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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 80th meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, today's meeting is in a hybrid format.

I'd like to welcome everybody to our meeting.

Now that we are in session, screenshots, photos and recordings are not allowed.

For those participating virtually, our clerk went through everything, hopefully. You have the choice of floor, English or French on your controls. Please select your language of choice. We potentially will be having questions in Inuktitut. You may want to make sure that you're ready for that if Ms. Ildout joins us today.

We're going to get started pretty quickly. One of our witnesses has to leave just after 4:30. We might be able to squeeze in a few more minutes for him, but I'd like to get into opening statements and then into at least the first round of six-minute questions before we move to the second panel.

With that, I'd like to welcome, on our first panel, Hayden Stenlund, student; Jordyn Playne, president, youth council, Métis Nation of Ontario; and Melanie Omeniho, president, Women of the Métis Nation.

Hayden, if you're ready, we'll start with you for your five-minute opening statement.

I do have a system. If the camera is on me, I give a yellow card, which means 30 seconds left, or a red card, for the end of your time. Don't stop in mid-sentence, but wind up your thoughts.

Whenever you're ready, Hayden, we'll turn it over to you for your opening statement of up to five minutes.

Mr. Hayden Stenlund (Student, As an Individual): [*Witness spoke in Michif*]

[English]

I am 17 years old. I have cerebral palsy. I am in grade 12 at St. Thomas Aquinas High School. I am a descendant of the half-breed adhesion to Treaty 3. My ancestors are from the northwestern Ontario Métis community in the traditional territory of Treaty 3—Rainy Lake, Rainy River, Lake of the Woods and Lac Seul. The

Métis are a distinct people with our own way of life and language, which is Michif.

My family has strong roots in the northwestern Ontario Métis community. My ancestors were present in the area prior to Canada being Canada. The Métis in region 1 are grounded in our identity with regard to who we are and where we come from as people. I've known my roots and Métis identity since birth. I have become a strong advocate for Métis rights and interests. I was raised within a Métis community, and I've been constantly surrounded by strong regional Métis leaders who've advocated and defended our Métis community. My older sister Katelyne and I have been lucky enough to grow up in our Métis community since birth. My Métis family ensured we knew, understood and protected our Métis identity and way of life. From an infant, I was brought onto the lands and waters of my traditional territory to receive teachings regarding my way of life. Because of this, I am proud of, grounded in and aware of where I come from, who I am and my very Métis roots, as I know them.

My mother Regional Councillor Stenlund has always fought for the rights of the citizens in our area. She taught me that my community is rooted in the facts of history: where our ancestors come from, and our rights, interests and claims. We have these inherent rights.

The Crown knew we were a distinct people in 1871, when the Dawson Route came through my territory. Canada acknowledged the Métis in the community via the 1871 half-breeds of Fort Frances Dawson pay list, on which one of my own ancestors is listed. In 1875, Canada again formally acknowledged the Métis community in northwestern Ontario by signing a treaty with us—a half-breed treaty, a Métis treaty. Canada made promises to our Métis community with our Métis treaty adhesion in 1875.

Bill C-53 is a way for Canada to be honourable and to treat our Métis communities the same way as first nation communities with regard to our being able to govern ourselves. The passing of Bill C-53 is more than just a legislative bill on paper. It's a way for Canada to treat us equitably and to acknowledge that Métis already govern ourselves. The passing of Bill C-53 is an opportunity for Canada to finally and formerly acknowledge our right to internal governance and authority over our citizenship, election processes and Métis child and family services.

I shared my story because I personally believe it's important for Canada to acknowledge and respect us. Our communities will have this legislation acknowledging us. How I was raised should not be compromised. My mom and the MNO should not have to continually stand up for and defend the citizens and our communities. I strongly believe Métis self-government will help us maintain our way of life and allow us to govern ourselves in the Métis way, for all of our future descendants. This is reconciliation in action.

I implore you all to realize the significance of what you are voting on. Think of how you can impact Métis families, communities and our way of life. Our citizens and future generations should not have to turn to the courts to defend our people and communities. Canada needs to act swiftly. This is your opportunity to pass this legislation to acknowledge our right to self-government.

• (1610)

Thank you all. *Kawapamitin*.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stenlund. You're right on the mark for the five minutes. Well done, and thank you for your opening comments.

We're going to go to our other online witness, as I always like to do while the technology is working.

Ms. Omeniho, when you're ready, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Ms. Melanie Omeniho (President, Women of the Métis Nation - Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak): Thank you.

Before I start, I want to say how proud I am of Hayden. I've known Hayden since he was a very young man, and he does make my heart big.

Good afternoon. My name is Melanie Omeniho. I'm the president of Women of the Métis Nation-Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm joining you today from Treaty 6 territory, the motherland of the Métis nation.

Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak is the national Métis women's organization. It's democratically mandated to represent Métis women across the Métis nation motherland. LFMO plays a significant role in enhancing the social, cultural, economic, environmental and leadership space occupied by Métis women. We influence public policy and decision-making related to rights, priorities, concerns and aspirations of Métis women within the Métis nation and the Canadian government.

I'm here today speaking in favour of the passing of Bill C-53. Having reviewed the proposed bill, I'm heartened to see that, after the signing in 2019 with Canada and the Métis governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, the relationship will be formalized by way of the passing of Bill C-53.

Métis people have long been seen as the "free men". The Cree people gave us the name of "Otipemisiwak": the people who governed and owned themselves.

This bill recognizes and acknowledges that Métis people have the right, based on section 35 of the Constitution of 1982, to actualize self-government. By way of law, this will further define that

Canada will interact with the specified Métis governments, recognizing their right to self-govern.

This bill does not deal with land or land rights, as may have been heard through media. It speaks solely to the internal governance structures of the Otipemisiwak-Métis government, the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan and the Métis Nation of Alberta. It does not impact on other indigenous peoples or other people who are Métis who are seeking their own rights.

The bill recognizes the authority with respect to governance, operations and things like child and family services. Further, Bill C-53 speaks to our self-determination on who is Métis. This bill has no adverse impacts on other indigenous peoples. Métis rights are not subordinate to the rights of other indigenous peoples. There is no hierarchy of indigenous rights. This fact is spoken about within the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and even in the Supreme Court of Canada in the Powley decision.

With several recent examples of the swift passing of government bills on other indigenous nations, I would expect that there would be no impediment to the swift passing of this act.

Article 4 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states:

Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

Further, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act states:

Whereas the Government of Canada recognizes that all relations with Indigenous peoples must be based on the recognition and implementation of the inherent right to self-determination, including the right of self-government;

Bill C-53 is simply validating what the Government of Canada has already committed to in its relationship with indigenous peoples. We speak strongly in favour of the work and look to offer our support with ongoing Métis gender-based intersectional analysis through the implementation of Bill C-53. It will take everyone's collective efforts to make this process a success and to empower this historic bill to be a driving force to advance reconciliation in Canada.

I look forward to joining with our other Métis nation leaders to ensure the swift passing of this bill supporting the Métis nation of governments and advancing our reconciliation.

Thank you.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you for your opening comments.

Ms. Playne, we'll go to you. Whenever you're ready, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jordyn Playne (President, Youth Council, Métis Nation of Ontario): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee.

I'm Jordyn Playne, president of the Métis Nation of Ontario youth council and the youth representative on the provisional council of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

I'm a descendent of Marguerite Dusome of Penetanguishene, a historic community along the shores of Georgian Bay. My community has a rich and long history of self-governing Métis people. We are rights-bearing community members of the Métis community of Georgian Bay under section 35 and have an inherent and constitutional right to self-government.

My Métis ancestors were forced off their lands, but always maintained their community around the upper Great Lakes. Today we celebrate our heritage through vibrant community councils, gatherings, youth cultural programming, Métis music and art and our traditional ways of life. We also celebrate the stories that connect first nations and Métis people. It is essential that we remember our shared history and the waters of Georgian Bay that hold the spirit of our ancestors. They continue to inspire us today.

That said, since the introduction of this legislation, misinformation has been spreading about Métis communities, driven by some Métis and first nations leadership. As a result, Ontario Métis students and young people are now living in fear of online misinformation and being subjected, at some points, to harassment at school.

It is not that Métis youth are questioning our identity. We are strong in our connections to our community and to our culture. It is our youth, like Hayden Stenlund, who spoke previously, who are continuing to pick up the fight of our ancestors to ensure that future generations find themselves better off than we are today.

This new-found concern stems from those who seek to undermine our very existence and leaves us wondering—and anxious—whether tomorrow might bring more hurtful accusations, and questioning how we can respond to this lateral violence.

While the Métis have always faced prejudice, our generation grew up at a time when Métis rights were affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada. For the past 20 years, we have had rights recognition that was denied to our ancestors. In some cases, even instructors and professors are attacking Ontario youth on social media. In other cases, Métis young people are being bullied at school.

This is having a negative psychological impact on Métis youth. We cannot allow political division to damage the relationships between the first nations and Métis people in what is now Canada. As we all work together to walk the path of reconciliation together, we need to focus on the common ground we share.

We found plenty of this, on issues such as climate change, education, equitable access to health care and the need to take action on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, but we must also support one another in advancing our respective self-governments.

Bill C-53 will not only empower Métis governments to protect Métis children and families in the welfare system but also ensure that Métis youth get a real say in the programs and services provided by our Métis governments.

Bill C-53 will allow youth to have a voice. It will empower our young people to be in the dialogue with our Métis leadership and uplift our voices around shaping the laws and policies of our Métis government. It provides us with the autonomy to ensure that our people are taken care of in a way that is respectful and representative of our own culture and ways of knowing. This legislation is truly reconciliation in action, and it enshrines in law the section 35 rights that our people were promised many years ago.

My ancestors and past leadership have fought for our right to self-govern and determine our collective paths forward. We have a historic opportunity to finish the work of our ancestors and build a Métis government that is rooted in our ways of knowing, being and culture. My Métis ancestors started to paddle the canoe forward in our journey towards self-government, and it is now the responsibility of Canada and our leadership to safeguard this journey for future generations.

I ask for your support of Bill C-53 to ensure not only that the people of today have protected rights of self-government but also that my children, my children's children and future generations are self-governing Métis people.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you for your opening statements, everyone.

I have a quick question.

Ms. Stenlund, I want to clarify whether you're willing or able to accept questions as well. I know that you're here in support of your son, but a question was asked about whether you are able to or willing to take questions today.

Ms. Theresa Stenlund (As an Individual): I'd be glad to take questions as well. Today is Hayden's day, but I'm also willing to take questions on behalf of the community and the MNO.

The Chair: I appreciate that clarification from you as a mother.

Colleagues, let's get into it. First up, I have Mr. Vidal, who has six minutes.

When you're ready, the floor is yours.

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

I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here today as we consider this important piece of legislation and try to find our way to a good outcome.

Ms. Playne, I'm going to start with you. Hopefully, I'll get to everybody a bit here throughout my time.

You had an article in the Toronto Star just in the last couple of days. It's very similar to a lot of the points you made today in your presentation, so I'm not pulling anything out of here that's not what you probably just said as well. I think it's pretty common information that you shared. I'm going to quote from the article, which, again, reflects what you said.

It states, "First Nations and Métis in Ontario are supposed to be walking this path to reconciliation together; yet each day, it feels more and more like a feeding frenzy. Some First Nations leaders are pitting us against one another." That's one of the paragraphs in there.

Today, in fairness, you clarified this. Part of my question was going to be about how it's not just first nations leaders, but other Métis leaders, other Métis organizations and the MMF. There have been letters written by the MN-S and the MNBC, which have challenged the MNO leadership on some of the membership stuff and some of that. I'm sure you're aware of all that.

My question around all of this—the importance of this legislation and some of the controversy that's happening between different groups, especially in northern Ontario—is on consultation. Do you think there was enough consultation?

You talked about misinformation. Was there the provision of enough accurate information to all of the parties involved in all of this to avoid some of the conflict, avoid some of the accusations and avoid some of the challenges that we're facing now?

Was an adequate job done in creating the relationship and providing information to all of the parties that are now concerned about some of the things going on?

Ms. Jordyn Playne: Thank you for your question.

Thank you, first of all, for reading the article. It's very much appreciated.

Last Thursday, some of our previous presidents spoke to some of the consultation, but one of the things I want to highlight around the misinformation.... I can speak directly to an incident that's happening in my home community and how this misinformation is directly affecting young people.

Due to the misinformation that we've seen, both in the media and on Parliament Hill previously, this information is trickling down to young people through their local leadership and their parents, and it's now trickling into schools. Our neighbouring first nations communities are coming into schools and fighting with Métis children because of this misinformation.

The MNO has done an incredible job of putting out the information surrounding this bill. The information is out there about the exact aims of this bill. We've all previously spoken about the exact targets of it, but I think the MNO has done an incredible job of putting out the facts of this bill.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you.

To drill down a bit further on that, do you think the government has done enough to educate people on this? This is a piece of legislation that—as we clarified on Thursday, I think, and the analysts clarified for me again today—if passed, provides that future treaties

don't have to come back to Parliament but can be approved by an order in council. In lay terms, that means cabinet can just approve future treaties.

In fairness, there's been a lot of talk about passing this quickly, like we've done with all the other pieces of self-government legislation in the past, but there's never been a piece of self-government legislation that has taken this approach. This is the first of its kind. For it to not have to come back to Parliament later is creating some concern for many people.

In the context of that, do you think the government did enough to educate some of the first nations people you're dealing with in this conflict?

• (1625)

Ms. Jordyn Playne: With all due respect, I think this bill has been a long time coming. We have been self-governing and we have engaged in these conversations for a long time, so I think some of those questions might be better answered by some of the technical team. I'm not here to speak about some of the concerns around the processes, but I can speak to how this has affected young people and the dire need to have young people's voices included in our self-government.

That's exactly what this bill is going to do. It will ensure that young people are empowered in those dialogues because, right now.... I think of our funding agreements and how they're heavily reliant on federal and provincial funds. At any time, in theory, they could be yanked. However, if we are in the conversation, we get to determine how funds are spent and spent in a way that is representative of Métis people.

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you for that.

I'm going to move on. I don't have much time left.

I'm going to move on to Ms. Stenlund. If you want Hayden to answer, that's fine. I'm going to ask you a question in relation to an article you actually put out, I believe, in the Hill Times just a few days ago. It's a bit similar to what I just asked Ms. Playne.

You say, "Métis are only asking to be treated the same as other Indigenous Peoples who have seen their self-government legislation passed swiftly and respectfully."

In the Library of Parliament's legislative summary to us, it's very clear that this legislation is very different from any of the prior pieces of self-government legislation. When you asked for this to be passed quickly and swiftly, are you suggesting that parliamentarians, or this committee, should not execute our democratic responsibility to carefully consider the legislation? This is really significant regarding the future of the Government of Canada's relationship with the Métis people.

Are you asking us not to do our due diligence in that respect?

The Chair: We are at the end of the six minutes. I'll just give you an opportunity for a brief response. There could be a chance to come back to that. A brief answer would be appreciated.

Thank you.

Ms. Theresa Stenlund: The Métis have been self-governing for generations. Hayden gave a quick synopsis of our history, who we are and where we come from. There's no hierarchy in the Constitution. The other indigenous peoples are self-governing. We're just asking Canada to formally recognize us on paper for what we've already been doing for generations. It's been a long time coming, and we're just asking Canada to move on that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stenlund, I'll point out that for this round we have 18 minutes left. Please stay with us as long as you can. I'm getting some anxiety about you missing your bus. When you need to go, feel free to hang up and leave. I'll just thank you now. Please feel free to stay as long as you can.

With that, we're going to move to Mr. Carr, for his six minutes.

Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Stenlund, I'm going to direct my question to you.

I want to start by saying how wonderful it was to listen to your presentation here today. As members of the committee know, I'm a former high school teacher and high school principal. To see young leaders articulate with such passion and intellect on behalf of an issue that's important to them is really inspiring. Thanks for being here.

One of the questions that I would like to ask is this. From your own experience, what role do you believe that youth and students, particularly in secondary, so in grades 9 to 12, can play in advancing the rights of indigenous peoples?

One way, of course, that this could be done is you can appear as a witness in front of a parliamentary committee, although that is not something that happens particularly often. It's a privileged position certainly for us to be able to listen to you and the opportunity for you to speak to us.

Beyond the confines of Parliament, what are the ways in which you think people of your generation, whether that's in your community, in your school, across the province or across the country can advocate for advancing the rights of indigenous peoples?

Mr. Hayden Stenlund: We can practise our way of life, show people that and be proud of who we are. We can tell people who we are. We shouldn't be afraid to show our Métis identity. We should be involved in our communities. We should proudly speak our language of Michif. We shouldn't be afraid to show our personalities. We shouldn't be afraid to show our identity. We shouldn't be afraid to practise our very way of life, which we practised for centuries without formal recognition by the Crown. I think we deserve that.

• (1630)

Mr. Ben Carr: Mr. Stenlund, I'm going to follow up if I can.

Your colleague here, Ms. Playne, had talked about an increase in both real and perceived fear, particularly online in regard to this particular debate. Are you able to share...if you're comfortable? I know this could be a difficult topic. Certainly, feel free to say, "I'd like to pass."

Would you be able to comment on whatever personal experiences you have had, or those around you have had, in relation to some of the anxieties and fears that Ms. Playne raised a few moments ago?

Mr. Hayden Stenlund: One of my fears is that we're treated differently than first nations. We are not given the resources that are given to first nations. We aren't really considered as first nations. We're sort of cast aside when we shouldn't be. If we say we're indigenous—and this is my personal opinion—we are telling the truth. It's not like we're a minority group. We've been around for centuries, decades and multiple generations. We're not going to go away anytime soon. I think we need to be considered.

Mr. Ben Carr: Thanks very much, Mr. Stenlund.

Ms. Playne, perhaps I will direct the same question to you—not the second one, because I think you answered that in part of your opening statement, but the first one.

Can you talk about the ways in which Métis youth across the country can exercise their leadership in the capacity of advancing indigenous rights for peoples across the country? What are some of the ways in which youth can do that, and is there a role for the federal government to be supportive in those endeavours?

Ms. Jordyn Playne: Absolutely. I think young people need to stand up and be proud of being Métis.

In the previous week, you heard a lot about Métis once being known as “the forgotten people”. What I'm seeing among young leadership in Ontario and across the motherland is that we are no longer sitting quietly and hiding. We are the ones leading the way and being proud of who we are. We are raised in a beautiful culture and community. Folks need to stand tall and speak their truth. It's not easy. We've seen that, but it's worth it.

Mr. Ben Carr: Could you elaborate on this? What has changed? You say “no longer”, which implies there was a time when youth were feeling less vocal or less engaged than you and your generation are now, perhaps.

Where do you think the shift occurred? What's behind that?

Ms. Jordyn Playne: I think more people are talking about Métis communities and families. It's something that is super common now. I come from a community that represents 25% of the Métis citizens in Ontario. We are engaging in dialogue, from the itty-bitties all the way up to our elders. It's no longer something folks are hiding. More people are coming to gatherings and engaging in dialogue that way.

Mr. Ben Carr: Thanks very much.

You said, “itty-bitties”. I was in education for a long time, but I have not heard that term. I'm bringing that back to Manitoba—the “itty-bitties”.

Ms. Jordyn Playne: That's perfect.

Mr. Ben Carr: Thank you.

Mr. Stenlund, thanks very much for your participation. I give you kudos for taking time out of your day to participate in the democratic process in support of something that means a lot to you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going now to Madame Bérubé.

[*Translation*]

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us, both in person and remotely.

My question is for Ms. Playne.

In an op-ed piece that appeared in the *Toronto Star* on Saturday, you said that Métis youth felt disheartened and anxious.

You also spoke about polarization, saying partisan politics was a growing problem impacting Métis youth.

Can you give the committee a clearer picture of the concerns you have regarding Métis youth?

• (1635)

Ms. Jordyn Playne: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

Absolutely.

I should also note that I'm a registered social worker. I work in a psychiatric hospital in my home community. This is where the intersection of my elected position and my social work position comes into play. I have conversations on a daily basis with young people about how they are affected by this misinformation. My community in particular—the Georgian Bay community—has been called into question. We've been called frauds, not real and not actually existent. You don't know what that does to a person until you see it in big, bold letters in academic articles or newspapers. To see your community called out.... Your family history feels as if it's been erased.

That's what makes people anxious. If we're seeing these questions and call-outs happen, what's next? We don't know, but I can assure you that Métis young people across Ontario know who we are. We are proud. We are born and raised in our communities, as Hayden shared earlier. That is something that is unequivocal and firm for Métis young people, which helps with the anxiety.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What impact would Bill C-53 have on Métis youth?

[*English*]

Ms. Jordyn Playne: “How won't this impact Métis youth?” is the real question. This will fundamentally impact young people in every single way. One of the beautiful things all our Métis governments have engaged in is ensuring young people are at the centre of every dialogue that happens. When we think about our laws, our

policies, the way our child welfare system could be shaped or our mental health supports, young people are in those conversations.

This bill moving forward would empower young people to continue those dialogues in order to shape a Métis nation not only for ourselves but also for the future generations—for my children and my children's children.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I'm going to turn to Mr. Stenlund.

I commend you for participating in the committee's study. It takes a lot of courage to be here as a student.

What are your concerns regarding Métis youth?

[*English*]

Mr. Hayden Stenlund: I am concerned that some people don't think we are an actual indigenous group and that some people don't believe us when we say we are Métis. We should be proud of who we are. We should be able to say, without repercussion, that we are indigenous, that we have an identity, that we have a way of life and that we are strong, proud Métis people who have a culture and a language, which is Michif. We have jigging, fiddling and ways that should be recognized. We shouldn't be cast aside. We should have a voice at the table.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: My question is for both Ms. Playne and Mr. Stenlund.

In the current landscape, what happens to Métis young people when they grow up? When something like this goes on and on, what is the intergenerational impact?

[*English*]

Ms. Theresa Stenlund: First, I'm going to thank Hayden.

You can go and catch your school bus now, Hayden. You can disconnect and head off. Thanks.

On the question of the intergenerational effects that this could have, as you heard my son say, he knows where he came from. He has been raised within a Métis community. His ancestors before him knew who they were. Canada formally recognized us. With Canada delaying this, it puts into question—as Hayden just spoke—who we are as a people. Are we a real people? We know that we are. We are recognized in the Constitution, yet Canada is delaying formally recognizing our inherent right to self-government.

You need to move forward and treat us equitably.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: My last question is for Ms. Omeniho.

What does recognition mean for women in Métis communities?

[*English*]

Ms. Melanie Omeniho: Thank you for the question.

I'd like to tell you that, for many women in our communities, it means that their roles are much more significant. We come from a strong egalitarian society where women were a significant part of all of the things that we did. You can see that in the leadership that exists within the Métis nation and how many of our leaders are Métis women who are holding strong and pushing forward on Métis rights. We proudly stand with them and support them.

Métis women, more than anybody, know the sacrifices that were made when we became a part of the forgotten people. I know that most Métis women we've consulted with and engaged with are very supportive of this legislation.

I come from Alberta. There has been an extensive amount of consultation and engagement around the Constitution and what self-government means. I'm no longer a young person, but since I was a very young person and my mother took me to Métis meetings—I even went to Métis meetings with my grandmother—we have talked about self-government. People wanted self-governance. It has been decades for us to get to this point, and I think the important part is moving forward. We're not here to try to deny anybody else their rights, but I will tell you that we have not been engaged on other indigenous self-government legislation with other indigenous peoples. It wasn't a requirement.

I appreciate that there are a lot of processes involved within the Government of Canada in how legislation gets passed and what treaties do, but those are processes that the government controls. We have no control over any of those matters.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you. We're at the end of our six minutes.

Now we'll go to Ms. Idlout.

The floor is yours.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Thank you to the witnesses. It is always a pleasure to hear what you have to say and to hear the youth as well. The young man delivered his speech really well.

Theresa, I am so proud of your son. Although he is still going to high school, he is already showing signs of leadership.

I want to ask every one of you if you can respond to my question.

If Bill C-53 is passed, in Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan, when the Métis have their own government, when you have self-government, you will be able to pass bylaws. What kind of legislation would you like to see in the constitution? As a self-governing people in Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan, what kind of legislation would you like to see for Métis to be able to govern themselves?

[*English*]

What kinds of laws would you like those self-governing nations to make? We're assuming that by having self-government that will

naturally lead to those self-governments making laws. What kinds of laws would you like to see those nations making that will have impacts on Métis peoples in each of the nations that will be impacted?

Ms. Jordyn Playne: Thank you.

I wish I could sit here and answer that, but I think one thing that was raised earlier was that we need to consult with our people. We need to talk to them about what laws they want to see. It's not up to me. It's up to the people. We listen, we sit and we learn, and then we go back and make those decisions.

I wish I could sit here today and list off 50 different laws that I would love to see, but I'd be misspeaking, because I know young people love to be in dialogue and that's what we plan on doing. We want to have that dialogue in order to make those decisions. I can guarantee you that young people will be at the centre of those dialogues.

• (1645)

The Chair: Maybe we'll go to Ms. Omeniho next and then to Ms. Stenlund.

Ms. Melanie Omeniho: For us, there are significant numbers of laws and things that need to be done and that, once self-government is implemented, will be within the control of our Métis governments to institute: things like decisions and laws based on family and child services and how to care for our families and children in a reformed manner from what exists today so that we don't have high numbers of kids in care.

We need to start looking at laws that are going to help us be more effective around the justice system so that not only do we not become victims of justice but we don't have the highest incarceration rates within the criminal justice system and we're able to become an effective government to deal with some of the issues we're facing within the justice system.

There are many different laws. I agree with what has already been said. There are too many to think.... The problem is that they need the tools and resources now to be able to start to institute those things and to push and work with other governments to change things so that there is a better future for our children and our youth.

Ms. Theresa Stenlund: Thank you to the two previous speakers.

I just want to remind everyone that we have inherent rights, and our rights come from the communities. We will need to go out, as Jordyn mentioned, and consult with our communities and our citizens.

There will be different levels of jurisdiction and authority. Within the Métis Nation of Ontario, there will be regional jurisdictions, authorities and laws, and there will also be provincial jurisdictions and authorities of different levels, on different matters. All of that is going to come from the people and our communities. They will be the ones providing us the direction in regard to the laws and the jurisdictions and authorities we set forward under our own self-government.

The Chair: That takes us to the end of our time, unfortunately. The votes cut into our meeting time today, and we have one more panel to hear from, so we're going to have to end it here.

I'd like to thank each of our witnesses—Ms. Stenlund, if you could, pass along our gratitude once again to your son for his being here—and thank all of you for joining us.

With that, we're going to suspend, and bring in the next panel. We'll do opening statements, and then one round of questions. That will take us near the end of the time we have today.

• (1645) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: Colleagues, we're back. I'd like to welcome our second panel.

From the Matawa First Nations, we have David Paul Achneepineskum, chief executive officer. From the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, we have Chief Greg Desjarlais.

Welcome to both of you. You'll have five minutes each for your opening statements. We'll then get into probably one round of questions for six minutes each, 24 minutes in total. That will likely take us to about the end of the time we have today.

Mr. Achneepineskum, I'll hold up the yellow card when there's 30 seconds left and a red card when the time is up. Just finish your thought; don't stop mid-sentence.

When you're ready, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum (Chief Executive Officer, Matawa First Nations): My name is David Paul Achneepineskum. I'm the Matawa chief executive officer. I'm also a member of Marten Falls First Nation.

I am presenting today on behalf of Matawa First Nations management and the Matawa chiefs council. There was very limited advance notice of these standing committee hearings, with only a few hours given to confirm our participation here today, but we are here.

The Matawa chiefs council represents the nine first nations of Aroland, Constance Lake, Eabametoong, Ginoogaming, Long Lake #58, Marten Falls, Nibinamik, Neskantaga and Webequie. The Matawa First Nations has a population of 10,864 as of March 2023.

The Matawa traditional territories and homelands are known around the world as the Ring of Fire region, Canada's and North America's emerging lone source of chromite and other critical minerals—nickel, gold and silver—that will be required to reposition Canada and its allies in the new green economy.

On June 21, 2023, the day Bill C-53 was introduced and referred at second reading [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the Matawa chiefs council issued a letter to the Governor General of Canada, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon, calling on her to respond to protect the rights and interests of our first nations.

• (1655)

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to jump in here for a second. I'll stop the clock. Your sound quality has deteriorated quite

significantly. I'm having problems hearing you, and I think our interpreters are having problems.

Perhaps I can get you to do another quick sound check. We may get you to move the mike.

I'll turn it over to our clerk to get you sorted out. Then we can hopefully resume with good sound quality.

• (1655) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1655)

The Chair: You have our apologies for that. If you speak nice and loud and clearly, we should be able to get through this.

You have three minutes and 20 seconds left on the clock. Please continue where you left off.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: Matawa is formally submitting this letter to the standing committee.

On Thursday, October 26, the standing committee heard testimony from the Métis nations of Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta that Bill C-53 only impacts the Métis people, and there is no trigger of the duty to consult with first nations on this proposed legislation.

It is the Matawa position that the Métis nations are not the consent providers of our peoples, nor are they appropriate legal advisers to be providing such high-level legal determinations and advice to your committee. In this irresponsible capacity, the Métis nations are acting as enforcers of colonial mechanisms and court decisions in their own interests.

Canada has not informed first nations of the impacts of Bill C-53.

Bill C-53, in clause 8, “Recognition”, raises the Métis nations to the definition of “Indigenous governing body”. It is the Matawa position that the Métis, specifically in Ontario, are not the constitutional equals of the original inhabitants of this land—a role held only by first nations and Inuit.

The Matawa chiefs council recommends to the standing committee that a formal analysis be conducted by the Department of Justice as to the impacts of Bill C-53 on the section 35 rights of the land-rights holding indigenous consent providers in Canada—the Inuit and first nations that are treaty, non-treaty or modern treaty rights holders.

It is the Matawa position that Bill C-53 will impact our section 35 aboriginal and treaty rights, including aspects of community governance, traditional jurisdictions, lands and resources.

The Matawa chiefs council submits to the standing committee the Métis Nation of Ontario's zone map, which is publicly available on its website. As shown on the map, the Métis Nation of Ontario publicly makes unsubstantiated claims to the James Bay Treaty No. 9 boundaries and the rich traditional territories of the Matawa member first nations.

The Matawa chiefs council also recommends that the Department of Justice, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, and Indigenous Services Canada provide an impact analysis or definition on the parameters for the term "distinctions-based approach". Bill C-53 will eliminate the distinctions-based approach between first nations, Inuit and Métis that has previously been a safeguard to distinguishing and protecting the established land rights and interests of first nations and the Inuit peoples of Canada.

Our land and resources rights, all current codeveloped legislative initiatives on policing, health, family and child welfare, and the upcoming negotiations of the United Nations declaration act will be impacted by Bill C-53.

Another ignored impact of Bill C-53 will be in the Impact Assessment Act, which has been successfully challenged by Alberta as unconstitutional.

It is the Matawa position that the list of impacts of Bill C-53 on the first nations of Canada has been minimized and ignored.

• (1700)

The Chair: Can I ask you to make your closing statement? Thank you.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: In closing, this Liberal government is engaging in irresponsible Crown legislative conduct by advancing Bill C-53. What we are witnessing in Canada is pitting first nations against Métis people to protect the section 35 rights and interests of our children and future generations.

Meegwetch.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Chief Desjarlais.

When you're ready, the floor is yours. You'll have five minutes.

Chief Greg Desjarlais (Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations): I want to thank the committee members for giving us, from the Confederacy of Treaty Six in western Canada, a chance to address some issues related to Bill C-53.

I am a treaty chief from the Frog Lake Cree Nation, which is part of Treaty No. 6. Our ancestors entered into a peace and friendship treaty with the British Crown in 1876 to allow her subjects to live in our territories. It is important for us to stress that we never gave up our lands and resources. Our ancestors allowed the Crown's subjects to live in our territories, not to own them.

We will have prepared a written submission for the committee. I will not read it, but will speak to a few points and leave time for questions.

This is a Liberal government bill. It is not a bill based on the consent of the treaty peoples. We have to remember that Parliament

controls this bill. In the future, if you want to change, amend or repeal the legislation, it is the right of Parliament. Our treaty rights are not controlled by Parliament.

We have noted that there is no implementation plan. How is the government going to reconcile conflicting interests? We ask these questions coming from Alberta.

We are going to raise an issue that is unique to Alberta. The Government of Alberta, during the 1930s' worldwide depression, created eight unique Métis settlements. The Province of Alberta set aside lands for Métis for their use. These settlements are not part of the Métis Nation of Alberta's constitutional structure. However, the constitution does contain language that, if the Métis settlements in the near future want to be part of the Métis Nation, they can negotiate their way into the Métis government. This is set out in chapter 19 of the constitution, with a very strange clause stating that the Métis settlements would continue as created by Alberta.

In effect, the federal legislation would create another structure of Métis within Alberta. One would be recognized by the province and one recognized by the federal government. The situation is really setting up a future conflict of laws. The Alberta legislation clearly states that anyone who is recognized by federal legislation is not entitled to be a member of the Métis settlement. There are a number of court cases that have reached the same conclusion.

We are wondering what the Alberta government has told the members of the committee about the apparent conflict. If the province has occupied the field under section 92, what is the federal jurisdiction going to do? How do industry and other agencies react when consultation is required? Does industry follow the federal definition of Métis as set out in the Supreme Court of Canada decision in Powley, or does industry follow the Province of Alberta's definition as set out in Alberta law?

Does Bill C-53 override any provincial legislation? If it does, then the legislation should be clear.

We have a number of questions.

First, if the process is based on the right of free, prior and informed consent, how does the government determine those criteria?

Second, the Province of Alberta does not appear to have been engaged in this legislation process. How is the federal government going to reconcile the two separate definitions of Métis? Who will decide?

Third, Canada appears to be creating chaos rather than reconciliation. The chiefs in Alberta issued a statement on Bill C-53, which is attached to our presentation. It says that the chiefs of Alberta call on the federal government to abandon this bill that they perceive as “ill-conceived and divisive”. The honour of the Crown is not upheld when Canada creates legislation that disregards our treaties. The inherent and treaty rights guaranteed to our people are not subject to change or renegotiation. That must be upheld for as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow.

As sovereign nations, our chiefs are standing up for our treaties and for our future generations. We cannot allow Bill C-53 to create a precedent for revisiting and undermining treaty agreements and the treaty rights they guarantee.

We commend this to the members to read.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will get into the rounds of questions right now.

First up, I have Mr. Schmale, who will have six minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses.

I have a ton of questions and not enough time, so I will pick up where you left off, Mr. Desjarlais. Could we talk about some of the comments you made just a few moments ago?

Last meeting, we had representatives from Métis Nation of Alberta here. They specifically said that a member of, say, Fort McKay or the Métis settlements did not necessarily have to be a member of MNA. If I heard you correctly, you said they do. Can you clarify this?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I think what's happening is this: If you hold status or bill...which was created by the government, you're not allowed to live on the Métis settlements.

What we're saying is that the issue was already dealt with in the 1930s through the creation of the settlements.

• (1710)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Yes, I think they were talking about the membership. MNA was saying that you don't necessarily have to be a member to be on a settlement. I get your point—the provincial and federal difference.

While we're speaking, I also want to push back a little and try to flesh this out in terms of what we're hearing from the Métis side about a piece of legislation that deals with their own self-governance. The Métis, as we heard in our last meeting, are saying this piece of legislation does not affect first nations at all. If you heard our previous panel talk, it's more of a self-governing piece of legislation to allow them the authority to keep doing what they were doing in the past.

Your statements just now contradict that.

Chief Greg Desjarlais: Yes. I think my comment was about the membership and, I believe, the land. When we're fighting over a territory, we have an issue.

We also have a traditional territory here, which the Métis settlements and now the Métis nation claim. When you use the words “treaty” and “inherent right”, that's very offensive to us because the federal government can't even uphold our treaty.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That's one of the things we're also trying to look into and get clarification on.

It's our understanding, as this legislation stands—and I invite comments from our friend from Matawa as well—that there is the potential that, after this self-governing piece of legislation, a treaty process starts. That will involve consultation. Potentially, it would not come before Parliament for final ratification.

Is that your understanding as well?

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: Perhaps I can speak from a state view.

As far as we're concerned, self-government leads to a lot of things. Potentially, it's going to allow, as we mentioned in our brief... It's going to lead to lands and resources. It's going to lead to getting our peoples together, and we don't want that. As far as we're concerned, we are the rightful landholders in our treaty territory. We want to keep it that way.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Desjarlais, do you want to comment?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I will address that in writing. I think there are too many points to discuss, but it's the same thing. We hold that position. We are the treaty and inherent rights holders.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: To our friend from Matawa, are there any amendments to this piece of legislation you would like to see added in order to make it more acceptable to the people you represent?

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: No. First of all, we do not support Bill C-53. Therefore, we're not going to recommend any amendments to it at all. As our friend from Treaty 6 stated, we are the rightful landholders. We inherited the land from our ancestors. That's the way we would like to keep it.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: When you talk about land and resources, can you maybe dig into that a little further? Can you give us some of your concerns about that part? What do you think that means, and what are your concerns?

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: We talk about the Ring of Fire development that's potentially going to happen within the next decade. As far as we're concerned, we—the first nations people of the land, the treaty rights holders—are solely responsible within our land. It will be up to us to negotiate with these industries to benefit our peoples of the land.

As far as I'm concerned, Canada and Ontario have messed up our treaties since 1905 or 1906. We don't want that happening anymore. We would like to remain as the rightful landholders and benefit from those resources. The Ring of Fire development is the biggest mining development to happen here in Canada, and we are the rightful beneficiaries of that.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're out of time here, so we're going to go to our next questions.

Mr. Battiste, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you to the first nations chiefs and leaders who are presenting to us today.

We've heard testimony from the co-drafters of this legislation that nothing in this legislation actually uses the words “lands” or “resources” or impacts first nations lands or resources. Can you point me to the clause where there's a misconception somewhere that this actual legislation delegates any lands or resources, or any kind of notion of lands and resources, within this legislation?

That's for either one of you.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: There's really nothing in there. However, certainly, you talk about self-government, and it just leads to something else along the way.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: It's not necessarily this legislation that you have issues with. It's what comes after, possibly.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: No. I mean, we've had issues with this legislation right from the start—

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Can you show me—

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: —because it's going to lead to other things. Why have this legislation in the first place if it's going to lead to other legislation that will impact our lands and resources, our treaty rights, etc.?

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Just to be clear, though, it's what comes after this legislation that you are concerned about—about the lands and resources once this legislation comes into effect.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: No, this legislation shouldn't come into effect at all. It shouldn't have been set at all.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay.

Chief Desjarlais, could you point to anywhere in the legislation that actually speaks to lands and resources?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I think that, in Alberta, we're already having issues when the government lumps Inuit, first nations and Métis into one. Do you know what? We stand in a treaty position all the time, so it's easier to deal with the Métis nation. It seems to be a divisive tactic, and that's why we say that we're calling on the federal government to abandon the bill.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: One of the key points made by some of the presidents of the Métis on the legislation is that there are a lot of people out there who claim to represent Métis from all across

Canada. Some are legitimate; some are not factual in law. They said that it's important for us to actually have a piece of legislation that recognizes the importance of ensuring that we see which Métis are actually legitimate Métis, recognized by the courts and recognized by some provinces. Some are not.

Do you not see value in government legislation that recognizes the valid Métis as opposed to those who aren't?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I guess, if I could take a stab at that.... Whose definition would it be under: the Métis settlements', the Métis Nation's, the provinces' or the feds'?

I think it hurts—how fast you're trying to push this bill—when we, as first nations, are being told on a lot of bills.... In many of them, you can't even find two sentences of first nations' input, and that really hurts. We're supposed to have a treaty, a peace and friendship treaty, and that's why our position is to abandon the bill.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Can you just go into a little bit about that?

What clause in the legislation do you believe impacts your treaty rights?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I believe this is going to open the door for more division.

• (1720)

Mr. Jaime Battiste: There is nothing within the current legislation, but what could happen after the legislation is passed is your concern. Is that correct?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: When you look at Alberta and the Métis nation, and all the offices across the province, we're confined to our reserves and to our traditional territory, but we're going after the same land now. When my treaty territory and land is in question, then we're very concerned.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay.

Under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, they have several clauses about identity and self-determination. Do you believe that UNDRIP should apply to the Métis of Canada?

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: Can I answer? I didn't get a chance to answer your previous question there.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: I don't have much time, so—

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: As far as I am concerned, this legislation, Bill C-53, does not define who the Métis are. It seems to me that the Métis Nation of Ontario defined who their own members are. Whereas, as indigenous status people, we are defined within the legislation under the Indian Act. That defines us, so it's a free-for-all as far as I can see in this Bill C-53. Anybody can claim to be a Métis.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay, so your concern is around possibly opening up to a lot of different Métis who don't have the proper ancestral lineage. Is that the concern?

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: It is happening right now with the Métis Nation of Ontario. Pretty well anyone who declares, "I am a Métis" can be a member, and clearly there is no real definition. I'm sure that happens across Alberta as well, so it's self-determination. Métis themselves define who they are.

The Chair: Mr. Battiste, we're out of time, and I do need to move to my next member.

[Translation]

Ms. Bérubé, you may go ahead for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My question is for both witnesses. The passage of Bill C-53 could undermine current efforts to advance reconciliation with first nations. What do you make of that?

[English]

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: I'm sorry. I have issues with the sound here.

The Chair: Madame Bérubé, would you repeat the question?

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: It's sometimes said that the passage of Bill C-53 would undermine current efforts to advance reconciliation with first nations.

What are your thoughts on that?

[English]

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: I certainly agree with that.

Reconciliation is being set back under this legislation, and trust is going to be lost. It's so unfortunate, but it seems to me that it's underhanded of the Liberal government to try to force this upon us as first nations. Certainly reconciliation, as far as I am concerned, is dead because of the introduction of Bill C-53.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Do you have anything to add, Mr. Desjarlais?

[English]

Chief Greg Desjarlais: Short and sweet, I agree with his statements, for sure.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: My question is for the CEO of Matawa First Nations. You passed Resolution 17-28-07-2022, which stipulates that Matawa member first nations reject Métis assertions in the Matawa homelands and territories. The resolution also rejects Ontario's recognition of the Métis claims as an indigenous people group constitutionally equal to the first nations people of the Matawa member first nations. Can you elaborate on those assertions?

[English]

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: As far as our position, first nations indigenous peoples are the only rightful owners within our treaty territories.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: About two weeks ago, Mr. Desjarlais, you met with Minister Anandasangaree to express your opposition to Bill C-53, among other things. You urged the minister to go back to the drawing board and carry out proper consultations.

What should those consultations look like?

[English]

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I think what has to happen... Even now, you guys gave us six minutes. What has to happen is that we should be involved from the beginning. If you want to talk about reconciliation, you have to involve first nations people.

Sometimes our trust is taken advantage of as first nations people. I talked about a peace and friendship treaty. We talk about the resources, yet first nations are the poorest people in this country. It's 2023 and there are still boil water advisories, just to give an example. You have to engage first nations and actually have some of their input involved in these bills.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You said earlier that treaties should always be honoured. Otherwise, it opens the door to division.

Can you explain that, please?

[English]

Chief Greg Desjarlais: We have to start somewhere.

I'm glad that you're hearing me. Again, when the NRTAs were unilaterally done, our people were not included. That was almost 100 years ago.

First nations are part of the solution here in this country. We were never the problem. Now that section 35 is full of victories, I think we have to go back to honouring the treaty and working together, listening to what we're trying to say, and not using the AFN, because it doesn't work for all. We treaty Indians try to uphold the treaty, not just for us but for all of Canada.

We really need to be heard, and sometimes our 46 votes in Alberta are not being heard.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You also talked about the James Bay Treaty. What is the difference between the James Bay Treaty and your treaties?

[English]

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: As far as Matawa is concerned, eight of our communities are within the James Bay Treaty No. 9. In fact, the communities signed Treaty No. 9 in 1905.

The Chair: All right. We're out of time on this round.

We'll now go to Ms. Idlout for her six minutes of questions.

Ms. Idlout, the floor is yours.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. Your statements are very important to us.

I have a question for both of you. If you would both answer this question, I would appreciate it.

Now, if you were to get self-government, can you go forward even without the land claims settlements...without land?

• (1730)

Chief Greg Desjarlais: We already made a treaty. Again, if it was upheld—look at the natural resources, the forestry, the oil and gas, the mines and the minerals—if those were paid to the first nations, we'd be more...“self-sufficient” would be the word. I don't know about self-government, because we're—

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*] I think I will repeat my question. I don't think it was clear enough.

Can you move forward with self-government or self-governance even without land?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: You cannot have a government without land.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Go ahead, David.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: I'll repeat what he said. We cannot have self-government without land. We have to have the land, the resources and everything that is here, as we had previously from our ancestors.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*] My other question is in terms of UNDRIP, which pertains to our rights as indigenous peoples. Do the Métis fall under UNDRIP?

Greg or David, can you respond to my question, please?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: Yes, I'll take a stab at that, David. The Métis fall under Canada. The first nations fall under UNDRIP.

Ms. Lori Idlout: David.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: As far as Matawa is concerned, first nations should be concerned, as well as the Inuit, in terms of UNDRIP, because we do not see it as being the right way of moving forward.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*] My last question is this: Why can't the Métis be supported by UNDRIP? Why can't their rights be under UNDRIP?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I think it goes back to the original definition. It's the people who were here at the time of contact, the treaty peoples.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: First nations and Inuit people are the original inhabitants as we stated in our brief. They were the original inhabitants and landholders of this land.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we're at the end of one round. Normally, we'd finish at 5:30. Because of our late start, we do have resources until 6 p.m.

We could do part of the second round. That's five minutes, five minutes, two and a half minutes, and two and a half minutes.

Does the committee want to do one more round? Okay.

We'll go to our Conservatives and Mr. Viersen for five minutes.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being here. I'm going to go to Mr. Desjarlais first.

What do you think this bill puts in place? It's not necessarily clear to me. There seems to be several levels of government. You have a treaty partner. On the indigenous side, you have the AFN, and then you may have something down to, say, a community association.

The Government of Canada wants to enter into a relationship with a number of bodies across the country here. Where would you peg Bill C-53, placing the Métis Nation of Alberta, for example, in that hierarchy of self-government?

• (1735)

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I just want to say that it's going to muddy the waters more in Alberta. If treaty members live off reserve, what do they fall under? If the Métis people live off the settlements, you're creating the Métis nation. I think you're asking me what they fall under. I guess it would be a fourth level of government.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I'm not sure if it was you or David who mentioned the AFN. Would this bill be creating a Métis AFN idea? Would that be your understanding of the bill? Then, I guess, there are all the interesting things around the AFN's role in governance in Canada as well.

Do you want to comment on that a bit, Greg?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: It would be creating another level of government. It's hard for us to accept and to understand when we're not given the respect that we deserve as the first peoples. I shared before that our 46 votes aren't enough at the AFN table. We get outvoted. I've seen treaty resolutions get trumped by the AFN charter, which is an arm of the government there, so....

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Would you say that this bill could be putting in place a Métis-level AFN, essentially? Is that your intuition on this?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: That would be my intuition, but I would ask the government that question.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: David, I think it was you who mentioned the AFN. Do you just want to elaborate a little on that?

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: No, I didn't mention it at all. It wasn't me.

The AFN is merely an administrative organization as far as we're concerned.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I was just wondering what the temperature is like up in your part of the world. What is the general mode of heating your homes in your communities?

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: In the Treaty 9 territory, communities are remote. Primarily it's heating furnaces that we have. You can imagine that the price of hydro is very high. We don't use it for heating at all.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I'm just wondering if you have a carbon tax exemption and if you would be interested in that up in your part of the world.

Voices: Oh, oh!

A voice: That's a great question.

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: No, we do not at all.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Are you negotiating with the federal government for a carbon tax exemption in your area?

The Chair: We are fairly off topic from the intent of this meeting, which is to study Bill C-53.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I saw an opportunity and I took the opportunity.

The Chair: There are 30 seconds left.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: All right.

Thank you very much for appearing here today, David and Greg.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll stop there and go over to Mr. McLeod next.

Mr. McLeod, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses here today. I really appreciate that you've taken the time to come and talk to us.

This is a very difficult subject. I come from the Northwest Territories. We've had lots of discussions around Métis self-governance and Dene self-governance and, in some cases—

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have a point of order, Mr. McLeod. I'm going to stop the clock.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: The interpretation has stopped.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: The interpreter indicated that the witness's audio quality was too poor.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm just checking with the interpreters to see if they are good.

Mr. McLeod, can you just give us a quick sound check? Give us a quick weather report from where you're at and we'll make sure we have the sound. Then I'll continue with the clock.

• (1740)

(Pause)

• (1740)

The Chair: You have four and a half minutes left. The clock is back running.

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

Thank you again to the presenters.

This is a very sensitive subject. I come from the Northwest Territories. We have 15 sets of negotiations going on, some with the Dene and some with the Métis. Several negotiating tables involve both. I grew up hearing about the treaties and hearing how sacred they are. Many elders view it as an agreement, a peace and friendship agreement, between two countries. However, I'm also very aware and hear on a regular basis that the Métis also signed agreements.

Chief Desjarlais, I want to get you to talk a little bit about your Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, their goals and how they want the treaty to be respected. You guys also want the right to self-determination to be honoured and respected. Can you tell me how that is different from what the Métis are asking for?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I just want to say that it's pretty hard to be first nations in Alberta, because it seems like we're not recognized by the province. It's like another—God rest his soul—Jordan Anderson again. We're bounced between jurisdictions.

Do you know what? Our common goal is to have clean, safe drinking water with no mould, an economy with people working, addictions-free nations and the utilization our resources to have ambulances. Some of our communities don't even have ambulances. It's 2023. As I said, first nations have always been part of the solution. We were never the problem. I think that's the goal of self-determination. We never surrendered our resources. I said it was unilaterally accomplished back in the 1930s. Do you think the first nations would do that? I don't think so.

Anyway, that's what it is. It's being able to stand on our feet in alcohol-free and meth-free reserves, practising our sacred ceremonies and not being thrown in jail for doing that. That would be kind of like self-determination, I think.

• (1745)

Mr. Michael McLeod: Thank you.

I think all of us who are indigenous and non-indigenous strive to have healthy communities with healthy people in them. I totally hear you. I sense the emotion on the subject of being treated with respect, being treated honourably and being treated fairly. History hasn't shown that.

Is that part of what is making it difficult for you to accept that the Métis would have any type of rights? Is it because of the situation your band or tribe is in, or has been in, and how they've been treated?

Chief Greg Desjarlais: I think that Canada should make all the wrongs right first. My fear is that, when I'm cranky, you'll just go to the Métis and ask for consultation on my lands and my projects.

Do you know what? We forgot.... I'm going to say it. The first nations were here. Then came the foreigners, the settlers, and then came the Métis. We've forgotten about all this, and that's the way it is if nobody teaches it. I'll share that. There is some apprehension from my nation because I see a huge problem coming down the road.

Mr. Michael McLeod: I don't know much—

The Chair: Mr. McLeod, I'm going to have to jump in. We just reached the end of the five minutes, and we're going to need to go to our next questioner.

We're going to go to Madame Bérubé for two minutes and 30 seconds.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Desjarlais, you said that Bill C-53 would create two tiers of governments.

Do you think the interests of first nations and the claims of Métis have to be at odds with one another?

[English]

Chief Greg Desjarlais: Like I said earlier about the projects in our area, the resources, the land and so forth, it's a divisive document. It may not directly say it in there, but that's what's going to happen.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What position would you have taken had you been consulted on Bill C-53 beforehand?

[English]

Chief Greg Desjarlais: Like I said earlier, you have to talk to the first nations. I think that's important, that we have our input involved in transcribing these documents. There probably wouldn't be as much push-back if the first nations were being heard.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: What does the CEO of Matawa First Nations have to say?

[English]

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: Certainly, I totally agree with what my friend is saying. We are both treaty people. As far as

we're concerned, with regard to our lands, we were the original inhabitants of the lands, and we are still there.

Look at, for example, water. One of our communities, for over 30 years, is on boiled water. Do you think any community or municipality in Canada would put up with that? No, it wouldn't.

Deal with first nations issues first. Otherwise, you're not dealing with anything. You're just completely messing up the first nations again, over and over. Deal with us. We're willing to work with you.

The Chair: We're going to stop there and go to Ms. Idlout, who will have the last two and a half minutes in this round.

Ms. Idlout, the floor is yours.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, what you are saying here is that it's always a struggle for us indigenous people, for Inuit and first nations. We have been put through real hardships, and that is so true. The Métis people have also had struggles and hardships similar to what we have suffered. When our rights are mentioned in Canada, it means all people. It means Inuit, first nations and Métis.

With that consideration, it seems that Métis rights should also be honoured. I understand what you are saying and I know that it's been a struggle, but we need to live in peace and work together again. If the bill is passed, would you be willing to work together alongside the Métis nations as well?

• (1750)

Mr. David Paul Achneepineskum: No, we didn't create the issue with the Métis. Within the Indian Act...infant tribesmen, women losing status when they married a non-indigenous person. That's where the Métis issue came about within our area.

It's up to Canada to resolve this Métis issue in another way, but don't use first nations again. You're putting the fault on first nations if this Métis Bill C-53 does not come about. We're not the ones at fault. It's the Government of Canada, and you have to resolve it yourself.

The Chair: Thank you. We're at the end of the time.

We're almost at the end of our meeting time today. I'd like to thank both of our witnesses on this panel for your testimony and for your insights from your perspective.

Chief Desjarlais, you mentioned the time restrictions. It is a pretty rigid process, and I apologize for that. I think I mentioned that we can receive briefs, so if you have additional comments, please submit them to the clerk.

Colleagues, on that, there is one small item. A few witnesses have asked about submitting written briefs. I wasn't on the committee at the start of this session, but this committee, in particular, adopted a limit of five pages. Most committees have a limit of 10 pages for briefs, and I have had some witnesses ask if they could do up to 10 pages. It is a deviation from what was adopted at the start of the session for the committee.

Do we have agreement to allow witnesses to submit up to 10 pages?

The Chair: For this study, we'll do up to 10 pages, and we can revisit it for other studies in the future. Thank you for the clarification.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Colleagues, thank you so much. The meeting is adjourned.

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