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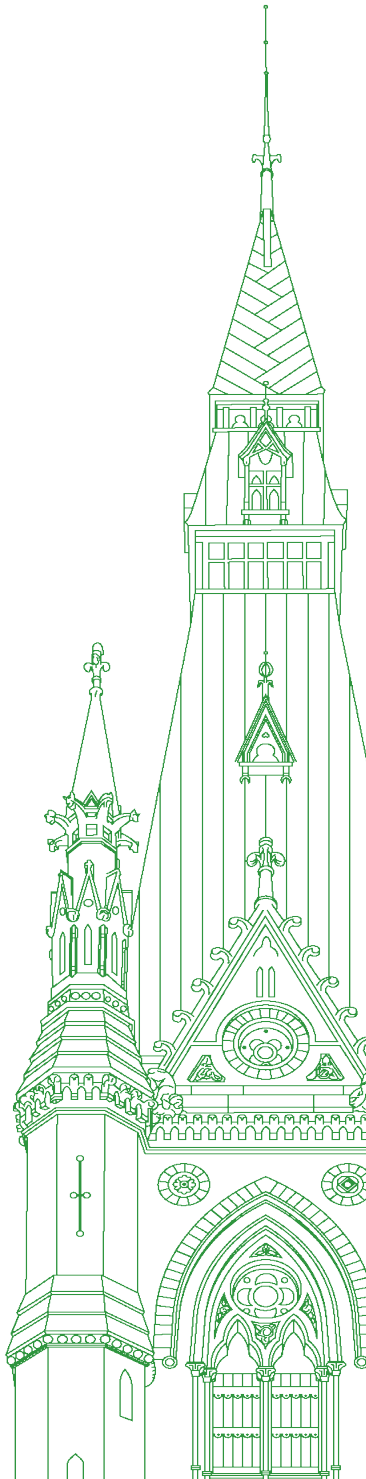

Chair: The Honourable Marc Garneau

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Monday, January 30, 2023

● (1530)

[*English*]

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

Good afternoon. Welcome, everyone.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to meeting number 47 of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

Like previous meetings, today's meeting will take place in a hybrid format.

[*English*]

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow, since this is the first meeting of 2023.

You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting in French, English, and Inuktitut.

You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, Inuktitut, English, or French. Please select your language now so that you'll be ready. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately, and we'll stop the process until we fix the problem.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name, or if you are in the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your mike will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer.

[*Translation*]

Please address your comments through the chair.

[*English*]

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

With regard to the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to respect the order in which people will be speaking.

I would like to ask the committee to consider the adoption of the budget for the indigenous languages study. You've all received this by email. It covers costs related to our meetings, including witness expenses, meals and telephone lines.

Do I have the committee's agreement?

The agreement is unanimous.

Lastly, I would like the committee to adopt the work plan that was circulated in December. It lays out the road map for the next three meetings of this study. Granted, the work plan is subject to change based on the availability of the witnesses, but do I have the committee's agreement?

There is agreement. Thank you.

With that, we'll begin our study.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on November 21, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of indigenous languages.

Today, for our first panel, we welcome Ms. Karliin Aariak, who is the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut. She is here in person today. From the office of the president of Makivik Corporation, we have Ms. Kitty Gordon, who is also with us in person today. From the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation, we have Mr. Mark Nelson and Mr. Ed Schultz. They are representing 25 self-governing indigenous governments.

For the benefit of our witnesses, we provide you with five minutes to make some introductory remarks. Mr. Nelson and Mr. Schultz, you'll share your five minutes. We will then go to questions from the committee members.

With that, I would like to invite Ms. Karliin Aariak to begin the proceedings today with a five-minute introductory opening.

Ms. Karliin Aariak (Languages Commissioner, Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut): [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you. I hope everyone can hear me.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson and all of the members, for inviting me. I am happy to be sitting here with you. I will be talking about how it is in Nunavut, because it is very unique and different from other areas of Canada.

Now, in terms of our Inuit language, there's Inuktut, Inuinnaqtun and Inuktitut. As the language commissioner in Nunavut, I am talking in my language to show that we are in support of our languages and are fighting to keep them alive.

[*English*]

More precisely, my primary duty is to promote and safeguard the language rights of Nunavummiut.

Nunavut has two distinct languages acts: the Official Languages Act, which recognizes, as I mentioned, the Inuit language, English and French; and the Inuit Language Protection Act.

I'm just going to go through the differences between those two acts for a minute.

OLA, the Officials Languages Act, recognizes Inuktut, English and French as our territory's official languages. It creates important obligations for the Nunavut government departments and public agencies, the legislative assembly and the Nunavut courts to serve the public in all of the official languages. The federal government and organizations from the private sector don't have to comply with OLA.

By contrast, the Inuit Language Protection Act was designed specifically to counter, among other things, the negative effects of colonization, or

> the past government actions and policies of assimilation and the existence of government and societal attitudes that cast the Inuit Language and culture as inferior and unequal, and acknowledging that these actions, policies and attitudes have had a persistent negative and destructive impact on the Inuit Language and Inuit;

Moreover, at a minimum, article 13.1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples proclaims the right of indigenous peoples to:

> revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literature, and to designate and retain their names for communities, places, and persons.

Federal agencies, departments and institutions have a legal and moral obligation to comply with Nunavut's legislation. Canada commits itself to respecting the UNDRIP declaration for indigenous people, and federal agencies, departments and institutions in Nunavut have to comply with the ILPA— that's the Inuit Language Protection Act—in Nunavut.

However, the Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut continues to receive—we continue to receive—concerns involving federal agencies, departments and institutions in Nunavut.

The issues that my office faces in addressing concerns involving the federal agencies, departments and institutions in Nunavut include a lack of response from the obligated federal agencies, departments and institutions, and/or the absence of tools to enforce their compliance with the law, even if the complaints are admissible.

This is especially concerning because federal agencies, departments and institutions in Nunavut are accountable for the lack of Inuktut in their oral communications, public signs, posters and reception and client services, as required under ILPA.

● (1535)

[*Witness spoke Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

The primary language of the Nunavummiut is Inuktitut. They speak their primary language in their homes, but that is being lost. There were studies conducted by Statistics Canada to see if Inuktitut was being kept alive or being lost. In 2016, the researchers found that the number of people who could speak their language in their homes was 23,225, or 65.3%. These are the statistics in Nunavut. Also, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that 23,970 people, or 52.9%, of Nunavut residents were able to speak in their language, which is Inuktitut.

This is a growing concern for us.

[*English*]

The decline is significant, and positive actions are more important than ever.

I'd like to get to a few examples of the concerns that our office receives.

● (1540)

The Chair: Ms. Aariak, I'll have to ask you to wrap up, because we have a lot of questions that are going to come.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: Okay. I'll just get to one of the examples. I can get to more later.

Information related to health, such as the "mask required" sign posted on our door during the election, was only in English, whereas there are unilingual voters in the community.

To address these concerns, I am recommending the following administrative and legislative tools, which I believe are vital for implementing and enforcing the existing law.

A memorandum of understanding is recommendation number one. Establish an MOU with federal agencies, departments and institutions in Nunavut. This will be the mechanism to improve communication on language issues and resolve them while concerns are raised about a federal institution in Nunavut.

Recommendation number two is a legislative tool to hold the Privy Council accountable for the implementation of recommendations on language issues in Nunavut and ultimately in Canada; and to establish a clear time frame for federal agencies, departments and institutions operating in Nunavut to respond to our office's recommendations.

In conclusion, the adoption in 2007 by the vast majority of countries around the world of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was a historic moment when UN states and indigenous peoples reconciled with their painful histories and resolved to move forward together on the path of human rights, justice and development for all. Moreover, UNDRIP declares 2022 as the beginning of the international decade of indigenous languages to ensure indigenous peoples' rights to preserve, revitalize and promote their languages.

Therefore, it is imperative for all federal agencies, departments and institutions operating in Nunavut to commit to taking all positive and necessary steps for the implementation of the Inuit Language Protection Act and the usage, preservation, revitalization and promotion of the Inuit language in Nunavut.

Qujannamiik. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Aariak.

We will now go to Ms. Gordon, from the Makivik Corporation.

Ms. Gordon, you have five minutes.

Ms. Kitty Gordon (Coordinator, Office of the President, Makivik Corporation): [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

I am Kitty Gordon from Kuujjuaq. I grew up in Kuujjuaq. My mother, grandparents and family brought me up.

[*English*]

I come from Nunavik, which is the region above the 55th parallel that is located in northern Quebec. There are roughly 14,000 inhabitants spread out in 14 communities. Approximately 90% of Inuktitut-speaking Inuit live in Nunavik, which is higher than other regions as compared to the rest of Canada.

To us, language is an integral part of our identity. Although it might be a small population, there are three distinct dialects in Nunavik, which contribute further to our uniqueness.

Sadly, our language is rapidly eroding. Traditional knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, primarily through oral history learned from one generation to the next.

I am here today on behalf of Makivik, the birthright organization that represents the Inuit of Nunavik. Makivik is an inception of the first modern treaty in Canada, which is known as the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. As we learn over the years, we are beginning to see that this agreement was more or less forced on our young Inuit leaders at the time.

How can we protect our language?

In our region, we have the Avataq Cultural Institute, which is a key player for language and culture in Nunavik. *Ilirijavut*, a report that came out in 2012, contains several recommendations on language and how to keep it alive. Makivik works in partnership with Avataq.

On Inuktitut in Nunavik, as I mentioned before, our language is alive but eroding. There are generational gaps and, sadly, the language is being diminished between generations. We're not looking for standardization. Dialects are distinct and we want to maintain it that way.

There's a major shortage of interpreters and teachers in our region. The curriculum needs to be developed in Inuktitut, and the working conditions for Inuktitut teachers need to be on par with non-Inuit teachers.

Recognition of Inuktitut as an official language in Nunavik will be a key component of our self-determination process. The implementation of an Inuktitut language authority is a key priority for Nunavik.

The implementation of the Indigenous Languages Act provides access to funding. It is a yearly funding process and it is project-based. In 2022-23, we received $1.4 million. What we need is adequate, sustainable and long-term funding. It is important that the funding be flexible and that it allow for Nunavik to establish its own priorities through self-determination for Inuit by Inuit.

We would like to build a working relationship with the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages in an effort to combat the threat of the loss of our language.

Lastly, keeping our language alive should not be at the mercy of ad hoc annual funding agreements. We should be able to self-determine and identify our needs ourselves through self-determination.

Nakurmiik.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gordon.

On the interpretation, the Inuktitut was coming through on the English channel. Perhaps the technicians can look at that.

Our next witnesses, Mr. Nelson and Mr. Schultz, will have five minutes. I'm not sure whether one of you will speak for the five minutes or whether you'll share it.

Please go ahead. We're ready.

Mr. Ed Schultz (Governance Director, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation): Thank you for the opportunity. I will speak quickly. We want to leave plenty of time for questions.

I'm very fortunately with one of the 24 self-governing indigenous governments that have been working over the last two years on a model under the collaborative fiscal process with Canada that we've been working on since 2017. It's very much in keeping with all the modern treaties that we have with Canada—the obligations and so forth.

I want to emphasize that language courses, as we've just heard, are essential to indigenous peoples' identities and a key basis of our well-being. A big issue related to the negative social indicators that our people are sometimes challenged with is the lack of their knowledge of our languages.

Language, culture and identity are essential foundations for our self-government. That was the premise of entering into modern treaties with Canada, but is one of the most weakly funded parts that we have.

It is a critical time for self-governing indigenous languages. Most of the 26 have only a few remaining speakers—very few. The model draws on expertise researched about approaches that truly support languages by creating speakers and how these approaches should be implemented.

I was kind of tossed up between just saying what I wanted to say versus what I was told to give you.

With that, I'll turn it over to Mark.

Mr. Mark Nelson (Fiscal and Implementation Representative, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation): Thank you.

Good afternoon to the members of the committee.

As Ed said, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation and other self-governing indigenous governments have been working together with Canada on updating Canada's fiscal policy on self-government and building out what expenditure is needed for various areas of responsibility, including indigenous languages.

Our work over the last couple of years has been in building a model of expenditure for what is needed on the ground by these indigenous governments to support their language. As Ed mentioned, with very few remaining speakers, the focus is on immediate and focused immersion-type approaches that will pass the language from the remaining speakers to a new generation.

These are intensive programs, such as full-time adult immersion done in cohorts of about 10 people, preschool language nests for young children, mentor-apprentice programs for more one on one, intensive learning and silent speaker support for people who understand the language but don't speak it actively.

In building the expenditure need model, we looked at assessing what is needed to implement those programs on the ground in a way that they're effective. We looked at existing examples. We looked at the realities on the ground in the communities. We identified what we think base capacities are that are needed to put those programs into practice, what incremental capacity might be needed as the population of the community increases and there's more demand on those programs, what some of the operational costs are that are involved in doing things like on-the-land learning, learning through cultural activities and what resources are needed for creating multimedia tools in support of that learning. All of this was built into the expenditure need model.

As I mentioned, this is all part of the work with the federal fiscal policy process, and we're working with Canada, the Department of Canadian Heritage and CIRNA to put forward a proposal for a phased implementation of this model that allows the indigenous governments to build up their capacity over time.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Nelson and Mr. Schultz.

Thank you to our witnesses for your opening remarks.

We'll now proceed to the first round of our question period of six minutes. We will begin with the Conservatives.

Mr. Zimmer, you have six minutes.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you Mr. Chair, and happy new year.

I want to say thank you again to you for coming to the committee all the way from Nunavut. It's a long way away. I was there this summer. Many have heard that story probably too many times. It's a beautiful area. It's a little colder up there than it is here right now. It's about -30C° plus.

Recently I was visiting the Kitselas band in B.C. with our leader, Pierre Poilievre, and one of the things we were honoured to be briefed on was how they were trying to preserve their language. What was highlighted by other colleagues in the meeting today was about some of the elders. There aren't necessarily a whole lot of elders left, depending on the community. Also, to help with that process, there aren't a lot of youth who are able to put that down on paper to really translate and get the language down.

It made me want to ask you some questions and raise some concerns around how we could be doing better. Certainly, in 2019, it was announced that the government was going to proceed, and since then almost $1 billion has been allocated to make this happen.

Karliin, I heard you say what things still need to be fixed, and I want to get into that a little more.

It's about outcomes, because I think we want to see that this is actually getting done. There are a lot of challenges around it. I'll start with Karliin and we'll go to Kitty after that.

What still needs to be done? What could be done better to achieve the outcomes? We heard about long-term funding and those kinds of things, but here's some time for you to say, “If I were the person doing this, this is what I would do.”

We'll start with Karliin.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: *Qujannamiik*, Mr. Zimmer.

I can only talk about my jurisdiction in Nunavut. My mandate as the languages commissioner is to ensure people are aware of their language rights. When Nunavummiut feel that their language rights have been infringed, they can send us their concern. We then investigate those concerns and whether language rights have been infringed.

The fact that my office is still receiving concerns from Nunavummiut is an indicator there is still a lot of work to be done. My role is to ensure that people are aware of their language rights and to make the obligated bodies aware of their language obligations.

In terms of funding, in the Inuit Language Protection Act there are three distinct offices: the minister of languages, which is with the Department of Culture and Heritage within the Nunavut government, and an Inuit language authority that is mandated to standardize terminology and to preserve traditional terminology.

In terms of the fact that my office is still receiving concerns, the recommendations we've been putting out there are not being addressed; hence that recommendation to have one central agency within the government, because they are obligated in Nunavut to comply with the Inuit Language Protection Act. There are many different government departments and agencies. To have one particular agency.... I mentioned the Privy Council. I'm open to discussions. Maybe it's the Treasury Board. Maybe it's Heritage Canada, but I'm open to those discussions.

Evidently, with the fact that I'm still receiving concerns as a languages commissioner, the language rights obligations are not being met by the federal government specifically.

Qujannamiik.

● (1555)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Sure. Thank you.

Go ahead, Kitty.

Ms. Kitty Gordon: As for Nunavik, first, we're still under the jurisdiction of Quebec, so we don't have a self-government per se, but there are recommendations that have been set forth in the *Ilirijavut* report, which was written by Zebedee Nungak and Adamie Kalingo.

In there, they identified recommendations that came out from workshops and the different meetings that were held in the region, so I think it's a matter of having meetings with the youth and the elders and trying to bridge the gap between the two generations and make this attractive for the youth to go to. There are many different activities and workshops that do take place in the communities, but nobody shows up because it doesn't sound interesting, so I think it's also in the way the delivery is done. It's just to attract as much of the youth as we can to get participation.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Do our members appearing via Zoom have any response to that as well?

Go ahead.

Mr. Ed Schultz: I can't speak for all 24 self-governing indigenous governments. They span from the north to the south and across the country under different provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

I can say from a Yukon context, and I would say as a more boilerplate observation, that at least in my community and in this territory, we firmly believe that we need greater community delivery of programs and services. Centralized systems have been tried for decades and decades, and they do not work well. On the other hand, any community initiatives, although lowly funded, have turned out better results and more sustainable results. I think the model that the SGIGs have now developed with Canada and CIRNAC and Canadian Heritage really deliver the options for unique communities with unique circumstances to develop the community programming necessary to make significant improvements in closing the gap between fluent speakers and a new generation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zimmer.

We'll go to Ms. Atwin for six minutes.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's nice to see our committee members back after the new year.

Thank you so much, witnesses, for joining us today for such an important discussion.

To start off, I'd like to direct my questions to Commissioner Aariak. Thank you so much for speaking in your language. Please feel free to do that at any time, because one of the great honours of this committee is that we get to have Inuktitut interpretation, which I think is a really bold step in the right direction.

I can't help but think about communities in the riding I represent. Wolastoqey Latuwewakon is extremely threatened. It's a small community of speakers, and very few elders who speak the language are left. I am wondering, in your position and with your experience, what advice you could offer to language keepers and to those who are invested in language revitalization across the country.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows*:]

Thank you for welcoming me here.

In Nunavut, when the Inuit Language Protection Act was passed in.... Nunavut became Nunavut in 1999. The language act was passed after that Nunavut Day.

We had a language act that came from the Northwest Territories, from Nunatsiaq. Then we had to develop our own act in Nunavut for Nunavut.

Before I even became a commissioner, I was told to let us not be shy to use our language anymore. Let us not be afraid to use it. Let us keep our language alive. Now those are the very words that are written in that act. That is what makes our language act so unique. The elected members who were political activists in the past had struggled when they were using their language, because Inuktitut was not very much utilized.

In order to keep our language alive, we have to start in the home, in the schools. When we walk, we walk left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot. That is the way we can begin to keep and sustain our language and utilize it more. Although the language is strong in Nunavut, our population is diminishing. Many are dying out and many are losing their own heritage. There are many who struggle with their own language. For instance, somebody said that if they went out on the camp, they could go learn their language out on the land. We do that in Nunavut.

There are many dialects. There are many concerns that were brought up, because we're struggling to keep those languages alive. They are our values. We are fighting to keep our language alive. If the elected members are not doing what they are supposed to be doing, we have to bring it to their attention.

There are many types of technologies available. Microsoft came up with something whereby if you write something in English, it can be quickly translated into Inuktitut just by using cell phones and televisions and other forms of technology. There are some in Nunavut now. I hope you will come up and check this unique and amazing device.

Thank you.

● (1600)

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: *Qujannamiik*.

Just speaking again about the tools, I think the technology piece is really interesting.

I'd love to hear more, Ms. Gordon, about the cultural institute. I think that's a really interesting concept as well. Could you just share a bit about how that's going?

Ms. Kitty Gordon: The Avataq Cultural Institute is an independent entity that represents our culture. It is there to safeguard our culture and language.

Again, this is an entity that lacks funding. They are limited to what they can do within our communities. There's a dictionary project that's taking place right now. We're in the process of getting it corrected and relooked at. Again, they are limited in what they can do because it is a private entity. It's fairly small. It's very important for our identity and culture, but again, there's always a lack of funding for programs that they want to create.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Atwin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): I thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

My constituency is Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. I fully understand Ms. Gordon's explanations concerning language. I went to Aupaluk before the holidays, and I saw a little bit of what is going on there. I actually want to go back in April for a longer visit to my beautiful, large riding in Northern Quebec, to Eeyou Istchee and Nunavik.

My question is primarily for the representatives of the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. I would like to look at the need for adequate and sustainable funding. As this indigenous language study moves forward, we are finding that the people who have come to talk to us, whether they are first nation, Métis or Inuit, need predictability.

Revitalizing a language, promoting it and ensuring its protection is a long-term undertaking. It's hard to do that groundwork. There is no assurance that, at the end of the day, the money won't run out.

You talked in your remarks about a recurring, annual investment of $80 million. That clearly demonstrates that a need exists and that funding is lacking in the area of indigenous languages. You also talked about a need for $995 million over the next decade.

Can you elaborate on the importance of this long-term funding in terms of indigenous language revitalization? What do you think accounts for such a gap in funding?

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Schultz.

Mr. Ed Schultz: *Merci*. *Mahsi cho*.

You covered a lot of ground in your questions and observations, and I thank you for them. Many of our people think there are many parallels between the francophone language and our indigenous languages. However, our observation here has been that over the course of the last 100 years, there have been mostly deliberate colonial practices and policies that were designed to weed out our language and weed out our practices. In many cases, it's on the law books that some things were outlawed, whether it was dancing or singing or in some cases speaking the language.

We're trying to reverse a trend that's well over 100 years old. The colonial system spent billions of dollars to get the language out of our people, and we are saying, in the spirit of reconciliation today, that as much of an effort should be brought forward to help us reintroduce it or sustain it while it's still alive. Like all languages from any place anywhere, there is sustained funding for its continued use, growth and development over the course of time. Unfortunately, it's not unique to Canada that indigenous languages are vastly underfunded or not funded at all. It's usually through volunteer efforts and the sincere hearts of others who are trying to make sure that language survives.

Just quickly, I want to share with you why that's so important. It's related to your question. In Canada and as first nations, we deal with a lot of negative social indicators of our peoples—low education rates, incarceration rates, low health conditions, low employment and so on—and those negative social conditions have been around. The summation by many of the first nations and SGIGs is that we are dealing with a lost people, a people trapped somewhere in between two worlds—a modern western world and our way. They have been deliberately moved away from that and are lost. Why are they lost? They're lost because embedded in our language are the values, the customs, the traditions and the beliefs that we have as indigenous people and that really ground us in who we are, as all languages do for all people.

So we're in this weird place and time, and we believe long-term sustained funding is necessary not just for the sake of helping to preserve indigenous languages; it's also to bring other values and healthy families back to our communities, where we really will make a difference on the symptoms—I call them the negative social indicators—and really start making some true, good relationships here in Canada.

Thanks.

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: One minute left.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Nelson: Am I able to follow up?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Nelson.

Mr. Mark Nelson: Thank you.

I apologize if I cut you off.

About the need for consistent funding, I'd like to tie that in to the previous question about outcomes as well.

As Ed touched on, the need for consistency in community programs on the ground so that you can build momentum and get people involved and build on success, and being able to do that without having to worry year to year about proposal-based funding, is really key. You need to do it in intensive programs that have results on the ground.

A great example would be these adult immersion programs in which people commit to full-time learning over a period of a couple of years, and they are paid for their time to do that. They take it on as a full-time job to become the learners of the language so that they're passing it on to the next generation. This has been proven to work on the ground and to create very high-level intermediate to semi-fluent speakers in a couple of years, but it needs intensive effort and resources to do it. It's very clear now that spending a couple of hours a week and maybe reading some storybooks in the evening are not enough to take a language from being used inconsistently to being the living language of the community.

This goes to the question of the level of resources that are needed to put those kinds of intensive programs into effect. The resources committed so far are substantial, but when you spread them out over the vast number of indigenous communities, they don't amount to enough to implement those intensive programs on the ground. That's what we've costed out in our modelling.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

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

[*English*]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows*:]

Thank you to all our presenters.

I'm so happy to see our two witnesses here, because we can speak in our language. Our language is made understandable by our interpreters. We are so blessed, because our language is precious to us, and we have to keep reiterating how precious our language is and how important it is to who we are and to our culture.

When others begin to understand how precious our language is, they will be more encouraged and more inspired to keep giving us support in areas where we need it, and when acts and bills are proposed—many bills and proposals or acts are developed—and bills and acts will keep being made, I'm pretty sure, in the future, because it declares we can get support and we can get funding according to the acts or the bills that have been passed.

I want to ask if the bill suffices. Do you have adequate funding? If you don't have adequate funding, how much more is needed to be allocated to indigenous peoples?

We have been told over and over again that there's limited funding. There's not enough money. This is beginning to sound like a scratched record, because that's all we hear.

We have to come up with a way to form our questions. How can we get more support? How can we get more funding to implement these programs to revive our language? I'm pretty sure that there will come a day when the federal government will finally be able to meet our needs and hear what we're saying, because our descendants are relying on us today to make sure that our language is not getting lost. How much more funding do we need to implement the programs of revitalizing our indigenous languages?

Karliin or Kitty, it would be great if you could answer that question.

Thank you.

● (1615)

The Chair: You'll have two and half minutes between the two of you.

Ms. Kitty Gordon: [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows*:]

Perhaps we can do research globally to see if there are some countries where there are indigenous peoples who lost their language and if they've managed to revive it. That would be a great area to start: to conduct a study on indigenous peoples globally.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows*:]

I cannot give a specific number, but I can say there are a lot.

Now, one example I want to bring up is that for federal government agencies, although we do get funding, there's no additional funding. If someone, say, is bilingual in French and Inuktitut, yes, they get additional funding, but they go through the same struggles to keep their language alive.

We have to ask. The French people get additional funding to keep their language alive. As Inuit, how come we don't get the same equal treatment? We are not treated equally.

Many things are getting more expensive today. Inflation is rising.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] within the system or outside the system.

Thank you.

The Chair: You only have 10 seconds, so we'll have to stop it there.

Colleagues, if everybody is ready to do a two-minute round—that's preamble, question and answer—we can have a second round. I'm going to assume that.

Mr. Melillo, go ahead.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here for this important discussion.

I want to go back to the very beginning with Ms. Aariak.

You mentioned some of the concerns that your office receives. You mentioned the signage at election time as an example, but I think you ran out of time in some of your other examples. Would you be able to share those with us to give us a bigger picture?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: Thank you. *Qujannamiik*.

There are a few on Elections Canada. I spoke to those during another committee. Inuktitut was missing on posters and ballots during the last federal election in Nunavut. We had received concerns in the previous federal election to the same effect. This is an indicator to me that the first recommendations were not addressed if I was receiving those same concerns regarding federal elections in the last federal election.

Information related to health, like the "mask required" sign, was only in English. Posters in a federal facility were in English and French only.

The last example I have, which I just briefly touched on for Lori's question, is that when we receive concerns, I'm obligated to investigate them and find out whether they are admissible or inadmissible. Is there a law that's being infringed or not? In special cases like this one, for example, that I'm going to talk about briefly, Inuit public servants in Nunavut are not paid a bilingual bonus, even if Inuktitut is required to perform their duties in the territory. The Nunavut government goes through assessments. If an employee wants to be assessed on the level of their Inuit language proficiency, they are assessed by an independent assessor, and then the employee, depending on the level—one, two or three—receives that extra pay. It's an incentive to encourage employees to give service in and learn more of their language.

It's the same concept as what the federal government does with its French-language bonus. Federal government employees go through the assessment process, and it's the same concept: level one, two or three. Then, depending on their competency, they get remunerated in that way.

In Nunavut—

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you. We'll have to go to the next questioner.

Mr. Battiste, you have two minutes.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you.

I am a fluent indigenous speaker who lives in an indigenous community and who's seeing that despite the fact that we have an immersion school, despite the fact that we have all kinds of resources available, our youth are still speaking English as a social practice.

What are the best practices right now that you've seen to bring the language back? We always talk about funding and the fact that there's not enough of it, but what are the top three things that we could be funding if we're to get results in bringing back the language?

Ms. Kitty Gordon: Well, I think maybe we can see where the youth are today. TikTok is everywhere. Everybody I see up north has TikTok—all my children. Maybe a TikTok account with language specifically could be created. It could be as simple as two or three words a day. Then we could make sure that it's reaching the youth.

By going where the youth are, on whatever social media they're using, we'll be able to reach them in any way possible.

The Chair: You have a minute left.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Does anyone else want to answer?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: Sure.

Early childhood is so important. Currently in Nunavut there are free apps that you can acquire. They're for preschoolers. They're geared towards the writing system and hearing and learning the grammar.

There's everything from having media, radio. We specifically have two television channels now in the Inuit language, which focus on covering what's happening around Inuit Nunangat, but also ensuring that more people are exposed to language.

There are many different ways and so many different resources, but there's also encouraging even first-time learners or early learners to continue learning. Learning never ends. There's no graduation from the learning of anything, and the importance at home—

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm not picking on you, Ms. Aariak. We're just tight on time.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Ms. Gordon, you know this study is about the Indigenous Languages Act, which the federal government implemented in 2019.

My question is very simple. Since the implementation of the act, have you seen any differences in terms of government funding or government support provided to your communities?

● (1625)

Ms. Kitty Gordon: Unfortunately, Ms. Bérubé, I cannot answer your question today, but I do want to say that I share the sentiments that Mr. Schultz expressed earlier.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Okay. Thank you.

I will put my question to the other witnesses, as well.

Has the Indigenous Languages Act made any difference?

[*English*]

The Chair: Perhaps, Mr. Schultz, you can have a quick stab at that.

Mr. Ed Schultz: With certainty I can say, on the ground, no.

I think we're still looking at how the full measure of the languages act is going to be rolled out and implemented. There's ongoing dialogue from centralized groups like the AFN, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, etc., Inuvialuit, Inuit, our groups. There are so many different people involved in a rollout of that one piece of legislation that's just really looking at a centralized approach. I still advocate that we really need to get into the communities where the language lives, and where it's still living. It will never be delivered by a centralized approach. That's my honest opinion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Aariak, you have about 15 seconds if you want to throw something....

Okay. We'll go to Ms. Idlout for two minutes.

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

Thank you.

I want to listen to Inuktitut, so I will ask the two Inuktitut speakers. I enjoy talking in my own language.

What would you propose as a recommendation to change and to improve the Indigenous Languages Act if it's going to be promoted more in our communities and to be more widely understood? How would you go about improving it, Karliin and Kitty?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

I had recommendations that were directed to government earlier, but we also have to understand and recognize that national legislation in Canada.... It has to be known in Canada that Nunavut has a language act that protects Inuktitut, and a protection act. People need to know that in Canada.

We have many struggles. It's not just the act itself. Our language has been undermined for many years.

I will let her respond.

Ms. Kitty Gordon: [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

I know federal government employees go to Inuit communities. They need to be more visible in the Inuit communities so that they can have a better understanding of our language today, and where it stands. They can get a better appreciation for language protection acts that will protect Inuit languages.

We need you to understand all of these things from the Inuit communities' perspectives, so come to us.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

I'd like to thank Ms. Aariak, Ms. Gordon, Mr. Schultz and Mr. Nelson, our witnesses today. Thank you for taking the time to appear in person or virtually, for your opening remarks, and for answering our questions on this important study. Very clearly, you've informed this committee on where we are at and where we need to go with respect to indigenous languages. It's very much appreciated. Thank you for coming today.

With that, we will pause very briefly to prepare for the second panel.

Thank you.

● (1630)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1633)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are ready to start panel number two.

For our second panel, I would like to welcome Miranda Huron, director, indigenous education and affairs, Capilano University, who is here with us today in person; Danielle Alphonse, B.C. regional innovation chair for aboriginal early childhood development, Vancouver Island University, by video conference; and Melanie Griffith Brice, associate professor and Gabriel Dumont research chair in Métis/Michif education, University of Regina, also by video conference.

Each witness will have five minutes to make introductory remarks, after which we will have questions.

With that, I would like to invite our first witness, Ms. Huron, to take the microphone for five minutes for introductory remarks.

Thank you.

Ms. Miranda Huron (Director, Indigenous Education and Affairs, Capilano University, As an Individual): *Kwe kwe*. Thank you for having me here today. I am the director of indigenous education at Capilano University and I was formerly the director of languages at the Assembly of First Nations while the act was being written.

I'd like to acknowledge the Algonquin territories that we're on today and the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam territories where I work and live as an uninvited guest.

My own nation is Mattawa/North Bay Algonquin. I am very proud to be back here in these lands.

The Indigenous Languages Act was an incredible first step in the recognition of indigenous language rights. It was Canada's first act that recognized the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and assured adequate, predictable and sustainable funding for language resurgence. The establishment of the indigenous languages commission was also an important move in ensuring that language issues will continue to be heard here in Ottawa.

Reviewing this act through its initial implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic is particularly difficult, so I acknowledge the work you're doing here, but we should also look to this experience as further highlighting the precariousness of the vitality of our languages.

UNESCO reported that the majority of our speakers are over the age of 50, and this demographic has been particularly at risk during the pandemic. Our languages—the longest, most enduring repository of knowledge of the history of this land—are in a palpable state of fragility.

After three years, we need to question what the aim of this policy is. Are we looking at sustaining indigenous languages as secondary languages, with the unfortunate potential outcome that students taking language classes in school remember only a few sentences in adulthood, or are we looking at language resurgence, such that we invest in developing sustainable language economies, much like what has been created for minority official languages?

If territorially based official language status is not on the immediate horizon, can we support instituting languages as languages of public affairs, as has been done in Taiwan, to begin to create these language economies?

We have yet to see real progress with respect to sections 8 and 9 of the Indigenous Languages Act, in particular pertaining to the coordination between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments—the last speaker spoke to that—especially when we have such an advanced piece of legislation in Nunavut that has had to backstep because the federal legislation isn't working to support everything within that territorial legislation. Without this coordination, confusion and lack of motivation will prevail, especially when engaging with complicated issues such as our support of indigenous languages in education, health care and the justice system.

Much as is the case with Jordan's principle, we cannot lose our languages due to the quagmire of finger pointing and resultant negligence that come with federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictional boundaries, boundaries that were imposed on our nations by the colonial project.

The federal-provincial-territorial coordination affects how post-secondary institutions respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, particularly 16 and 62.ii. Targeted funding allocations to support a response to language needs within a post-secondary context have yet to take place. These funds should not come from the funding highlighted within the act, as those funds are established specifically for indigenous organizations.

Provinces and territories must allocate funding within their budgets for post-secondary institutions to respond to these calls—funding that is above and beyond what indigenous groups require for their own internal language resurgence programming. It's been normalized for post-secondary institutions to do this work based on existing funding, which typically exploits the labour of indigenous faculty and staff, who are required to do more with less.

There is also a need for discussions on how to do this work without creating additional work for community members, who are overburdened in creating their own language programming. Language workers are often doing this work without significant support.

● (1635)

I know of one teacher who has all of her materials stored in her car because of lack of office space. This infrastructure needs supporting as well. Many of these workers are frustrated by their lack of capacity to chase down funding while working more than full time to sustain their language. Others face the challenge of having to advocate for their work when they may only have one or two students. This cannot be a numbers game. These students, whether in small or large numbers, are the ones keeping their languages alive until others are ready. These language workers are looking far into the distance, to the next seven generations and beyond. So should the Government of Canada.

Meegwetch.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Huron.

We'll now go to Ms. Alphonse for five minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Danielle Alphonse (BC Regional Innovation Chair for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development, Vancouver Island University, As an Individual): [*Witness spoke in Hul'q'umi'num'*]

[*English*]

I am from WSÁNEĆ and Anishinabe Algonquin Nation. I'd like to thank the ancestors past, present and future.

[*English*]

My opening statement is focusing on the key words of inclusion, early childhood, multiple diversity, and equity in access.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples are diverse in their efforts to save their languages; the complexity is not only the many dialects but how to capture the reality that many indigenous peoples live in their community on reserve, or they live in urban communities away from home.

A significant challenge and opportunity is to design and track the progression of each of the 70 language groups and determine with each nation a long-term plan to ensure that future generations are able speak their language. In commitment to policy and reconciliation, I believe education is the answer to support and revitalize multiple languages, as a lifelong trajectory for each baby at home to early childhood to post-secondary education.

Examples that I've included are thinking about the language nests in New Zealand that started with the Maori people, the success of language immersion within Canada and the continued development of community-based capacity. It's not only thinking about language nests in early childhood but also thinking about family nests for community and family homes and sacred healing nests for elders and residential school survivors.

Advancing all indigenous languages is not only the right of indigenous children and families but of all Canadians connected to the land of our ancestors, and they have the right to learn multiple indigenous languages.

Equity and allocation of funds need to be quite visible for all first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, and I recognize again the diversity of our language dialects. They are valued, authentic and at different revitalization stages. It is a spectrum. Representation of all nations needs to be a critical piece in decision-making. Again, there needs to be accountability regarding a transparent picture of all language loss with all nations, as language loss affects every community in healing, resilience and identity.

Indigenous leadership and government need to articulate a clear pathway regarding ongoing deliverables, administration, community, and language resurgence/recovery evaluation processes. There needs to be an indigenous assessment on their language recovery and language function for all nations.

Regarding post-secondary and early childhood programs in Canada, I think it's mandatory for all licensed early childhood programs to teach indigenous languages, and to support educators in mentorship, resources and professional development with ongoing funding, as well as supporting funding for post-secondary and early childhood programs, education, child and youth care, and social work.

In regard to research, I keep thinking about the online learners and the youth using the apps and how government will be able to develop a tool to show the efficacy of people learning online. Another issue is bridging the disconnect of online platforms by creating a collaboration with shared responsibility between community and post-secondary initiatives. Each language group should have online accessibility and agreements with post-secondary for first nations, Inuit and Métis people to community members wanting to access their language. Nations should have the right to their ownership of their language and be able to access it from any post-secondary institution.

I was just wanting to follow up on the two pilot projects with the Nisga'a and the Nunavut projects for the last two years.

I really want to acknowledge with deep gratitude the elders in my community who have been working really hard to save our Hul'q'umi'num' language: My late grandmother Philomena Alphonse, the late Violet George, Arvid Charlie, Mena Paguaduan, Florence James, Marlene Rice, the late Lexi Charlie, the late Ruby Peter, Gary Manson, and Stella Erasmus Johnstone.

Huy tseep q'u.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Alphonse. We'll now go to Ms. Brice, the research chair.

I don't know whether Mr. Dumont is with you, but you have five minutes. Go ahead, Ms. Brice.

Dr. Melanie Brice (Associate Professor and Gabriel Dumont Research Chair in Michif/Métis Education, University of Regina, As an Individual): *Tansi, tanshi.Bonjour*. Hello. I'm Melanie Griffith Brice.

[*Witness spoke in Northern Michif and provided the following text*:]

Nisihkâson Melanie Brice. Michif niya. Kayate Lac Prairies ochi niya ekwa L'brroshå Sâkahikan. Oskana kâ-asastîki mîkwac niwîkin.

[*Witness provided the following translation*:]

My name is Melanie Griffith Brice. I am Michif. I am originally from Meadow Lake and Jackfish Lake. I live in Regina currently.

I'm Dr. Melanie Griffith Brice. I'm the Gabriel Dumont research chair in Michif and Métis education in the faculty of education at the University of Regina.

I'm in the process of reclaiming my language, northern Michif. Like many indigenous people of my generation, due to the impacts of formal education and urbanization, I do not speak my language. However, I was fortunate to grow up hearing the language around me from my grandparents, my mother, my aunt, my uncles and other extended family. I learned some basic commands, but I did not develop any proficiency in the language.

As a child, I recall hearing my mother talking with others and laughing. When I asked what was funny, the response was always that it's not funny in English. It's not only the humour that I lost out on, but also the knowledge that accompanies our language. As an adult, I've taken conversation classes and university classes, but I retained only a few words, never enough to speak or understand.

There have been two pivotal experiences that have facilitated my increased proficiency with learning my language, and both have involved language immersion techniques.

The Michif language is an endangered indigenous language, with a very small group of speakers left in western Canada who are predominantly *lii vyeu*, or “old ones”. Statistics Canada reported in 2016 that there were “9,710 Métis, or 1.7% of the Métis population,” who “reported being able to [converse] in an Aboriginal language....” That census also reported that out of the more than 70 aboriginal languages spoken across Canada by the 260,550 aboriginal language speakers, only 1,170 of these spoke Michif.

In his research, Peter Bakker, a linguist who studied the Michif language around 1988 to 1991, found that the Michif language is an anomaly. It does not fit into a language family with its mixture of Cree verbs and French nouns. It is neither an Algonquian language nor an Indo-European language.

He also explained that not all mixtures of French and Cree stem from the same source as Michif. He identified three types of mixtures, noting that the Cree-French or French-Cree spoken in northern areas of Saskatchewan and Alberta has no historical connection to the Michif language that is commonly referred to as southern Michif. This needs to be noted, because it has political and cultural implications.

Although the Métis National Council has identified Michif as the national language of the Métis people and our nation, Métis or Michif people also speak Nehiyawewin, or Cree; Dene; and Anishinaabemowin, or Saulteaux. If Métis communities are provided funding only for Michif, it does not honour the Cree, Dene and Saulteaux spoken in their respective communities.

The Gabriel Dumont Institute, which is the educational arm of the Métis nation in Saskatchewan, has been at the forefront of preserving the Michif language through the promotion and creation of Michif resources. Their website, metismuseum.ca, states that it “employs sociological conventions when classifying a Michif language: if a Michif person living in Saskatchewan calls their language “Michif,” then the Institute respects their wishes and calls that language “Michif”.

I've employed this same thinking about Michif in my research. My recommendations are based on the cultural and linguistic diversity that exists in our Métis communities across the Métis homeland and preliminary findings from my research.

I have completed two research projects on Michif language revitalization. The first project focused on studying the experiences of learners and fluent speakers at a land-based Michif language immersion camp. It was done in collaboration with the Gabriel Dumont Institute and SUNTEP, which stands for the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program, in Regina. Russell Fayant, a faculty member at SUNTEP Regina, was a co-investigator on this project.

The second study focused on effectiveness of transmitting the Michif language using video conferencing, like Zoom, in a mentor-apprentice program method by examining the experiences of the Michif language mentors and apprentices.

● (1650)

A major obstacle that I have encountered is appropriately compensating fluent language speakers to work as mentors and participate in language revitalization research projects. As I already mentioned, a majority of our language speakers are older. Many are receiving a pension and some are living on the guaranteed income supplement. Stipends or honorariums are considered income and therefore impact their annual income tax. These changes influence their future pension and guaranteed income supplement, so they are put in a position where if they participate, they are negatively impacted. Rather than being paid for their time and knowledge, they are penalized financially.

I recommend that the remuneration received by retired fluent indigenous language speakers not be considered income when it is used for indigenous language revitalization activities.

Second, the mentor-apprentice program has been proven to be an effective method of indigenous language transmission; however, it requires considerable time and money. If someone is interested in becoming a fluent speaker, there should be opportunities for them to take time away from work to spend those hours participating in language transmission activities with fluent speakers.

Language immersion programs are more effective than one-off language learning activities, so more needs to be done to support the immersion programs in schools, in homes and in communities. Indigenous languages need to be found in more places. We cannot rely just on schools. Communities need to be supported to create immersion programs like the mentor-apprentice program, as well as provided with resources to create videos, games, audio and television programming in the target language.

Ekosi . Marrsî. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Brice.

Thank you for being too polite to correct me. I thought you would be with Mr. Gabriel Dumont, but you are in fact a holder of the Gabriel Dumont research chair. You have my apologies.

We'll now proceed with the questions. We'll start with Mr. Vidal for six minutes.

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

I want to thank all our witnesses for joining us today. I appreciate your input.

All of you are very educated and professional people who have done a lot of work in research and whatnot, so I'm going to frame this question really quickly. I want to give each of you a short minute to answer it because I have a couple of other questions I want to get into specifically. I would ask you to be as brief as you can, but I want to give you all the opportunity.

You've all done a lot of great work and a lot of research on this subject, by the sounds of it. I would like you to just take a minute quickly and talk about the outcomes or the specific, data-based results that the revitalization of languages has on the well-being of indigenous people in our communities. That's the socio-economic aspect, whether it's education, health, cultural well-being or representation in the justice system. What's the data link to how the revitalization of languages impacts those outcomes for people in the communities?

Ms. Huron, do you want to go first? Then we'll let each of the other witnesses go as well.

Ms. Miranda Huron: Sure.

I'm unfortunately blanking on the name. There's the Hallett report, which talks about the social impacts of suicide prevention in communities with respect to language learning.

Multiple reports have come out in 2010 and unfortunately.... I should have the documents here.

However, AFN produced a 2017 report, which was the report on the national engagement sessions. That cites what was heard across the country from successful programming and so on.

I'll shift it over to my colleagues.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Alphonse, and then Ms. Brice.

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: Thank you.

I can send some documents to the committee with the research regarding well-being in connection to the language and culture.

The one thing I keep thinking about is that language encompasses everything. If we think about the Maori people and how they've started with their revitalizing of language, their *mana*.... We call it our *snuw'uy'ulh*, or our spirit. When you're speaking your language, you're strengthening your spirit. If you think of that soul wound that we have with the language loss, our connection to land and ceremonies, and all those pieces, it is collectively impacting us at all levels, if that makes sense.

I would like to follow up with some documents.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Brice.

Dr. Melanie Brice: There is already significant research that has been conducted on the connection between indigenous language learning and well-being within our communities. I don't have all the studies. The one that really comes to mind comes from Dr. McIvor at the University of Victoria. It would be great to have somebody put together a database where that information would be easily accessible, as it would just take a little bit of searching to find the different research studies. There are quite a few studies out there that can attest to that connection.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you for that, and thank you for the offer to send us some of that information, because that can be incorporated into our report as we continue with the study.

I'm going to ask a couple of questions of specific individual witnesses now because I'm going to run out of time. Ms. Alphonse, I'll go first to you.

You talked a fair amount about technology and modern teaching methods. You even got into the use of apps, and you talked about TikTok a little bit. We actually heard earlier from somebody in the first panel about maybe using TikTok. I've seen some work being done in northern Saskatchewan recently using even virtual reality for different purposes. I'm curious if you would take a couple of minutes and quickly talk a little more about some of the ideas you might have around the benefits of using modern technology to advance the work of the revitalization of languages. as well.

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: That's a great question.

What I'm noticing about the technology piece and the online pieces.... I have searched for Hul'q'umi'num' in different school districts and Simon Fraser University and all sorts of places. I'm trying to track and look for where I can find more Hul'q'umi'num'. The FirstVoices platform, as well, has developed a keyboard, and they've developed a link to many of the languages, but it's limited in words and sentences. There's a real disconnect in what's happening online. Apps, I think, are really accessible for youth and also for educators if they're in the classroom, if they're able to use them within their classrooms and curricula. I'm just hopeful that we can utilize the technology that's there and with which there's already some success, as well as have what Melanie was speaking to, generating a space, a hub, that could be very accessible for anyone to develop.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Ms. Brice, really quickly, I want to just ask you.... In my own community in northern Saskatchewan, I know the elementary schools are teaching some basic Cree, Michif and Dene. I think this is really important when we talk about reconciliation and fostering relationships between our children as they grow up together. Could you comment quickly on how that use of language within our elementary schools is maybe a really good tool to foster the relationship that ultimately leads to a reconciliation of our children as they grow up together?

Dr. Melanie Brice: Definitely, the work that many of the elementary schools are doing around early learning and across the elementary grades in language learning has been great. Notably, at Rossignol Elementary Community School in Sakitawak—Île-à-la-Crosse—they are doing phenomenal work. I had the opportunity to visit their pre-K kindergarten classroom, and it was just wonderful to see the teachers, who were also speakers, talking to these children completely in the language. Even though the children were not able to respond, they understood exactly what they were being asked to do.

While these are all really great steps, the issues come in when the language isn't being supported in the home and in the communities. We're getting a lot of great things happening within schools, but we have to do more so that the children are immersed in this language, not just in schools but in their homes, so that there are.... I believe Ms. Alphonse was talking about the language nest initiatives that have been very successful with the Maori. That is about supporting language in the home and in the community as well. It gives opportunities for more than just the students in terms of reconciliation with the greater population if other people have access to these language opportunities.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Weiler is next.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

I also am very grateful for the witnesses who are joining us virtually, as well as for the witness who has come all the way from the north shore of British Columbia to join us in person.

The first question I'd like to ask is for Ms. Huron.

You mentioned in your opening comments some of the challenges so far with the implementation of the act, particularly with sections 8 and 9. I was wondering if you could share with this committee some advice on how the federal government could best approach coordination with the provinces and territories in the context of this act.

Ms. Miranda Huron: I think the main step is getting it on the agenda. I've been watching the agenda for the FPT meetings, and it isn't getting on that agenda. When we look at the way those meetings are coordinated, we see that Métis, Inuit and first nations don't necessarily have a seat at the table. It's usually a pre-meeting, and sometimes they're invited as guests, so there's the question: Should they be coming into those meetings as well? I think so.

Even within the pre-meetings, having a very significant point of meeting to really discuss, because this is a very complicated issue.... Even when we were doing the national engagements, pulling apart what's provincial and territorial policy from what's federal policy is so intertwined because we just don't have the same colonial boundaries that exist. It needs to really be a conversation of how we cross those jurisdictional hurdles.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

You mentioned a couple of the challenges there. Noting that it may still be premature to ultimately assess this, I was wondering if you could speak a bit to some aspects of the implementation of the act that have been successful thus far and what guidance you might have for this committee as we begin or launch the parliamentary review this fall.

Ms. Miranda Huron: Multi-year funding is one of the most significant pieces that has happened. The fact that people aren't having to renew their applications consistently is so helpful.

There's a mixed piece around regional entities that are doing funding distribution. It's very important that this remain, but also, in considerations for when people are having challenges doing funding applications through their regional entities, is there a backup space? Can they also apply via the federal funding? It's a very complex issue.

Sometimes questions of dialectal politics can come into play with that. Looking at dialects is really important, because they can get lost in the mix, but when you look at it from a linguistic perspective, you see that they can triangulate languages when some languages are about to become dormant. Those dialects are key to maintaining languages that are in critical states.

All of these things are quite complicated, and the more fluidity and pathways we have, the better.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: That's great. Thank you very much for that.

I'd like to ask Ms. Alphonse my next question.

You spoke a bit in your opening about some of the good practices you've seen in New Zealand with the Maori. I was wondering if you could share those with this committee and how that might inform us in the review of this act and in assessing the effect of the act to date as well.

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: Thank you for the question.

For early childhood, children under the age of six can learn over a hundred languages. The Maori developed a full immersion in the Maori language within each of their communities, and they were able to revitalize it very quickly.

Many have adapted, and I've seen the different changes that have happened. I went to New Zealand to see their early childhood programs, and there is this strength. There is this strength within their community, and they keep branching the mentorship from the elders. Like what Melanie....

I keep going to your first name, Melanie. I'm sorry.

Melanie speaks to the elders, the eldership, the people who are the key knowledge holders of the language. Then it goes to the aunties and the uncles and branches more into that family collective space of learning. These language nests are all supported with curriculum. All the educators are supported when they're learning how to become an educator. They're fully immersed in the language as well.

That's really the success. It's a hub of support of language that's within the educational system. That's what I'm saying.

● (1705)

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you very much.

This was mentioned earlier by Ms. Huron. On a number of languages, I think the wording we used was that there is a “precariousness of the vitality of [the] languages”. I've certainly seen that, unfortunately, in my riding, with one of the nations, the shíshálh Nation, where some of the language is already in the process of disappearing at the moment. It's really the dedicated work of some members of the nation that has been revitalizing that language.

In the context of the implementation of programming, what advice, Ms. Alphonse, would you have on how we can ensure that resources are allocated for those languages that are most at risk of becoming dormant or of disappearing?

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: That was one of my talking points. In looking at the stats and looking at the indigenous act, I can see there is a variation in where funding is allocated. I recognize what you're saying about the Sechelt language and having the ability to access a tracking system of research to know where all these dialects are at with respect to dying out.

If you can find out where those are, that's the target—trying to reach those programs first, to revitalize their languages. That's what I would recommend.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weiler.

[*Translation*]

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

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

I would like to hear more about the research. If you look at the current programs that help fund indigenous language revitalization initiatives, they mostly focus on education. Of course, you all mentioned it, and it's important.

Aren't there gaps in federal funding when it comes to research? Some communities would like to restore their language, but they are unable to do so owing to a lack of academic research or archives.

Witnesses here today have also spoken of barriers to language research.

My question is for you, Ms. Alphonse, Ms. Huron and Ms. Brice. Would you have any recommendations for bridging the gaps and breaking down these barriers?

[*English*]

The Chair: We will start with Madame Alphonse.

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: Thank you for the question.

I would love to see more SSHRC or CIHR funds dedicated to revitalizing language, as determined within each of the communities. There would be a shared responsibility of funding allocated not only for the university but for the communities to be able to hold a space to develop programs, curriculum or technology to increase the number of language speakers.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Huron.

Ms. Miranda Huron: There are a few things here.

I agree that we need to have dedicated educational funding. Also, when we look at what's happening with WIPO right now, with intellectual property and the ownership of languages, we see this is a significant challenge.

Because linguists have done the data, technically they have ownership over language that they've collected, particularly historically, so we do have very sensitive archival information that is the possession of linguists. There are numerous cases of this data and these languages being willed to institutions or to other linguists, and there is no access point for the nations.

Many times at SSHRC and other funding areas, the publications go into.... It's less so now with research ethics, but there's still a wall that exists for accessing research findings when you go to pull documents. You have to be a student or a faculty member. We really need to work on access by our nations to the work that has been done, to the results, and ensure usable data has been created for them to work with. This has to be a collaboration, not just institutions creating a wall around the information they have harvested from our peoples.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Brice.

Dr. Melanie Brice: I definitely agree with the other panellists in terms of where the funding is directed as well as in terms of knowledge ownership to not only ensure that the communities own that knowledge but that it is also shared with them.

Lots of times western ways of knowing are greatly influencing how language learning and language teaching are taken up within the classroom. We already know through research that there are very effective practices that are based on indigenous language transmission initiatives. How can we get that information to our communities so that they are putting together programs that are already using effective practices?

As I also mentioned in my opening remarks, how are we compensating those fluent language speakers for their time and knowledge? That is a huge consideration that definitely impacts research. I have had many fluent speakers who are very interested in helping out, but when it comes to providing them with an honorarium, because they are on a guaranteed income supplement they are not in a position to help, because the honorarium impacts their income negatively.

There are things that need to be put in place to protect the knowledge as well as the time and experience that those elders and fluent speakers are bringing.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Tell me about the importance of elders in transmitting the language to new generations.

We often talk about stakeholders, but what can elders do to ensure better transmission?

The Chair: Do you want to put your question to someone in particular?

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: The question is for the three witnesses.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

We have about a minute, but on the role of elders, we'll go in the same order and begin with Madame Alphonse.

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: In our community we're losing the elders, so a lot of them are recording the language. Thiyaas—Florence James, from Penelakut—is trying to create content through little YouTubes and document as much as she can, because we're losing a lot of our elders in our community. That's the one thing I am really concerned about—the elders we're losing and being able to hold on to the significant link to the words that we may not know.

It would be recording them, like the late Ruby Peter on the Simon Fraser University website, but it's very limited to community.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Huron.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Miranda Huron: The input of elders is paramount in this entire project.

[*English*]

Without them we can do nothing. They also hold that knowledge. From working with the elders, I know they are the ones who can really intuitively know how we can create new words to meet these modern times, based on their innate knowledge of how the language functions. They also hold the scientific and historic knowledge of our languages, the specialization that makes languages unique.

Mahsi.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Brice.

Dr. Melanie Brice: Again, I agree with the other panellists.

To echo my earlier comments, we have so very few elders. This ties into the comments from Ms. Huron—it might be Dr. Huron, so I apologize—about having access and not only having the elders in communities but also, as Danielle mentioned, banking as much of that language as possible.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[*English*]

Madam Idlout, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you, everyone. It is so good to hear everything that is being said today. As a member of Parliament for my constituents, I know that a lot of what you have shared here today is recognized by everyone who is indigenous here in Canada. Our language was, well, almost literally beaten out of us. There were people who were forced to speak English and were not allowed to use their mother tongue.

Now, in the act pertaining to indigenous languages, there will be funding allocated for each and every program—I guess indigenous programs—and I have a question for you. We all know that up north our children and our grandchildren are mainly speaking English now. Those of us who lost our own language, who were not permitted to use our own language, were full of anger. We were hurt. We were harmed.

Can someone—Miranda, or maybe Danielle—respond to my question? Do you see the importance of healing as a way to begin revitalizing our indigenous languages?

The Chair: Ms. Huron, would you like to start?

● (1715)

Ms. Miranda Huron: Healing is critical. In doing the national work, something we heard everywhere was that there must be funds for creating spaces for people to heal and considerations for “silent speakers”. These are people who have the language innately within them from growing up around it but who, because of the atrocities you're speaking about, are afraid to speak it. They are too traumatized to speak it. It's about creating space for that language to come through in a healthy way again.

Health is key to all of this. There are so many factors, and you've identified a very important one.

The Chair: It's Ms. Alphonse and then Ms. Brice.

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: What you just said was very powerful, and I want to acknowledge that the death of language is a soul wound that we have in every indigenous community from not being able to speak our languages. A transformation and healing happen when we are able to speak them fluently and are able to hold them.

I just recently learned Hul'q'umi'num'. I have been taking it with Thiyaas, Florence James, and I started to cry because there was this feeling that I felt, like a loss, and that grief and that shame. I didn't realize that, as you said, the anger was sitting in me for so long, and once I was to speak it on my own territory, there was this wave of opening for me. She said, “Your heart's opening more and you're healing because you're able to speak and connect to the language.”

I'm able to gather medicine and know how to talk to the plants and the trees properly, so healing is a huge piece to all of our families and our children and every community. I just want to thank you for being able to speak to the importance of language and how it can transform and heal in really deep ways.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Brice.

Dr. Melanie Brice: The other panellists have said a lot of things that I can definitely echo.

We look back at the hurt of not being allowed to speak our language, but also when I think of members within my family, I know they felt shame and ridicule when they did speak their language. Many Michif speakers were ridiculed and made fun of because that was the only language they came with, and they didn't speak English or French within the schools. Now they are able to speak their language out in public and they feel pride in that, and then they are willing to come and work with the younger people and the adult learners who want to learn the language and join in and share that pride. It definitely heals those wounds that have deeply scarred our communities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

Colleagues, we have 10 minutes. We could do another quick round if people wish, and I am going to assume they do. I'll give it to others if they wish to use it.

Would you like to avail yourself, Mr. Schmale, or shall I go straight to Mr. Battiste?

Okay, I will go to Mr. Battiste. If you change your mind before the end, please....

Go ahead, Mr. Battiste.

● (1720)

Mr. Jaime Battiste: My question is around incentives for indigenous language speakers. We often talk about the need for us to have educational programs and immersion and adult immersion. I feel as though we're putting too much of a burden on educators without any incentive.

How do I tell my teenage son, who went to Mi'kmaq immersion, that he should continue speaking the language? What does that open up for him in opportunities?

I know that if you speak the French language in Ottawa, that's obviously a benefit for jobs and for all of these different things. What incentives are out there for our youth to actually continue to speak their language?

Ms. Huron, you can start.

Ms. Miranda Huron: This goes into that idea of creating a language economy, and we need to work on that, because right now it's challenging. Single moms are being told that they have to learn their language alongside their children and speak it alongside just existing, and it's such an impossible ask for so many people. There's also that cultural guilt if you're not learning your language. We can't be driven by guilt; we have to be driven by celebration.

Yes, it was a tragedy that came up in this past year to see that indigenous languages weren't being treated like minority languages with respect to language bonuses in government. That's an easy first step for government to take.

Within any workplace, having that should be seen as something that needs to be funded. Even within education placements and so on, it needs to be seen as something that people are striving towards. We need to create this economy around our languages, much like what has been created for minority languages in this country.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Ms. Alphonse, do you want to comment on what incentives we could create?

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: I'd like to change the mindset of incentives, because while I think having the languages is something that is a celebration, of course, it needs to be immersed in community.

When we think about climate change and how we'll have lots of other communities coming to Canada at some point, we're going to have to know more languages. The incentive to start to have this real strength through speaking languages and holding onto indigenous languages is connection to our land.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Do you think that a 13-year-old on reserve would understand his place in the overall world's culture, and that he would see that same incentive created?

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: Yes.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay.

The Chair: Ms. Brice, did you want to comment on that?

Dr. Melanie Brice: Yes.

To build on Danielle's comment in terms of the connection to the land, our youth are already incentivized by land-based education. They enjoy going out onto the land and learning about traditional knowledge. Right there, there's an opportunity when we start doing things with language and on the land. Many communities are already doing this because the youth are interested in getting out onto the land and learning.

We have to tie into those practices that our youth are already interested in that celebrate our culture and knowledge, and we have to tie into changing the mindsets, similar to what Danielle said.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Battiste.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead for two minutes, Ms. Bérubé.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I would like to continue talking about barriers to research.

Many witnesses have told us about the administrative difficulties and complexity of the paperwork involved in getting a grant or funding, as well as the wait times following project submission to the department.

Have you experienced that?

[*English*]

The Chair: We can start with Ms. Brice, if you want to comment on that, and then Ms. Alphonse and Ms. Huron.

Dr. Melanie Brice: Yes. As an academic, I have had the experience in terms of the time that it takes to apply for research grants. Of course, there's the waiting. I have been supported in applying for grants by my institution. These same supports do not exist at the community level. Our communities do not have the same infrastructures that are set up at universities in the way that I'm supported as a scholar to submit grant applications.

There are things that need to be in place that are supportive and help our communities to get over these obstacles around, as you say, the administrative side, in terms of the paperwork, especially in communities where their first language is not English or French, and that's what the application requires. There are accommodations that need to be made.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Alphonse.

Ms. Danielle Alphonse: I'm going to agree with Ms. Brice. Yes, that's a true fact. There needs to be a weight of funding that can support communities within the research.

Also, in thinking about elders, we have to be really careful if we're going to be doing more research in language with elders. We have to be careful about how much we're utilizing each of those elders within those language groups. We can overuse elders as well, and we have to be very careful and protective of those people.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Huron.

Ms. Miranda Huron: I would echo what my two colleagues have said. I'm also looking at great organizations like the First Peoples' Cultural Council. They are doing regional work and going out into the community to support the filling out of applications. Oftentimes, if you're a single teacher in your community, it's hard to put your hand up for that help or know where those pathways are. Just communicating where those pathways are is one of those things. It's such a hard thing to get the word out in the right ways that people will hear it and know how to do it. It's a challenge.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Idlout, would you like to conclude?

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

Thank you.

I have a question for Melanie.

You mentioned earlier that when elders receive honoraria, the honoraria are taxed as income. It affects their income support or pension. I was told the same by my people.

How would you recommend to change that so that it does not affect the income of elders? If we truly value our language, how do we protect it by protecting the elders?

Dr. Melanie Brice: Thank you.

I don't know income tax law and I'm not too sure about all of that, but if there's a way that honorariums can be seen not as income for people who are over the age of 60 or 65, or if there were some way that it could be reported....

What I have found with the elders is that they don't mind paying the tax on that, but what they do mind is that it's considered as income. For example, with the guaranteed income supplement, if you receive over $20,000—$20,000 is not a lot of money—as soon as you go over that, it's taken off from the following year. While they receive the honorarium that year, it means that in the following year they receive less money. They're being penalized for helping out and for wanting to revitalize their language. There has to be something in place so that our elders are not penalized.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This brings our second panel to a close.

I'd like to thank Ms. Huron, Ms. Alphonse and Dr. Brice for providing testimony today. Quite often you all agreed with each other, which I think makes what you've said today very strong. We very much appreciate it as we continue our study of indigenous languages and of the act itself.

Thank you for giving us your time and your testimony today.

With that, colleagues, I call this meeting to a close. We are adjourned.