identified. If there are others, I'd like to know about them, but I think right now there were 15 communities that were identified as not being in the food mail program and therefore didn't qualify for nutrition north, so step one is to include those and then figure out how we fix the program.

**Mr. David Yurdiga:** So these additional communities are being added to the program, and we've got an additional \$40 million. People on the current program are benefiting from the savings on the food, but is there not going to be any additional funding for the communities on it? Forty million dollars isn't a lot of money over four years. If you've got 15 more communities, are they going to be taking away from the current program? Ten million dollars a year goes quickly when you have an additional 15 communities. Adding communities it will actually reduce the amount of subsidies for other communities in the north.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** We're increasing the money and we're also increasing the number of communities, but we know that it has to be dealt with differently.

As you know, the Auditor General wasn't too happy with the value for money and whether this was actually saving money. What I keep hearing is people saying that they used to be able to feed their families, but now, when they take their shopping carts out at the end of the week, it seems to cost more. Even though certain foods were subsidized, because of the cost of feeding a family and dealing with other foods and staples, it isn't working.

I think a revision has to take place, but I think we do have to include those other communities. Then we've got to figure out whether it's a social program or a fairness program. If it's a social program, then is it going to the people who need it most? Are we dealing with hungry kids or not? When 70% of kids in Nunavut come from food-insecure homes, we've got to do something else.

• (1650)

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

The final five-minute question is from Mike Bossio.

**Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.):** Thank you so much, Minister, for being here today and answering our questions fully. We appreciate that.

With regard to the review of legislation and the nation-to-nation relationship and all the ways that we are trying to change our relationship with indigenous peoples in Canada, I think that at the root it is self-determination and being able to expand it so that first nations have self-determination over education, health, resource extraction, environmental protection, etc. In this legislative review and in your relationship with indigenous peoples, is that part and parcel of the end goal of what we are trying to accomplish?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Absolutely. I thank you for that, because I think it gives us an opportunity to talk about what happens when first nations or communities feel in control of the choices in setting their own priorities.

In British Columbia, the Chandler and Lalonde report showed that communities that were in charge of health, education, and justice and were back doing their ceremonies saw their suicide rate drop dramatically.

It's a matter of a sense of control over their lives that gives people hope. We know the idea of secure personal cultural identity is the key to overcoming social determinants and to healthy choices, good health outcomes, good education outcomes, and good economic outcomes. It is about being in control and about sovereignty.

**Mr. Mike Bossio:** In being able to do that, though.... I notice that a large chunk of the estimates is grants. I look at that and I wonder what kind of long-term sustainable funding is there through a grant-like process for there to be self-determination? Are those funds dedicated dollars to specific purposes or specific nations? It is very difficult to understand what that really means.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** As you saw in the mandate letter, I am charged with evolving a new fiscal relationship. You've heard many first nations say they would rather have a transfer than little grants that give them a little money for this, a little money for that, but they don't dare move money from here over to here, because they're going to get caught. It doesn't work. We are seeing communities robbing Peter to pay Paul in order to address emerging urgent needs in their communities.

That is where we are hoping to go. Whether it is land management or moving along the continuum to self-government, that is what we are hoping. The role of the Minister of Justice at the AFN, under governance, was actually being able to help people, when they are ready and able, to take more and more control and to build that capacity in first nations.

**Mr. Mike Bossio:** Finally—and I know I am running out of time—we have talked about lifting the 2% funding cap. Once again, this leads into the same discussion, in that there are huge deficits now that have accumulated in many of the budgets of first nations. Do we just start from a new slate and say that from here on we are going to have a new funding formula, or do we go back and say that these are the deficits, and we are going to try to eliminate those deficits so that it's a level playing field and they're moving forward? Does it become a permanent type of funding formula? How is that going to work?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** As you know, the 2% cap was actually an escalator, but then it didn't keep up. Frankly, in the devastating budget of 1995, the prime minister and the finance minister had to choose. In order to protect my department from across-the-board cuts that were happening to every other department, they put in this 2% escalator to make sure that the fastest-growing population was getting a little bit of an increase, while all the other departments were being cut.

That said, it stayed in place way too long. Kelowna would have lifted it, but now we have to stop the music and start again. We hope that the investments we are making in budget 2016 will begin that process, but we also hope that going forward it will be much more in keeping with the fastest-growing population and its needs.

● (1655)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. Thanks for the question, Mike.

The next segment is a three-minute question, and it goes to Romeo Saganash. Romeo, are you sharing your time with your colleague, Sheri Benson?

**Mr. Romeo Saganash:** No, I'll take up the three minutes, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

I want to complete our discussion on FPIC, because having been in this business for 35 years, I know that clarity is important for everyone. I know that clarity is good for development and it's good for the economy of this country.

UNDRIP was adopted by the United Nations in 2007. FPIC is part of it. TRC makes UNDRIP a centrepiece. As a matter of fact, they say it should be the framework of reconciliation in this country.

Your mandate letter makes a reference to it. It requires you to begin with the implementation of the UN declaration. The Prime Minister spoke before the Assembly of First Nations and made reference to UNDRIP.

There's a recent report from the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that was presented recently on March 4. One of the concluding observations and recommendations of this committee refers to FPIC. It states:

The Committee recommends that the State party fully recognize the right to free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples in its laws and policies and apply it in practice.

That's the recommendation from that committee.

Minister, as you are probably aware, I introduced a private member's bill last year in the previous Parliament about UNDRIP to ensure the laws of Canada were compatible with the provisions of UNDRIP.

In the spirit of reconciliation, I told you I would come back with my private member's bill. In the spirit of reconciliation, I offered co-sponsorship of that private member's bill to one of the members from the government side. That was a sincere offer in the spirit of reconciliation.

How is the thinking on that coming along?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Step one, I'm pleased to report to the member that in November 2015 we joined the consensus without reservation for the first time in five years in terms of the annual general assembly. I look forward to having the conversation in terms of how we go forward with you and your bill.

I know we are committed to implementing it, and implementing it across government departments, so we're happy to work with you and to see where we can get with this in our genuine commitment to make this measure happen.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you for the question, Romeo.

That brings us to the bottom of the first order of questions, which means we are going to reset and go back to the top and have seven-minute questions.

I guess we're going to fit about two questions in. Whatever question is in process at 5:15 p.m. will be the last question, and then we'll go to voting on the supplementary estimates.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** I have a point of order. I would ask for the unanimous consent to go to five minutes for this final round. It might get us an extra person or so.

**The Chair:** It would, in fact, get us one extra person. Is there unanimous consent to go to five minutes in this round?

There appears to be consent, so we'll start with Monsieur Massé for five minutes.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, thank you for agreeing to meet with us and for bringing your department colleagues. We appreciate it very much.

Obviously you have addressed a lot of important and pressing topics in your presentation and in the answers you have given. There is one issue that is important to me. I represent a riding that includes half of the Gaspé Peninsula and that is home to three Mi'kmaq communities. I had the opportunity to meet with them several times during the election campaign and afterwards. Education is an important issue for these communities.

Could you please talk about the education programs you are exploring?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I expect that the 2016 budget will help to better meet the demands and true needs of schools on the reserves when it comes to literacy and numeracy—I'm not sure if that is the right word.

**Ms. Hélène Laurendeau:** You might call it arithmetic.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Very well.

There is also preparing children in day care for school. It is very important that children be ready when they start school, and it is also important to close the gap between students in indigenous communities and other students in the provinces and territories. It is very important, and it is vital for our government and Canada's future.

**Mr. Rémi Massé:** Thank you.

I have a supplementary question.

In the supplementary estimates (C), \$40 million is allocated to first nations education, and this program is awarded in grants and contributions. As I understand it, there are two and a half weeks left before the end of March. How will the department be able to spend \$40 million in two and a half weeks? You spoke about a broken system, and perhaps this is a concrete example of an issue in that respect.

**Ms. Hélène Laurendeau:** The funds in question here have already been committed by the department. We are asking Parliament to approve the supplementary estimates to replenish the coffers. We have already done what we often do: once we receive authorization from Treasury Board, we started committing the funds. The funds will be spent by the end of the fiscal year.

**Mr. Rémi Massé:** Okay, perfect.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** They are increased mid-year. That is very important.

**Mr. Rémi Massé:** Great. That's clear.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Rémi, you have a minute remaining, if you'd like to make any use of it; otherwise, we can put it forward.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Rémi Massé:** Right.

I will wrap up quickly by saying that language is very important. You mentioned that. An important aspect for the communities I represent is ensuring that education is carried out with respect for their culture and language.

Perhaps you could speak more about the importance of education in Mi'kmaq, for example.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Absolutely. It's very important. In the past, it was considered an extra, but now it is essential to include security for the culture and the language in the budget allocated to the schools and the communities. In fact, personal security and cultural security are extremely important for the success of students and for their future.

• (1705)

**Mr. Rémi Massé:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The next question is from Todd Doherty.

Are you sharing your time, or is it five minutes?

Okay. Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister Bennett.

There are no two ways about it; your passion shines through for this file. For that, I commend you, and I commend your office for the work that you've helped me with in my riding of Cariboo—Prince George.

I do have some concerns, though, and I think our colleague who was here earlier also shares some, and colleagues from my party as well. It's on clarity of a plan moving forward. All the passion in the world still leads to failure when you don't have a plan. I think the concern is that we're growing hope and building hope with no plan behind it. We're throwing money at programs that, in your own admission, are broken, and there's no plan behind it. That's just a statement.

I'm going to go back to UNDRIP, if I can. Articles 26 to 32 caused some real concerns, and there needs to be clarity around that.

In reading UNDRIP as it is today, could articles 26 through 32, in your understanding, have an effect on our existing ports and airports and major transportation routes?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Now you see my colleague Romeo shaking his head.

That's not what anybody wants.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** There needs to be clarity.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** I want to say, Todd, that I was grateful to see your passion in receiving us in Prince George and for being there. Your town has had some of the worst with the Highway of Tears, and a judge and a medical examiner and the youngest serial killer.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** And the Tsilhqot'in land claims decision and the New Prosperity mine—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** You have a lot going on there, and Tsilhqot'in as well. You demonstrate that this is not a partisan issue.

I think we do want a plan. We do want to set some targets that will not only be about getting land claims being settled but also about high school leaving and all of those things. We're in the business together, trying to set some targets and get enough clarity that people aren't worried about—

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Would it affect, in your mind, ports, airports, and major infrastructure that currently exist and that could be on traditional or formerly traditional territory?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** It's never been about taking lands away or expropriating. It's about planning together going forward.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** I know. I understand that, but it also calls for fair and equitable compensation if that is not available. Has that been considered as we move forward?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Yes. The plan is to recognize existing rights and title and compensate appropriately. We have to do that.

I live in Toronto. The land claim for Six Nations would be in the trillions. They aren't interested in bankrupting the Government of

Canada on their land claim. They are interested in figuring this out. What they were promised in the Haldimand Tract never happened, so we have to figure that out.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Okay.

My next question goes to your mandate letter. It is about one of the points that for me is most important, because without education we can't lift people up.

Maybe you could clarify this point for me. With respect to first nations educations, have you considered comparability of education to be a priority? Do you feel that someone given a grade on reserve would be able to seamlessly transfer to off-reserve education? If you support comparability, what do you plan to do to ensure that education investments mirror that as we move forward?

• (1710)

**The Chair:** You're left with 10 seconds, I'm afraid, Minister.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** That's what we should aspire to. The kids should be able to switch schools, but we also know the number finishing high school. We know that if kids don't make that transition from learning to read to reading to learn by grade 3, they will fake their way through until they drop out in early high school. We have to know what's going on.

That means it's not just putting kids through. It means dealing with adult literacy. It means dealing with all of the things that are the elements of success for these kids. We need them to be successful. We need them to get to post-secondary education and help our country go forward.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Has it been considered in your plan—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we're right out of time. In fact, we're over time.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** It's about results, Todd, yes. It's not about money. It is about money, but it's also about results.

**The Chair:** This leaves us with time for the final question of this afternoon, which goes to Romeo Saganash, or perhaps you're sharing time. I'm not sure.

You have five minutes.

**Mr. Romeo Saganash:** Thank you.

Before I go into my first question, I sense the insecurity or the fear that has been expressed by some members on this side of the table with respect to UNDRIP and FPIC. I want to remind people here that in interpreting declarations or the law, you don't read articles in isolation. You have to read the document in its entirety, so when we only make references to the provisions that contain the "free, prior, and informed consent", it's sort of a mistake.

I want to remind people that article 46 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, at paragraph 3, says:

The provisions set forth in this Declaration shall be interpreted in accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and good faith.

That's how it works.

Back in 1975 when the Cree signed the first modern treaty, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, I still recall how the hunting and fishing associations thought that if the Cree were given the right to hunt, fish, and trap throughout the year, there would go the moose population, there would go the caribou population, and there would go the fish population in the territory. It never happened. The world did not stop turning that day. It was the same thing in 2004 when the Haida Nation case came down. The world did not stop turning. It was the same thing in Tsilhqot'in. The world did not stop turning. Let's stop this fearmongering.

My first question is about some of the gaps in targets that should be set by your department in terms of considering these supplementary credits. What specific targets has the minister or the department established for housing, education, safe drinking water, infrastructure, health outcomes, and so on and so forth? These are questions that are also in your mandate letter, where you have to make real progress.

I noted that the language in the mandate letter omits that enumeration. Perhaps you can speak on that first.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Language and culture are in the mandate letter of Minister Joly, but there's no question that I see language and culture as part of my mandate in early childhood education, in K to 12, and in anything we do. This is the only way that we're going to have kids being successful. In the way forward, I see it as understood in my mandate.

With regard to the targets, I think that even in language and culture we need to be setting targets about the languages that might be disappearing or how many language speakers there are in each of the languages. I think we can do a good job by just measuring that. There are also conversations I'd have with Minister Joly about making sure there are digital recordings of language speakers and that they are protected in the way that we now can.

On the other targets, the platform was really clear about water advisories being stopped within five years, but you and I know that there are a lot of places that don't even have water to boil. There are places that don't have any taps to turn on. In northern Manitoba, it's shocking. We are pleased that a lot of the provinces and territories have decided to help us with this, but we're going to have to get this thing done.

With regard to housing and education, we will have a retreat as a department. In accordance with the Prime Minister's mandate to us,

we will deal with deliverology, but even setting realistic targets has to be done in partnership with first nations, Inuit, and Métis.

What's realistic? I remember being part of targets that said Canadians will be 10% more physically active by such-and-such a time, but nobody had even talked to anybody or figured out how they were going to do it.

What, by when, and how are part of the strategy, but the "what" has to be realistic. Otherwise, people give up. I'm very keen that it's something that maybe.... For any of these things, we would love to have the committee help us. Setting targets is going to be important.

● (1715)

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Mr. Chair, I have a quick point of order.

Minister Bennett knows my passion for this comes purely, honestly, and with the greatest well-being. This is not out of insecurity and it's not out of fear. It's out of clarity. It goes to my original comment that we need to have clarity in this document.

As here, we need to be leaders. If we are going back to our communities, we need to be able to talk to our constituents about it. I take a little bit of offence to it because I'm deeply passionate about it

**The Chair:** Todd, I'm sorry, but I'm not hearing a point of order there, my friend.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Todd, I'm happy to come back at any time.

I think the parliamentarians' guide to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples will be very helpful on this, and then maybe we can talk about it, or you might want to bring Willie Littlechild and all the people who were involved in writing that guide. I think we have a lot of work to do on this together.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister Bennett.

Thanks also to the departmental officials who are with us here today. It's much appreciated.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** As we're dangerously close to finishing on time, I'm not going to suspend while we thank and say goodbye to our guests, but we're going to move right into the voting. I will call the votes.

CANADIAN HIGH ARCTIC RESEARCH STATION

Vote 3c—Program expenditures.....\$263,077

(Vote 3c agreed to)

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Vote 1c—Operating expenditures.....\$112,682,479

Vote 5c—Capital expenditures.....\$100,000

Vote 10c—Grants and contributions.....\$119,273,013

(Votes 1c, 5c, and 10c agreed to)

**The Chair:** We have concluded our business for today.

There is a final question I must ask. Shall I report the votes on supplementary estimates to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

The meeting is adjourned.

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