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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Marc Garneau





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• (1300)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 12th meeting of this committee on indigenous and northern affairs. We're gathered here today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*Translation*]

Today, we continue our study on the effects of the housing shortage on Canada's indigenous peoples.

[*English*]

Today we will be hearing from president Eva Clayton from the Nisga'a Lisims Government, as well as from councillor Alvina Paul from the Sechelt Indian Band.

The second half of our meeting will be dedicated to considering the draft of our first report on barriers to indigenous economic development, followed by a brief discussion of committee business.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind everyone of the Board of Internal Economy's requirements with respect to physical distancing and masking.

[*English*]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules that we follow.

Members or witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services in English, French and Inuktitut are available for the first part of today's meeting. Please be patient with the interpretation. In some cases, there's a delay because they have to go from Inuktitut into English, and then translate from English into French if somebody wants to listen in French, and vice versa. The interpretation button is found at the bottom of your screen for English, French or Inuktitut. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will stop things until we fix them.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute. I would remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[*Translation*]

Our two guests will each have five minutes to speak, and then we will proceed with a first round of questions.

[*English*]

With that, I would now like to invite President Clayton to start us off.

President Clayton, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Eva Clayton (President, Nisga'a Lisims Government):** Thank you.

Good afternoon to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

It gives me great pleasure to appear before you today to provide some context to the issues of housing shortages in indigenous communities. By way of background, I'm here as the president of Nisga'a Lisims Government, representing the Nisga'a Nation.

Indeed, adequate housing has always been an issue since the arrival of newcomers. Prior to contact, the nation lived communally and lived on the land and the waters, where we gathered our clothing, food, fish, berries and other staples that ensured our survival. After contact, the Indian Act was imposed, and we were placed on postage-stamp reserves and were given the bare minimum to work with to create housing. Over the generations, it certainly has been a challenge.

Prior to the Nisga'a Treaty, each Nisga'a village operated its own housing programs directly with Indian and Northern Affairs. Some of the issues that we are still faced with today include overcrowded housing with multiple families, the lack of land to develop further housing, families living in dilapidated houses, and mould and other serious matters that cause great concern for the health of our people. That is to name just a few. Post-treaty, we have been working with the tools in our treaty and, indeed, with our treaty partners, to address the serious issue of housing shortages.

Our housing management program has evolved over time and, more recently, we have made significant progress with our treaty partners. We recognize the importance of the issues, and the Nisga'a government has established a new directorate of housing, capital and facilities operations to create a unified approach to housing in the Nisga'a villages of New Aiyansh, Gitwinksihlkw, Laxgalts'ap and Gingolx.

We also established a relationship with B.C. Housing through a memorandum of understanding. The intent of the MOU was to share and develop best practices in residential asset management. The Nisga'a Nation recognizes that asset management is more than a report or plan; it is an approach to managing our housing infrastructure in a more sustainable way. To ensure this, our approach builds the capacity within our nation to deliver a significant amount of hands-on training to our current housing staff in the following areas, which are listed in my presentation: asset condition assessments, data management and capital planning, to name a few.

In December of 2020, I had the opportunity to meet with former MP Adam Vaughan. At that time, I shared with Mr. Vaughan that the Nisga'a Nation, through our administration, routinely calculates and assesses our crowding rates through different methods. We estimate that between 15% to 30% of households on Nisga'a lands are overcrowded, and the pandemic has increased overcrowding. We know that our women and children are disproportionately impacted by poor-quality housing and by this pandemic.

The overcrowding and the inability to manage major repairs lead to increased mould in houses and increased asthma and other health issues. Through our work with our fellow self-governing indigenous groups, we have a technical team that has been working on pillars to address funding requirements with Canada as our treaty partner.

- (1305)

In order to protect our most vulnerable, the self-governing indigenous governments, SGIGs, asked Canada to make a targeted investment of \$426 million in safe, affordable housing and to support infrastructure for citizens living below the poverty line. The SGIG proposal aligns with our government-to-government relationship and with policy commitments that Canada has made to support SGIGs' access to affordable and adequate housing.

Our legislature, Wilp Si'ayuukhl Nisga'a, met in the last three days, and they were so very happy when we announced the good news about the housing funding. They were jubilant about making sure that we address the housing shortages.

- (1310)

**The Chair:** Ms. Clayton, I'll ask you to wrap up now.

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Okay, thank you.

The increase in funding is coming to the Nisga'a Nation over four years. As I stated regarding the \$44 million, our legislature was very jubilant, and we are delighted by the government-to-government approach to address this issue. For us, this is just the beginning.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, President Clayton.

I'd now like to hand the microphone to Alvina Paul.

Councillor, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Alvina Paul (Councillor, Sechelt Indian Band):** Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Alvina Paul. I am council-elect of the shishálh Nation. I am coming to you from the unceded territories of the Coast Salish people of British Columbia.

I am delighted to accept this invitation to speak to you today on this very important matter. The challenges related to the shortage of housing are rampant throughout first nations communities and their respective *swiyas* across the country of Canada.

The shortage of housing has been our highest priority and something we are very familiar with. Our current leadership team and previous leaders have always made it our mission to establish affordable and sustainable housing for our people.

I come to you with a good heart, to share the struggles and desperation for the lack of housing in our community.

This is to emphasize the importance of the housing crisis. Our community has made great strides in developing land and developing the resources necessary to house our members. We are approximately 1,500 strong in our nation. We have about 50% of our people living within our *swiya* and far fewer living on the shishálh Nation lands.

Due to the already impossible cost of living we are facing today, our people are unable to afford the homes in the rental market and are often unable to attain their own mortgages. It is, and always has been, our intent to build homes for our shishálh Nation members.

We have multiple generations living together under one roof. Most homes are made up of youth aging out of care, single-parent families and elders. A study we had commissioned confirms that we have overcrowded homes and a population of transient or unhomed members who find themselves couch surfing as they are unable to afford housing on their own. Additionally, members have taken opportunities to purchase homes that we have for lease to non-nation people to generate revenue. The lack of our housing has pushed our nation members to purchase those homes to live in so that they can live within the community.

There are currently 165 homes within our four nation subdivisions and the nation is currently developing a new subdivision of 44 service lots with funding that we have received from the self-governing indigenous governments negotiations.

As it currently stands, we have well over 100 people on our housing waiting list, each coming from different family sizes and circumstances. It is our belief that this is just the tip of the iceberg, as many of our nation members are reluctant to submit applications, knowing the severity of the housing crisis within our nation. At this point our people are forced to leave their traditional lands to find affordable housing in other communities, separating them from their families and culture. These families deserve access to nation-provided services, as well as strong family values and the support promoted by the security of community and encouragement of traditional and cultural practices. More importantly, they deserve the opportunity to participate in the preservation of our language.

Housing in our community is our number one priority and we would like to have the opportunity to build everyone a home within our community, but of course that takes resources. My predecessors and my co-council have maintained for years that providing housing will benefit the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our nation members.

We would like to increase our capacity to build homes to ensure that we have our shísháhlh Nation living together communally like we once had.

In closing, I would like to wish you all well and to acknowledge all our nations across this great country.

• (1315)

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Councillor Paul.

We'll now proceed to a round of questions, beginning with Mr. Schmale from the Conservative Party.

Mr. Schmale, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for your testimony today. It's similar information to what we've heard in other testimony. We do appreciate it. It's very important as we try to develop policies to help the current situation.

My first question would be for President Clayton. I'm glad she was able to be here today.

I notice from your website and your testimony today that you talk about citizens within your territory now having the ability to sell, transfer or will their land to anyone, whether they're first nations or non-first nations. You talked about the ability to secure mortgages on this land.

Could you tell us more about that and how they're able to work around the Indian Act?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Thank you for your question.

The work of the previous leaders for our citizens to sell, transfer or will their homes has been a work in progress over time. Many of our citizens have not utilized that because of the shortage. Many are understanding the ability to will their homes to loved ones. It's still a work in progress when it comes to our citizens understanding their abilities to participate in Canada fully.

Thank you.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you.

President Clayton, I will continue with you for this time.

Can you talk about any road bumps or cautionary tales that other nations might be able to take from your experience?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Is that road bumps in terms of housing?

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Yes, and what are any cautionary tales or the kinds of things that you've learned along the process that other nations or this committee could recommend to the minister?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** We have been encountering all good things in terms of learning how to reach out, government to government, with our treaty partners.

It's been a challenge. There have been some bumps in the road in understanding the relationships as set out in the treaty, especially in regard to understanding the implementation and understanding that we are not band councils anymore and that we should not be lumped in with, for example, the Assembly of First Nations.

Anything to do with housing programs coming from Canada, as an example, should be going to the modern-day treaty groups or the SGIGs.

Thank you.

• (1320)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** President Clayton, continuing along this path, what steps had to be in place to ensure that the Nisga'a Landholding Transition Act became a reality?

Did certain economic or social considerations need to be in place before your nation could consider such a proposal?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** No. We entered into the treaty with no economic base, as we all know. It's been a challenge to walk forward and truly build the economic base.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** President Clayton, you had mentioned some of this in your testimony, but maybe you can elaborate more about the results that your housing program has been able to deliver, both from an economic and a social perspective, please.

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Thank you for the social perspective.

We used many methods to gauge the state of our housing on Nisga'a lands. It's been a challenge for us to get funding in place, but we have hope that this will happen.

We have also been looking at the invisible homeless on Nisga'a lands. That invisible homeless are the multiple families that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** President Clayton, could you just finish that last bit? Your feed froze.

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** I'm sorry.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** It's not your fault.

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** The Nisga'a Nation has been experiencing invisible homelessness. By that I mean that we have multiple families under one roof. It causes health issues and other issues.

For instance, in my home, I have three families living under the same roof. Through the pandemic, it created some challenges. It creates the ability for children to grow in a healthy place.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Weiler, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I'd also like to thank President Clayton and Councillor Paul for joining today to talk about a subject that's top of mind across the country but especially in indigenous communities.

It's really great to have the first nation with a modern treaty in B.C. represented today, as well as the first self-governing first nation in Canada. It's really important for us to hear the particular concerns of self-governing indigenous governments.

I'd like to direct my first question to the shíshálh Nation. In last year's budget, we had funding for two large programs, the rapid housing initiative, 41% of which went towards indigenous recipients in B.C. to rapidly roll out housing solutions to the most vulnerable, and the indigenous community infrastructure fund, which has over half a billion dollars directed towards self-governing first nations and modern treaty partners for infrastructure and housing priorities.

Councillor Paul, I was hoping you could explain to this committee how these programs fit into advancing the housing plan of the shíshálh housing authority and what recommendations you would have for the government to improve upon these programs to ensure that they meet the needs of the shíshálh Nation and perhaps other self-governing first nations.

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** Thank you, Patrick.

Yes, in last year's budget we did receive some of the funding for rapid housing. We have three duplexes being constructed at the moment. We hope to have them move-in ready by this fall. We appreciate your working together with us and bringing these projects for affordable housing to the community.

We hope to have another application in soon for more units. We do have other projects, such as our house of clans, which will be supported housing. We received funds from B.C. Housing on that project also, which is 34 units of apartments within the community.

The indigenous government infrastructure fund is also something that we've tapped into in regard to expanding our community by creating and building a new subdivision. We're also in the midst of building a new subdivision with the funds from the Canadian infrastructure grant that was provided from the federal government. That covers a portion, but we've also covered and topped up where we had to so that we could make this project come to life. We will have 44 lots under infrastructure soon. We hope to have those ready to build on by this fall.

• (1325)

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** That's fantastic. It will be great to see those projects come to fruition. It's really amazing to see the work already being done on our house of clans, as well.

I was hoping, Councillor Paul, that you could provide some commentary to let us know if these programs are really fit for purpose or if there are ways that we should consider restructuring these programs to really meet the needs of self-governing indigenous governments. Do you see a need for a separate type of programming to meet the particular housing needs of the shíshálh Nation?

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** The timeline in regard to the rapid housing was quite aggressive. It was a shovel-ready project that we had to

come up with in a day or two. A lot more planning needs to be done in the sense of constructing and providing housing.

We were fortunate enough that we did have two lots that we combined to build the three units on, but those were basically our last two lots within our current standing community subdivisions. To be able to build the new subdivision currently, with the funding for that also from the Infrastructure Bank.... It was a bit laborious for our staff.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Thanks for that. That's very useful feedback.

Maybe I'll ask my last question, as my time's running out. With a number of these projects moving ahead, it seems like a lot to be doing at once. I'm wondering if there is the capacity within the nation to ensure that those housing projects are going to be built by the nation or by indigenous-owned businesses to ensure that a lot of the economic impact from that construction will be held within the nation.

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** Can you repeat that, Patrick? I'm sorry.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** With all these projects moving ahead at the same time, is there confidence that the construction activities will be able to be led by the businesses owned by shíshálh Nation?

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** Yes. Our apartments' prime contractor is an external contractor, but we have subcontractors who are all nation contractors doing the foundation, the siding and the framing of the new duplexes for the rapid housing projects. We hope to continue with that once the Selma Park subdivision is ready for construction also.

The challenge with that will be the funding for any of our nation members to be able to afford a mortgage on their own for those new lots coming.

• (1330)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** That's the next challenge.

**The Chair:** Perhaps you'll have a chance to expand on that, Councillor Paul.

Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since we began this study, the witnesses we are hearing have said that the housing shortage is the root cause of the challenges facing first nations. They have stated that, despite the formidable challenge and the many obstacles to addressing the housing construction and renovation shortfall in the various indigenous communities, the government already has the solutions in its hands.

Some chiefs and indigenous organizations have said that, in order to implement the solutions, the federal government needs to roll out a comprehensive strategy with a plan and process to get there. Others have told us that first nations should be allowed to have individual strategies, because not all first nations have the same needs.

What do you think? I'd like to hear more from you about strategies and solutions to address the housing shortage in your communities.

[English]

**The Chair:** The question is addressed to both of you.

President Clayton, perhaps you could start, and then we'll go to Councillor Paul.

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Thank you.

Thank you for the ability to comment. Nisga'a Nation has been having strategic housing sessions with all of our communities. Out of that strategic housing planning, we came forward with one plan that would benefit the nation. From that strategic plan, it would become an operational plan. I do believe that, working with our treaty partners, we can do that strategic planning and present government to government.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Councillor Paul.

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** With regard to the programs and the funding, they have some red tape. We've had to create a society—this is from B.C. Housing—for our house of clans.

For us to be able to proceed with our structures for housing to better our nation members is very important to me. Yes, we are unique. We are a self-governing nation. We are also recognized as a municipality. To be able to move forward and provide affordable housing for our community members is of the utmost importance to me and my community. To be able to build programs, which we currently are....

At the moment, we are redrafting our housing policy, as it is outdated. It's from the eighties and it's been amended once. I think it was done in 1991. We have external consultants coming in to help us better our position to bring these programs to life.

I hope that answers your question.

[Translation]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Thank you, ladies.

You talked earlier about funding programs that you have. You also said that you have advisors who will update your policies.

Do you currently have any solutions being implemented? Are they being promoted in your community based on your needs?

We know very well that subsequent investments from the federal government are not materializing to implement solutions. In your opinion, what's keeping these funds from being transferred?

[English]

**The Chair:** President Clayton, would you start?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** The obstacles to funding, first and foremost, at the heart of the nation are the amount of funding that is required

for us to fully meet the needs of the nation. It has to be sufficient and it has to be sustainable. We are receiving funding over a four-year period, with a goal to construct 195 new homes in four communities and to renovate 160 homes in the four communities. It's all about the ability to do that within the funding.

• (1335)

**The Chair:** Councillor Paul, did you want to speak to that?

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** I can provide comment. Thank you.

The solutions that we have are to create affordable housing for people who need supported housing or subsidized housing. As we all know, the standards and the rentals on the Sunshine Coast.... From a study done about five or six years ago, the Sunshine Coast has the second-highest rate of rentals in Canada, so rent is no different from living in the Lower Mainland in Vancouver. You can rent a one-bedroom suite here for about \$1,700, which is by far far out of reach for most people, even non-nation community members of the Sunshine Coast. The standard [Technical difficulty—Editor].

**The Chair:** Councillor, you've gone on mute.

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** I'm sorry about that.

For a living wage for the Sunshine Coast, the average person needs to earn \$19.65 per person for a family that has two children and both parents working to be able to afford any sort of rent in Sechelt on the Sunshine Coast.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[English]

Ms. Idlout, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** *Qujannamiik*. Thank you so much.

Welcome, President Clayton and Councillor Paul.

Normally, I start in Inuktitut, in my language, but I'm quite emotional today. With permission from my interpreter, Simona, I want to acknowledge her. She is very important to me, not just because she provides interpretation so that I can speak in Inuktitut. Today is very important because Simona is a former student of residential schools. I really need to acknowledge her in light of Pope Francis's apology this morning.

I just wanted to make sure I gave the space to share my respect. She's been an important leader in my community. It's such an honour to have her as my interpreter so that I can speak in Inuktitut.

Having shared that moment, I'll ask my first question in English. Then I'll revert back to Inuktitut, the way I normally do.

President Clayton and Councillor Paul, perhaps you could both answer this. During this study, witnesses have argued that not only is existing funding for housing insufficient, but there also is a need to support employment, training and capacity building to address housing needs. Does the federal funding you receive for housing meet the needs of your communities? If not, could you describe the gaps between what is needed and what is received?

*Qujannamiik.*

**The Chair:** President Clayton, will you start, please?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Thank you.

Thank you for the question. All my respect to you.

The existing funding that the nation has received for four communities over a four-year period is viewed as insufficient, but we are thankful for it. It's insufficient because of the rising cost of lumber to build the homes. It's incredibly high. That is really the big obstacle.

As for the building of the homes, the nation has been training our people over the years to get into the business of building homes and to become subcontractors. Our people have been building their homes for quite some time now within each community, and it's organized. We have some members who are subcontractors. The biggest obstacle is the rising cost of living and lumber.

Thank you.

• (1340)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Councillor Paul.

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** Thank you very much, Lori. I appreciate your question, and I'm very sorry for your experiences thus far. I feel you. We are a part of the class action in regard to representing residential school survivors, so it's been a heavy week for this.

The funding is getting thin as the cost of fuel and lumber, and all those other supplies, go through the roof and the living wage is minimal. To provide training for all our nation members who are interested in the industry.... We know that, by far, all the industries and trades are short of manpower. Therefore, to be able to provide a wage that's going to be sufficient to rent and/or build a home in their own community is something that needs to be factored in also. I think the price of all these supplies is just too much to bear.

I know when I built my home at the beginning of the millennium in 2000, I actually was very fortunate that it was approximately about \$150,000 to \$160,000. Now you're getting a shoe box size for that.

That's just another factor that we need to consider for safe, affordable, healthy housing.

Thank you.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut as follows:*]

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[*Inuktitut text interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

Regarding the shortage of housing and substandard old houses, these are a concern to all indigenous people in Canada: Métis, first nations and Inuit.

The federal government has some monies they allocate but that is never enough. We all know that. I want to ask you, what would you say the federal government needs to do more of to ensure quality indigenous housing is a right and not a privilege?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** President Clayton, would you start?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** The standard of homes on Nisga'a lands and in our Nisga'a communities has been a concern for quite some time. Some of them have been in place for 40-plus years. There's a need to bring them up to standard because of the electrical changes over the years. The one-pane windows are not doing it when it comes to heating the homes because the heat goes right back out, and there are the mould issues because of the damp and the heat coming together.

I think it would be great if the federal government would target bringing the homes up to standard in the indigenous communities. It would be a target just for that, and not to build new homes.

Thank you.

• (1345)

**The Chair:** Councillor Paul.

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** To bring the standards to a healthy, safe status within communities is with codes, I believe. With regard to the new standards, I'm not too sure if it's like building a new home and putting plastic wrap around it—and I'm not a builder—but with the mould issues that we have within the affordable housing rentals in our community, it's not sufficient.



To be able to repair and renovate those units is costly with regard to all of the wages and the supplies needed to complete and make those units safe and healthy again. The emotional impact of living in a dilapidated unit is demoralizing, and that mental health component is what I factor in to healthy communities.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

We'll go to a second, shorter round. We'll start with Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Vidal, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank President Clayton and Councillor Paul for being here today.

President Clayton, I'm going to start with you.

In your comments, one of the things I heard from you is that you seem like a person who builds good relationships and you build partnerships. That seemed to be the nature of a lot of what I heard. You also talked about starting with no economic base after the treaties.

One of the things we talk about when establishing communities—and I'm getting to housing—is infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools and other services. How does your nation approach infrastructure in the context of partnerships? Do you have some private sector partnerships that are contributing to that, or is it strictly government-funded or strictly funded by your own nation?

I'm curious about the partnerships you might have from an economic perspective.

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** The Nisga'a Nation has been quite busy building relationships. We have our four communities, which are working in partnership to build those kinds of relationships where they can invest in the Nisga'a Nation.

Workers aren't going in that area. We continue to work to bring in partnerships that will assist the nation.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** On Tuesday this week, we heard from a vice-chief from a tribal council in my area. He made a direct link—and I'm curious if it's true in other places—between economic opportunity and some of the work being done by the first nations leadership. He made a link between that and the number of people in each home.

Within his tribal council, there were nine first nations. He said, where there was greater opportunity, the average number of people in a home was less than where there were smaller opportunities. I'm curious if that applies in your nation as well, and if that's a pattern or if that's just his example.

• (1350)

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** I think that would apply to his area, when you think about the differences between economic bases. The Nisga'a Nation is working toward building that economic base, and I'm sure that there would be far fewer in one home when we have a healthy community.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** In doing some research on the Internet about your nation, you have a quality of life strategy. Could you tell us a bit about that quality of life strategy and then tell us how that interlocks or connects with your housing strategy?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** The nation's quality of life strategy is one that we carry out on an annual basis to measure. We use it as a measuring tool for the quality of life of our nation, and it gives us a picture of where our people stand with housing. We have been working quite diligently to carry on with that quality of life.

The quality of life strategy addresses all areas. We also look at homelessness in our nation, because we know that our nation is not immune to homelessness.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** In that quality of life strategy or the index that you measure, there's a direct link to housing in that, as well. Is that right?

That's what I think I heard and I want to confirm that.

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Yes, it gives us a picture.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Thank you.

I also noted that you have the authority to levy taxes within your jurisdiction, but you don't have the ability to tax property yet. I was fascinated by what I read about your home ownership and fee simple, and what my colleague talked about with the right to transfer mortgage and will homes.

Can you just explain to me the journey towards property taxation? What do you think that will accomplish in your desire to achieve better housing outcomes for your nation?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Thank you for the question.

We do have the authority to levy taxes. It has been a work in progress since 2015, I believe, with the property tax and coordination agreement.

Our nation is fully aware that we require these taxes in order to become truly self-governing. The property tax in each of our communities is ongoing. Our members have been paying property tax since 2013 or 2015.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Powlowski, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Let me start off by saying that, not being from B.C., I find that the situation for your B.C. communities is very different from the communities around where I'm from in Thunder Bay, where the Indian Act applies.

President Clayton, correct me if I'm wrong. Under the Nisga'a Final Agreement, the Indian Act doesn't apply at all to your community. Is that right?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Technically, yes.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Technically yes, but in practice it still does?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** The principles of the Indian Act don't apply.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Okay.

Alvina, you are a self-governing first nation, but I think the Douglas treaties still apply to you. Are you basically like the Nisga'a in that the Indian Act doesn't apply to you either?

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** No, it does not. We still mimic it in some forms, but we are developing our own ways to try to better our community for self-governing.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Being a self-governing community, you don't have a treaty like the Nisga'a Final Agreement.

**Ms. Alvina Paul:** No.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Okay.

President Clayton, under the Nisga'a Final Agreement, I looked up the section on land and land title. I have to say, it's really complex. I don't really understand it.

Afterwards, there's also the Nisga'a Landholding Transition Act, which is a Nisga'a law. Under the final agreement, it gives your first nation the power to write Nisga'a law. Is that the way it works?

• (1355)

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Yes, it does. It's within the general laws of application, but it applies to Nisga'a lands.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Under your law then, land can be held in fee simple, which is obviously very different from communities where the Indian Act applies.

How do you decide which piece of land goes to which family? I'm comparing it now to Fort William First Nation, where there isn't land ownership per se. They don't have fee simple ownership of the land.

How do you decide in your community? Is it like this piece of land traditionally belongs to Mary's family and her ancestors and, therefore, they have ownership of that land?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** No, it's not for families.

The foresight of our leaders who negotiated the treaty put the land in what we call a common bowl. It's by application for the Nisga'a government to issue a disposition of land. It's not by family.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** People apply and you would decide who gets what piece of land.

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Yes, we have practices and procedures that oversee the disposition of land.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** If this is my land and I build my house on this, then I can still sell it to someone who's not first nations. Is that right?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Yes, under the land title....

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Is the community concerned about the fact that what was Nisga'a land may eventually end up as not being Nisga'a land? Is that not a worry to the community?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** That was very concerning for the community. At the outset it was so very concerning that members of the nation protect what is theirs more so.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Although it's not officially there, the people tend to want to sell to other people who are in the community or first nations.

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Yes, if they want.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** In practice, within the Nisga'a Nation, are there many non-indigenous, non-Nisga'a people living there now?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** There are not too many in the community of New Aiyansh and probably not too many in the remaining three villages, other than the professionals like the teachers and the doctors who come into the community.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Do they own their land?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** No, they rent. When they come as professionals, they rent their accommodations.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** Is it the same way in—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm sorry, Mr. Powlowski. You've used up the time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I'd like to thank Ms. Clayton and Ms. Paul for appearing before the committee.

I would also like to thank the interpreters for providing good interpretation in our languages. I feel that's very important.

My question is for both of our guests.

During the course of the committee's study, several witnesses have mentioned that members of their first nation were not able to return to their communities following their studies outside, for example, due to the lack of available housing for everyone. These individuals are often forced to live outside the community, even though they belong to it.

Could you paint a picture of this issue in your communities for us?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** President Clayton, would you like to start off on that question?

**Ms. Eva Clayton:** Many Nisga'a, prior to treaty, left the homelands for employment, education or health matters. There are some who chose to come back, but there are others who came back only to find a shortage of [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] factors in the growth of the population and the need to carry on with their education. However, the Nisga'a Nation has been working diligently to continue to grow our housing so that our people can come home.

• (1400)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Councillor Paul.







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