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Chair

Mr. Andy Fillmore

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.)): We'll come to order.

I thank everyone for being here today. Before we dive into the agenda, I want to start, as always, by acknowledging that we're meeting today on the unceded hereditary land of the Algonquin people.

Also, I want to invite the committee to send our best wishes to David Yurdiga. He's been home in Fort McMurray since Tuesday dealing with the very difficult situation there. Of course, all of our best wishes are with him.

There are two issues on the agenda today. I propose that we deal with them together. The first is the main estimates, and the second is the report on plans and priorities. To speak with us about those issues are the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett; Hélène Laurendeau, the deputy minister of INAC; and Paul Thoppil, the CFO.

Thanks to all of you for coming today.

Again, committee members, I want to go over my proposed model for the meeting today. I'd like to invite the minister and her colleagues to have 15 minutes to present what they need to get through. They advise me that they probably only need about 12 minutes, so we'll probably finish that a bit early.

I've created a list with the clerk of one speaking order that should take about 51 minutes. By the time we do all that and get through the voting, we should finish around five or so. Now, I'm proposing that only as long as every committee member is okay with only going through one order of questions. I had some assent from some members earlier, before we sat, but does that seem reasonable?

Cathy.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): I didn't think it was one order. I thought it was to continue to roll the questions, to go back to the top, not to go back to the start. One hour was the intention, but certainly, if we have the minister—and of course she has been very gracious with her time—I would certainly hate to waste any minutes if she has them to spare.

The Chair: Okay. Why don't we do this? We have the votes to get through toward the end of the meeting, so let's check what the time is after we get through the first round of questions. We'll fit a few more in if there's time, while still leaving time for the votes.

Without further ado, Minister Bennett, you have the floor. Thank you.

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

Before we begin, we also want to offer our condolences and support to the residents of Fort McMurray and the surrounding areas as they're dealing with this absolutely devastating tragedy. I was able to speak to three chiefs last evening. It's quite amazing to hear from Fort McKay how they're actually receiving people from other areas. This is something that I think this committee will also be very engaged in.

I too note the absence of the member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, Mr. Yurdiga. I think we all believe he's in the right place, back helping the people in his community with this heartbreaking disaster. It is what members of Parliament do. I hope you'll convey to him that if there's anything our department can do to help or anything he hears on the ground, we would very much like that direct contact if that's possible.

It's a pleasure to be back here at your committee, acknowledging the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

• (1535)

[Translation]

I am here today with our new deputy Minister, Hélène Laurendeau, and our chief financial officer, Paul Thoppil.

[English]

They promise to take all the tough questions.

I think you know that I am somebody who believes that the role of committees is hugely important, and we want to make sure that you know we believe in the role you play. This is a fundamental role in the parliamentary process, and the really important role is holding government to account. That is the role of all parliamentarians from all parties, and we take your job very seriously.

[Translation]

I want to work with you to ensure that you have all the necessary information for this essential work.

[English]

We want you to know that if there's anything we weren't able to answer today, we will get back to you. I think we've been doing that reasonably well. I need to know if there's any information you need that I don't have. We'll get it for you.

I also think this is an opportunity for all of us to recognize the people who are watching carefully at home and who care about the work of this committee. It's an opportunity for all of us to use this as an example of how government works and how parliamentary committees hold governments to account. I think that as we see this collision today of plans and priorities, main estimates, and budget 2016, it is going to be quite an interesting exercise of how we do that when it all comes together.

I think you know that because we're doing main estimates together with budget 2016, there's some confusion as to what main estimates really mean. I want to explain that the estimates, as I think most of you know, are the total of all funding that's already been approved by Treasury Board. That's a separate check and balance that the President of the Treasury Board puts in place. These are never an estimate of the total spending for the year; it's just what has already been approved.

As Treasury Board approves new funding or renews existing programs, we come back to Parliament, and I to this committee, through the supplementary estimates process. Sometimes there is an understanding that it's something we hadn't thought of yet, but it is actually just things that haven't yet had the detail necessary to get Treasury Board approval.

As we know, there's also a disconnect in the sequence between main estimates, reports on plans and priorities, and the budget. I think we all know that this system is archaic and unclear. That's why the President of the Treasury Board has committed to modernize the estimates process to ensure that Parliament has timely and accurate information.

As you've all read, our main estimates total about \$7.5 billion in spending and reflect a net decrease of about \$726.3 million. This may alarm some, but I'm here to reassure you that the vast majority of these decreases relate to the targeted initiatives that either have had funding reprofiled to future years or have had funding replaced by new funding in budget 2016.

[Translation]

I am happy that we have this opportunity to discuss the main estimates and the report on plans and priorities in the context of budget 2016.

[English]

As you know, in budget 2016 we're committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for indigenous peoples so that first nations, Inuit and Métis youth, wherever they live in Canada, have hope. You have heard many times that budget 2016 makes historic investments in indigenous peoples, totalling \$8.4 billion over five years. We've been very pleased that AFN National Chief Perry Bellegarde has said:

This budget invests in important priorities for First Nations and all Canadians. Investments in housing, clean water, education, and child welfare will bring long-needed relief for those living in third world conditions, and build a stronger economy for everyone.

We know that this budget is only a start. Beyond new investments in 2016, we're working in full partnership with first nations to establish a new fiscal relationship, one that gives their communities sufficient, predictable, and sustained funding. This is to be a new

relationship. It means that people of first nations have the opportunity to plan as other communities have the ability to plan, as the chair knows all so well.

• (1540)

[Translation]

Although I don't have enough time to describe all the investments set out in budget 2016 that relate to aboriginal peoples, I would like to mention a few key initiatives.

[English]

Education has always been top of mind for everybody in terms of the way out. We know that closing the gaps in first nations education outcomes is critical, and we know that we must be held accountable for the results. Numerous reports, including from the Auditor General, have confirmed that chronic underfunding of first nations education systems has held first nations students back.

Budget 2016 contains transformational funding totalling \$2.6 billion over five years in K-to-12 education. We are focused on investments in programs that will improve the literacy and numeracy rates, build and improve schools and classrooms, and better support the integration of language and culture into first nations education, which we know is the way to success.

[Translation]

I want to say very clearly that we respect the first nation's jurisdiction over education and that we will not act unilaterally in this area.

[English]

We will work nation to nation as a partner to ensure the goals set by first nations are achieved and to support first nations-led.

[Translation]

The government has also made a commitment to promote reconciliation with the Métis nation through the recognition of rights, partnership, and a renewed relationship, from one nation to another.

[English]

As Métis National Council President Chartier recently said, the Trudeau government has already recognized the Métis Nation and is prepared to deal with them on a "nation-to-nation" basis.

As a first step, in recognition of the entrepreneurial spirit of Métis in Canada, budget 2016 proposes \$25 million over five years to support economic development for the Métis nation.

We all know that we have to increase the proactive support for indigenous children and their families, keep more children out of foster care, and support them to grow up with a secure personal cultural identity.

Child and family services on reserve must be overhauled, and we are committed to working with Dr. Cindy Blackstock, the Assembly of First Nations, and provinces and territories to fix it. As a start, we will provide nearly \$635 million over five years, in addition to funding the first nations child and family services program. This will allow us to respond to indigenous calls to expand the previous pilots of the enhanced prevention-focused approach to first nations child and family services on reserve to all provinces and territories.

We will also work in partnership with provinces, territories, indigenous communities, and the Ministry of Health to ensure Jordan's principle is expanded and applied in a way that always puts the health and well-being of children first.

Every family—every child—deserves access to clean water. Budget 2016 provides \$2.24 billion to first nations communities to improve on-reserve water infrastructure and waste management. This funding will support our commitment to put an end to long-term boil water advisories on reserve within five years.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Housing is also a basic need and all Canadians should have safe housing.

[English]

To address urgent housing needs on reserve, budget 2016 provides \$554.3 million over two years, beginning this year.

The need for affordable housing is also particularly high in the north and in Inuit communities. We heard clearly from the indigenous members of Parliament that focusing on housing only on reserve was not going to serve their needs and that there needed to be a separate allocation for the north and in Inuit communities.

As pointed out by Natan Obed, the president of ITK:

The \$170 million earmarked in the budget for building affordable housing in Inuit Nunangat is welcome given the severity of crowding in our four regions, and I look forward to working with the government to find ways to achieve the much larger investment that is necessary.

[Translation]

Food insecurity is another particularly pressing problem in northern communities.

[English]

We are committed to working with northerners to update and expand the nutrition north program to ensure northerners can feed their families and better access country foods. As a first step, budget 2016 provides \$64.5 million over five years, and \$13.8 million per year ongoing, to expand the nutrition north Canada program to support all northern isolated communities.

The government believes that the historic \$8.4 billion in investments in indigenous communities through budget 2016—on their priorities—will improve living conditions and social and economic outcomes.

I also want to make the point many other investments in this budget beyond this \$8.4 billion will have a profound positive impact on the lives of indigenous peoples in Canada. From the new fairer tax-free Canada child benefit to increasing the northern residents

deduction and enhancing Canada student grants, these and other measures will benefit all Canadians, including indigenous peoples in Canada.

Last June, Gwich'in elder Ray Jones said this in the Gitksan language on the morning of the final ceremony for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

Shed Dim Amma gauu dingus Mel.

This is what it means:

The canoe must be uprighted.

I believe that budget 2016 is an important first step to uprighting the canoe and to true reconciliation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. Did you also have remarks about the report on plans and priorities? Did you want to do those separately after we dispense with this?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think we felt that it's moot, based on budget 2016. I think that's what the President of the Treasury Board is trying to sort out.

The Chair: Very good. In that case, we'll move right into our first round of seven-minute questions. As always, I'll hold up a yellow card when there's one minute left, and a red card when I'm asking you to finish up, and then we'll move on to the next questioner.

The first question comes from Mike Bossio, please.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you so much, Minister, for being here today. I will echo Cathy's words. It's great you're availing so much of your schedule to come to our committee. We greatly appreciate it.

I've spoken to you about this before, but on the whole funding issue around first nations, you mentioned that the \$8.4 billion over five years was going to offset the shortfall, going from I think \$8.6 billion to \$7.5 billion.

Of that \$8.4 billion, do you have a time frame as to how that's going to be allocated over each of the five years? How much of that last \$726 million or whatever it was is going to be given back through that large sum?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: If you go to the main estimates, I think you'll see that a number of things, such as the specific and comprehensive claims, Indian residential schools, federal contaminated sites, and water and waste water have brackets around them. Those look like they're less. If you then compare that with what's in budget 2016, you can see those are augmented because of that anticipated funding.

There are some things that go down because they are winding down. With the Indian residential school settlement, as more and more people have been paid, we need less and less of a secretariat to do that work, so that one is definitely on its way down.

On the specific and comprehensive claims, that is always an estimate that gets booked based on how many claims you think you're going to settle. If they're not settled, they get moved into the following year and reprofiled. The department has not lost the money; we just didn't spend it this year.

On contaminated sites and water and waste water, what's in budget 2016 more than makes up for what looks like a decrease in the main estimates.

• (1550)

Mr. Mike Bossio: Thank you so much, Minister.

I want to get to the brunt, then, of my questioning around funding. As everyone knows, I've put forward a motion—or I will be—to look specifically at funding, because I really do see it as one of the key short-term things that we can try to deal with to lead towards more self-determination and self-government.

Under the grant process today, as you know, it really is a very short and narrow window of funding that is very specifically geared to a particular area. To me, once again, it's that whole paternalistic notion that we know how best to spend their money rather than indigenous communities setting their own priorities.

My own personal view is that if we can change the grant structure so that it's operational and moves more towards self-determination, then it also gives that responsibility of establishing priorities, which then leads to accountability, which then leads to a true nation-to-nation relationship. As long as they are beholden to us for the purse strings, how do you have a nation-to-nation relationship?

I point out to you today that we had a group in our environment committee, the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, which has established the Thaidene Nëné Park up in the Northwest Territories. One of the key factors in them being very close to reaching this agreement was the trust fund that was set up that gave them very long-term and secure funding. They had the trust, and based on that trust, we're able to build on the relationship. It once again reconfirmed my whole view of that.

I want you now to just speak to that. Is the department looking in the same direction? We've have to really start looking at the whole funding mechanism to lead toward self-determination and self-government.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Well, I couldn't agree more. The commitment to sufficient, predictable, sustained funding is there, but it means changing the fiscal relationship.

In some ways, what you're describing is even worse, in that some of the communities received notice on March 1 that they had to have the money spent by March 31, and it's only an annual grant. Nobody can plan like that. We couldn't plan our families that way. As you say, it's having sufficient predictable funding to move it more into a transfer, which is the objective of moving to a self-governing body, where they can actually know what's coming in the long term. It also allows them access to capital to be able to borrow. If people know there's money coming in a regular way, it's not this red light-green light, will the money be there next year or no?

Yes, absolutely, sitting down and working is how we can change from this very linear approach of just grants and contributions into a more mature nation-to-nation relationship. I think that is the goal of everyone.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I see that in some respects the department has been trying to move in this direction. I guess my concern is how we accelerate it. How do we accelerate that? Once again, everybody is

always concerned that if we do that, will they know how to manage it?

We've been setting up our own system of governance since the 1400s. We've had plenty of time to be able to figure these things out. We need to give them the opportunity to figure these things out for themselves. Guess what? They're going to make mistakes in doing that. If we truly want to back off from this paternalistic notion that we know what's best, the only way we can do that is by giving them that responsibility and allowing them to set their own priorities.

Do you see a way forward to accelerate this process?

• (1555)

The Chair: Mike, you've taken us to seven minutes there.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I'm sorry.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think that if you look at the First Nations Fiscal Management Act and the kinds of tools that were put in place that then set up various institutions that allow that, I think almost 200 first nations are now certified in that way. There's a way of incenting building capacity so that people don't have to play red light-green light with our department anymore. They can actually count on this. I think that is what the exciting future is as to how we go forward building that capacity.

The Chair: Speaking of red lights, Minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: As the Minister of Justice says, we want more and more communities to be ready, willing, and able to get out from under the Indian Act.

The Chair: Thank you.

Cathy, please.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you to the minister. I do want to acknowledge that when I first came to Parliament, I came from a background of local government and health care. A budget was set, and that's what you dealt with for the year. You perhaps had a contingency fund. So this whole very circuitous way of planning and spending money was a little bit of a mind-boggler when I first arrived. I appreciate that we need to make things a little bit more fine-tuned.

Certainly the Prime Minister and you have indicated that the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is of critical importance. The Prime Minister committed to all 94. I have a few questions in that area.

First, just this week, on Tuesday, we heard from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, and they said they had no idea about their budget and what they were getting. I think they were a number 74 commitment. They were up and going, and then all of a sudden they were completely in the lurch in terms of the commitment to that organization.

Could you perhaps relieve them, and relieve us, that this one is progressing?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, I agree; we were pleased to be able to give the centre a little bit of money at the end of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for them to continue their work, but I think it's very important that we sit down and again work with them on their work plan and on the kind of work that we know needs to be done.

On other recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I think in the little deck we gave you we analyzed who does what. There are certain ones that have been picked up by the provinces and territories, like the curricula for education; the universities have picked up theirs.

Our job is to drive that effort across all government departments in all jurisdictions, including municipalities and the private sector, but for us to feel that we are really helping get this done even though we don't have to pay for all of them.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Minister.

You will know that in the House I have looked for the production of papers. I have noticed that you say that you want us to have the information you need to do the crucial work. I think consistently, understanding the 94 recommendations, I see that 45 are designated toward federal government purely, but I don't get a sense of any sort of depth or framework or costing or analysis.

Hopefully you would be willing to table with this committee any work that has been done by you and your department.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. I mean, the work is early in terms of the.... I think, Cathy, the work of reconciliation is bigger than just the 94 recommendations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission came out of a class action suit. As Charlie knows well, there were people left out of that. So we're going to have to develop a plan for the reconciliation framework that includes all Canadians, and not just those who were in that class action.

As we work with cabinet colleagues to develop the full reconciliation framework, that will be an exciting opportunity for us to develop work plans—what, by when, and how—on each of these, to cost it out, and to figure out how we get done this unfinished work of Confederation.

• (1600)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Certainly when you commit to 94 recommendations, I would think that some substantial work has been done already in terms of the implications and the costs. Is that not accurate?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes, I'm happy to share with you what's been done to date. I'm saying that in terms of our organizing this across the whole of government, it's important that we are working with all of our cabinet colleagues, but also with the provinces, territories, and municipalities. That's why, when I meet in June with the aboriginal affairs working group of my counterparts in the provinces and territories, these are the kinds of things that we'll be working on every day.

There are some things that we know about, like the inquiry on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls—that money has been booked—and all of the work we're doing on the things that are there: education, health, child welfare, language, and culture. A lot of those things are in this budget, but we know that's a first step. Full

reconciliation won't be accomplished with this \$8.4 billion, but we will begin our way down the path.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: That makes sense. You have 94 recommendations, and you gave an example. That kind of chart would be very helpful for us as a committee in regard to seeing what's happening. If you're willing to share with us any of the work you've done around the calls to action and how they're moving forward, I would appreciate it. That would be very helpful.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Great. Thanks.

The Chair: Thanks to both of you. The next question comes from Charlie Angus.

Charlie, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Madam Minister. It's a pleasure to have you here. The last time we spoke on these issues it was in a plane on the James Bay lowlands, but we don't have a two-hour flight and I only have seven minutes, so you'll excuse me if I seem curt.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's a bit bigger than that King Air.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes.

I could ask questions for days on these issues, as you well know. You talked about the Indian Residential Schools Settlement agreement sunseting. I believe it's this year. When does it officially sunset?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: As I understand, it says each of the cases gets resolved that is within that settlement. There are only a few. We're targeting 2020 in order to have it all done.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay.

Has the Indian residential schools health support program already been sunsetted? I can't seem to find it anywhere.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The...?

Mr. Charlie Angus: The mental health support that was in the Indian residential schools health support program, has it been sunsetted?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Let me check.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau (Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): The main estimates identified that the residential schools program had sunsetted, but it's planned to be renewed until 2020 to finish all the work that needs to be done on the IAP, including the support until the end.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay. That's good to know.

We have survivors going to court on Wednesday, where their evidence was suppressed by the justice department, as you well know, in the St. Anne's case. They are going to have their case reopened, which would be certainly a milestone in the IAP.

We have a thousand cases in the administrative split that seem to have been unfairly adjudicated. Are they part of the numbers of what you're looking at? You said that you had "a few" cases that still had to be.... Is the government going to continue to oppose these cases in court or is there a settlement process?

•(1605)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Working with the Minister of Justice, we want to see as many of these cases out of court as soon as we can. This is really hard on people. I think we're close in the case in Newfoundland and Labrador. We're getting there, in that.... Harm was done, and we have to sort this out.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I appreciate that. I would urge you to meet with Rebecca Friday and Edmund Metatawabin, because the trauma in those communities is directly linked to what's happening to these cases. If we can get these out of the judicial system, we would go a long way, so I appreciate that.

On the child welfare decision and the Human Rights Tribunal ruling, it was pretty damning last week. They raised a question about the insufficient funds. You have \$126 million starting this year, but by year five, we still haven't reached the \$200 million. Cindy Blackstock says it has to be \$200 million now. The Human Rights Tribunal has called on the government and it's called on your department, and no offence, but it seems to be under a sort of third party management. They're wanting plans and priorities and stuff, which I think is a helpful thing, you know. How are we going to get that shortfall dealt with?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We had a very good meeting with Dr. Blackstock and the AFN last week. There are some programs in her estimates that I think are quite good and that we will consider.

The money that we put in the budget was the money that was absolutely necessary to make it fair across the country. The enhanced prevention dollars were pilots, and they weren't in B.C., Yukon, parts of Ontario, New Brunswick, or Newfoundland. What we chose to do was to put those enhanced prevention dollars right across the country as we work on changing the system.

We know the system has to be overhauled, and we're working with the AFN and Dr. Blackstock to put that advisory committee back together, which will advise us on the reforms. Then we will get the money as it's required to be able to fund a better system that will wrap services around kids and keep them with their families and in their cultures.

As you know, Charlie, there are more kids in foster care now than at the height of residential schools. It's a disgrace and it has to stop.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I appreciate that. One of the things the tribunal has said, though, is that action has to happen now, because this has been nine years of fighting in the tribunal, so we're going to have to see that moved up.

I just want to ask you a few questions about the estimates and the main estimates. I have to admit that I only got 52% in grade 10 math, so I'm always challenged on these basic things. I'm looking at the nutrition north program and I see that you're putting—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I knew you would.

Mr. Charlie Angus: —\$13 million a year into the program. That sounds great, but then when I look at the supplementaries, there was \$68.5 million last year, but now it's down to \$54 million this year. That reads to me like a cut in the nature of \$1.5 million. Now, I don't want to do that twice because I'll probably trip on my numbers, but can you explain it to me? It seems like we've cut the program and

then we're adding money, but it doesn't add up to what was there last year.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I got 97% in grade 13 math, and I asked exactly the same question, so I don't think your teacher was fair, Charlie.

This is important. What this doesn't show is that there is \$18 million that's sitting there. The money you see there as the \$10.2 million is actually money added to what's there to run the program. There is \$18 million that is there but hasn't gone through the Treasury Board process yet, so we'll be back in the supplementaries. The \$10.2 million is for the additional communities.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay.

Very quickly, then, when the Prime Minister was running for the job, he promised \$50 million in post-secondary education, but I don't see any of that in the budget. What happened to that money?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Post-secondary?

Mr. Charlie Angus: That's \$50 million in additional spending a year, but I didn't see any in the budget.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Well, post-secondary, again, is a.... The assets money is in Minister Miychuk's budget. For post-secondary, we are really needing to sit down with first nations to sort out the best way to go forward. As you know, the money for grants in the budget was doubled, so we are very interested in eliminating the wait lists in all the first nations by trying to get those kids to qualify for those grants.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thanks, Minister.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: There are tons of money in that other budget, and we want to be able to shape the program so that first nations kids can apply and get into school.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks to both of you.

The next question comes from Michael McLeod, please.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): I want to say thank you to the minister and her staff for the presentation today. Reviewing this budget is a very interesting process.

I do want to first of all thank the minister for all the hard work and effort on the many files that are in this department. We're starting to see some movement in many areas. I think we were in deadlock for many years, and I really appreciate all the effort that's being put into some of these difficult challenges.

That said, though, every time we seem to scratch the surface of an issue we uncover a whole bunch of other things that we have to work towards. We have done a lot with this department, but there is a lot to do.

Out of the \$726-million to be decreased, I noticed that \$403 million of that was in the area of claims and specific claims. I'm assuming that it was a bit ambitious if that was targeted to be spent in the year for which it was allocated. I'm assuming that we're going to see it come back in the supplementaries or that we're going to carry it over, but what I really want to hear is that claims, comprehensive claims and specific claims, are a high priority for this department. I want to hear that we're going to budget even more than this and that we're going to try to resolve a couple of the big ones in the Northwest Territories.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I thank the member for all his hard work and his deep understanding of how important claims are and how we really do have to move these things along, almost to Mike Bossio's point about how you get stable funding and just certainty in being able to plan your life.

As you know, we are very excited about the treaties and aboriginal government part of our department, led by the amazing Joe Wild, who is mandated to take creative and innovative approaches to get these things done. It is going to be with creativity and innovation that this happens. Even in the B.C. process, some people don't want a full treaty; they want something a little short of a treaty.

The way forward is to go out and ask people what they need and for us to try to help them get it, so that we can end up with a final agreement that is good for the first nations and is exactly what they know they need.

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you. I'm hoping that we are going to see some resolution to some of the claims that are outstanding in the north. I would certainly offer any assistance I can.

In the budget, you also mention that there is \$25 million for Métis through the Métis National Council. Not everybody belongs to the Métis National Council. I am Métis, and I don't belong to the Métis National Council. I have a lot of relatives in the Northwest Territories who are Métis. There is a population there that doesn't belong to the Métis National Council, and there are some members who do. How can we be reassured that there is going to be money for the Métis in the Northwest Territories?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That's an excellent question. Because it is part of the Métis economic development strategy for the Métis nation, I think it is Métis communities and Métis financial institutions that are setting up the ability for entrepreneurs and businesses to tap into economic development.

We can get back to you as to how that would apply in the Northwest Territories. It is a success story, as you know, with Métis across Canada.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I appreciate that. However, I have some concerns. We are left out in the Northwest Territories. There is \$8.4 billion earmarked for aboriginal programs, indigenous programs. The north is going to get very little of that. We do not fall under the category of Indigenous Affairs responsibilities, even though 50% of our population is indigenous.

Is there a way in this budget...? You've said that the system is unclear and archaic. How do I carve out budgets going to the Northwest Territories from your budget? How can I tell the people in my riding who are aboriginal that they are getting treated fairly?

There is no earmarked money, really, unless there is a carve-out for housing.

I want to say that it is the first time we have had housing investment in many, many years, and we really appreciate it, but there is a real responsibility on my part, and I think on this government's part, to be able to reassure the people in the Northwest Territories that they are getting fair funding. The studies show that it is not happening that way.

• (1615)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It works in a couple of ways. As you know, there's the transfer to the territory, and that money is negotiated with the territory on certain aspects. If you take housing, for example, the Northwest Territories itself was given \$12 million, but there was also \$15 million over two years to the Inuvialuit settlement region, to the Inuit. As you know, some of the Inuit housing situations are really disastrous.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I have another question before we end. Why is the review of the friendship centres happening? Can you just tell me that? Why is it needed?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Why is there a review? Over the past two years, the whole of the urban aboriginal strategy was delivered through the National Association of Friendship Centres. There have been some concerns in terms of urban Inuit, urban Métis, and youth, in that they wanted a more collaborative approach to where that money goes into communities.

The friendship centres will get exactly the same amount of money for this year coming up, but we do believe we need a review. I did a round table on urban aboriginals on Friday in Montreal. There are all these organizations that have been put into a competitive atmosphere instead of a collaborative one, and we want to know how we could do this better.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move now into the five-minute questions.

The next questions will come from Arnold Viersen, please.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here today. I'll add my voice to the chorus of thanks for your time today.

Charlie has already talked to some degree about the apparent cuts to the funding for post-secondary education. What was interesting as well is that the number of full-time employees also seems to have been reduced. I was wondering if you could address that a bit.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I'm having trouble hearing you.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I can speak up. It's not a problem.

Charlie addressed the apparent drop in funding for post-secondary education. I was wondering if you could address the reduction of the full-time employees from 19 to 17.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: So the...?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: The human resources have been reduced as well on the post-secondary side. We were just looking at it. For post-secondary education, on page 29, there are now 17 full-time employees. It's a significant reduction in full-time employees. I was wondering if you could address that.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: I'm sorry. I'm not sure where you're seeing that. You said which page...?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: It's page 29. When we compare it to the last budget, it's a significant reduction in numbers.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: We would have to check into that. I cannot give you an answer.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay. Thank you.

Access to safe drinking water and effective treatment of waste water is critical to the health and safety of our first nations peoples. One of your government's promises was to ensure clean water availability in 93 communities on reserve currently affected by poor water quality.

In your plan to ensure clean water availability, has your department developed and implemented any of the regulatory components of that?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: At the moment, the regulatory has to be in collaboration with the provinces and territories. The safe drinking water act caused some consternation in certain communities such as Akwesasne, which is in Ontario, Quebec, and the U.S.

As we go forward, the regulatory piece is one thing. The infrastructure is another. Training is huge in terms of the plants. You can build all the plants, but if you don't have people who can run them and who won't be poached by the local town to run theirs.... I think that's why we have to work in regions: to figure out how we do this collaboratively both on the regulatory side and also on infrastructure and training.

• (1620)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

Under the previous government, we spent nearly \$400 million per year on water and waste water. Under budget 2016, the government announced \$360 million in annual funding for clean water on reserves. Why the decrease in this waste water funding?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The increases?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Decrease.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: For what looks like a decrease there, if you go to what's added in budget 2016, it actually ends up for 2016-17 at \$294.8 million, so it more than makes up for the \$137.3 million that looks like a decrease.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay. Thank you.

Minister Bennett, I was pleased to see a strong endorsement for financial transparency and accountability in the report on plans and priorities. The report states:

Transparent and accountable institutions and organizations strengthen the fabric of Indigenous governments across Canada, assist Indigenous communities and their governments in attracting investment, and support Indigenous participation in the Canadian economy.

If this is the case, why did you instruct your department to stop enforcing the First Nations Financial Transparency Act? It seems counterproductive.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thanks for the question.

All first nations have to submit audited statements to our department. The practice is that they all share those statements with their members in their communities. If any member has trouble getting that information, they can approach our office.

The problem with the way the previous bill was written is that it included band-operated businesses, and that led to the potential for predatory practices from competitors in terms of actually knowing how much you're paying your engineer and all of those things.

In the Kelowna Accord, there was a first nations auditor general. I think everybody wants to work on better approaches to transparency and accountability and, through the First Nations Financial Management Board and other institutions, I think we're moving well on ensuring the transparency and accountability.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

I'm also a little bit alarmed by the target of 75% compliance for first nations communities. Our government had aimed for 100% compliance, and we had a compliance rate of over 90%.

Could you comment on why there's been a lowering of the target when the actual compliance was higher than your target?

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: The target was the same. The achievement was above the target last year, you're quite right, and we expect that the achievement will be same this year, or roughly the same. The target was set in such a way that it got exceeded.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Okay.

I have 14 first nations in my riding, and I've made it my task to visit all of them. I meet with several of the band leaders, but I also generally drive around the reserves and talk to anybody who happens to be there who's interested in talking with me. One thing I ask about is our transparency act and if that was effective. I tell them—to give your example—that anybody who's interested in these things is able to get them. They say, well, that's interesting, but on the ground it's a completely different story. If you ask for the information, the band council holds a great deal of power over your life, and things will happen in your own life just for asking the wrong questions.

I'm just wondering if you're aware of this situation or not.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I have heard the odd anecdote that reflects that practice, but I think coast to coast to coast, where I've been, first nations have posted their statements on a website that's password-protected, just for their members. I think there are always outliers in these sorts of situations, but these are democratically elected chiefs and councils. If people don't like their practices, they can vote them out.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you both very much for that.

The next question is from Don Rusnak, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you for coming, Minister.

Mr. Anandasangaree and I recently had a tour of a couple of first nations in my riding. While we were there, we heard of problems with the drinking water systems in their community. Some of the problems have been related to the equipment that was provided. I don't know how old the equipment is, but a lot of it was outdated when it arrived. I know that Lac La Croix had to get part of the equipment from the Czech Republic, and it was old equipment they were buying just to keep their system running.

Is the department doing anything in terms of procurement of water systems, to make sure they're the best systems and not substandard systems that are being delivered to first nations?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Absolutely, Don. We are really interested in listening to some of the engineers and experts. I met with a technical advisory committee in Alberta two weeks ago. I think the technical advisory committee for Ontario is meeting soon...from Chiefs of Ontario.

Everybody knows we have to get away from this vendor-driven approach. There have been many well-known stories of people being sold something that just isn't going to work for them. It either doesn't work and it's antiquated, or it's way more than they need and requires a level three operator who will be immediately poached by the local town, and then they have no one to run the plant for them.

We think having technical expertise shared amongst first nations is the way forward, almost in a public utilities technical advisory approach. Again, that gets away from our department doing red light-green light on these. This has to be a way in which we can move forward to make sure that people get exactly the piece of equipment that will work, and we train up their people such that it's sustainable and the water quality is what people need.

Mr. Don Rusnak: In your statement to the committee, you mentioned that budget 2016 provides \$2.24 billion to first nations to improve on-reserve water infrastructure and waste management. Is that amount over five years or is it immediate?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's over five years, yes.

Mr. Don Rusnak: It is over the five years? With that total amount, is it broken up? Is it sheerly for infrastructure or is that amount also expected to be used for training operators and training people in the community to run these systems?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. Again, that's the package. The piece of equipment won't work on its own.

I think there are other training centres that people access in different ways. There's an excellent program in Dryden and there are others where young people decide that being a water operator is a good thing to want to do. I think it's exciting to see that people will find these technical jobs that really help their communities.

Mr. Don Rusnak: Getting back to the \$2.24 billion and the program where they're training... I'll get the name wrong—

• (1630)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The circuit riders.

Mr. Don Rusnak: Yes, training them. There's a young man right out of high school who went straight into running his community's water treatment system. It's an excellent program. I've heard about and seen other programs across the country where municipalities actually partner up with the first nation to help train the first nation operators. Partnerships like those are amazing. I'd like to see that continue.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Go through a plant with one of those young people who has just been hired and you'll see their pride. Whether they're talking about E. coli or emergency management, these are proud citizens who are helping their people. It's great.

The Chair: We're out of time, Don.

We're going to move right along to the next questions from Todd Doherty, please.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Thanks, Minister, for being here today. You've been very generous with your time.

I'm going to apologize right from the start. I am fairly frustrated, and I'm getting a little tired of some of the rhetoric, I guess, that we're hearing. That was a great question from our honourable colleague from the Northwest Territories regarding Métis. I think it's very important that we do everything in our power. I'm not quite sure that... I've said this before about all the hope in the world and all the passion in the world: without a plan, I think we're still going to fail.

Regarding Métis, I know it's different from province to province and territory. Are there land rights that have been included from the Canadian government? Have you budgeted for health care for our Métis as well in terms of the status now that we're recognizing?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's a great question, and I think the Supreme Court decision is a new chapter for Canada.

I practised in a non-status town for a couple of weeks once and realized that people who had been veterans had to choose to give up their status in order to get veterans benefits, because those were more generous for their family than benefits, so—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Minister, I have a number of questions and I know—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But the issue is, we have to go to the table and see how these people who now have rights want to exercise their rights.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Okay. So it hasn't been budgeted as of yet?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Well, there's no certainty that that will be required.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Okay.

My next question is in regard to the friendship centres. It's frustrating. Friendship centres are not just token centres within our communities. They deliver fundamental plans, whether they are for safety, counselling, or programs to help keep youth off the streets. In my riding—you know it very well—we have the highway of tears, a 724-kilometre stretch where over 30 women have gone missing or have been murdered. Friendship centres, whether they're in Prince George, Williams Lake, Kamloops, or across this country, deliver core programs.

I am just floored with the comments that were coming out that there is some concern, that there are some worries that the programs aren't there.... You held a session in Montreal on this. I just don't understand how this fits with your agenda of renewed relations with indigenous people.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I'll explain. There's a difference between funding for the friendship centres, which is secure. Over the past two years they have been administering the whole of the urban aboriginal strategy. At the moment, the National Association of Friendship Centres has the money booked. It's there, and they just have to sign their contribution agreement in order to get the money to flow.

Mr. Todd Doherty: All right.

The next question I have is again with respect to my riding. We have an alarming first nations gang issue going on. We have asked a number of times on behalf of my riding that this government take its focus from the urban areas and come to the rural areas. Again, I'm glad that the cameras are on, Minister, because I think sometimes you do your best work—or the government does its best work—when the cameras are on. Unfortunately, when the cameras are off, and the media aren't watching, we still need help.

We have a first nations gang problem in Williams Lake. I'm imploring you to work with your colleagues and come out to my riding to help us address this. The chiefs from our area, the Tsilhqot'in chiefs, have implored government to try to help in finding a solution with our provincial government. We need your help.

•(1635)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think that on some of these issues around gangs.... The police chief in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, developed a HUB model that really began to work to prevent people going into gangs.

Mr. Todd Doherty: We're trying to work on the same thing. Again, I talked with you during the pre-inquiry meeting in Prince George, and I told you that we are creating hope with no plan. This program, whether it's the violence, the first nations violence, was spoken of that day, too, but this is all part of our truth and reconciliation, and truth and reconciliation have to go beyond just words.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: As we know, hurt people hurt people. One of the problems is that people who have had childhood trauma have had no hope in their lives. That's a problem with addictions, with violence, and eventually with incarceration.

Mr. Todd Doherty: What are we going to do?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We are going.... That's why I think the crime prevention model coming out of public safety, Project Venture, and some of these things, that have been absolutely shown to work —

Mr. Todd Doherty: It's been cut.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You won't have to do this alone. We'll be with you.

Mr. Todd Doherty: It wasn't renewed, though.

The Chair: Minister, I'm afraid we have to move on.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: What wasn't renewed?

Mr. Todd Doherty: The project wasn't renewed for 2016.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Project Venture? We're working on it. We are working very hard on programs that work. I believe that one works, and we're going to try to find the money for it.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Because it wasn't renewed.

The Chair: Okay, that—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Pardon?

The Chair: Thank you for that.

The next question is from Rémi Massé, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Hello, Madam Minister. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. I would also like to thank all your staff supporting you. I know that a lot of work goes into a meeting like this.

I would like you to talk to us about education. The budget provides approximately \$3.7 billion for first nations' education. I am trying to compare the estimates with the budget presented.

Can you provide a breakdown of the funding in the budget?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The budget provides \$1 billion to build schools and \$2.6 billion over five years for students in order to improve education and training, and in particular literacy.

[English]

That is the worst word in French: *alphabétisation*. Did I say that okay? *Merci*. For the literacy, numeracy, and special education, we've targeted

[Translation]

these matters in order to obtain results.

[English]

It's language and culture, but one of the things that's exciting right now is that there are a number of like-minded first nations coming together to build school systems. They will build their own training, professional development, accountability, and student success programs. There's some money in there to encourage anybody who wants to come together to develop their own school system, because we know that's what's going to work bottom up.

[Translation]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Thank you.

A number of witnesses who appeared in recent weeks told us that there is a significant gap as regards education in each province and education on first nations reserves.

I would like you to tell us about the supplementary estimates that have been allocated. Will these supplementary estimates help close the gap in education between first nations and the rest of the population?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Unfortunately, only 39% of students complete high school. This is a tragedy for them and for the rest of Canada.

Increasing accountability for students' success is therefore absolutely essential.

•(1640)

[English]

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: Perhaps I can add something.

[Translation]

The injection of \$2.6 billion is specifically aimed at improving the on-reserve per child investment in education. The purpose of this funding is to reduce this gap. The goal is to invest, among other things, in languages, cultures and other methods to be determined with the first nations.

Mr. Rémi Massé: I would like to draw your attention to a specific situation. I am of course from the Gaspé, and I represent Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia. There are three large aboriginal communities in the riding. They are Micmac communities. Since the majority of these people are anglophones, they have to go to New Brunswick for training. Since they live in reserves in Quebec, they receive a certain amount of funding to take courses in New Brunswick. There is nonetheless a gap between the funding provided by Quebec and the costs of receiving education in New Brunswick.

I wanted to point this out to see if there is any way of helping them out with this.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That's a very interesting question. The members of first nations have to make choices. This is an issue we need to rectify.

Ms. Hélène Laurendeau: You are talking about people who live on reserves, right?

Thank you for raising this point.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

The final question in the order for now is from Charlie Angus.

It's a three-minute question, Charlie, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madam Minister. Of course you know I'll be talking to you about education. It's a very important issue.

Two weeks ago, at the Thunder Bay inquiry, Indigenous Affairs spokesmen spoke under oath and said that there was no way to compare the federal and provincial per capita funding, and that there was essentially no funding gap between what students on reserve receive and what students in the provincial system receive. Is that the position of the department?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's not mine.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I appreciate that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, I mean, we... There was a way of averaging things, of adding things—i.e., some of the first nations children go to the provincial school, and therefore we pay that amount. You average it all together.

But what I'm interested in is the per-child investment, on reserve and off reserve, and how we get that equal without adding in what my department is paying to send kids to provincial school, paying that fee.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Shannen Koostachin left home at 13, and if she'd stayed, she would have gotten \$8,000 in funding. She had to live with my family, and Indian Affairs paid \$16,000 in the provincial system. The gap was enormous.

I want to stick with these numbers. Again, excuse me with my grade 10 math. The Prime Minister promised \$2.6 billion in core K-to-12 funding over four years. In the budget it's over five years. So the next government actually delivers \$800 million of that. If we look at a four-year number, we drop off \$800 million. That puts us at about \$1.8 billion over that four years.

I'm interested that \$800 million is described as transformative, and that includes money to the Paul Martin foundation. I have great respect for Paul Martin, but I don't know of any other provincial system that pays outside agencies when it's supposed to be core funding.

I have two quick questions. One, are we going to have a legislative framework, as the TRC has asked for with education and as the Auditor General has, so that we can set some standards? Two, if this transformative money is not core funding, then what is it?

• (1645)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The educators, I think, as they come together, are going to determine whether they themselves think a legislative framework would be helpful in terms of indicators/markers. It may well be that it will be the the educational school systems themselves that will sort out and codify the standards.

With the Paul Martin initiative, I think the reason the AFN asked for money to go there is that it has been transformative in those schools. If you go to Hillside and see the teachers who say, "I used to think I was a good teacher. I now know I'm a terrific teacher", and to be able see those kids do so well in very short order, that is like the Lighthouse schools, where you end up with principals sharing across jurisdictions their best practices. On the results that have been demonstrated by the initiative, we want that to, what, be replicated in many more communities, now that we have proven it works.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We've come to the end of the first round of questions. I do have interest registered by a number of members for carrying on with the questioning. What I would like to propose is that we continue the rotation. We will start with the seven-minute questions again. Looking at the clock, we have room for four seven-minute questions, which will take us to 5:15, and then I think we should turn our minds to the vote at that point.

Just to give a heads-up to the committee members, the order will be Mike Bossio, Cathy McLeod... I'm sorry. Yes, we switched: Gary Anandasangaree, Cathy McLeod, Charlie Angus, and then a Liberal to be named. That's Michael McLeod. Thank you.

Let's leap right into that with Gary Anandasangaree, please.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Minister. I sincerely apologize for being late. I had another engagement to attend.

I want to pick up on what our friend was talking about.

Can you outline what kind of transformational change, at least in attitude and work plan, that you have implemented as the head of the department, as the minister, in the last six months since taking office in November?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Obviously, the first thing we were able to do was launch the pre-inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. I think that in itself, although maybe "transformational" would be too strong.... I think that what we felt was that after a decade of asking for an inquiry, for the ministers to be listening to those families, coast to coast to coast, and for them knowing that they have been heard, was really important in resetting our relationship, and for us to be clear that there is an uneven application of justice, that the link between residential schools and child abuse, addictions, and violence that has resulted in this....

I think for us to have worked as hard as we did with all of our colleagues and with the finance minister to be able to do the kind of work it takes to get this kind of money in a budget...that is what our

department really worked hard for. Because you can't fund a dream. You actually have to fund a plan. I can't thank the department enough for all the work they did and to have these persuasive ways of getting money that would be acceptable to the finance department for it to be able to fund it.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Minister.

Several weeks ago, we had the Office of the Correctional Investigator here, who shared with us some startling numbers with respect to incarceration.

How do you feel that this budget will assist in addressing some of the structural challenges? For example, Canada has now surpassed 25% in terms of incarceration rates in prisons, and it's 36% for women. How does this budget help us in addressing some of those criminal justice issues and the inequitable numbers that we see in the criminal justice system?

• (1650)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: This budget is very important, particularly in terms of the money around education and child welfare. There are some really significant things that will make a difference.

We know that if people are successful, finish high school, and go on to post-secondary education, they are much less represented in prison. When kids drop out because they didn't learn to read properly, they get into trouble.

My experience in prisons is that there are way too many indigenous people there who shouldn't be there, and that this comes to the uneven application of justice or things like breaching conditions. I was at Headingley prison for women. I asked what most of those people had done. All they had done was breach their conditions. They hadn't been sentenced to jail in the first place, yet the prison was full of people who had breached their conditions, gone to administrative.... Now, not only are they in prison, but they're no longer with their children, and it begets, begets, begets this generational thing. I think the correctional investigator has done a really important job.

It's also no place for people with mental health problems. We have to help people get healthy again, and I think that with some of the drug courts, the indigenous courts, and some of the things that aren't in my ministry but that I am very keen on, and with the kind of money that is going to be required with the health accord on healing and wellness, that's the way we're going to get there.

The money I am most proud of is the money for secure personal cultural identity. Investing in language and culture in these schools is how these kids feel good about themselves as proud indigenous people in this country. That is how they make healthy choices—good health, education, economic outcomes. That's what all the kids have said to me: they want to be on the land and they want to know their language and culture. It cannot be funded anymore as some fluffly extra if you have time or money for it. It really is a core service that this government is committed to doing.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Minister.

I know that Mr. Rusnak spoke about how we were in the north last week. One of the places that we visited was the courthouse in Thunder Bay, which is I believe the first one in Ontario that has a room for resolving conflicts relating to indigenous populations.

What kinds of programs or incentives are required so that the justice system itself as a whole systematically and completely relooks at how we prosecute, how we sentence, and how we investigate? I suspect that if you look at the U.S. court system the numbers are very similar. The underlying discrimination that we've seen in many of the U.S. courts I think is very similar and can be transposed to our indigenous populations. What can we do to ensure that we start to make some structural changes within our system?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you for the question.

I was so inspired in British Columbia to meet Chief Belleau from the Esk'eteme first nation, who is doing restorative justice right in her own community in terms of people coming together through facilitation to say to someone, "You were harmed, I harmed you, and what are we going to do, what would it take, to make this right?"

In the indigenous court in New Westminster, Judge Buller Bennett, is very clear about how so many of the people who come before her were harmed as children, and they didn't deserve to be harmed. She is then able to help them get on a good path by making sure they have a family doctor and making sure they can speak five words in their own language. These are the ways that we're going to get people back on a good path. Coast to coast to coast on missing and murdered women, we heard that the criminal justice system is just not shaped to do this right now. We have to make a big change.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thanks to both of you.

The next questioner is Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

I have three questions that I really hope to get answers for, so I'm going to give you all three, and hopefully we can work our way through them.

I wasn't going to go here, but I have to go back to the first nations transparency act. I'm going to use two examples.

If I'm a citizen of Kamloops, there's nothing that prevents me from looking at Kelowna's audited statements and vice versa, or looking at those for Timmins, for example. I heard you talk about a pass key, so do you believe that a first nations Osoyoos band member shouldn't have access to Kamloops statements? Integrated with that is this: Bell Canada posts its shares report online and so does TELUS. I

went through a number of the statements that had been posted, and there is nowhere that I believe it would ever erode business interests. I am hearing from band members who are writing me and saying that they are very uncomfortable that you have moved away from the first nations transparency act. Again, this is a basic level of transparency, whether it's Kelowna, Kamloops, Bell, or TELUS in terms of what is available. Truly, for a band member, sometimes the ability to make comparisons is important. That's number one.

Number two, I'm glad to hear you talk about Project Venture. I've had calls from the directors. It's been a very successful criminal prevention program. They are very, very concerned right now. Normally they have had operating money that's moved forward to them, and they're thinking that they're going to have to collapse the program. I know it's not yours, but I just wanted to share that.

My third area is that when we supported murdered and missing indigenous women we also were very concerned that it would impact the delivery and support for on-the-ground prevention programs, so I want you to reassure me, because it appears that there's a decrease in the funding for the family violence prevention program. When I take the budget, the estimates, and everything into account, the former government gave approximately \$12 million to support the work of the family violence prevention program. We were hoping that it would be matched or increased. The new budget is fairly murky in this area. There's \$6.7 million per year over the next five years, and \$3.5 million to better support shelters, so it's very murky. Perhaps your officials might be wanting to look—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes, and we'll—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: —at that piece, but most importantly, the first two.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. Again, this is one of the ones where, even though it looks like... It's actually in the major increase column for me, because budget 2016 has another \$73.6 million and \$24.8 million in this year, but it is about extra money for shelters, and that's \$33.6 million over five years. It is increasing, but we can get you the details on the breakdown, if you like.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: As I say, we did the estimates, the budget, and we broke it down.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: To me it looked like a decrease, which is one of our concerns: that we're going to focus on the inquiry but we would do that to the detriment of supporting some very important programs.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I couldn't agree more, and I know that Minister Hajdu is working very hard on a national strategy on violence against women, and obviously the indigenous part of that is hugely important. But that money is going to be there and increased.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: To go back to Kamloops versus Kelowna

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: On Project Venture, ever since I was in La Roche I've heard very strongly from the community that Project Venture was something that had been working there, so we came back and spoke to Minister Goodale. We're working hard to make sure we can.... We want to fund programs that work, and that's very well received on the ground. We're going to figure this out.

• (1700)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: To be frank, the directors of the successful programs that I'm aware of are very, very concerned that they are not going to be funded again, because they have had no indication. Of course, once you're into a new fiscal year—and I think it goes back to what Mike talked about at the beginning—you might be giving a four-year program but you're not giving them four-year funding, so it's a big concern.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. Was the Project Venture that you knew of in the summer, or was it delivered all year round or just during the school year?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I believe it was a year-round one.

An hon. member: Year-round.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yours was year-round as well? Okay. I'll want to know a little more about that.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: To go back to my favourite...I truly believe we are doing an incredible disservice to band members.

Again, I'll use my Kamloops/Kelowna citizen. There is a basic level of transparency, accountability, and the ability to compare, and I think we've done a huge disservice to band members when we have backed away, or when we start to talk about needing a pass key to get into the information, or say that maybe the business information shouldn't be there. I would argue the band members should have robust information about band business, because they are shareholders.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes, and I would agree with you that the objective is for the chief and council to be accountable to their members. That's where you and I disagree: this is about first nations control over first nations. Some put that up on a website that's accessible to everybody, but some want it...and are accountable just to their members.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I'm sorry, Minister, but I think we do them a disservice.

Again, it's for the band members. How can you hold your chief and council accountable? You might say that something sounds outrageous, but then you go and look at what another band is perhaps doing and say that it's the norm and that's okay.

You do that with councils. They compare themselves all the time. That is basic transparency and accountability, and it is truly a shame that community members will not have that information and that the targets are 70%...you're talking about 25% of communities.

The Chair: Cathy, I'm sorry, but we're out of time.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Really?

The Chair: On the upside, you got the last word, so that was good for you.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

The Chair: Charlie Angus, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to do some wrap-up in terms of what we've already discussed.

In terms of the question on is there a funding gap between what is given to students in the provincial system and the federal system, that was the question that was asked at the Thunder Bay inquiry. You said that your opinion is that there is a funding gap. Is that the position of the department?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes, and again, the funding gaps are different depending on where you are, like even if you talk to the first nations education steering committee in British Columbia. The funding gap depends on a population, too: on how many special ed children there are and how remote the community is. If you were able to match a school on reserve with the same population and the same opportunities for the students, just meeting the gap may not be enough in certain ones. In some places, we should be giving more, because the kids have greater needs. We should be able to offer extra things like homework clubs or the kinds of things that are really essential to the students' success.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I certainly agree. I guess my concern is coming out of having been a provincial school trustee. The funding formula is how everything is done in education. No offence to the department, but it seems to be almost a secret society. You can't seem to ever figure out.... I could never get a straight answer as to how the funding is done. It should be something such that if you can look at it then you know where the gaps are. Without knowing that, how do you do that?

Would it be possible for you to supply our committee with an overall view? I'm hearing that even within the region of Treaty 9 we seem to have differences between what one school region is getting and what another is getting. Like I said, the difference between Attawapiskat and the Timmins provincial board is \$8,000 to \$16,000. In other areas, I hear it's more like \$10,000 or \$11,000 to \$14,000. Without those markers, we can't judge anything. Would it be possible to get that? You don't have to give it to us now, and I'm not asking for you to—

• (1705)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But what I am happy to share with you—and we'll do it differently—is that when you look at the percentage finishing high school, I count it at 38% on reserve nationally, while non-indigenous is at 86.8%. These results are unacceptable—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I agree.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: —and we have to do whatever we can to close the gaps in the outcomes. It's going to mean spending the money wisely on the things that matter.

Mr. Charlie Angus: You're preaching to the choir there, Madam Minister, but this is why we need the data.

You cannot do anything without the data, so I would like to ask you a question. What I see in the priorities and planning is that they talk about incremental improvements year after year. I've have asked the department how they base that, and they say, well, incremental improvements.... In the Ontario region in 2013 we had numeracy rates and literacy rates down at 18% and 21%. You don't have anything that low anywhere in the world except maybe sub-Saharan Africa.

That is probably our students in Treaty 9 who are not getting the support. What are the markers, then, that we are going to identify, other than hope, that change is going to happen? Is it possible to see how we're going to get these things? What are the standards you're going to use to make sure that we increase these abysmal rates?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's also even before school, right, Charlie? It's even the readiness to learn when you hit the school system, so early learning and child care also become part of student success.

The place that I am really interested in is making the jump from learning to read to reading to learn between grades 3 and 4. This we know: the kids who don't make that jump will fake it until grade 8, grade 9, or grade 10, when they drop out. We do need evidence-based approaches to finding the kids who are struggling and being able to wrap around the services to help them be successful.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay, so that's why I want to ask you about the legislative approach. In 2004 the Auditor General said that Indian Affairs had done a brutally bad job. In 2011, it was even worse. How is it possible, if you spend that much money, that you could have worse outcomes?

They said that we need a legislative approach. The government has committed to it through the TRC, but when we talked earlier, you said well, you're going to talk to the educators and see what they want. How do we get legislation if there is an isolated one-off school over here and then a proper big board down there that is already doing its own thing? Without legislation, we don't have any way of establishing these markers. How are we going to get that in a timely way so that we don't lose another generation?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: There are two kinds of legislation.... Would the legislation be around the funding formulas, Charlie, or would it be around measuring and achieving outcomes?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Well, you need them both, right?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Because the problem is that in the provincial systems, we have ring-fencing, so the department can't move money from a school to fix a bridge. That's one of the reasons we have such great public education, but that doesn't exist in the department. Without legislation, without ring-fencing, when you leave this department and we get the next indigenous affairs minister who may be further down the rung in terms of quality, who knows what is going to happen with the money? That's why you need a legislative ring-fencing approach: so that what you leave here is something that cannot be touched.

You know, Carolyn, that the money is taken all the time and moved elsewhere and not spent, and that's where these outcomes are failing. Is there going to be a legislative response so that this money is going where it's needed, that it's going to the classroom, to textbooks, to buildings, and to outcomes?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think the Auditor General was also pretty clear that it was a lack of money too. We're very keen to be accountable for the results as we go forward. We need to have these kids doing better, and we're interested in looking at how we can ensure that.

As you know, as we move to getting people out from under the Indian Act to self-government or to school systems that are accountable for results, then I think we can figure out what that looks like and we will be able to shape it, if there is a need for legislation, around that kind of flexibility and understanding that one size doesn't fit all when it comes to first nations.

Some of these kids are in the provincial school system. How can I control whether they are getting language and culture properly when we know that's part of their success? If they are in a provincial system.... I want to make sure the money is in the system with great teachers, as in Finland. I want kids to grow up and want to be a teacher, and then we're going to win.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thanks to both of you.

We're going to have our final question before we move to the votes, but I want to let the committee members know that I have business in the House that I have to leave the committee early for, but not just yet, Charlie, although we all appreciate your enthusiasm.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I'll be leaving after Michael finishes his questions, and Charlie will take over the chair.

Michael, please.

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

I want to say that I for one applaud the fact that the transparency act is gone, as do I think a lot of aboriginal people in the north for sure, and probably aboriginal populations across Canada. I've worked with many companies in the Northwest Territories, companies that aboriginal band councils had shares in, and this act tripped us up non-stop. Every affiliate that the council had a share in had to disclose its revenues, so the competition saw that and the potential partners walked away because they didn't want to be involved with companies or band council projects that also had to disclose.

It was not a good act. It went against the principle of own-source revenue generation. We're trying to create healthy communities. We're trying to create independent communities. This didn't help that. It flies in the face of the nation-to-nation concept, and I'm glad it's gone.

On the nutrition north program review, I'm hoping that we're taking a holistic approach on how we move forward on that front. I still think—and I've mentioned this before, so it's not going to be a surprise—that we need to pull in the Department of Transportation to take a look at the size of the runways in our smaller aboriginal communities. We have runways that are just short of the length that is needed to allow the larger cargo planes to land, so we have planes landing with half a load. We have planes landing with half the seats filled. In my campaign, I witnessed some communities where people had to wait: a plane landed with 18 seats and only nine people could get on.

I think that if we're going to make a change, then we have to include looking at other things, not only the subsidy. The \$60-million subsidy is one thing that's going to be ongoing forever, but if we change the length of runways and we start building roads, we're going to eliminate that subsidy. We also have to include community gardens and local wild foods. Those things should be part of the review or part of the consideration as we move forward.

Maybe I could ask you to talk to those points, if you would.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I hear you about the runways. I think it's something that we need to look at, absolutely, and again, I think country food is something that I've heard about in the north. People want to be able to feed their families, but with climate change, it's just more expensive to get out to where they can hunt, and more expensive in so many ways. With the abundance of the fish up north, there's no excuse for kids to be hungry. It's going to be an ongoing conversation about how we really fix this program so that there are no hungry kids, and how hunters and fishermen can actually be proud again of feeding their families.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I also want to talk quickly about where you're going with some of the support for the programs that are aboriginal based. In the north, we have Dechinta that offers education programs to youth, and we also have Foxy, which is a health program for young females. On the environmental side, we have the indigenous boreal guardian program so they can provide monitoring in that area.

We have the aboriginal head start program, and I don't know, I don't think you can speak to it, but why is it in health and not in your department? It doesn't make sense.

Why do we still have aboriginal programs such as CanNor that don't cater to certain populations of aboriginal people? More specifically, the Métis are not allowed to apply. Maybe you could talk quickly about some of these things.

• (1715)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think this is a reason for why members of Parliament and committees can really have their ears to the ground. They hear about the programs that work and find out about the ones that really don't. We want that kind of feedback. If there are good programs where you think we can work with colleagues in other departments or other levels of government, then we should do that.

The aboriginal head start program almost came to our department when I was Minister of State for Public Health. It was about to be moved when our government fell. That was a tough conversation 10 years ago. It's an interesting question. I sort of remain a minister of social determinants of health, but I am interested in your observations. That aboriginal head start program in Yellowknife is one I'll never forget. I'll never forget that visit in terms of what they do with those children with such challenges.

Mr. Michael McLeod: My final question is on the opportunities for jobs in our communities. I come from a community that has a little over 60% unemployment, and we've been in that situation for many years. That's just for the adults. For youth, the percentage is even higher.

As we move forward and try to encourage youth to stay in school and do a lot of things on their own, I think it's our responsibility to first of all provide opportunity, as political people who make these decisions, but it's also our responsibility to make sure they learn how to work. Summer jobs are a really important part of growing up. We don't have a whole lot of opportunities on that front. I'm hoping the labour market opportunities you talked about are also going to be delivered in the Northwest Territories in our communities.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes, and I think Minister Mihychuk is also very interested in this. We do really believe that the summer jobs program is a tremendous experience in terms of contacts, confidence, and leadership. Yes, I'd love to work with you on that.

The Chair: There are 20 seconds left if you can make use of them. Okay? I think we're good.

Thank you very much for the questions.

Minister, thank you very much to you and your colleagues for the testimony today and for the wonderful information.

I'm going to step out of the Chair's seat. Charlie Angus will step in and run the vote. Thank you.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thanks very much. We'll get back to you on the things the committee asked for, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Don't get us in trouble, Charlie.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Charlie Angus): You're letting an anarchist have the chair?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Charlie Angus): We are still in session, so please take your seats. We're on camera, not in camera.

Our job right now, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), is to dispose of the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2017, minus the interim estimates that the House agreed to on March 21, 2016.

Do we have unanimous consent to deal with all the votes in one motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Charlie Angus): Shall all the votes under Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Canadian High Arctic Research Station of the main estimates 2016-17 carry?

CANADIAN HIGH ARCTIC RESEARCH STATION

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$18,853,197

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$658,200,538

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$41,432,179

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$6,652,765,968

(Votes 1, 5, and 10 agreed to on division)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Charlie Angus): Shall I report these votes to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Charlie Angus): Thank you very much.

That's it? Okay. We're adjourned.

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