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Chair

Mr. John Williams

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC)): We have quorum and we will get going. I understand the minister has to leave at 4:30.

The orders of the day are, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), chapter 5, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, “Education Program and Post-Secondary Student Support”, of the November 2004 report of the Auditor General of Canada, referred to the committee on Thursday, November 23, 2004.

Our witnesses today are the Honourable Andy Scott, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development we have Mr. Paul LeBlanc, senior assistant deputy minister, regional operations support and services; and Line Paré, director general of the education branch. We have, from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, Ms. Sheila Fraser, the Auditor General of Canada; and Mr. André Côté, a director in the office.

Many people may be aware that the public accounts committee passed a motion a couple of months or more ago asking the department and the minister to prepare a plan to present to the committee. The minister is now in a position to do that, and the minister has given me notice that he will be leaving at 4:30.

But before we get into that, I have just one issue I want to bring forward. You may recall we had a discussion regarding Mr. Kinsella and Mr. Frank Schiller. Last week I met with Mr. Schiller as well as with the law clerk, the assistant law clerk, and the clerk of the committee. I have here a letter from Mr. Walsh, the law clerk, that says:

Dear Mr. Williams:

You have asked me to report to the Committee on the meeting held in your office on April 27th where you interviewed Mr. Frank Schiller whom Mr. Kinsella had identified as the person who called him a few minutes before he appeared before the Committee on April 18th.

Mr. Schiller was cooperative and straightforward in his responses and recounted fully the exchanges he had had with Mr. Kinsella and the matter was fully considered.

In my view, this matter does not warrant any further consideration by the Committee in view of the fact that Mr. Kinsella testified that he did not feel constrained in his testimony and Mr. Schiller has indicated that there was never any intention to intimidate or constrain Mr. Kinsella as a witness. There appears to have been a misunderstanding between the parties, perhaps attributable to the pressure of events at the time.

Yours truly,

R.R. Walsh

That's dated May 4, 2005.

Mr. Kramp.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion with regard to your comments and following up on the letter from Mr. Walsh.

I would like to maybe preface my comments by expressing that I personally would reserve other thoughts or deliberations with witnesses at a later date, in discussion with my honourable colleagues at the table.

But I would like to present this motion at this particular time. I think it's in order with respect to getting on with the business of doing what we have to do with public accounts. The motion would be as follows: that notwithstanding the motion contained in the 10th report of the steering committee inviting Frank Schiller and Warren Kinsella to appear before this committee, this committee consider the matter closed and call no witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Murphy.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): I would be prepared to support that motion. The only caveat I'd make is, given the comments by Mr. Kinsella, the committee should use caution in dealing with him in the future. But I agree with Mr. Kramp and I would support that motion. I think we should be very cautious in dealing with this individual.

The Chair: Very briefly, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I will support it, but I do want to say that it does still leave one dangling thread. There's still a clear inference in writing by Mr. Kinsella, and that is, while it wasn't Mr. Schiller who was the source of the intimidation, the wording clearly leads you to believe there was some attempt by someone, somewhere, in a chain of events.

I have to concur, as much as the politician in me on the political side would love to continue to pull at that thread. Given where we've been and the likelihood of finding anything germane back to the main issues that are in front of us, I do think the motion is in order and I'll be supporting it.

• (1545)

The Chair: It seems everybody is speaking in favour. We have a minister here, so I do not want to spend any real time debating this issue.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Lastewka.

Hon. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I think the remarks made by Mr. Murphy concerning any future testimony...we're going to proceed with very much caution.

The Chair: That's on the record, yes.

Now to the business at hand. We're going to reverse the normal order. We're going to have the minister speak first and then the Auditor General, rather than have the Auditor General speak first.

The Honourable Andy Scott, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the floor is yours.

Hon. Andy Scott (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, and thank you very much for your graciousness, Auditor General, in reversing the order. I hadn't known this was different, but I do appreciate it.

Let me say, Mr. Chair, when I walked in the room I headed to that end. I sat there for many, many, many years.

So good afternoon. I'd like to thank the chair and the committee members for this opportunity for us to present our education action plan. This action plan specifically addresses the Auditor General's recommendations on first nation education as contained in chapter 5 of her November 2004 report. My presentation today also follows up on the commitment made by Deputy Minister Michael Horgan when he last appeared before you, in January 2005.

As the committee members are aware, the issue of first nation education in Canada is as important as it is complex, and I do not dispute the findings of the Auditor General nor criticism of the status quo. However, I do believe progress is being made. A brief glance at recent history shows that within one generation we have moved from the policy that established the residential school system to a policy that is committed to first nations inclusion. Today the vast majority of first nations communities manage their own schools and support their students who attend provincial schools through tuition agreements.

A number of first nations have established tribal or regional organizations that support on-reserve schools and their communities in much the same manner as provincial school boards. In addition, some first nations have expanded their control of and jurisdiction over first nations education through self-government agreements.

Education, one of the main socio-economic indicators, plays a significant role in the well-being of first nations communities. However, there are many challenges facing first nations communities. That is why the department is working with first nations in areas identified as key to high-quality education and student success. We also have the Mi'kmaq education agreement, legislation that in 1999 gave each of the nine participating communities the power to make laws related to elementary and secondary education that would be applicable in their communities and that created a corporation to support these communities in the delivery of education.

Over the last several years we have established a number of programs that have helped students, parents, and teachers. Recognizing that lifelong learning starts at birth, we've invested in every aspect of the learning environment. This includes special education and programs for learners with special needs, professional

development for teachers, community capacity development, and other measures designed to ensure students come to school ready to learn.

Is this enough? No, it isn't. Our country needs a skilled labour force. We have an aging population and a declining birth rate. The first nations population, in contrast, is a youthful one, with more than 50% under the age of 25.

Over the next 10 years we'll see a great increase in first nations children passing through the educational system. This is an opportunity to ensure this generation of aboriginal children contributes fully to their communities and to Canada. Progress in first nations education can only be accomplished by the federal government working in partnership with first nations, the provinces and territories, and other key stakeholders to ensure first nations learners enjoy the same educational opportunities and outcomes as other Canadian students.

Two follow-up sessions to the Canada-aboriginal peoples round table on lifelong learning produced recommendations that will inform our policy development on education. In the coming months my department will work with first nations representatives to reach a common understanding on the strategic vision for first nations education and outline the steps necessary to make this vision a reality.

I believe improving the educational outcomes of first nations students at all levels requires the pursuit of three broad but complementary goals: enhance the quality, accessibility, and relevance of educational programs and supports for first nations students; strengthen the planning, management, and accountability of first nations education programs and supports based on effective and meaningful first nations education systems; and foster interconnections and collaboration between first nations educators, federal, provincial, and territorial governments, and other stakeholders. The department will work with first nations and education stakeholders to develop a first nations education policy framework by June 2006 and a first nations education management framework by June 2007.

• (1550)

I should point out, however, that these are dates on which work will culminate. We will have measurements, identified on page 7 of the action plan, throughout the piece so we can check. And I would welcome the opportunity to come back to this committee or have it reviewed by the Auditor General as we go along that route.

This year's strategic vision for first nations education will outline the steps required to make this vision a reality and will clarify roles and responsibilities. The targeted draft date for that exercise is September 5, and it is to be finalized, after consultation, by December 2005. It will be informed by a joint review of INAC's education policies, programs, funding levels, and methodologies. The management framework will include improved funding mechanisms and resourcing options, enhanced performance indicators, tools, and reporting requirements, as well as accountability and monitoring processes. This will support the ultimate goal of first nations jurisdiction over first nations education.

INAC is working with first nations to strengthen the accountability regime in all areas of education, including the post-secondary student support program. INAC and first nations representatives are conducting policy and program reviews, which will contribute to the development of reliable accountability, principles, and practices. To address the issues of performance measurement, monitoring, and reporting, my department will take steps to increase performance measurement and reporting while reducing the reporting burden for first nations.

To conclude, we believe the implementation of this plan will ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of first nations education programs and services throughout the country. Through its clear focus, commitment to joint work, and concrete actions, the plan will help facilitate the continuous improvement of education outcomes for first nations students.

I should put this within the context of the round table process that I mentioned in passing in the text. As members probably know, last April 19 there was a summit that involved 20 ministers and members of Parliament and a large number of leaders from within the community. At that time, one of the areas that was identified for collaborative work was education. In fact, it was so important that we divided it in two and had two sectoral exercises in the case of education. That work is culminating in a policy retreat that has been announced for May 31. I think all of this has to be taken within the context of a genuine, and I think historic, collaboration between the community and the Government of Canada, leading to a first ministers meeting on aboriginal issues, which obviously would include education, in the fall.

Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup.

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

I presume you're tabling with the committee your *Education Action Plan: In response to the Auditor General's observations and recommendations, chapter 5 of the November 2004 report, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, April 2005*.

That's deposited with the clerk. If anybody wants copies, they can obtain them from the clerk, but I'm sure the department would have some extra copies too.

Madam Fraser, your opening remarks, please.

Ms. Sheila Fraser (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We thank you for this opportunity to appear before the committee to comment on the departmental action plan in relation to chapter 5

of our November 2004 report on Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, particularly the education program and post-secondary student support.

As you mentioned, I'm accompanied by André Côté, who is the director of this audit.

The motion adopted by this committee last February called for the action plan to be prepared in consultation with our office. We have had two meetings with departmental officials to discuss drafts of the action plan. At both of those meetings, we conveyed comments and suggestions to improve the document. Some of these are reflected in the document that has been presented to you today by the department.

Mr. Chair, I would like to start with three positive aspects that we see in this action plan. First, thanks to the persistence of your committee, you have commitments from the department on a set of actions that will guide the department, first nations, and other partners as they work together to improve the education of the children living in first nations communities.

Second, we are pleased to see that the department's commitment to define its roles and responsibilities will be the first deliverable. The department has committed to complete a draft statement of its roles and responsibilities by September of this year. As we mentioned in January, we believe that clarifying roles and responsibilities is a prerequisite to progress in first nations education and to effective accountability.

Third, the plan sets specific dates for the completion of key actions and commitments. This will provide a basis against which the department and other interested parties can measure progress toward implementing this plan.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, I would like to make a few other observations about this action plan.

I am disappointed to see that it is difficult to establish a precise link between the measures suggested by the Department and our observations and recommendations, as you asked in your motion. To determine if the plan follows up on all our recommendations, one has to reorganize those recommendations and establish the link with the measures suggested. We have added to the present statement a table showing the department's answers to our recommendations which, we hope, we be helpful to the committee.

This action plan deals with all our recommendations of November 2005. However, it is difficult to see if the measures related to each of those recommendations answer all the needs since few details had been provided.

Some of the words used to describe the measures or the expected outcomes seem to be too technical and we would have preferred a clearer presentation.

Furthermore, this plan does not include many specific measures required to answer the needs of 38% of elementary and secondary students in the provincial schools. It is particularly important that these measures be aimed at the secondary level. Since the percentage of students in provincial schools is higher at the secondary level than at the elementary level, the provincial partners have an essential role to play to help us face the challenges raised by the high rate of dropping-out and the low rate of graduation at the secondary level.

Finally, there is no clear distinction in this plan between the needs of elementary and secondary students and the needs of post-secondary students. Those needs are obviously interrelated but we believe it would have been easier for us to check on the progress made in the implementation of our recommendations and observations if the measures had been presented separately.

Our understanding is that this plan reflects some measures that the department and First nations have agreed to undertake jointly, and that those measures cannot be changed unilaterally. We also understand that this plan will be implemented within the broader framework of the policy established by the government with the native peoples, First Nations included.

[English]

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, there is no doubt that this action plan is a step in the right direction. We are guardedly hopeful that it will result in concrete changes in the education program between now and June 2007. Your committee may want to ask the department for more specificity, as the minister mentioned, as the plan rolls out, including concrete deliverables and interim dates. You may also want to discuss how you will be kept informed of the progress being made by the department as it implements its plan and, if required, of any changes in deliverables or timeframes.

Mr. Chair, that concludes our observations with respect to the action plan, and we would be pleased to answer any questions committee members may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Fraser.

Again, the appendix you referred to in your opening statement will be tabled with the clerk and available for anybody who would like a copy.

Mr. Fitzpatrick, please, you have eight minutes.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: If I can just interrupt you for a second, Mr. Fitzpatrick, I believe, if everybody looks at page 7 of the report by the department, you will see milestones and timelines, which are in essence a very brief summary of the report. That's on page 7.

Mr. Fitzpatrick.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I believe in a system approach to things, and I also believe in something called continuous improvement. The officials that were here last time, quite honestly, Mr. Minister, had a rough ride from the committee. I think it wasn't a good day.

I want to bring in some of my life experiences. Back in 1974, I was in law school, but I had taught in a public school system for four years that was of high quality. I had the opportunity, for April, May,

and June, to work in a first nations school in northern Saskatchewan. Quite frankly, the contrast was appalling. There was no system in place. The aboriginal people are being let down in a major way, as far as I'm concerned.

It's very troubling to me, personally, to come back here, some 25 to 30 years later, and start hearing symptoms or descriptions of things that are very troubling to me. I was asking myself whether we've made any progress.

And to have officials in the department basically say that they're helpless and can't do anything to deal with this problem because there are agreements in place for self-government, or whatever they were alluding to, and they can't really do anything about it made me just question in my own mind what they were doing here. If they're helpless to do anything, why are taxpayers even paying them to do anything if they can't deliver the goods?

I guess the real concern I have here is that in a lot of areas in this country we don't have a system in place; we have a chaotic situation in place. Everybody knows—and I don't care which culture you're from—in our society, if you're 18 or 19 and you don't have good language skills, if you don't have good math skills, if you don't have a good grounding in basic science and other things, life is going to be very difficult for you. It's too darn late to start fixing the problem after they've spent 13 years in a school system and all they've got is a piece of paper that says they graduated, but they can't read or write.

This sounds like more studies and more consultation, which is a step in the right direction, as the Auditor General is saying, but I guess the question I have for you, sir, is, when is this consultation and discussion process going to get over and get us into the stage where we can institute an actual system in place where we can start getting measurable results and get into continuous improvement and good management of a system that will, in the long run, improve the quality of life of first nations people in this country?

• (1600)

Hon. Andy Scott: For the most part, I would concur with the things you've said. I've been very outspoken about the need for us to make modern the educational system for first nations in Canada. I think that probably is the cornerstone of the K-to-12 aspect of the round table work.

If I were to identify anything that came out of that exercise, it would be this: unlike the school systems that exist in various provinces and so on, first nations schools tend to exist in isolation, without the kinds of support given by the school board that I know, in Fredericton—and you talk of your life experiences—whether it be professional development or the kinds of testing and accountability that we speak to here.

So I am not only supportive of but also committed to that approach to enhancing the system. However, it is critically important, as we go forward, that we...and not that we undertake studies. We're consulting with the community, and that will go on forever, because that is the nature of the relationship. But I wouldn't want anyone to get the impression that we're talking here about studies, unless it means, I guess, better measurement, better evaluation, making sure that every step we take is the right step, and then knowing if it is the right step—all of those kinds of things.

That's what this is designed to do. You will see that the steps are incremental. That's there for a reason, so that we are not only accountable to ourselves, to make sure we're meeting our targets and timelines, but also accountable to you, so that you can in fact hold the department to this agenda.

As the Auditor General said, it isn't independent of the work that's going on as a result of the round table, which has been very ambitious. That is slated to conclude on May 31.

There's been a lot of talk about the need for us to make sure our program and our system will be integrated with the provincial systems. There is so much overlap—I'll put it that way, in a positive sense—that it's going to be critically important that we engage the provinces.

So the process we're involved in now through the round tables would see a bilateral arrangement. We're dealing with first nations education, with the first nations themselves, and the community, to arrive at some policy decisions, some shared approach. Frankly, I'm quite excited about it. As soon as that's done—again, May 31—we move into the exercise of engaging the provinces to make sure we're all on the same page. I think this is the appropriate way to go.

Quite frankly, I'm happy that we're also doing what the committee has asked us to do by way of accountability and measurement, because as we do things differently, we need to know that we're doing them right, that we're doing them efficiently. And at the end of the day, the test of our success is simply the educational opportunities for first nations kids.

• (1605)

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: I guess the concern I have, sir, is that I've often wondered whether, if I went back over the last 30 years and looked at standing committees, I would see ministers of the crown in charge of Indian Affairs appear before committees and talk about round tables and studies and initiatives and so on to improve the quality of first nations, and it would play out just like a broken record.

The Chair: Mr. Fitzpatrick, you have one minute left. I do want to keep people to time in order for Mr. Christopherson to be able to speak to the minister.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: Okay.

I hope at some point in the near future this consultation process will come to a halt and we will have a man who will take the bull by the horns, start implementing something, and get in a permanent system that will lead to continuous improvement for the aboriginal people in our country.

The Chair: A brief response from the minister.

Hon. Andy Scott: Very briefly, I can say with absolute certainty that if you were to do an assessment of the educational attainment within the community 30 years ago, if that's the time you would choose, and compare it with the educational attainment today... There are numbers that are available here in terms of people who have graduated from high school, retention rates, and people who have graduated from university. The numbers aren't good enough, but the numbers are considerable.

I think where we fall short—and as I say, the numbers aren't good enough—is that we also have to do this relative to the rest of Canada, the non-aboriginal population of Canada, who have also seen significant increases in those kinds of statistics. So we have to measure one against the other.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, colleague.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

Monsieur Cleary, s'il vous plaît, huit minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Cleary (Louis-Saint-Laurent): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Minister. Welcome, Ms. Fraser.

While listening to you, I remembered something. Eighteen or 19 years ago, while negotiating for the Conseil Attikamek-Montagnais, a young adult of the Betsiamites band came to work with me on a comprehensive land claim.

There was a boy who had finished grade 2 at the Betsiamites school and who had just registered at a school in Québec City but that school refused to accept him in grade 3. They said that he didn't even have a grade 1 education. Of course, this caused quite a scandal. Some people even said that it was racist not to accept a student from our own schools. I met with the director of the school to get more information and he demonstrated to me that the child really did not have the required level of education. We complained to Indian affairs. We told the minister that the children were not educated well enough to be accepted in other schools.

When we were talking about negotiations, parents told us that they wanted their children to be as well educated as their white friends but there was a difference. Of course, I was told at that time that everything was being done to achieve that result and that the department was doing everything in its power to make sure that children would be well prepared.

I remember a meeting similar to this one where Ms. Fraser told us that it would take, if I remember correctly, 26 years to fill the gap. I almost fell off my chair. I thought this doesn't make any sense. We started trying to fill the gap 18 years ago but, today, we have not made any progress at all.

I read your document. Of course, I did not read it in detail because it is difficult but, to my mind, this is too little and too late. As we say in Québec, what is needed is medication fit for a horse. Something extremely major has to be done and this is what I expect from Indian affairs and Northern development Canada. I understand it will be difficult. I make sure not to blame anybody, even though I blamed a few people last time but, really, something has to be done. This is insane for our communities and for our youth.

Mr. Minister, I won't say that the work is not being done but one has to conclude that we have not received what we were entitled to receive. There is some catching-up to do. It is not enough to state that you will take from 2003 to 2007 to design a strategic framework for First Nations education. Even if you were to succeed in designing it by 2007, when would something concrete be done to educate our youth? We do not have the luxury of taking three years to design a strategic framework. It is already too late. It is high time to act.

I have to tell you that it is not enough. Do you believe it is enough? Don't you think that, at this pace, the problem will never be resolved? Your duty as a minister is to make sure that it is resolved. I know that your officials tell you that this is today's reality. I am telling you what I have already told your officials: this is not enough. This is not the time to do that. You have to do something else.

● (1610)

I urge you to do something in that direction.

[English]

Hon. Andy Scott: Again I will respond as I did to Brian earlier. The reality is that, first of all, this action plan is in response to the Auditor General's work and is also a result of a motion from here, so it speaks to those things.

The need for us to fundamentally redesign the way we provide education is not necessarily the subject of this particular document. This document is critical because at the end of the day nobody wishes to invest in a system that isn't working. The only way you can know if the system is working is to measure it. And that's what this speaks to in a whole bunch of ways, frankly.

But the broader issue of what I would refer to as the big bang that is necessary to fundamentally change this is the work of the round table that has been going on since last April and that culminated in May. It was fundamental that the exercise had to do an assessment, albeit not perhaps as scientific as this, of the current situation.

I would share the view that has been expressed before, that the fundamental problem is that we don't have the systemic support for the educational system. What distinguishes the system in first nations from the system that exists elsewhere in Canada is that the first nations system doesn't have the same kinds of supports. Significant collaboration with first nations will be required so that in fact they have more ownership, and that is something we're committed to.

And that also will require resources. At the end of the day we cannot make a credible request for resources if we can't measure how we're doing with the resources we have.

So the broader issue that Monsieur Cleary has expressed is one, frankly, that I share, that the current level, the difference, the gap that has been referred to is unacceptable. It's unacceptable to us as Canadians and there's no more to say. The reality is, getting to how to fix it will require the kinds of measurement tools that we're speaking about here. That's a general reference to this, but conceptually at least that is what we need. But it will also require strategic actions within the educational system itself. It's not going to be solved just by measuring it more; we're going to have to act on the findings of those evaluations.

● (1615)

The Chair: You have only 15 seconds left, Mr. Clearly. I'm just going to call it there and go to Mr. Holland.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank Madam Fraser as well as Minister Scott for taking the opportunity to come and see us today, as well as the other witnesses.

Let me first state that back when the deputy minister came before this committee and made a commitment to bring an action plan forward in the timeframe that was discussed, I think there were a lot of us who thought that was going to be very aggressive and wondered if we'd actually see something.

I think it's a very encouraging sign that the action plan has come back and is in front of us. I think it's a sign of the commitment that is being made to take very seriously the recommendations of the Auditor General, so that's encouraging. I guess, though, as we're moving forward, there are questions about how we make sure we stay on the rails with this, particularly with our committee's interest in following up with the recommendations the auditor made.

Would there be a willingness, Minister, to have progress reports to this committee on a semi-regular basis that perhaps could also be shared with the auditor so that we could stay informed as to the progress you're making with respect to this action plan?

Hon. Andy Scott: Yes. In fact, I alluded to that I think in my opening comments. If you go to the milestones and timelines, there's more detail there than I gave when I made those comments, and I would be very willing to have the department or myself report as you would see fit.

The other thing is, in the Auditor General's opening comments there were some expressions around the format it took, so that we could actually measure exactly against the observations. I've asked the department, and they've agreed that in some cases the way the action plan is laid out is more consistent with the order of actions as they would occur to us. It doesn't necessarily translate as well as it should to the report. It was born of the actions. Therefore, I've asked and the department has agreed that we will in fact reformat in a way that would make it easier to make comparisons between what we're doing and what we've been asked to do. There were also some questions about making the language and so on more simple, and we will attempt to do that.

So yes, it's our intention I think to be here as often as we need to be to make sure your committee and the Canadian public generally are satisfied that we are doing two things: that we are spending Canadian taxpayers' dollars well, and at the same time getting the results that I believe we're obliged to get for aboriginal children.

Mr. Mark Holland: For me, I think that's extremely important. I know you alluded to it, but I wanted to underscore it or make it specific, because I do think that as we're going forward and dealing with these recommendations, such dialogue back and forth would be very useful. I appreciate your commitment in that regard.

I understand that dealing with an auditor's report and its recommendations is very much a work in progress. I want to talk for a second about the round tables that were launched a year ago, or several years after the 2000 audit. With regard to lifelong learning specifically, can you tell us what direction that's heading in now; specifically, what does that particular round table do to resolve some of the issues the Auditor General has raised and are before us now?

Hon. Andy Scott: I think the work of the round table is significantly more general, if you like. In fact, education is only one of six elements, and one could easily identify 25 or 50 different streams of activity that have resulted from that.

I think there are a number of things. One, it's critically important to recognize, and it's my understanding of what's emerged, that the community and the government have identified this element out of all of the elements as the one that can actually have the most impact on improving the lives of first nations, Métis, and Inuit Canadians. There is a significant consensus around that, which is a good thing. I think we've identified a need for a more systemic approach, including in terms of measurement, making sure the things we're doing are working, and having more access to information and all of those kinds of things, but it also speaks to the issues of cultural sensitivity and language and all of the issues that I believe would be better supported if we had a better system.

I know that Brian—if you don't mind being called that—referred to his life experience. In my life experience, there is one first nations school in my school district in Fredericton. They are part of a huge school board or district, which has to be overwhelming. Even if the integration is perfect, the reality is that this should co-exist in my province with a system that would include all first nations schools, meaning that the integration would work in two ways and not just one. I think that would be helpful for a whole range of reasons, which we probably don't have time to get into today.

• (1620)

Mr. Mark Holland: I appreciate that answer, but I'm wondering if we could go for a second to the statement the Auditor General made today, and perhaps just get some clarity from you on some of the areas causing her some concern. She's largely I think very supportive of the direction being headed in, but there were some questions. One was with respect to the distinction between issues relating to elementary and secondary education. The Auditor General expressed a desire that it would maybe be better to separate these two. I'm wondering why the decision was made not to do that, and if you had any thoughts around that.

Hon. Andy Scott: I'll go to the officials for the technical reasons, but before I do that, I should say that we have discussed it. In fact, as I said, we're going to try to respond in a fashion that's easier to understand for those who aren't involved in our department on a day-to-day basis; what makes sense to us is sometimes not necessarily the same for someone who is not engaged all the time.

So if I may, Paul or Line.

Mr. Paul LeBlanc (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Regional Operations Support and Services, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Very briefly, I would assure the Auditor General and her colleagues, and the committee members, that the measures in the plan are certainly intended to, and do, apply

fully to post-secondary education, as they do to elementary and secondary education, and they apply fully to aboriginal children studying in provincial schools, as they do to individuals in schools on reserve.

We accept the point that this could have been expressed more explicitly, but we want to show you that the impact of all of these measures will be rolled out in all of these areas. I think it would be helpful to provide you with progress reports along the lines the Auditor General recommended today, breaking out the streams of activity.

The Chair: A very brief response or question, Mr. Holland, of 30 seconds.

Mr. Mark Holland: That's okay. I know your time is short and that I'm not going to get in much within 30 seconds.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Christopherson, please, for eight minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for attending.

Madam Fraser, as always, it's good to see you.

First of all, I want to again underscore what the Auditor General has said:

However, it is difficult to tell whether the actions related to each recommendation will address all the issues as few details are provided.

I probably have three questions, but my first one would be this. What are you going to do about that to give us some detail so that you can raise everyone's comfort level?

There are two issues I want to focus on. One is on the education gap. We know that the original Auditor General's report of November 2004, last year, brought out the fact that 28 years are now required, instead of 27 years, to close the education gap that exists between first nations people on reserves and the Canadian population.

I know one of your references was to the original action plan, *Gathering Strength*, the one from 1998. Your ministry is big on the words "action plans". That was seven years ago. Seven years ago, they said one of the things this was going to do was:

...include a stronger and better-tooled First Nations education system and a faster resolution of the gap in student achievement between First Nations and other Canadians.

You came out with this great, grandiose plan in 1998, and you were going to achieve these things. Then we get an auditor report in November 2004 that tells us it's taking longer. We're not even going in the right direction, Minister. We're going to take longer now.

I'd like to know two things from you. First of all, why is that? Secondly, what assurances are you going to give us that the new action plan is going to resolve that gap issue?

The last question, because we don't have an awful lot of time, is on roles and responsibilities. I have to tell you that this one drives me round the bend. It was reported again in 2004, and it was reported in the audit of 2000, that you need to have roles and responsibilities and that this was a key thing.

In your comments, you made note of the importance of measuring things. You can't measure anything if you don't have a starting point. Your roles and responsibilities are the first obvious starting point to measure whether or not you're really getting anywhere.

The committee then called in your representatives from the ministry. They came and said that we were right. They should have done it, but they didn't. They promised to have it by June 2002. They generated a bunch of drafts, which are mentioned here, but never any final product. They actually gave a date. After they missed the first deadline, they gave a second deadline, and then they missed that one.

The last time your deputy was here I asked him about that. In opening remarks, his comments were that this was not, however, a straightforward task, given the number of stakeholders, differing views, etc. That's fine, except he already knew that when he gave the first deadline, and he knew that when he gave the second deadline. It's not much of an excuse for missing the third deadline.

I have some real concerns. I know the Auditor General took the time to mention that you were going to draft reports, but I also looked at her 2004 report that said there had been numerous drafts in the past.

So I say, with great respect to the Auditor General, I'm not quite as generous as you are today, Madam, because the fact that they're going to generate a draft by the end of this year doesn't get us any further than before.

When I look at their action report, it tells me that the final date is going to be June 2006. How long is it going to take us before we actually complete roles and responsibilities, the starting point for everything, Minister? When is it going to be done?

We don't want more action plans, buzz words, and drafts. When are you going to have the thing ready? When is it actually going to start to close that gap?

All you've done to date is successfully fail. You've put us in a worse situation than the one we had before the Auditor General had a look at it.

Could we please have some feedback, Minister?

• (1625)

The Chair: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Andy Scott: In reverse order, on the roles and responsibilities document, the draft is scheduled for September 2005, with the opportunity then to consult with the community on a document that we could agree to by the end of the year. In terms of roles and responsibilities, I also think it's critical to recognize the large number of players. It's not an excuse to not get it done. It simply has to inform the process, including the provinces and territories.

The thing that would distinguish this exercise from exercises in the past is that we are in the middle of a process, which is independent of this right now. There has been enormous take-up by the first nations community and significant involvement in all of the sectoral workshops that we've had on education, with an eye towards doing exactly this. The opportunity presented by having a first ministers meeting on aboriginal issues this fall, to refine that so it fits

with everybody, is an opportunity that simply hasn't existed in the past.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, that's one. There are two more.

Hon. Andy Scott: The gap in terms of educational attainment is something we've referred to and is the principal objective of the exercise we're involved in with the community itself, and have been since the round table commenced. I would say if you can identify any one objective, that's it, to remediate that gap.

The timelines in which the present process would deliver more equality are unacceptable. That's the reason we're doing what we're doing, because this is proof that the system isn't working.

And finally, in terms of details, there are more. We can get into them. The action plan we're speaking of here is an action plan in response to the Auditor General's report and a motion of this committee. This is not the detailed action plan that would be our response to educational needs in Canada. That's part of the exercise we're engaged in now and will be an end product of the round table process that is scheduled to be completed on May 31.

• (1630)

Mr. David Christopherson: If I may, with great respect—I appreciate the answers—the reason I have trouble with your answer that there are a lot of stakeholders is your ministry knew that when they gave the first deadline. They knew it when they gave the second deadline. You've missed both of those. Now you're giving us a new deadline, and I'm just raising the concern about the lack of evidence to show that you're going to be any more successful at reaching your third deadline than you were your second or your first.

If I may also point out, on the gap, the trend line is going the wrong way, Minister. This original report came out seven years ago. It's fine for you to say, oh, it's not working and we've got to fix it, but you're the government that is responsible. You've taken seven years to put the car into reverse and start going backwards. What I want to know is, when are we going to go forward?

The Chair: I'm going to ask the minister to respond because he has to leave.

Hon. Andy Scott: I thank you for that, and I thank you for the hour we've had together.

The reality is—and I say this with I think significant support from the community—that the level of engagement has never been greater. This is not going to be a problem we're going to solve for the community; it's going to be solved with the community.

I think that's part of why I'm optimistic that this exercise will be more successful than exercises in the past. This will be helpful. We will measure our progress better than we have in the past.

Finally, the level of engagement by the provinces at this point—because the educational system for first nations in Canada cannot be seen as independent from the integration that is necessary within the provinces—is greater than it has ever been on this file, I suspect, in Canadian history.

So all of those things cause me to be optimistic and to feel that we are going to be successful where in the past we have not been.

The Chair: Minister, we thank you very much for coming before us. We appreciate that you have another commitment. You may leave, and we will continue with Mr. LeBlanc and Madame Paré.

The bells are ringing. We will break about five minutes before the vote and go, but now it's Mr. Kramp, for eight minutes, please.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is unfortunate that the minister has to leave right now. I had some previous discussions with him that I would have liked to have followed up here at committee. However, that having been stated, I will direct my comments in a different frame to Mr. LeBlanc and Madame Paré.

I'm concerned about two things. I'm concerned about direction, and I'm also concerned about transition. In other words, I want to know where we're going, and then I want to know who's going to fall by the wayside and/or who is going to be affected negatively in the transition to getting a better process.

If I can be a bit more direct now, we've had studies and studies and studies, and now we have another round table. Your department has been asked to come up with an action plan. Quite honestly, you have an action plan, and yet we still haven't even had the full deliberations of a round table. So then the round table will come in and make a whole lot more recommendations, but what if they don't dovetail with your action plan? And then all of a sudden we have to have another action plan based on the revelations of the round table.

In other words, here we go, around and around and around and around—and just to emphasize the point Mr. Cleary has made and Mr. Christopherson has made, this seems to be a never-ending ongoing process, and somehow it has to stop. It has to stop in order to have definable results.

We always want to improve, but where do we go? I'm echoing that concern because somehow there has to be some faith that we are going to get to a resolve. Right now, there isn't one participant in this field, from anywhere, who feels a great deal of assurance that we've reached a definite conclusion, that we have an absolute plan—whether it's a business plan or an action plan—that is doable and that is not subject to just another whim and/or some other outside interference or influence. I just wanted to make that point.

I'm asking for an opinion. You've been exposed to a number of the goings-on of the round table. Are we moving to a more autonomous set of directions? Are we moving towards a bit more of an assimilation in the provincial system? Where are we going?

• (1635)

Mr. Paul LeBlanc: I have a number of points, if I may.

While the action plan we've tabled has many components, they really aggregate into two fundamental streams. One is a policy stream and one is a management stream. In that management stream are measurements, outputs, better management, accountability, better reports, the right kinds of things—managing in a modern, professional manner. They're both very important. The policy theme is very important. It is being affected now by the reviews we're doing, and in all these reviews we have first nations organizations working with us. The policy retreats and the round tables are going on, as you aptly describe, but many of the same people are involved

in the train of work described here as are involved in the round table type of work. So I don't think it's likely that there will be these great clashing counter-moves from the policy perspective.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Do you feel there's some consistency, at least within the process?

Mr. Paul LeBlanc: I believe that the nature, the model, and the way the processes are unfolding are conducive to consistency and, more importantly, to consensus-building, at a time that's really opportune, when the first nations organizations are quite ready and are working strongly with government, when the provinces and territories are also at the table, and all the elements of government are present. I think the minister talked about how opportune a time it is.

These management means—along the management stream, managing better—will be important breakthroughs, important innovations. Whether the policy goes a bit to the left or the right, a bit up or a bit down, they will be important innovations that should apply to whichever policy choices are adopted.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Do these positions, management levels of qualification, or different levels of management teams, have clearly written responsibilities, or are we making this up on the fly?

Mr. Paul LeBlanc: Well, we're certainly not making it up on the fly. The components in the plan that talk to the management system weren't developed by Madame Paré and myself, or any couple of people off on their own. We drew people from throughout the department. All of our regions, our financial experts, and our educational experts were involved. We consulted with first nations leadership in the development of the plan. We had the benefit of input on a few occasions from the experts in Madame Fraser's organization.

When members say, "How do we know it's serious this time?", part of the response is, "I can assure you that the department's reaction to the call to develop this plan was a very high priority in the department, a very high priority of the ministers, and it mobilized a great many people from throughout the department."

Mr. Daryl Kramp: That may be, but I'm not seeing it translated into results.

If I can just give a simple example based on a personal experience within my own riding, there doesn't seem to be an effective level of communication to make an effective transition. We've had a form of funding for a post-secondary institution for 14 to 16 years—very successful. Away the funding goes. Whether it was ad hoc or planned, I honestly don't know, but all of a sudden now we're going to a new system. A new system all of a sudden means the funding is stopped or dramatically curtailed, and we're going to head to something else.

In the meantime, you have an effective operation that's cast aside. You have hundreds and hundreds of students who are saying, "What do we do when we're in the middle of a multi-year program?" We have an institution with teachers and federations all involved. We have culpability, relationships with community colleges, and degree courses—this is only one example I'm telling you about—yet their funding is just dramatically reduced to the point that they're rendered inoperative.

My comment to the minister is we can't have this. You can't throw the baby out with the bathwater. In other words, if you're bringing in a new system, whether you're going to have a provincial association, or whatever you're going to do with it, you can't leave them without that lifeline until you have an effective transition.

My point is that this could be extrapolated across this country, whether it's in post-secondary or secondary education. As you are going from one system to another and trying to make improvements in the system, recognize that you cannot just make arbitrary changes without having a huge impact on communities when you have the very few success stories in this. I'm proud to be able to say this is a wonderful success story, and there are a few like that. If we are treating an institution like that—

● (1640)

The Chair: I'm afraid your time has expired. We're going to have a brief response from Mr. LeBlanc.

Mr. Paul LeBlanc: There's a lot of wisdom in the point. It's a good cautionary point, very important. As we try to progress, particularly when we're dealing with a fairly fragile system, we have to be concerned about protecting the successes we have and building on the strengths.

I'm not aware of this specific case, but certainly the principle is a valid one that I heartily accept.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Kramp. My apologies for cutting you off so quickly.

Mr. Murphy, I believe we've got about eight minutes, and then we will suspend for the vote.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: This issue was dealt with in a 2000 report from the Office of the Auditor General. The Auditor General made certain recommendations at that time and they were agreed to by your department. It appears the department failed to live up to the recommendations. I'll not repeat the language of Mr. Christopherson, although I agree with much of what he said, but the department has been less than stellar. The recommendations have been reconfirmed in this process.

Yesterday we finished an extensive process on governance in some of the departments. One of the problems is the ever-revolving door of deputy ministers. We see a deputy minister there for nine months, a year, a year and a half, and then he or she is gone. When the auditor's report was tabled in 2000, who was the deputy minister and how many deputy ministers did you go through before you reached Mr. Horgan in 2005? I understand Mr. Horgan has been there a year.

Ms. Line Paré (Director General, Education Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): If I recall, the deputy minister at the time was Shirley Serafini. Since 2000, I think Mr. Horgan is the fifth deputy minister.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: The fifth deputy minister in four years.

Ms. Line Paré: If I'm correct.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: So who were the three deputy ministers between Shirley Serafini and Mr. Horgan?

Ms. Line Paré: I have a bad memory, but there was Marc Lafrenière, Alain Jolicoeur, and...

Mr. Paul LeBlanc: I think that would make Mr. Horgan the fourth.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: This is one of the main components of the problem. Is Shirley Serafini still with the public service?

Mr. Paul LeBlanc: I believe Madam Serafini is the ambassador to Norway.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: So she was there when the 2000 report was tabled. She would have accepted the recommendations, and she probably left shortly afterwards.

Mr. Paul LeBlanc: Correct.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Is this the most recent plan adopted? Does this appear in the report on plans and priorities?

● (1645)

Mr. Paul LeBlanc: It certainly will.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Has it?

Ms. Line Paré: When the motion was passed, we had already produced our report on plans and priorities. We're just starting the process of preparing what we call the DPR. It will definitely be mentioned.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Since 2000, have any of the recommendations that came out of the 2000 audit ever appeared in the report on plans and priorities?

Ms. Line Paré: I don't have the answer, but we would be pleased to go back and verify that from our plans and priorities reports since 2000.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Chairman, I'm through, but I believe Mr. Lastewka may want to take a minute. Is that correct?

Hon. Walt Lastewka: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, witnesses, for being with us. I know that we're pressed for time.

Mr. LeBlanc and Ms. Paré, after hearing some of the discussion on dedication and how we will know that this is now going to be done on a timely basis, I, as a committee member, would like to take you up on your offer to come back to the committee, probably within 10 or 12 months, to understand the progress you've made in each of the areas, because we have a concern, as expressed by the Auditor General.

Mr. Chairman, I think I'd like to get it on the record that we would like them to come back, as scheduled by you and the clerk, in order to see the progress that has been made and maybe to understand a little bit some of the difficulties in implementing certain items that the Auditor General has brought out. I'd like to compare those items, if you could, in a report down the road, Mr. Chairman, at your request.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lastewka. That's valuable.

As we all know, we have to vote. By the time the vote is over and we come back, we may have just a few minutes. I'm thinking that rather than suspending the meeting, we adjourn the meeting, and at the steering committee tomorrow we'll discuss whether we actually want to have a continuation. Mr. Lastewka said that perhaps we should leave it for a year.

Before we adjourn, I know Mr. Allison has a notice of motion.

Mr. Murphy, do you have something to say?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: I just have a procedural point, Mr. Chairman. Since we are adjourned early, the Office of the Auditor General or the department may want to submit something in writing to conclude the meeting. They may have points to make but they don't have time now. I agree with your suggestion to adjourn, but they may want to submit something in writing.

The Chair: Okay. If any department or the Auditor General wishes to make closing comments, send them in writing to the committee, please. Feel free to do so.

Mr. Allison has a notice of motion, and then I will adjourn.

Mr. Allison.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The first one was just to make a friendly amendment to Mr. Sauvageau's motion in terms of dates, and that was, on the last one, to include 1993 to 2003.

The Chair: Are you agreeable to that amendment to your motion, Mr. Sauvageau?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Absolutely.

[*English*]

The Chair: Notice of motion by Mr. Sauvageau. It will be amended and brought forward at a later date.

Mr. Dean Allison: I also want to submit a motion.

The Chair: Another one?

Mr. Dean Allison: Yes. That was an amendment, but I also want to submit a motion.

The Chair: I thought that was the motion.

I really don't want to have to suspend. I really have to adjourn the meeting. I'm sorry, I will have to get it later.

The meeting is adjourned.

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