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Mr. Bruce Stanton

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good morning, dear colleagues. Today marks the sixth meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

Welcome to our presentation this morning.

Our orders of the day include a briefing from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development regarding the issue of post-secondary education for aboriginal people.

We're going to start this morning with a 10-minute presentation, leading off with Mr. Yeates.

So I'd ask you to start, Mr. Yeates, and to introduce the other members of the delegation with you today. You have approximately 10 minutes; we'll provide some latitude on that. Then we'll go to questions from members.

Mr. Yeates.

Mr. Neil Yeates (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you very much, Chair.

With me today is Christine Cram. Christine is the assistant deputy minister for education and social program partnerships. Next is Allan MacDonald, who is with the Office of the Federal Interlocutor, and then Christopher Duchesnes, who is the head of our Inuit relations secretariat.

[Translation]

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee,

[English]

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the important issue of post-secondary education. I will outline what we're doing to improve the educational achievement of aboriginal students and, specifically, what we are doing to improve access to post-secondary education for first nations and Inuit students through our post-secondary education program and other education initiatives.

I think we all understand the importance of aboriginal education. Education is key to a better future for a young and growing aboriginal population. The Centre for the Study of Living Standards and other research institutes have confirmed the potential for this young and growing population to make a significant contribution to

Canada's GDP, tax revenues, and reductions in social transfers. The demographics of a young and growing aboriginal population and an older non-aboriginal population mean there will be important opportunities for well-educated aboriginal youth in both today's labour market and those of the future.

However, available data suggests that the number of first nations and Inuit students accessing funds through our post-secondary education program is going down, at a time when population needs are rising. Under our department's post-secondary education program, approximately 23,000 first nations and Inuit students across Canada are receiving about \$314 million to help with the cost of tuition fees, books, transportation, and living allowances. This is down from nearly 30,000 students a decade ago.

Although clearly this poses a challenge, some progress has been made. In 2006 approximately 7% of first nations people between the ages of 26 and 64 had a university degree, which is up from 5% in 2001. Similarly, 4% of Inuit students had a university degree in 2006, up from 2% in 2001. However, in comparison, 23% of the non-aboriginal population had a university degree in 2006. Attainment levels are, however, significantly better for college certificates, with 17% of first nations having a college certificate in 2006, compared with 20% for the non-aboriginal population. Clearly, the gap in achievement levels means that we need to speed up the rate of improvement to improve educational outcomes for students.

That is why it is so essential that now, more than ever, the federal government play an active role in supporting access to post-secondary education, especially for aboriginal youth. This year alone, the Government of Canada is investing a total of about \$9.8 billion on post-secondary education to address this important issue. What's more, through Canada's economic action plan, HRSDC are making additional investments in labour market and skills development for aboriginal people. These investments will help aboriginal men and women to not only develop vital skills but also take advantage of existing employment opportunities.

In budget 2008, the government committed to review Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's post-secondary education to ensure that it is coordinated with other programs and that it provides the support that first nation and Inuit students need to stay in school and complete their education.

Committee members may recall that the post-secondary education program was examined by the Government of Canada—including this committee in 2006—and outside evaluators a number of times over the past several years.

• (0910)

[Translation]

Some of the observations are that the current program does not ensure that students who most need support get funding; and, awareness among First Nation and Inuit youth of the full range of options for post-secondary education funding is limited, especially for those on reserve.

[English]

There needs to be better information on the results being achieved by the program, so that the government can improve the way it reports to all Canadians.

Through the current review, we want to determine how best to increase student access to post-secondary education and ensure that the maximum number of students benefit from the resources available. As well, the review will provide recommendations on how best to support first nation and Inuit students through greater complementarity with other Government of Canada programs. The review will also look to ensure that funding reaches the students who need it most and that the program is accountable to aboriginal students and to all Canadians.

The review is looking at the financial and non-financial barriers faced by students. For example, students may underestimate the costs of attending college and university or may not explore what other types of student financial assistance are available to them. We know that first nations students are more likely to be older, female, and have child care responsibilities; these factors increase the barriers to completion. They are more likely to interrupt their studies to earn employment income. While many of these barriers exist for non-aboriginal students, we know that they are more acute for first nation and Inuit students living in remote, isolated areas.

We are currently in the early stages of work on the review and we will want to hear from others as the work advances, especially from students and their families and from first nation leaders who have primary responsibility for delivering the program funds to their students. One of the issues identified by educators as key to increasing access to post-secondary education is the need to start early and ensure a solid learning foundation.

For first nation and Inuit students, this issue is especially applicable given the low rates of high school completion. Greater success at the post-secondary level is contingent on better results at the high school level. That is why, in addition to the review of post-secondary education, we are exploring other avenues to improve the education of first nation children, including ongoing work on kindergarten to grade 12, improved support for aboriginal economic development and skills, and the provision of career development opportunities, the latter managed largely by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada in partnership with provinces and territories.

[Translation]

I want to take this opportunity to tell you about work underway at INAC to set the foundation for long-term improvements in education. On December 1, 2008, the Department launched two new education programs: the First Nation Students Success Program, and the Education Partnerships Program.

[English]

The first nation student success program will support first nation educators on-reserve to develop success plans, conduct student assessments, and put in place performance measurement to assess and report on school and student progress. In particular, the program will help first nation educators to plan and make improvements in three priority areas of literacy, numeracy, and student retention.

Through the education partnerships program, we are working to bring together first nation and provincial educators to improve the academic performance of aboriginal students in first nation and in provincial schools. The closing date for the first-round submission of proposals was February 16—a few days ago—so we are just beginning the work with first nations and provinces to roll out these programs across the country.

Off-reserve, the quality of education for aboriginal students is of critical interest for the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, or OFI, as we call it, which works closely with provinces, national and provincial aboriginal organizations, federal departments, and organizations to improve the quality of education available to off-reserve aboriginal Canadians. OFI is collaborating with several provinces, universities, and other stakeholders on specific projects to address the needs of aboriginal students within provincial systems. INAC is also working with leaders from the four Inuit organizations and key provinces and territories on an Inuit education accord and a related national Inuit education strategy. We'd be pleased to speak in more detail about these initiatives, if the committee wishes.

Mr. Chairman, work is under way across the department to increase access to post-secondary education for aboriginal youth. Clearly, there are no simple solutions to the challenges facing this growing population, but we believe that the work we have started on the review and on improvements to kindergarten to grade 12 education will ultimately help more first nation and Inuit students pursue their educational goals and make a greater contribution to their communities and to Canada.

• (0915)

[Translation]

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue with your Committee.

[English]

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

Now we will go to questions from members.

We'll start with Mr. Russell, for seven minutes.

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

Good morning to each of you. It's good to have you with us again.

In terms of the general funding formula—the 2% cap that currently exists—I think it's generally understood that this doesn't keep pace with the increase in the cost of education for aboriginal children. We also understand there's a rapid population growth—some estimates of 6.2%—in aboriginal communities. Some estimates say that there is a growing gap, that the gap from 1996 up to 2005 is somewhere in the range of \$1.7 billion and that the projected deficit in 2010, for instance, could be as high as \$304 million alone.

Of all the reviews, audits, and studies that you're conducting, is any thought being given to this? In the correspondence that I have read—the letter from the minister, the response to the standing committee's report on post-secondary education, for instance—there's no indication that the government is even considering getting rid of this 2% cap and coming up with a true funding formula that reflects true costs in population growth.

So I'll ask that question first. Has there been any consideration of getting rid of the 2% cap and moving to a different funding formula?

Mr. Neil Yeates: It's a good question from the member, Chair.

As the committee would know, the 2% cap, as the member has noted, has been in place for a long time. It has placed a significant amount of pressure on the whole array of programming. It's not just education; it is social programming, and so on, more broadly.

But the question on the 2% cap itself is really a question for the government, Mr. Chair. We in INAC deal with the budget funding that we have and try to make the best use of the funds that are appropriated to us by Parliament. I would say, however, that the government has made investments above and beyond the 2% cap. The budget 2008 initiative that I refer to is beyond the 2% cap.

Mr. Todd Russell: Excuse me. I've asked a direct question. You're doing a study. You're doing an audit. You're doing all kinds of things. Are you making any recommendation whatsoever to get rid of the 2% cap? It doesn't seem like there's any evidence in any of the literature or any of the indications in terms of the notes that I've read that you're looking at getting rid of the 2% cap and moving to a different funding formula. Are you?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Specifically for post-secondary education?

Mr. Todd Russell: For education generally and post-secondary education specifically.

Mr. Neil Yeates: In the review we are looking at what we feel the needs are for post-secondary education. So for that program, yes.

Mr. Todd Russell: So you are looking at getting rid of the 2% cap for education, generally.

Mr. Neil Yeates: No, I didn't say that, Member. What I said is that we are, in the review of post-secondary education, looking at the needs for that program and at what's the best way to address the needs for post-secondary education.

Mr. Todd Russell: I'll tie this into a question that was asked to the minister when he appeared before the committee.

If you're going to build new schools and you're going to renovate schools, where's the additional funding going to come from for those new schools if you have this cap in place and you have an existing budget that's already stretched? Are new funds to run these schools being allocated or being put forward?

Mr. Neil Yeates: The school capital program is basically replacing existing schools of one kind or another. Depending on the community, there may be a mix of kids who are attending school on-reserve and off-reserve. But basically we're replacing capacity that is already out there.

Mr. Todd Russell: On your audit, is the audit complete?

Mr. Neil Yeates: On post-secondary?

Mr. Todd Russell: Yes.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, it just has been completed.

● (0920)

Mr. Todd Russell: Can the aboriginal affairs committee get a copy of that audit?

Mr. Neil Yeates: It is going to be posted in the next number of weeks, Member.

Mr. Todd Russell: Number of weeks? That could be 52. That's a year. When is it going to be posted?

Mr. Neil Yeates: It just went to our audit committee at the end of last month. It'll be posted, I'm told, within the next 30 days.

Mr. Todd Russell: Is there any truth to the rumour that INAC is looking at transferring the post-secondary student support program out of the first nations and Inuit organizations' hands and into some other kind of administrative body, such as the Canada student loans program?

Mr. Neil Yeates: We do want to look at what the options are for the most effective delivery of the program, whether that's through INAC, directly to first nations, third party organizations, or closer affiliations with the Canada student loans program. Yes, we are looking at that array of options.

Mr. Todd Russell: So it is possible that you could recommend administratively taking the post-secondary student support program out of the hands of first nations and giving it to the organizations?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, that's one of the options.

Mr. Todd Russell: Well, I can tell you that every piece of correspondence that I've received from every chief and aboriginal leader in Inuit organizations to date has soundly rejected that type of approach, and in fact, most of the evidence speaks to the fact that since the first nations have taken over control of their schools, the results have been better. The direct involvement in the delivery of educational programs, whether at the secondary or post-secondary school level, is much better than what it is in provincial school systems or by other third parties.

I'd recommend that you consult much more when it comes to the transfer of that particular program, or any type of change you're going to make to the arrangement of the delivery of it.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Thank you for that.

I should be clear, I'm talking about post-secondary. I'm not talking kindergarten to grade 12.

Mr. Todd Russell: Oh, I know you're talking about post-secondary, but the fact is that it's a part of the whole educational spectrum that we talk about, and the first nations, the Inuit organizations, those who have control over that program now want to maintain some control over it. I believe their concerns are well-founded and that there is some real action taking place that would take that out of the first nations and Inuit organizations' administrative control. Is that right?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, that is one of the options. I should say that I think there are trade-offs between the type of delivery regime that we have and principles around the program about equity and dealing with students who have the greatest needs. Those may vary quite a bit from one community to another.

The delivery regime that we have does affect the type of program you can deliver. We feel that it needs to be examined.

The Chair: Okay. You're finished there, Mr. Russell.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemay, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you for being here today.

I have several questions, and I would like to go through them quickly. Can you tell me, once again, how many students received funding for post-secondary education over the last year?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, certainly. Twenty-two thousand.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Twenty-two thousand?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: And how many millions of dollars does that represent?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Three hundred and fourteen.

Mr. Marc Lemay: So, 22,000 students received some \$314 million in funding. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Neil Yeates: Just to be clear, \$22 million of the \$314 million was for our support to educational institutions. So you'd have to take the \$22 million off the \$314 million to approximately get the amount that went to students.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I wanted to be sure of that. I wanted precise numbers. So, we have to subtract \$22 million, which means that there is less money going directly to students than in 1999, when 27,000 students were receiving money under the program. Now, there are only 22,000. So, rather than going up, the number of students pursuing post-secondary education is actually going down. Is that correct?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, it is.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Yeates, we tabled a report two years ago. Have you read it?

• (0925)

[*English*]

M. Neil Yeates: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Fine. There are a lot of new members on the Committee, Mr. Chairman, including yourself, and I invite all of you to read the report. It contained 10 recommendations. Of those 10 recommendations, can you tell me how many have been acted on by the Department over the last two years?

[*English*]

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, we can take you through that, certainly. Maybe we can just do that fairly quickly and then provide more detail if you would like.

There was a series of recommendations around improving information available on the web, and we've done a fair bit of work there between ourselves, in terms of the department website, and HRSDC. There is the CanLearn website, which collects a lot of this information. There's also the Aboriginal Canada Portal, which is an across-government website that provides very good access to the whole array of information on post-secondary programs. So we've actually done a fair bit of work on that.

There was also a recommendation on the 2% cap. I think we've talked about that. That remains a challenge for us.

Another one, recommendation three, deals with increasing the budget for post-secondary to reflect increased needs, and as you know, we've basically been dealing with the 2% cap since that period of time.

There was also a recommendation on looking at the number of first nation and Inuit learners who might be eligible. We don't have that kind of very detailed information. Various numbers have been raised there, so we've not really made much progress on that.

In terms of data collection overall, you had a series of recommendations on data collection, and we are pleased to report some progress there. We have recently obtained some funding to develop a data system for education and post-secondary education, which we are confident is going to provide a lot better information right across the board on data.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: You may recall that when you appeared before the Committee, I asked you a question which I am going to ask you once again. Is it not true that the \$305 million set aside for post-secondary education is part of a discretionary program which the minister or the government can terminate at any time? Is the answer still the same—in other words, yes?

[English]

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, that remains the view. It has been the view for a long time.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I understand. Whether it is the Liberals or the Conservatives in office, the program continues to be discretionary. The Committee should consider asking that this be an established program, but I understand your point. What I am very interested in, however, is the fact that you had until 2008 to review it. You said that a study was underway and, in response to a question by a colleague, you stated that the study would be released within the next 30 days. But does that study consider the possibility that the program may disappear overnight, or do you simply assume that the \$305 million will always be there?

[English]

Mr. Neil Yeates: We're assuming the program will continue. This is a core program for INAC, so we don't see that as a possibility. Our interest is in trying to sort out how better to improve access and how to make the best use of whatever sum of money we have available to us.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I don't want to tell any tales out of school, as long as the report has not been released, but you are investing \$22 million to assist post-secondary institutions. What are the \$22 million being used for in terms of assisting institutions?

• (0930)

[English]

Mr. Neil Yeates: Maybe I'll ask Madam Cram to speak to the details of that, but it's basically to fund programs specifically for aboriginal students.

Ms. Cram.

Ms. Christine Cram (Assistant Deputy Minister, Education and Social Development Programs and Partnerships Sector, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you very much. The \$22 million is there for a number of institutions, both aboriginal institutions and post-secondary institutions that are accredited by the provinces, with a view to ensuring that programs aimed at aboriginal students are developed and that they receive help to continue their studies.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Fine, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

Ms Crowder, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you.

Thanks again for coming here today.

I want to start off with a comment about the decreasing number of students. The millennium scholarship funding study that was done in 2004 says that one possible reason for the decline in the number of students is that funding levels have remained unchanged and costs have risen. I don't think it's any surprise to any of us that one of the reasons the bands are struggling with many more students is simply that it used to cost x number of dollars and now it costs x plus, so that's one good reason for a decline.

I want to come back to the fact that the committee did some very good work on a report in 2006. Back in 2000, the Auditor General indicated that at least 22 studies between 1991 and 1999 had been conducted on education, K to 12 and post-secondary, and then went on to say that the total cost of the studies "is unknown", adding that "None of the study reports that came to our attention was accompanied by a departmental implementation plan that identified how and by whom the necessary remedial action would be taken...." That was in 2000.

In 2004, the Auditor General went on to again highlight the fact that the department had again had any number of studies and there really wasn't a lot of action as a result. She commented in chapter 5.61 that "the Department informed the government that a comprehensive review of the policy was ongoing" and that it was "committed to developing recommendations, in consultation with First Nations, to update the policy framework and program delivery...by 2003."

When the committee went on to do its study in 2006, one of the reasons we looked at post-secondary, even though we recognize that K to 12 is a very important building block for post-secondary, was that the department was in the midst of conducting a review of primary and secondary education programs, with new policy and management frameworks due for completion by early 2007. We haven't seen that either.

So when I hear there's another review going on.... I was on the committee on Status of Women when the women's organizations talked about the fact that in one of their broken-down offices they could hold up the corner of their table by the stack of reports that had not been acted on. It appears to be the same when we're talking about education, both elementary and post-secondary.

I'm going to raise another point. From 2004 to 2006, INAC worked with the Assembly of First Nations to renew the authorities for the post-secondary education program. What's happened with that review on the authorities? Has there been any reporting out on it?

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you for the questions.

As you're probably aware, about every five years authorities need to be renewed, and the education authorities, including post-secondary, were up for renewal at the end of 2007. I could be wrong, but I think it was March 31, 2007. We have renewal for another five years for those programs.

The new initiatives, which Mr. Yeates spoke to in his opening remarks, the two new programs that the federal government launched in December, relate to that program renewal. What came out of the renewal were two initiatives related to K to 12.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Excuse me. So out of that renewal, though, is there a report? Is there an action plan? Are there details that the committee could access? That's what I'm interested in.

Ms. Christine Cram: To my knowledge, no. There's information on the two new initiatives.

• (0935)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Just on those two new ones. But we can't go in and say that this is what this renewal initiative looked like and these are the two things that came out.

I want to know how that decision was made. What process was used? What was the involvement from first nations? How many other recommendations were there that aren't being acted on? What's the cost of implementing that action plan? What's the timeframe? We can't find that information.

Ms. Christine Cram: There was a long process, I will say, with the Assembly of First Nations. Jointly, we agreed on a series of priorities. I will say that this isn't the end of renewal for education. We launched a series of phases. The first phase was the two initiatives that did get launched in December and were focused on K to 12. More work is needed in terms of post-secondary.

Ms. Jean Crowder: The frustration is that we continue to get report after report, but we don't see the action plans and we don't see where the accountability is for all of the thousands of dollars that have been invested in these reports. Where's the accountability for action being taken on it? I'm glad Monsieur Lemay went through this report, because we spent hours of taxpayers' dollars hearing from witnesses across the country who highlighted some serious concerns with post-secondary education. We prepared this report, and outside of a website and a funding proposal on data systems, virtually nothing has been acted on.

I know part of this is outside of the department. Committing to making the funding available to post-secondary is a political issue; I recognize that. In 2004, the Auditor General talked about the increase in the number of young people under the age of 25. We have an urgent situation wherein we have to address post-secondary.

Are there any terms of reference for the PSEP review? If there are, can the committee have access to them? What does the consultation process look like? What's the timeline?

Mr. Neil Yeates: I can start off, Chair.

Minister Strahl has recently written to all first nations, because there has been a fair amount of public interest in the review of post-secondary education. The minister recently wrote all of the first nation chiefs and Inuit leaders to invite their input and feedback. We are determining with the minister an appropriate, more formal, and fulsome engagement and consultation process. We expect that will

roll out in the late spring and over the summer, leading to some proposals in the fall.

The Chair: Madam Crowder, unfortunately your time is finished. You'll get some time on the second round.

Now we'll go to Mr. Duncan, for seven minutes.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Thank you very much.

Just to follow up on where this conversation has been going, the review was launched partially on the basis that we have declining take-up, and there were concerns identified, I understand, from first nations and Inuit about the post-secondary education envelope. Could you describe what some of those concerns were and why the review was launched the way it was?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Certainly. Chair, some of the issues that have been identified include the following.

I think we're all aware that the number of students involved in the program has declined in the past 10 years. We're quite concerned about that.

Other studies have shown that the awareness of the full array of student support programs amongst first nation and Inuit youth is very low. That concerns us, because there are many options available; it's not just the INAC post-secondary support program.

We also know that there are many barriers to success, and a straight student financial assistance program doesn't necessarily get at any of those barriers. We need to think about more holistic and integrated approaches to our support for post-secondary.

There's been an issue raised about the equity of access to funding for the program. It is allocated at a community level, which largely presumes that the need for post-secondary is the same across all communities in the country. I think we know that's not the case.

Also, issues have been raised about how we ensure that the students with the highest needs get the most support. Again, with the type of program we have, we really can't be assured of that.

Finally, how do we report better, as I think this committee is asking—and for Canadians in general, how do we report better—on the results and the outcomes being achieved through this program? Again, there are challenges to that, given the existing structure of the program that we have.

So we have a set of fairly wide-spread issues.

● (0940)

Mr. John Duncan: When we talk about post-secondary education for aboriginals, we're having an incomplete conversation, in a sense, when we only talk to INAC. I know you mentioned HRSDC in your opening comments, and you may have talked about a dollar figure, but I missed it. I think it was at the moment of a little slowdown in the conversation initiated from the other side. But I know that's a very significant spending. I know the numbers you gave on the dramatic increase in college graduates from first nations and Inuit were encouraging, and I know a lot of that HRSDC money is tilted towards college.

So could you enlighten us a little bit on what those numbers are and whether that represents something that has been on an increasing trend or not? If you happen to know the answer to that, that would be most useful.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Certainly. The Government of Canada, as I said in my introductory remarks, invests about \$9.8 billion in post-secondary education. That has increased very dramatically over the past number of years. Now, that's funding that has gone into university research, financial assistance, and a whole array of areas.

In budget 2008, an additional \$123 million over the next four years has been put into the Canada student loans program. A further \$350 million is being invested in a new Canada study grant program, again, for which aboriginal and Inuit students are fully eligible. There's also \$25 million for a new Canada graduate scholarship award and a further \$3 million stipend. As well, there are the registered education savings plans that have been implemented on the tax side, which again are worth, I think, in the neighbourhood of \$1.8 billion.

So there's a whole array of different interventions that have been made. In budget 2009, there's a further \$100 million available over the next three years for the aboriginal skills and employment partnerships, as well as a new investment fund of \$75 million and an aboriginal human resources development strategy of \$25 million, all of those things through HRSDC.

So there's a lot happening on the skills development side as well, which is an important counterpart to the work being done in post-secondary education itself.

Mr. John Duncan: Those directed moneys from HRSDC to aboriginal programming—I know you mentioned several numbers there, and they're quite significant—do you know if those are major expansions from previously?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, Chair, they are fairly significant. The strategic investment fund I mentioned is new. The aboriginal skills and employment partnership is an additional investment in an existing program, as is the human resources development strategy. But yes, they are significant both new and incremental investments in existing programming.

● (0945)

The Chair: Just a very brief question.

Mr. John Duncan: My final question is this. I know that, for example, at the college level, there are many aboriginal students who are taking programs. But when I talk to the administration, I find that many of those people are considered aboriginal based on self-identification, and we all know self-identification doesn't produce a perfect number. Is there some recognition of that in this whole equation as well?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, the broad information we gave you on educational attainment, in terms of university graduation and college graduation, is from the census data. So that is self-identification, but I think the view is that those numbers are reasonably accurate over time and they do show you changes over time. But yes, that probably is a factor in terms of perhaps some level of under-reporting. I think, regardless, we still know we have a challenge in terms of a gap.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry, we're really over time there. Thank you, Mr. Yeates.

[Translation]

We will now begin the second round. Mr. Bélanger will lead off.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let's get right into it, Mr. Yeates.

[English]

I want to be clear on this matter of new schools, because there is some uncertainty. Will the investment be to replace existing schools only?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes. Until we actually have the final list announced to confirm that for you, that is the thrust. Where we are building a new school, typically it's replacing a school that is viewed as needing to be replaced.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Not typically; I want to know. It is \$200 million, is that correct?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Will it be used entirely to replace existing schools?

Mr. Neil Yeates: I can't absolutely confirm that for you until we have a list of schools that have been announced.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: But is that the intention?

Mr. Neil Yeates: That is the intention, yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Therefore, if there were to be any additional schools—which there are not intended to be—would there be additional operational funding?

Mr. Neil Yeates: What happens, Member, when a new facility is built—say, on a reserve—is that we assess what the operating cost requirements are for that school and make provision for them.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Let me come at it from a different angle.

Currently, is there any operational money attached to the \$200 million of capital money?

Mr. Neil Yeates: No.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

If it is not to replace existing schools—and you don't know that yet—

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, I've expressed what the intent is, but we'll be able to confirm that once they're announced.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: When will that be?

Mr. Neil Yeates: It will be over the next several weeks.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: “Several” could be 52 weeks.

Mr. Neil Yeates: No, it will be a few weeks—four to six weeks, let's say.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So there will be no additional schools, essentially.

Mr. Neil Yeates: I don't expect so.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Cram, I would like to move on to something else, if you don't mind, because we have very little time.

In the budgets set aside for post-secondary programs off-reserve—which are delivered in post-secondary educational institutions accredited by the provinces—is there any money earmarked for programs aimed at training First Nations people to become health care professionals?

Ms. Christine Cram: There is a health-related program. I believe Health Canada has set aside \$15 million for health care training.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Do you mean \$15 million out of a total budget of \$22 million?

Ms. Christine Cram: No, it is not from the same envelope.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: With all the different envelopes out there, it is not surprising that confusion exists.

Let me just digress for a moment. I participated in the creation of a program aimed at training health care professionals in Francophone communities outside Quebec. A national consortium was developed involving ten different post-secondary institutions. I believe this is a five-year program, and these institutions are training 2,500 health care professionals at most. As far as I know, there is nothing similar out there for the Aboriginal communities.

Ms. Christine Cram: Not to my knowledge, no.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Would it be possible for your Department to liaise with the Health Department to see how they went about developing such a program for Francophone communities outside

Quebec? Perhaps you could use their model or, at the very least, take inspiration from their initiative in order to better meet the needs of Aboriginal communities in relation to health care professionals.

• (0950)

Ms. Christine Cram: We can certainly discuss it with the Health Department.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Will you do that?

Ms. Christine Cram: We can do that, yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: But are you going to do it?

Ms. Christine Cram: Yes, we will.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Ms. Christine Cram: Could I just add something? As regards Aboriginal training, we have noted that it works better if the institutions are close to the areas where they reside.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes, that's perfectly normal.

Ms. Christine Cram: But it does present a challenge. We have to find ways of providing post-secondary education near—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The Francophone communities faced exactly the same challenge. One of the components of the program was that they had to do their internship in their home community. Requirements can always be added to the program with a view to encouraging people who have received professional training outside their community to return there.

This program has yielded excellent results for Francophone communities outside Quebec. I encourage you to look at it, to see whether you could use this same model or adapt it to the Aboriginal communities.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: You may respond if you wish.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you very much for that suggestion. We will look at it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent.

Merci, monsieur Bélanger.

We'll go to Mr. Albrecht for five minutes, and then to Mr. Lemay.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair

Thanks to our witnesses for being here today.

A number of times today we have referred to the report that this committee did in 2006. Certainly I recall being part of that committee study, and I think a lot of good recommendations came from it. I want to remind the committee, however, that the government did table a response to that report.

There are some key elements we're missing in terms of response. Mr. Bélanger mentioned the different envelopes that are available. Mr. Duncan referred to the incomplete picture if we look at just INAC funding.

I just want to read a couple of paragraphs from that report for the committee, because some of us are new here.

It reads:

The Government believes that a concept of shared responsibility must apply in providing support for Aboriginal post-secondary education and that this entails exploring the range of resources available from public, institutional, non-profit and private sector sources. Thus a learner might seek funding not only from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's post-secondary education programs but also from the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP), the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, the Millennium Scholarships and private scholarships, as well as from personal and family sources. Likewise, a program of Aboriginal studies might simultaneously receive support from an Indian and Northern Affairs Canada program, operate within a provincially funded institution and be sponsored by a not-for-profit foundation

It goes on:

At the same time, the Government recognizes that it is essential to continuously monitor and reassess ongoing federal programs. Issues of funding for post-secondary education will be considered as part of the required review of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's education programs. However, this must be done in the context of measuring outcomes, evaluating the effectiveness of programs, and exploring alternative models.

I know that seems like a long introduction, but I think it gets to the heart of the oversimplicity of thinking that we can increase the envelope of the 2% cap that's currently here and suddenly all of our problems will disappear. I think it's essential that ongoing monitoring and evaluation of our educational programs is done, because that not only benefits taxpayers in Canada, but in the end it benefits all first nations people, especially students who are wanting to access this program. The more efficiently those dollars are used, the more students will benefit from it. So I want to get that on the record.

If I still have some time left, I would like you to expand a little bit on the two new programs that you mentioned in your opening remarks. If I have them correctly, these programs are the first nation student success program and the education partnerships program. There are significant funds being invested in those over the next five years. Could you expand a bit on those for us? For us as new committee members, I think it would be beneficial.

• (0955)

Mr. Neil Yeates: Certainly, Chair.

Both of the programs were part of budget 2008, as we've noted. They are proposal-based programs. We issued the call for those proposals late in 2008. They just closed 10 days ago, actually, so we're in the review process for those programs and we'll see where we go from there.

But I'll ask Ms. Cram to explain a little more in terms of the intent of each one of those programs.

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you very much.

The student success program, the first element, is really focused on trying to improve student outcomes. It can have a range of things, but it involves such things as student testing, student success plans, and school success plans, all aimed at improving student success.

The second aspect is the education partnerships program. That involves tripartite partnerships between provinces and territories, the Government of Canada, and first nation groups. That is aimed at trying to take advantage of all the assets that everybody has to bring to the table and try to improve educational outcomes.

I'd just like to identify for the committee that 40% of children who are normally resident on-reserve attend public schools. So in our view, it's not just enough to improve on-reserve schools; we also have to be looking at how we improve education programs for aboriginal students and educational outcomes for aboriginal students off-reserve. That of course requires very close partnerships with provincial and territorial governments.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: In regard to the \$22 million that goes to the aboriginal institutions, is the program here in Ottawa—Nunavut Sivuniksavut or something like that—part of that program? Would it be under that program?

Mr. Christopher Duchesnes (Executive Director, Inuit Relations Secreteriat, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): At the moment, no, they do not receive any.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albrecht.

Monsieur Lemay, *cinq minutes*.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I, too, would like to put a few questions to Ms. Cram, since we seem to be on the right track.

Are you aware that, in many communities, individuals wanting to pursue their studies at the post-secondary level, either at a college, CEGEP or university, are very often single parents? Has any provision been made for that? Is that taken into consideration when it comes to making educational assistance available to students? As a general rule, or about 90 per cent of the time, these are women with children, whatever area of study may be involved, whether it is nursing or education. Is that reality taken into consideration? Are there any special measures in place to help these women, particularly those with children, to pursue their studies?

Ms. Christine Cram: Thank you very much, Mr. Lemay.

At the present time, 70 per cent of the students registered in our program are women. As you stated, many of them are single parents. The funding that we are able to provide does include support for these women and their families.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Do you not think it might also be a good idea to help these institutions smooth the way and support these women, given that they represent 70 per cent of their client base? I am pleased to hear that number. In my area, we noted that there were a lot of women. Would it not be appropriate to increase the \$22 million allocated to the institutions so that they can provide better support to these women? As a general rule, they need decent housing, equipment and day care. Can those needs be covered with the \$22 million allocated to institutions?

Ms. Christine Cram: The total budget is \$314 million. If you allocate more than \$22 million to that activity, you would have to deduct that amount from the total budget, which means less support for students. So—

Mr. Marc Lemay: Pardon me for interrupting, but it is important that you clarify one thing. Is the total amount of \$314 million, not counting the \$22 million, paid out directly to students?

Ms. Christine Cram: No. As Mr. Yeates was explaining, that money is distributed to various aboriginal organizations, such as bands and tribal councils. There are different ways of distributing the money. Outside of the \$22 million amount, funding provided indirectly for students goes through the band councils and other organizations.

• (1000)

Mr. Marc Lemay: As you were explaining earlier, the band councils decide whether it is important to invest that money in medicine or education.

Ms. Christine Cram: No, that is not the way it works. A First Nation can also set its own guidelines, but they must comply with national guidelines. Caps are also set. For example, they may decide that \$35,000 is the maximum amount that can be paid out for one year.

As Committee members pointed out, there is more demand than there is available funding. Every First Nation or organization has to make choices and set priorities in relation to student demand.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I don't have much time left, but I would like to ask one other question.

Is professional training, such as training programs for plumbers, electricians or construction workers, part of the post-secondary program?

Ms. Christine Cram: Yes. It includes not only universities, but colleges as well. However, it does not include apprenticeship. I'm sorry, but I don't know the proper term for that in French.

Mr. Marc Lemay: It's "l'apprentissage".

Ms. Christine Cram: The HRSD program covers that sort of thing.

Mr. Marc Lemay: But the colleges are covered under the program.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemay. Unfortunately, your time is up.

Mr. Payne, for five minutes.

[English]

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to thank you for coming here today and being witnesses.

You have heard some are new members. I'm one, so I'm trying to get up to speed on some of this information. Some of it is a bit confusing in terms of all the dollars being talked about, so my first question is this. Could you confirm for me the number of dollars allocated, either through HRSDC or through aboriginal affairs, or wherever, for post-secondary? Do you have a total number?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, Member, we do. We quoted the figure. It's approximately, for the Government of Canada, \$9.7 billion or \$9.8 billion. Of that, about \$3.2 billion goes to provinces through the Canada social transfer. That's notionally allocated for post-secondary education, but how provinces and territories allocate that is their affair. And \$1.8 billion is through the tax system in terms of education, savings, grants and so on, tuition deductions, all of those kinds of things. And then \$2.1 billion is for student assistance: grants, scholarships, loan programs, and so on. And then a further \$2.7 billion is for funding for research and development in post-secondary institutions through the granting councils: Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

So those are the main blocks of federal funding. The INAC portion of that is that we have, as we've said, \$314 million for post-secondary education. The bulk of that is for student financial assistance, less this \$22 million we've been talking about, that we use to support individual institutions for aboriginal programming of one kind or another.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Does that include that \$200 million for HRSDC?

Mr. Neil Yeates: No. I'm sorry, the capital funding we have is for K to 12 schools.

• (1005)

Mr. LaVar Payne: No, I was thinking more in terms of the skills training.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Oh, sorry. Okay, yes, the skills training funding through HRSDC is additional money in budget 2009. So that has just arrived.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Next, in terms of education. I don't think there's anybody who doesn't support the goal that all Canadians should increase their post-secondary education, if that's feasible, but I have some questions about the sixth report of the standing committee, "No Higher Priority". In there, we talked about the percentage of aboriginals aged 20 to 29 who have either a degree or a diploma. I'm just wondering how that compares to the overall Canadian average, if you have those numbers.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes. Of the general numbers I refer to, the first nation number for university graduation is around 7%, and the non-aboriginal is about 23%; college graduation for the non-aboriginal is around 20%, and for aboriginal or first nations it is around 17%.

So you can see a big gap on university, and a much smaller gap on college.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Right. So in terms of the provincial governments, what is their role in providing post-secondary education overall, and also in terms of aboriginals?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Provinces and territories have the primary role in providing post-secondary education. They run the post-secondary education systems. The federal government makes financial contributions of various kinds.

So they have the primary role. They provide—and I think, from our perspective, this is a pretty important point—the direct operating costs, the operating budgets to all the post-secondary infrastructure, and our involvement on the operating side is very limited.

Mr. LaVar Payne: I'm not sure how much time I have left here.

The Chair: Thirty seconds, Mr. Payne.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Oh, that's not much.

Okay, in terms of grants and scholarships, I'm making an assumption here that that those are open to everybody, aboriginals and all Canadians?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes.

Mr. LaVar Payne: I have one last point. Is it possible to get a copy of the breakdown of the numbers you gave out for all of that funding by the Canadian government?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Certainly.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Payne.

Now we'll go to Madam Crowder for five minutes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Great, thanks.

It's been mentioned a couple of times that 10 schools are going to be built or are replacing existing schools. When those schools are designated, is it possible that the committee could have a list of them and the communities?

And I'm just curious about something else. I know you're well aware of the fact that Attawapiskat has been in the news again. In the access to information documents that came out, one of the comments made in a memo dated March 17, 2008, when a couple of different schools were being identified, was that there was no real issue because the schools were sitting in an opposition party riding.

So I'm curious if that's a factor in determining where schools will be built, whether or not it's in an opposition or a government riding?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, I can say that is certainly not a factor in determining where schools will be built. We use a regional capital planning process to determine priorities.

The only addition to that in this current round, where we have some additional funding from budget 2009, was that we needed schools that were ready to go in these next two years so that we could take advantage of the stimulus funding. So that was the only additional criterion applied to the criteria that we used to rank projects in each region and across the country.

Of course, we'd be happy to provide you with a list of the schools once they are announced. As I say, that'll be taking place over the next few weeks.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So is any of the \$3.2 billion that goes to the provincial government for post-secondary education earmarked specifically for first nations institutions?

Mr. Neil Yeates: If I understood your question—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Is there funding earmarked for first-nations-specific institutions, like—

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, there is. We do provide significant funding to the First Nations University of Canada in Regina, which is part of the University of Regina.

• (1010)

Ms. Jean Crowder: But that wasn't my question. Is any of the \$3.2 billion that goes to the provinces for post-secondary education specifically earmarked for first nations or Inuit education?

Mr. Neil Yeates: That goes as a block fund. None of it is earmarked for any particular institution—none of it.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Okay.

In the Auditor General's report of 2004, in paragraphs 5.65 and 5.66, she talked about the fact that there was “ambiguity in the Department's roles and responsibilities, potential inequities in how funds are allocated, a lack of clearly defined expected results, limited program and performance information, and discrepancies in the information provided to the Treasury Board”. Can you tell me, particularly in your reporting to Treasury Board and Parliament, what actions the department has taken in terms of its own accountability for how the funding is allocated and the performance results?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, one of the challenges we have had and still have is trying to collect the right kind of information. So one of the things we have been able to get some additional funding for is the development of a much better information system for—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Is that what you referenced before?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, it's for education from K to 12 and post-secondary education. We think that's going to make a huge difference for us in our ability to report to Parliament and Canadians on the broader education system.

Ms. Jean Crowder: When do you expect that system to be up and operational?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Maybe I can ask Ms. Cram to speak to that, because she's leading the charge on implementing it.

Ms. Christine Cram: It's going to take some time. We're just at the initial stages of developing it.

I just want to raise a couple of things. We think it's very important that the data are able to be linked with provincial data, so that we can track K to 12 children both on- and off-reserve and post-secondary students, because it's not enough just to know about those students who are getting funded through the INAC PSE program. We also want to know information about aboriginal students who are being funded through other means, or accessing Canada student loans and things like that, and in what kinds of programs they are studying.

So we need to work with a lot of partners to ensure that the system is developed to be—

Ms. Jean Crowder: So it sounds like a very lengthy process.

Ms. Christine Cram: It will take a number of years.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I have a comment. You indicated that 40% of aboriginal children attend off-reserve schools. That ends up being a problem where there are on-reserve schools because the bands have to pay the provincial rates, and often they're funded at a lower rate per student for on-reserve schools. Can you comment on whether that might impact on the band's ability to actually provide quality education on-reserve when they're paying a different rate off-reserve?

Mr. Neil Yeates: It is an issue. It varies in different parts of the country to what extent there may be a gap between what we refer to as off-reserve tuition costs versus on-reserve. Every year we go through the process of trying to manage all of these different pressures on budgets—

Ms. Jean Crowder: But the Auditor General in 2000 identified that as an issue for the department in terms of the department itself not having a good handle on the difference between on-reserve and off-reserve funding.

The Chair: We're a little bit over here.

Go ahead, give a brief response if you wish, Mr. Yeates.

Mr. Neil Yeates: It's an issue that continues to be a challenge. I don't think there's any easy answer for it, because the provinces fund their systems somewhat differently, so we're always in a bit of a catch-up mode with what provinces are doing. We do our best to try to make sure those gaps are minimized, but it is a challenge for us.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Mr. Payne for five minutes, and then to the first vice-chair.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be sharing my time with my colleague Mr. Albrecht.

I have another question in terms of the funding. I'm trying to get a good handle on this. I understand there's a fair amount of funding for post-secondary education for aboriginals. I understand also they may be able to get scholarships and grants. So I'm really getting down to this question: do you have any information, any figures, and have you done any studies in terms of what the debt load is for an aboriginal coming out of university or college?

Second, how would that compare to the average Canadian, all Canadians, going to college or university in terms of their debt load?

Third, if you don't have that, is it possible to get that number for us?

•(1015)

Mr. Neil Yeates: I think the short answer is that we don't have that information, and I'm not actually sure it is obtainable. This may relate to a question that a number of members have asked. We do not have a student-based information system. We do not have that kind of system. Given the very devolved nature of the program we have, it would be a big challenge to have that kind of system, but we don't, so this means the information that we would roll up is really very limited. But we do know that our program is 100% grant. There is no loan component to the INAC post-secondary education program.

As I think members know—and perhaps it's what the member here is referring to—Canada student loans, of course, is a student case-based system. They would have data on self-identified aboriginal students, so the committee might be able to get that through HRSDC on the experience of Canada student loans, but it wouldn't deal with students in our program who are receiving grant funding.

A voice: They don't have that.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Oh, they don't? I'm corrected here. It's underlined; HRSDC does not have aboriginal funding. I'm sorry, I thought they did. Let me correct that. They do not have information on aboriginal students. So I guess that means none of us has good information on the experience of aboriginal students.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I want to ask a question that I started to pose in my last round. Was a program like the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program, which is here in Ottawa—and I'm probably not pronouncing it correctly—receive funding through territorial funding? How would they operate a program like they're running in Ottawa? Would it be territorial?

Mr. Christopher Duchesnes: Thanks for the question.

Yes, the Nunavut Sivuniksavut—and you're pronouncing it very well—is based here in Ottawa. It receives the bulk of its funding from the Government of Nunavut through the FANS program, the financial assistance to northern students program, as well as significant funding from the land claim organization, from NTI. It does receive a minor amount of contribution in the range of \$300,000 a year from Indian and Northern Affairs.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you.

This is a different tack now, but last fall or spring—I forget when it was—I had the opportunity of attending the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation Awards, and it just struck me that the way they celebrate the success of many aboriginal learners is part of the key to the puzzle of how we get interest among aboriginal learners to pursue post-secondary education. I'm wondering if there's any clearing house in addition to the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation that would share stories of success of those who have taken the initiative, possibly in many cases from circumstances that would not automatically lead us to believe they could achieve that success, from very difficult circumstances? If we could have a clearing house or some kind of sharing arrangement so we could get these stories back to different first nations communities, I'm wondering if that could be...or maybe it's already being done.

Is there something along that line that we could consider?

Mr. Neil Yeates: I think the member makes an excellent point. The idea of role models and aboriginal kids seeing positive role models is critical to their view about whether it's something they in fact can pursue. We do have some of that on the INAC website in terms of success stories and so on, but I'm sure we could do more than we do at the moment. We'll certainly take your suggestion.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It's more of an encouragement for all of us, as committee members, to be aware that we have a role we can play here by sharing the success stories across our constituencies.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albrecht.

Now we'll go to Mr. Russell, for five minutes.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to come back to that a bit more.

Committee members sometimes ask what the budget is, and when it's a high number some people say, oh my God, that's a lot of money. But we must always compare that money to the need that exists. I believe there is a general consensus that when it comes to primary and secondary education for aboriginal people, there is a gap between the money that's being contributed and what's actually required. There is a gap there.

I know there's a reluctance to remove this 2% cap even though the federal government itself, the Conservative government, had said when it came to the Canada social transfer that they have ballooned the Canadian social transfer to the provinces. They have ballooned that, but for aboriginal people it is at 2%. Why the reluctance to get rid of the 2% cap? I'd like to have some rationale on why there is a reluctance.

My second question is to Mr. MacDonald. It's good to see you again.

The committee recommended the government enter into consultation around access to post-secondary for Métis, non-status, and urban aboriginal people. Has any of that taken place, with a view to direct federal government assistance based on a PSSP model to these particular aboriginal groups?

• (1020)

Mr. Neil Yeates: Perhaps I'll start with the first question from the member.

I don't think we can speculate on the 2% cap, but I can say specifically on post-secondary education that there are some decisions...or we need to reflect on whether our program should be 100% grant, which is what it is today. We're the only program that is 100% grant; there is no loan component, and that is an issue. Also, should our program be income tested? Again, ours is the only program that is not income tested.

When you look at the world of student financial assistance, our programming is unique. We feel that needs to be part of the review discussion and, as we've said earlier, also the delivery mechanism that's used. Depending on the type of program one wants to run, the objectives one wants to achieve, there's a set of issues there to be discussed as well.

Mr. Allan MacDonald (Director General, Office of the Federal Interlocutor, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Russell, it's nice to see you again as well.

To answer your question, there's always ongoing consultation with both the Métis National Council and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples on their educational needs and aspirations with respect to the full range of education.

Having said that, in INAC's programs right now the PSC program we have does not apply to Métis students. I don't think there's anything on the board with respect to that particular program being modified to capture Métis students at this point. But there is a broad range of investments the federal government makes, and I think Mr. Yeates and Ms. Cram have gone through those.

In addition to those investments that go to provinces, and also to which Métis students are eligible under Canada student loans, there's also a number of Métis bursary programs that exist out there. Some are funded through the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, which has been capitalized by the federal government; some are put up by the Department of Health specifically for Métis bursaries; and some are put up by our organization as well, in consultation with some of the institutions that are out there.

There is no program on the table right now to specifically target Métis students the way the department is targeting first nations and Inuit students.

Mr. Todd Russell: Do I still have time, sir?

The Chair: Yes, you have a minute and a half.

Mr. Todd Russell: Blessed father!

An hon. member: That takes your breath away.

Mr. Todd Russell: Yes, it does.

I have to come back to this 2% cap. When you do your review, do you acknowledge that a gap exists between what's currently being provided for primary and secondary education and what the need is? Does any of your analysis give rise to that situation, particularly if you have a 6.2% population growth and the costs have gone up? Does any of your analysis point to a gap?

Mr. Neil Yeates: In K to 12?

Mr. Todd Russell: Yes.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes. We think there is a gap. It varies across the country. Remember, doing the direct comparisons is always a bit complicated in terms of what's in and what's out and so on, but I think in general, yes, we believe there is a gap. As I say, it varies across the country.

Mr. Todd Russell: Nobody in the general public would think that aboriginal education, whether primary or secondary, is on a par with that of the rest of Canadian society. Nobody would accept that, either from the delivery of it in the bloody rundown schools to the lack of teachers and the types of resources they have, and to the incomes we see. There has to be more money. They can quote all the figures they damn well please, but there has to be more money.

• (1025)

Mr. Neil Yeates: The member is probably also aware that there's quite a variation between provinces in terms of per-student funding. Provinces have made different decisions on the level of K to 12 funding.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Yeates.

Thank you, Mr. Russell.

We're going to go to Mr. Duncan for five minutes. I have three more speakers after Mr. Duncan. We don't have too much left to finish up today, so I will be at the pleasure of the committee as to how long we go.

We'll proceed with Mr. Duncan, for five minutes

Mr. John Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to explore this a bit more. You've just explained that the student grants are 100% and are not income-tested. Is it not also correct that it's not transparent and that's the reason we don't actually have very good statistics here? I say this from the standpoint that the choices are very often determined by other levels of other government, by first nation governments, etc. The federal government makes a financial transfer, and at that point, it's actually others that make the decisions. We're not controlling the output. We're only controlling the input.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, that's essentially correct. We provide funding through our regions to first nation communities. The funding is distributed on a per capita basis. First nations make decisions at a community level about which students and how many students to support within the context of the national guidelines that we have.

Mr. John Duncan: So in a sense, that student number of 23,000 could be a different number, at least theoretically. Am I correct?

Mr. Neil Yeates: It's what is reported to us. As I said earlier, we don't have, if you like, an individual student-based system like

Canada student loans has. We don't have that kind of system. This is what's reported to us from first nations.

Mr. John Duncan: Is there an expectation that if we transfer a certain allotment that will create a certain number of students?

So technically it could be correct, and I assume this is part of the review, that there are moneys allocated that never actually go to students.

Earlier you made the statement, and then I assume it was somebody from HRSDC who dropped a note saying they also do not have any numbers in terms of student debt load for aboriginal students. But the way you worded it was such that you said you have no aboriginal experience in terms of numbers. I just wanted to confirm that that terminology meant experience in numbers in terms of debt load. Is that correct?

• (1030)

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, that is correct. I think that was the original question. Do we know about their experience with debt? And no, we don't have. It was a member of our staff from INAC who provided that note, just so you know.

Mr. John Duncan: I could talk for a minute about—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): No, you can't. You have 15 seconds.

Mr. John Duncan: I just have a plea. Members of Parliament represent the entire country. We need some aboriginal awareness on some of these programs that are available. Our offices are disarmed. We don't have enough information on what's available for our own constituents. Many of us represent serious, significant populations. I think we could be utilized more.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Lévesque, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Cram, in answer to a question, you said that \$10 million has been given to the University of Saskatchewan. Did I get that right?

Ms. Christine Cram: The amount is approximately \$7 million, not \$10 million.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: And that \$7 million is part of—

Ms. Christine Cram: I am sorry, did I misunderstand you?

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I'm talking about assistance provided to the University of Saskatchewan.

Ms. Christine Cram: Yes, I did misunderstand. I thought you were talking about the First Nations University of Canada.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: In Saskatchewan.

Ms. Christine Cram: So, you are talking about the First Nations University of Canada.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Yes, I am.

Ms. Christine Cram: The federal government provides a little more than \$7 million to that university on a yearly basis. The province also provides funding.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: And that \$7 million is part of the \$22 million amount you mentioned at the outset.

Ms. Christine Cram: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Can you tell me what that \$7 million is used for?

Ms. Christine Cram: I cannot tell you exactly how the First Nations University of Canada spends that money. It is the only university that is given money for its operating expenses.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I see.

Ms. Christine Cram: The money is used to cover operating expenses, but also to pay teachers and that sort of thing. The university receives money from the federal and provincial governments and from its students. It sets a budget and decides on how it will operate. Our share is a little more than \$7 million.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Using the model for that university, the First Nations Pavilion was established in Val-d'Or, in my riding. Has that institution applied for funding to assist with its operating expenses?

Ms. Christine Cram: I believe the federal government did provide \$3.5 million. I do not recall in what year, but I believe it was part of the Socio-economic Forum. The province of Quebec provided a similar amount. However, I cannot tell you specifically what that money was used for.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: It was invested in infrastructure. In terms of subsequent funding, such as the kind you are providing to the University of Saskatchewan, are there amounts set aside to keep the First Nations University Pavilion operating?

Ms. Christine Cram: Not to my knowledge. It's possible, but I do not have that information.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: In answer to a question from our current chair, Mr. Yeates said that in every province, the costs of operating primary schools were different. Does the same apply at the post-secondary level?

[English]

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, I think it is. Provinces make different decisions on the level of funding they want to provide. You're probably very well aware that one of the key issues in post-secondary education over the years has been the level of tuition. Provinces have made quite different decisions about the level of tuition that they wanted to see set. As you would know, Quebec in particular has maintained tuition at a fairly low level in comparison to other provinces. But that is all within the jurisdiction of those provinces and the universities themselves.

●(1035)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Mr. Lévesque, you have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I am going to take advantage of that to ask a question that interests me.

In Nunavut, there is a cost-sharing arrangement for post-secondary education. Does the same rule apply to Nunavik? If so, how does that work?

Mr. Christopher Duchesnes: Thank you very much, Mr. Lévesque.

Under section 17 of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, the federal and provincial governments provide funding each year for post-secondary education; 75 per cent of the total amount is paid by the province and 25 per cent is paid by the federal government. Last year, the amount was approximately \$2.4 million, or \$600,000 in federal funds. That is something that is negotiated and renewed every three years.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): Thank you, Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Payne.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You've changed your looks here from—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Russell): He's a helluva lot better looking. Even his wife says so.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Anyway, I understand as a new member, through some of the questioning that the recently removed chair, Mr. Russell, was talking about, in regard to some of the funding for schools and the \$200 million, which you referred to in your discussion, that these poor, rundown schools go back many, many years. Do you have a record of how far back these schools go; or is it just recently, in the last few years, that the need has arisen for these schools to be replaced or refurbished?

Mr. Neil Yeates: On-reserve, there are 12 schools. This has been a challenge for many, many years, but it's not just a challenge being faced by INAC. A lot of infrastructure was built in the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s, and it's all coming due to be replaced at the same time. Municipalities, school boards, and health regions are all facing similar kinds of challenges, and we certainly are as well. So we have some catching up to do.

But we're very pleased with the additional funding that we have through budget 2009 for these 10 new schools. There will be three major renovation projects, as well as additional funding for water and waste water treatment plants. So that's going to make a big difference for us. But yes, the need has been high.

Mr. LaVar Payne: I am pleased to see that the government is certainly putting funding into that. I understand that Minister Strahl has recently announced—today, as a matter of fact—a new school for grades K to 8 at Burnt Church, New Brunswick, as part of the government's economic plan. I'm assuming that must be part of that \$200 million.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, it is.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you.

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes still. Are you finished, Mr. Payne? Do you want more time?

Mr. LaVar Payne: No.

The Chair: Okay, we'll go to Madam Crowder, and then Mr. Bélanger.

Ms. Jean Crowder: When I looked again at the Auditor General's report, because she raises many good points, she talked about the fact, again, that limited progress has been made. Based on the information she had in 2004, the gap has increased slightly from about 27 to 28 years, based on when they could anticipate aboriginal first nations would actually get the same—

• (1040)

Mr. Neil Yeates: Do you mean the attainment gap?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Yes.

One of the things they talked about in paragraph 5.3 is that as a result, the department.... There are lots of things about lack of information. We've already covered the fact that you're developing a system but that the department does not know whether program funds are sufficient to support the eligible students. So it's a little troubling that many people believe, and there was certainly a hint from the Auditor General, that there are not enough funds available to meet the need.

One factor that we know prevents students from attending, in many aboriginal communities, is poverty. We know that poverty rates on reserve are significantly higher than they are in the rest of Canada. When we look at the Human Development Index, first nations on reserves rank, in many cases, with people in the third world.

So when I hear that some of the options being considered are looking at going to Canada student loans or not having a 100% grant basis.... We already know that there are significant barriers to many first nations students attending. I can't remember the percentage, but there is a percentage of women who are attending, and you outlined the fact that they often have additional responsibilities caring for children and, as we also know anecdotally, caring for elders in their communities.

So when you look at these potential options, what other options are you considering that would address the poverty barriers to people attending post-secondary?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, the array of options we're looking at goes the full gamut. One is looking at increasing special support for students who have barriers, if you like, beyond what you might consider the average student would have.

We are concerned, as I think perhaps you're expressing as well, that some of the neediest students are not getting the level of support

they need. I think we would say, though, that not all first nations communities are in the same situation. Some are relatively well off, and not all aboriginal families in those communities are in the same situation.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I only have five minutes.

I'm well aware of that, but I think it's well documented that poverty rates overall are higher among first nations on reserves. It's not that there aren't some communities that do better, and it's not that there aren't some families that do better, but the reality is, if you look around.... In my own community I have a number of reserves, and generally the poverty rates are pretty grim. And I'm in an urban-rural area; I'm not in a remote community, and in remote communities it's even worse.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, if you wanted the most support to go to the students with the highest need, you would not run a 100% grant program that was sent out to communities on a per capita basis. So there is a trade-off, outside of a program that is completely open-ended. I think that's one of the dilemmas we have.

Ms. Jean Crowder: That's a fundamental shift in that program. It would seem to me that if you're having that kind of fundamental shift, first nations need to be at the table from the outset of the consultation process as partners in the review and in the development of the outcomes. Instead, it looks to me like the consultation is tacked on after a significant amount of work has already been done. Forgive me, but a letter just to the chiefs asking for their input is limited consultation. I know you said that something is going to happen later, but the process will be well under way by the time you get to that stage.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, typically when we engage in consultations, we flesh out an array of options to present to stakeholders and communities.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Why didn't you ask them up front about that? Why wouldn't you include people up front about fleshing out that array of options?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, we're in dialogue all the time. We get a lot of correspondence. We have a lot of contact with first nations and communities on these issues. We know there's a very high degree of interest in this program. That comes, if you like, solicited and unsolicited. The minister wrote to the first nations to acknowledge the level of interest they have in this program and to indicate that, yes, he would certainly be ensuring that there was a full hearing of their perspectives on these issues.

I think we should be very clear, Chair, that we're a long way from any sort of decision on these programs. We're just trying to outline the array of issues we have in front of us.

•(1045)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Crowder.

Mr. Bélanger, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: *Merci.*

Mr. Yeates, I want to come back to the \$200 million in the schools, and I apologize ahead of time if these questions have been raised while I had to step out for a few minutes.

You said the intent was to basically replace existing schools. So there would be no additional schools. There would be 10 new schools. And 10 is the number, correct?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Now, is there a more defined intent in terms of the envelope, in terms of how it will be apportioned and attributed—for instance, high schools or primary, or combined, or by geographic region?

Mr. Neil Yeates: I think the answer is only going to be when we're actually able to share the full list with you that the minister will be announcing. What we've done is go through our regional capital planning process to determine the communities most in need of replacement schools. That will vary, but the emphasis tends to be on K to 8. That's most typically what we have available on-reserve.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The need is presumably bigger than 10 schools, so what assessment grid, what criteria has the department developed in order to arrive at the recommendations it will be making to the minister?

The Chair: Can you hold that thought for a minute, Mr. Bélanger, and we'll get the question here in a minute.

I just want to inform members that there will be a vote in approximately 30 minutes. We're just about finished.

If there's consensus to continue until shortly before eleven, we'll proceed. Failing that, we will need to in fact adjourn at this point.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Fair enough.

The Chair: Okay, is there consensus to continue for the next few minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, carry on, Mr. Yeates, then.

Mr. Neil Yeates: In response to the member, we have a national ranking framework in terms of setting priorities across the country. The first factor deals with the health and safety for existing facilities. Then we look at—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Is it possible to share that in its entirety with the committee?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Yes, we can certainly do that.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: But before the announcements?

Mr. Neil Yeates: Well, as the other members indicated, there is an announcement taking place today, but we can share it right away.

Maybe just to finish off so you can see the factors, it's not that long a list. We do major maintenance projects, where we feel the existing facility and structure should be reinvested in. We look at growth in the school population as a factor as well. We may have communities where overcrowding has developed, so that could be a factor in some communities. And we also look at curriculum requirements. It may be that when a school was initially built there wasn't provision for something that we would then want to take into account in a new project.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Will the analysis that derives from your recommendation be something you're prepared to share with us as well?

Mr. Neil Yeates: We do regional capital plans, and those are internal to the department.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I understand they're internal, but I'm asking you if you're prepared to share them with Parliament, to whom you're accountable.

Mr. Neil Yeates: Member, we will have to check on that and advise you further.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Check with whom?

Mr. Neil Yeates: We'll have to check further within the department.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Fair enough.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

Now, members, we will adjourn in a minute or two, but there are couple of things I want to bring your attention to before we finish up.

The first is that the minister will in fact attend our first session on Bill C-5 next Tuesday. Similarly, it would appear—and I can't confirm this—we're working on getting him here for the supplementary estimates (C) the following Tuesday as well.

I would draw your attention to some materials that were circulated today, one sessional paper, and the other is the calendar, as promised, in terms of the work that we have in front of us for the next two weeks. It should be with your materials. Just make sure you have it. If you don't, please see the clerk at the end of the meeting.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of all the members of this Committee, I want to thank you for your presentations this morning. I am sure they will prove extremely helpful in our future discussions.

Thank you very much and we'll see you next Tuesday at 9 a.m.

The meeting is adjourned.

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