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Chair: Mr. Patrick Weiler





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• (1110)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 113 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

I want to recognize that we are meeting on the ancestral and unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples. As always, I want to express my gratitude that we're able to do the important work of this committee on the lands they've stewarded since time immemorial.

There are a couple of changes today. I want to welcome our new clerk, Monsieur Alexandre Roger. I also want to welcome Mr. Caputo, who's going to be joining our committee today as well.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Wednesday, April 10, the committee is going to continue its study on tax revenues from businesses on first nations territories.

Before we begin, I would like to ask that all members and other in-person participants consult the cards on the table for guidelines on how to prevent audio feedback incidents. Please take note of the following preventative measures in place to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. Only use a black, approved earpiece. The former grey earpieces must no longer be used. Keep your earpiece away from all microphones at all times. When you're not using your earpiece, place it face down on the sticker placed on the table for this purpose.

Thank you all for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I'm informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting. We may have some technical difficulties, but we will navigate those as we do.

With that, I would like to welcome our witnesses who are here right now.

We have Grand Chief Joel Abram from the the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, who is joining us by video conference. The committee very much appreciates your patience in meeting with us again today, in light of the challenges last week. Thank you very much for that.

We also have Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann, the president of the First Nations University of Canada, who is also joining us by video conference.

Just to inform members, Chief Delbert Wapass from the Thunderchild First Nation is unable to attend today. Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik is going to be joining us, but he's unable to join until noon. We will have just one round of questioning with Grand Chief Kyikavichik, starting at noon.

With that, we'll move into opening statements, starting with Grand Chief Joel Abram.

You have five minutes. The floor is yours.

**Grand Chief Joel Abram (Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians):** Thank you very much, panel. Hopefully you can hear me better this time.

I hope that you have received my speaking notes. For those of you who need translation, hopefully you will get that very soon as well.

My submission revolves around three particular areas: excise tax, casino and ATM taxes, and carbon taxes.

The Chiefs of Ontario's chiefs committee on economic development, which I chair, has focused on excise tax sharing and its possible feasibility. Also, we have reached consensus on focusing on excise tax, and that work has been ongoing.

We did undertake a legal feasibility study through Woodward & Company, and that recommended that our chiefs committee move forward with the FACT tax-sharing framework mentioned in the federal budget.

However, we are also going to be looking at this with a closer legal eye, considering the case that's going to be coming before the Superior Court of Québec and the Quebec v. White and Montour excise tobacco case in which the court has already found that the charges against them would be dropped. Quebec's government is appealing that.

It found that they're supported by UNDRIP, which is now federal law—they have that right to economic development—and also by the Covenant Chain treaty, which was found to be valid. Back in 2020, then minister Marc Miller used that treaty to meet with the Mohawks who were blocking the railroads at Tyendinaga, so that is an active treaty. That's also one of the 13 areas that Quebec is trying to use to say that the treaty is no longer valid. Also, it found that the excise tax violated their treaty rights under that particular treaty.

It will be interesting to see where this is going to go federally. If this does get to the Supreme Court, the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians has agreed to intervene in this case in favour of the White and Montour side, supporting those rights going forward.

We are still going to look into the other parts of that and look into the FACT tax-sharing framework creation. Regardless of whether section 89 applies to that, it's up to the federal and provincial governments to create new revenue-sharing agreements with first nations leaders to ensure that tax profits are allotted for first nations community needs.

I'd like to point out that, in Ontario, Grand River Enterprises pays well over \$200 million in excise taxes. However, Six Nations itself doesn't receive much of that money.

With regard to casino and ATM taxes, the problematic provincial cartel system hurts first nations gaming hosts from making that profit. When we look at the federal jurisdiction framework for gaming in the United States, we see that they have a larger number of gaming businesses. The federal government should also consider providing partnership opportunities in Internet gaming.

Another option for the government—we know this through Bill C-92 and that appeal from Quebec as well—is that the federal government has the ability to override provincial legislation and recognize first nations jurisdiction in any area it pleases. Of course, gaming could be one of those areas as well. First nations did have gaming before.

Also, we're looking at the Van der Peet test being overturned. That's a very colonial test. Whether your rights are solidified or not depends on when you met a European, which, of course, we know is all based on racism from the 1400s and doctrines of supremacy.

With regard to carbon taxes, Chiefs of Ontario and Attawapiskat First Nation filed a judicial review after the federal government failed to negotiate carbon pricing with first nations in Ontario.

The GGPPA established Canada's carbon pricing regime, which was meant to be revenue-neutral but had disproportionate effects on first nations. Basically, we're asking the federal government to re-develop the policy with their communities by either exempting first nations or allowing for cost recouping.

Currently, we cannot comment on carbon taxes in any capacity due to the current, ongoing legal action.

There has also been some backlash from other first nations communities, as seen from the Anishinabek Nation and the United Chiefs and Councils of Mnidoo Mnising, which made an intervenor memorandum of argument on the GGPPA to the Supreme Court in 2018, arguing that the carbon tax overlooks the exaggerated climate impacts that already affect first nations communities and arguing

how these impacts uniquely affect first nations due to their cultural ties to their waters and lands.

• (1115)

This case also shed light on article 29 of UNDRIP and its connections to the carbon tax, which expressly recognizes, among other rights, the rights of indigenous peoples “to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources.”

For first nations, carbon taxes are not about federalism but rather a violation of first nations land rights and an affront to the economic reconciliation efforts the federal government has promised.

I'll leave it there for now. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Grand Chief.

With that, we will move over to Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann for a five-minute opening statement.

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann (President, First Nations University of Canada):** *Aaniin*, everyone. I'm humbled to join you today from Treaty 6 territory. I am originally from Fishing Lake First Nation, which is in Saskatchewan. It's a Saulteaux, or Anishinabe, community. I'm also president of First Nations University of Canada.

Today, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this committee has undertaken a study to examine economic reconciliation, including ways that existing tax revenues from businesses on first nation territories might be placed under the control of those first nations themselves.

Today I stand before you to advocate that first nations should have autonomous control over the existing revenue streams from their own territories' resources. We've already heard one example.

One thing we're doing—this is beyond the notes here—at First Nations University of Canada is launching a national indigenous economic prosperity institute. At this pivotal moment in our ongoing journey towards economic empowerment and self-determination for indigenous communities throughout Canada, the national indigenous economic strategy—and this is the connection here—which was launched two years ago, is a foundational and essential document and one that encourages and guides economic reconciliation in Canada.

The NIES is a blueprint for the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the Canadian economy and envisions a future where indigenous peoples have an equal voice in managing and benefiting from natural capital and the systemic and legislative barriers to accessing capital are removed. Indigenous futures should be self-determining, and that also includes the control of this capital.

This is where the national indigenous economic prosperity institute, which was publicly announced at the Bank of Canada just last week, has a significant role. The institute directly responds to the calls to economic prosperity outlined in the national indigenous economic strategy, specifically call to economic prosperity number 79, which reads:

Establish and empower an Indigenous Institute to collect and govern Indigenous data about population, businesses, lands, and resources.

This would also include information related to taxation and business. It continues:

This Institute will monitor and measure implementation of these Calls to Economic Prosperity.

There are 107 calls to economic prosperity under four categories, including people, infrastructure and lands. The national indigenous economic prosperity institute aims to address economic disparities by fostering sustainable development and creating new pathways to prosperity.

Indigenous peoples have long been stewards of this land, possessing invaluable knowledge, culture and traditions. Despite this, many indigenous communities face economic challenges that hinder their full potential.

The institute will serve as a catalyst for change, promoting innovative solutions and fostering economic resilience within indigenous communities. It will provide a platform for indigenous-led research, development and implementation of economic strategies tailored to our own unique needs and strengths. Also, by facilitating access to resources, training and mentorship, the institute will empower indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses, create sustainable business models and enhance financial literacy. It will also support policy development and advocacy efforts to ensure indigenous voices are heard and integrated into broader economic policies.

Through these efforts, the institute aims to help build a robust and vibrant economic future for indigenous peoples, contributing to the overall prosperity and well-being of our communities.

This institute is both meaningful and inspirational. It's a beacon of hope, a source of creativity and motivation, and a hub of innovation. It will provide training, research and resources tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of indigenous communities.

• (1120)

This institute is made possible with the generous financial support of two foundations in particular: Mastercard Foundation and McConnell Foundation. This is a demonstration of their commitment towards economic reconciliation. This is also what we are hoping to see demonstrated within all forms of government, federal and provincial.

We at First Nations University of Canada are profoundly committed to the principles of self-determination and economic em-

powerment for indigenous peoples. This institute aligns very well with our own principles and the foundation that we have—

**The Chair:** Dr. Ottmann, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to ask you to wrap it up.

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** —of indigenous knowledge systems.

The institute is on its way to being launched. It is something that you will hear more about in the coming few months.

*Gichi meegwetch.*

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Ottmann. I'm sure we'll have an opportunity for members to ask questions, so you'll be able to continue the line you were just speaking about.

Jumping right into that, for the first round of questioners we have Mr. Schmale for six minutes.

• (1125)

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

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today on this very important topic. I appreciate this conversation for a number of reasons, but specifically what our last witness Ms. Ottmann just talked about: economic reconciliation.

Before I jump to a line of questioning with her, I'll start quickly with Grand Chief Joel Abram. You were talking earlier in your remarks about the carbon tax and the effects that your nations are dealing with, specifically the increased costs of goods and services, yet the rebate the government seems to champion is not being seen by your peoples.

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** Really, what we want to do is to start having that conversation with the federal government on that cost recouping and the disproportionate impact, and it varies from region to region too. Whether you're remote or a smaller or larger first nation, those impacts are going to vary quite widely. We think there is a way to fix this by starting to have those important conversations.

I think all first nations in Ontario really want to proceed with that rather than going the legal route all the time. I think it's always better to have these kinds of conversations and solve those things that way, rather than just being told no and being forced to go the legal route.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** As we talk about the area of taxation and jurisdiction on reserve—you touched on it a bit in your remarks—can you elaborate, if you want, on the importance to your community if your nation were able to keep more, if not all, of the fuel, alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, gaming...and those types of things? That revenue would change the dynamic from the current status quo, which is money leaving your land, only for you to beg Ottawa for it back later.

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** Yes, definitely. That's something that's part of economic reconciliation, not to have those handcuffs on.

In a larger context, doctrines of superiority are woven into the fabric of legislation and federal policy. Nobody alive today was responsible for those, but those were definitely based on 1400s racism, all the way back to papal bulls. We have to start to decolonize that relationship, and economic reconciliation is a big part of that, as well as recognizing the old treaties that are still in effect that Canada relies on for its holdings of the land.

Again, we never had those conversations about how first nations' interpretations of the treaties were different from what's written on paper. We saw that with the "medicine chest" clause a few years back. I think it was Treaty 8 where it was found that elders' cultural knowledge was used to argue for that medicine chest. It just goes to show that oral traditions are also invaluable when it comes to finding out what treaties are valid, whether they're post-Confederation or pre-Confederation treaties.

That's the basis. We want to have as much first nations jurisdiction and sovereignty as we initially had. We reject the notion that it should be a father-and-child relationship. Our original relationship is more born along the lines of the Two Row Wampum treaty or the Silver Covenant Chain treaty. Once that relationship becomes tarnished, one party shakes the end of the chain. The other person who is holding the other end feels it, and then they get together and polish the chain, so to speak, to renew that relationship.

As you know, silver becomes tarnished if you don't take care of that relationship. Part of what we're doing here is addressing those kinds of things.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Grand Chief, you talked earlier about decolonizing the atmosphere that we're in right now, the space that we're in right now. Given the fact that we have multiple pieces of legislation—we have court decisions and treaties—how do you see the going, piece by piece, to get to the point that you're talking about?

• (1130)

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** I know that the government likes to do a pan-aboriginal approach, which is a one-size-fits-all approach. That's just not always possible, depending on which treaty area you're in. Sometimes you have areas that don't even have treaties, like British Columbia. They don't have any, except for the modern-day ones like the Nisga'a have. However, they're not covered off by any. I think most first nations would reject that anyway. The Anishinabek Nation is different from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and so forth. They even have different treaties.

For instance, in Ontario, we have the beaver hunting grounds, which are covered off by the 1701 Nanfan treaty; and the 1701 Dish With One Spoon treaty, which also led up to 1764 at Niagara Falls, with the proclamation.

There are a lot of overlapping things that we have to look at, and a pan-aboriginal approach doesn't work a lot of the time.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Schmale. That concludes our first questions.

Next, we have Mr. Powlowski for six minutes.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

I think this is an interesting study. One of the most interesting things about it, I think, is that we have a bit of a fundamental problem here.

Generally taxes are a good thing. If we didn't have taxes in our society, we wouldn't be able to pay for health care, we wouldn't be able to pay for education, we wouldn't have roads to drive on, we wouldn't have bridges to cross, we wouldn't have sanitation and we wouldn't have water. We wouldn't have any of these things, nor would we have the money to address things of common concern like putting money into research into diseases that affect us or putting money into addressing climate change, which seems to affect us all. There are very definite benefits that come to our society from taxation.

I know within the indigenous community that there are all kinds of available taxes like the first nations sales tax and the first nations goods and services tax. There's the real property tax under the First Nations Fiscal Management Act, and apparently and most interesting to me, 14 self-governing aboriginal groups have enacted income tax.

I think that, pretty clearly, this is money that can be used for the betterment of indigenous communities. The fundamental problem is that we seem to be having trouble finding chiefs to come and talk to us about this because—do you know what?—it's not really popular when you impose a tax. Nobody wants to be taxed, including me. If you asked me, "Hey, Marcus, I'm gonna start taking \$20,000 more a year in your taxes; how are you going to like that?", I'm going say, "No thanks. Keep the taxes as they are. I don't like that."

Maybe, Dr. Ottmann, you can start off by talking about it. What is the very real obstacle? I think, and you realize, that first nations can use their tax authority to their advantage; however, you're relying on political leadership to potentially bear the cost of imposing those taxes. I'm sure there's a trade-off, and maybe you can wax philosophically about this issue for me.

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** Thank you for those comments.

I think what we are doing is, to a large degree, positioning ourselves to take steps into new territory. Of course, there has been dialogue for many years about how first nations or indigenous peoples benefit or don't benefit from the taxes that are imposed upon them. The reality is that, in my case, many first nations peoples do pay tax. Very few on the Prairies benefit from the one tax that's alleviated. In Saskatchewan, we have numerous urban reserves. There are, as you mentioned, first nations that are imposing forms of tax that will directly benefit the community and individuals within the community.

I'll talk about the First Nations University of Canada, which is in its 47th year. Many people don't realize that this institution has been in existence for this long. Two of our locations are situated on urban reserves. Our Regina campus and our Saskatoon campus are on urban reserves, and our Prince Albert campus is not. We run into a situation where the employees on our Prince Albert campus are taxed, even though our work is for first nations peoples and we see ourselves as the solution to many of the issues that are experienced within our communities today, and that's education. The barriers we're experiencing are connected to the CRA and how Prince Albert is deemed taxable even though our primary campuses, two of them, are on urban reserves.

• (1135)

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** I'm sorry. Can you clarify that for me?

If you're on an urban reserve and then, because it's a reserve, you don't pay income tax, but St. Albert is not on the reserve, so you do have to pay tax?

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** It's Prince Albert. It's in northern Saskatchewan. We have a campus there. We have three campuses.

Even though the building is owned by Prince Albert Grand Council, which is a first nation organization, the employees within that campus do pay all taxes.

That is a challenge we have right now with CRA. It was just a decision that it made. Even though our primary campus is located in an urban reserve in Regina, those first nation employees are seen differently. It's very frustrating. This is something that first nation businesses and organizations navigate every day. Of course, there are benefits to.... Everybody understands the benefits of taxation, but then there's also the quality of—

**The Chair:** Dr. Ottmann, I'm sorry. I'm going to have to cut you off there. We've gone quite a bit over time for this question.

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** I'm sure you'll have an opportunity to continue that with another one of the members here shortly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire, you now have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Ottmann, I will let you continue your answer, but there's something I'd like to mention first.

In 2002, you and a number of first nations economic organizations developed an economic reconciliation strategy to establish and provide clear directives to help indigenous peoples achieve their economic development objectives—

[*English*]

**Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** I have a point of order. The English is not coming through.

**The Chair:** We're going to briefly pause here.

[*Translation*]

I will speak in French for a few moments, until we can get the interpretation.

I'm being told that everything is working now.

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Ottmann, in 2002, you and a number of first nations economic organizations developed an economic reconciliation strategy to establish and provide clear directives to help indigenous peoples achieve their economic development objectives. This was in response to the 2020 OECD report on creating links between indigenous economic development organizations. Your work provides a road map for the economic component and is in keeping with the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples on closing socio-economic gaps. Last week, you announced the establishment of the National Institute for Indigenous Economic Prosperity.

Could you tell us about your priorities and your organization's immediate needs?

• (1140)

[*English*]

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** Yes, I can. Thank you for that comment and question.

The national indigenous economic strategy that was launched two years ago, in 2022, was, as I mentioned, under four categories—infrastructure, finance, people and lands. There are approximately 25 calls to indigenous economic prosperity under each one of those categories. This strategy is not just for indigenous communities or people to implement. It's for all Canadians and for organizations in the corporate sector. It's like the truth and reconciliation calls to action, where everyone has a role in implementing those calls to action.

The objective here, or one of the goals, is for not only economic reconciliation but also the collaboration of indigenous and non-indigenous businesses and people to contribute to economic prosperity for indigenous peoples, which benefits all Canadians. It is a reciprocal, mutually beneficial document. Since many indigenous people still live in poverty and experience barriers to success, this strategy is a road map for all Canadians.

The launch of the national indigenous economic prosperity institute is very important in that this institute will act as a hub. It will generate research. It will compile case studies. It will track the implementation of the calls to economic prosperity by every sector. Those will be compiled. It will showcase the successes, whether it's the federal government or corporate sector or health sector or education sector, in implementing these calls.

It's very much like the truth and reconciliation centre, which does something similar. It tracks and promotes. Willie Littlechild, who was involved in the development of the truth and reconciliation calls to action, did also indicate that there was a gap in those TRC calls to action of economic reconciliation and indigenous economic prosperity.

This is what this document does. It fills that gap. It is a living document. That's been highlighted. It could reshape and it could grow in a couple of years after review and after feedback. We'll live this document for a couple of years. Then there could be a revisiting of this particular strategy. It does provide an essential road map.

What we're doing now is that we will be posting a position for an executive director. A team will be hired and they will hit the ground running. There's a marketing budget. Again, we are very grateful to the foundations for helping us launch this particular institute. A lot of people don't know that there are approximately 26 indigenous entrepreneurship and business associations across the country. This institute will support those associations but also be a connector, a hub, for those associations.

• (1145)

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you.

Have you assessed the cost of this effort to increase prosperity for indigenous peoples in Canada?

[English]

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** The cost is dependent on the commitment of an organization. The institute itself is going to be housed within First Nations University of Canada. Right now, we have just under \$7 million that will help launch the institute.

A municipality, say, might choose four calls to indigenous economic prosperity that it's going to focus on. How it is going to do that may be unique...to another municipality. There is probably that financial commitment that an organization will bear initially.

One of those initiatives could be.... I'm thinking about the City of Regina. Its procurement policy says that 20% of its procurement will go to indigenous businesses. That is an example of economic reconciliation. It does meet some of the calls to economic prosperity that are mentioned.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm sorry, Dr. Ottmann. I'm going to have to cut you off there.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

[English]

Last in our six-minute round of questioning, we have Ms. Idlout.

The floor is yours.

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

Thank you.

I wish to thank you, first of all, for your report. It makes it easier to understand taxation.

Grand Chief Joel Abram, I have a question for you.

You talked about taxes in the old days and that nothing has changed—no upgrade, no revisions—and some things have to be revised and brought up to date. Can you talk a little more about how much work is required to bring us up to date?

There are recommendations and resolutions. I want to learn more about whether, for indigenous peoples—first nations, Métis and Inuit—our lifestyles, lives, bylaws, our own laws and our own philosophy have to be incorporated into current changes today, like this one, if we revise certain things.

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** Thank you for that question. I don't think there's any really easy answer to that, but I do think that, when it comes to benefiting from taxation, first nations historically have been at the bottom of the list. If you take a look at housing deficits and who has actually benefited from the land and the resources that have been extracted from it, it hasn't been first nations.

When you look at the vast amounts of money that have been created through tobacco, which is one of our medicines, it really hasn't been first nations until recent decades. If you talk about wealth, it's more than just money. It's more of a holistic view. Well-being is part of that, whether it's social, emotional, mental, spiritual or financial. There's our social innovation, social finance, entrepreneurship—which is coming back now—co-operatives and non-profits, and there are the essentials, which are things that we really have struggled with historically: housing, food, employment, purpose and education. A lot of this has stemmed from things like the Indian Act, which really limited what you could do.

For instance, we're just now playing catch-up with regard to the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the economy. For a long time, we couldn't even hire lawyers, for example. We couldn't vote. We haven't really been included, so we really just want to catch up—we're playing catch-up. We haven't had statutory funding. We've had funding that's been discretionary funding, which is at the goodwill of the government. I think hopefully we can all agree that the government hasn't had a lot of goodwill when it comes to first nations. If you take a look at how many boil-water advisories there have been over the past few decades, at the housing crisis or all these murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, we know that there hasn't been a lot of support for first nations. There hasn't been a lot of benefit from the taxation when it comes to supporting that.

First nations now control less than 1% of the land mass within Canada, so Canada has enjoyed 99% of the land and the resources that have come out of that. We need to look at things not just in terms of taxation but in terms of resource revenue sharing, and also look at taking care of the environment in a sustainable way so that the next seven generations can enjoy it the same way that we do today. Again, enjoyment of the environment is another form of, I think, economic reconciliation. There's tourism and all sorts of things that we can do nowadays.

I think in terms of taxation, we've gotten the short end of that, of receiving the benefits of taxation. There are all sorts of hidden taxes we haven't really talked about either yet [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] that are in all sorts of goods and services that we get. Hopefully that helps to answer your question.

• (1150)

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

Thank you. The federal government stated that they would produce economic reconciliation. I'd like to understand more from you about what the federal government is proposing. I'd like to hear from the grand chief and the chief.

What is your response to economic reconciliation and what is your vision?

I will ask the grand chief first. Dr. Ottmann will be after the grand chief. Thank you.

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** To keep it really brief, I think that economic reconciliation recognizes the independence, sovereignty and jurisdiction of first nations.

We know that right up until very recently—and I already talked about this before—in the relationship with first nations the federal government saw the first nations as children unable to take care of their own affairs, and they legislated accordingly. That's where we got things like the Indian Act, residential schools, the sixties scoop, the ongoing child welfare situation today and underfunding for everything. There were a lot of instances of Indian agents stealing resources from first nations.

In order to reconcile, we need to hear the truth about what that relationship was and how lopsided it was, and really start to, like I said, decolonize that and go back to the original relationship, which was more, as equals, sharing the resources of the land and also the responsibilities of that as well. I think that's really what we want to do in terms of that reconciliation. It's more of a holistic thing and involves other things besides just economics.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Grand Chief. I'm afraid I have to stop you there.

Thank you very much, Ms. Idlout. That concludes our first round of questioning.

We move into the second round—the five-minute round—with Mr. Melillo.

The floor is yours.

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

Thank you to both of the witnesses for being here and being a part of this important discussion.

I start with Grand Chief Abram, picking up on what my colleague asked you as well. In your opening comments you spoke a bit about the carbon tax specifically, and it wasn't necessarily surprising for me. We see more and more first nations coming out against this policy—including the Chiefs of Ontario, of course, taking the government to court surrounding the detrimental policy of the carbon tax.

I'm just wondering if you can elaborate further. I believe you said it was a “violation” of land rights. I just want to know, if you can elaborate further on what you meant by that and how you view the carbon tax.

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** I can see the necessity of doing this, especially for industries that are very carbon-heavy, but it does have disproportionate impacts on first nations, especially within treaty territories. I know the federal government sees itself as having total control over 99% of the land. However, first nations do have traditional territories that they have rights within, whether they be hunting and fishing or resource rights, so we really think there has to be some level of government accountability to first nations for the protection and preservation of those rights.

Article 29 of UNDRIP recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples “to the conservation and protection...and productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources.” Again, carbon taxes, to us, are not really about federalism but rather are a violation of our land rights, and this goes in opposition to the economic reconciliation efforts you're talking about now. Again, I can't go into too much detail because we do have legal action on that right now, but hopefully we can get that settled sooner rather than later.

• (1155)

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Thank you very much, Grand Chief.

Dr. Ottmann, I'll ask you a bit about building capacity. I believe you mentioned that earlier in another comment. It's something that I think is a very important aspect of this.

I'm from northwestern Ontario. There are 42 first nations in my district. Over and over, different communities are, of course, trying to appeal for federal funding to help get support for projects. Just when it seems like it's going to move forward, there are delays. There are bureaucratic hurdles, the government isn't ready, the costs increase and it seems like this process drags on. Critical infrastructure and other needs aren't being met as a result.

In your view, how would the ability for the first nations to directly collect taxation revenue assist in their ability to build capacity and move forward on some of these projects more quickly, either by taking a greater lead in those projects or even by going, if necessary, on their own without federal support? I'm just curious about your comments on that.

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** Thank you for the comment and the question.

I'll begin by saying that there is this unique relationship between the federal government and first nation communities, which is entrenched within not only the treaties but also the Canadian Constitution. There is a commitment the federal government has to first nation communities. I would even say it's about infrastructure, as the federal government is also engaged in infrastructure. I don't think the fiduciary responsibility to first nations people should ever be eliminated or go away because of all those constitutional and legislative agreements.

For first nations people, there's a shortfall. This is what the grand chief mentioned. There isn't economic parity. For indigenous governments and businesses, there is this continuous seeking of resources or financial revenue to make up for that shortfall.

An example we have is our northern campus. It's in a very old building. It's situated near a safe injection site. The City of Prince Albert gave us five acres of land for five dollars in an amazing location, so we submitted a \$25-million proposal to the federal green and inclusive community buildings program. We had the land, a detailed schematic and community engagement. As I said, education is the solution for many of the issues we engage in. However, we didn't get the grant, and we didn't get a reason for the grant being rejected.

Now we have, like Prince Albert Grand Council and FSIN—the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations—this challenge. This has been a 30-year issue in that location in Prince Albert, so we are looking—

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Dr. Ottmann, I'm afraid I'm going to have to cut you off.

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** Sure.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I hate to keep doing this, but I'm afraid we're over time here.

With that, we'll turn it over to the second questioner in the second round.

Mr. Powlowski, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** I'll start and then pass it on to Ms. Gainey.

Chief Abram, you talked about your displeasure with the carbon tax. At the same time, you also talked about climate change, which perhaps disproportionately affects indigenous communities, particularly in places in the north—like my friend Michael McLeod's riding in the Northwest Territories, which has been pretty severely affected.

We also know that most conservative economists think the carbon tax is the most efficient way of addressing and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Chief Abram, is your problem with the carbon tax per se or with the fact that you think first nations should get more of the rebate? We know it is meant to be revenue-neutral. I know indigenous people, like everyone else, get their individual rebates, but perhaps the argument is that first nations communities use more fossil fuels be-

cause of their isolation. They're up north and ought to get more of the rebate.

Again, is your problem with the carbon tax per se, or with the way the rebate is handled, figuring first nations communities should get a better deal on it?

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** I think the issue is twofold.

You know, one is around collective... Where does the benefit come in for first nations? You know, for instance, it could be helping to build infrastructure in northern communities. We know it is happening to a limited extent. However, to support cleaner energy being available for those communities....

I think we all know about all the greenhouse gases—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Mr. Chair, we should make sure the witness is closer to the microphone because there is an issue with interpretation.

[*English*]

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** Okay. I'm sorry about that. I'll try to speak a little bit louder.

Is that better?

**The Chair:** I think we're good. With that, we can continue.

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** I think the number one thing is that we want to have more of those tax revenues going toward collective things like building that infrastructure to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases. I think that's good for the climate overall.

Also, look at things like the impacts of forest fires. We can make a good argument that those are climate-based. For every degree of temperature, we know that the storms are going to be more violent and have more intensity in terms of all those things, whether you're talking about flooding, tornadoes, forest fires or all those natural disasters we can see increasing.

Again, more data over the years will find this. I think that's part of the issue. There's more impact to first nations than just what the carbon tax can speak for. This is especially true for northern ones, where they have to evacuate every summer or every spring because of fires and flooding and all the sorts of things that happen.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Mr. Chair, I have to stop you again. The sound is cutting out, making interpretation difficult.

• (1205)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Let me just pause for one minute here.

We're going to try to get through this. If this is going to continue to be a problem, we may have to suspend again, but I'm hoping we can get through this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire, you can raise a point of order if the problem persists.

[*English*]

With that, we can go back to the grand chief.

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** I think the other main point I would like to make is that, if we're going to decolonize that relationship and talk about taxing first nation communities, there has to be a discussion with first nation communities and treaty areas as well about what that's going to look like in terms of having free, prior and informed consent, which is now federal law.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Powlowski, you still have another minute and 20 seconds.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** I'll turn it over to Ms. Gainey.

**Ms. Anna Gainey (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.):** I had a question for Dr. Ottmann, if she's still online with us.

I was curious about the capacity building of the FNU and how you are building knowledge of economic development capacity through the university. How could we perhaps better support or, through the university, offer more support to some of the regions that have fewer resources or less capacity?

It seems like there's an uneven reality across the country in terms of capacity and resources. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about that and perhaps about what FNU can do in that regard.

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** Thank you for that question.

For First Nations University of Canada, one of the principles that we have is being responsive to communities across the country.

An example of that is that we are certifying a Mohawk language program in Fort Erie. We've had programs in Northwest Territories. Many of our newest programs will begin in northern Saskatchewan, in Black Lake and Hatchet Lake, which are way north. They came to us and asked us for a social work program. We are nimble enough to be able to start that program this coming September for that community.

We do have an indigenous business program. Within that program, financial literacy is part of the learning. There are leadership and executive programs that are available to first nation leaders and their teams. The institute will also broaden the scope of our reach and the capacity that we could help develop within first nation communities and organizations.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Ottmann. I'm afraid I'm going to have to stop you again.

With that, we're going to briefly suspend while we get Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik logged on here.

We'll briefly suspend. Thank you.

• (1205) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1210)

**The Chair:** I'm going to call this meeting back to order.

Before going to Mr. Kyikavichik for his five-minute opening statement, I'll just say that, given the changes to our schedule today, I'm going to give each party four minutes for questioning after Grand Chief Kyikavichik's opening remarks.

With that, Grand Chief, I will give you the floor for five minutes.

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik (Gwich'in Tribal Council):** *Màhsi'.*

*Drin gwiinzii.* Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and honourable committee members.

My name is Ken Kyikavichik, and I'm the grand chief of the Gwich'in Tribal Council of the Northwest Territories and Yukon.

Gwich'in Tribal Council, or GTC for short, was established in 1992 with the signing of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement. We work in collaboration with the governments of Canada, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon in implementing this modern-day treaty for our over 3,500 participants who reside across this country. Our communities are located in the Mackenzie delta region of the Northwest Territories and are known today as Aklavik; Inuvik; Tetl'it Zheh, or Fort McPherson as it's now known; and Tsiigehtchic.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee on tax revenues on first nations territories. This is an important issue and an opportunity that impacts the economic development and self-sufficiency of our region.

Today I would like to raise a few points for your consideration as you undertake this study. First are the distinctions between modern treaty holders, such as the Gwich'in Tribal Council and first nations on reserve, for example, in southern Canada. Second is the Gwich'in interest in establishing tax-free zones both within our Gwich'in settlement region and in areas where we decide to invest. Third is the role that tax revenues can play in achieving economic reconciliation.

For a bit more context, the Gwich'in were signatories to the last numbered treaty in Canada, Treaty 11, which was signed in our communities of Tsiigehtchic and Tetl'it Zheh in July 1921. At the time, many of us were known as Locheux Indians. We lived a nomadic, subsistence lifestyle in our traditional territory, supplementing our living by participating in the fur industry.

Treaty 11 was the only treaty in Canada that did not create reserves for the Dene of the Northwest Territories. The only reserves in the Northwest Territories today are located in Treaty 8 territory in the South Slave region near Hay River and Fort Smith.

I'm back to my first point that it is crucial to recognize the distinct circumstances and needs of the various indigenous groups and nations across Canada. First nations in the Prairies, for example, face unique challenges compared to non-treaty first nations in areas such as B.C. and modern treaty holders in the north such as the Gwich'in. Each of us has differing legal, social and economic contexts that must be considered when discussing tax revenues and economic policy. Métis and non-status indigenous peoples face their own challenges, as you are well aware, particularly related to recognition and access to programs and services.

Second, the Gwich'in Tribal Council is interested in establishing tax-free zones within our Gwich'in settlement region and in other locations where we have participants located in cities such as Yellowknife, Whitehorse and Edmonton. These would be tax-free zones and not reserves. It is an important delineation here. It would provide tax benefits to our citizens and businesses and create opportunities for us to invest in southern centres.

Finally, we are also seeking the ability to impose sales and excise taxes on non-indigenous citizens who may utilize our businesses. Our potential future government would then be able to invest back into our communities to improve the infrastructure and services that we provide. This would directly allow for some wealth redistribution to reduce our current reliance on federal funding to provide the infrastructure, programming and services that we offer. It would be a critical step towards the achievement of economic reconciliation.

Whether it is economic development or protection of our lands and essential resources such as the Porcupine caribou, upholding the rights and the interests of the Gwich'in has been and will continue to be our priority.

To be a truly sovereign nation, our nations, our language, our traditions, lands and resources need to be governed in a fulsome and responsible manner. We believe that potential tax revenues and tax exemptions that are afforded to other levels of government at the current time, whether it is in a self-governing environment or not, will help us achieve this. In order to be effective, such legislation must recognize the jurisdictional difference between indigenous nations, the complementary role that tax-free zones for indigenous businesses and governments can play, and the ability of indigenous governments to implement sales and excise taxes on non-residents accessing these services as a means to enhance these programs and services into the future.

• (1215)

While the study on tax revenues is positive, like anything, the true measure of success will be in its implementation and its applicability to such northern nations as the Gwich'in.

*Hàì'.* Thank you for your time and the opportunity to present today.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Grand Chief.

As mentioned earlier, we will do an abridged four-minute round for each party, starting with the Conservative Party.

Mr. Shields, you have four minutes.

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your presentation. I appreciate your being here to make the presentation today.

MP Bob Zimmer said to say hello, so on his behalf, I'll pass along that message.

I think one thing you said strongly was that one size does not fit all. You were talking about a modern treaty versus historical treaties. Could you quickly define the difference between those and the economic reality of it?

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** Do I just answer directly, or do I go through the committee chair?

**The Chair:** Grand Chief, you can direct your answers through the chair. Go ahead and answer, please.

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** The last numbered treaty was signed in 1921. That was Treaty 11, as I mentioned here. It allowed us the ability to continue our subsistence lifestyle while also recognizing the rights we have to this region. It granted us a whopping five dollars a year for each man, woman and child. There were also provisions for minor payments to chiefs and headmen. It was very limited in its application, and the implementation even more so.

Fast-forward 70 years to the modern treaties, as they are now known, or the comprehensive claims policy, which was an effort by indigenous nations, such as the Gwich'in, to sign modern treaties. It provided some real dollars and some fee simple lands to areas within our traditional territory. It has allowed for a level of economic reconciliation by providing the dollars we require to provide programming and services to our people, to better implement our agreements and to reshape our relationship with mainly the Government of Canada and others.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Thank you.

One of the comments we've heard is with regard to the grant structure of annual grants that you might get for economic development. You're talking about a very different structure as compared with an annual grant application style of economic development. You're talking about a very enlarged structure of governance and taxing policy. How soon do you think this could be implemented?

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** It could be implemented within the next five years, if we so desire. It's all dependent on our current negotiations. We are one of the few modern treaty holders in Canada who does not yet have self-government. When we signed our agreement back in 1992, we anticipated that self-government would follow shortly thereafter. We didn't anticipate the millennium passing and us not having self-government. For a variety of reasons, we have been negotiating for over 24 years. Taxation has been a key impediment in the past to our achieving resolution of an agreement.

As many of you will know, the federal government had a policy that required indigenous nations who were finalizing self-governments to sign away tax exemptions afforded to their status Indian citizens. That has changed in recent years, which allows us and paves a way for us to finalize an agreement sooner rather than later. However, there are many technical differences that need to be sorted out through the negotiations process. We are one of the nations who hope to have governing and jurisdiction authority upon day one of the execution of our agreement. Taxation is a key element of our fiscal package that we are looking to negotiate with Canada.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** For 24 years, the big barrier has been the tax challenge...?

**The Chair:** I'm afraid, Mr. Shields, the four minutes has elapsed. I'm sure there will be other colleagues who will probably get, or I hope will get, to the same questions.

With that, I'd like to turn the floor over to Mr. McLeod for four minutes.

• (1225)

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

Thank you, Grand Chief, for joining us. I appreciate your comments on this very important issue.

Maybe we could continue along the same line as the discussion you had with MP Shields. You were talking about what it takes to run a government and the dependable revenue streams that are required. In most of the self-governing nations, they look at a number of different ways to raise revenues to operate their government. They look at the core funding they get from the federal government, program funding, dividends from businesses, royalties and taxation.

Can you quickly discuss the importance of taxation powers for the Gwich'in Tribal Council as you move forward with your self-government negotiations?

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** I resided for almost a decade in the city of Saskatoon. In Saskatoon are Chief Darcy Bear and the Whitecap Dakota First Nation.

As you may be aware, the Whitecap Dakota has been able, in the span of—

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I'm sorry to interrupt you.

Mr. Chair, interpretation is not possible because of the poor sound quality.

[English]

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** Am I talking too quickly?

**The Chair:** Grand Chief, we're hearing from the interpreters that it might be helpful if you moved the boom up slightly—maybe a couple of centimetres.

Speak a bit, and we'll see what the interpreters say.

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** Okay.

As I mentioned earlier, the Whitecap Dakota has been able, in the span of three decades—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Grand Chief. We're going to have to pause again. I don't believe that's made much of a difference.

Grand Chief, I'm hearing from our technicians here. If you're comfortable with taking out the blur of the background, it might allow for the sound to come through more clearly. Is that okay?

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** Okay. Does that help?

I'm regretting my decision to not put up an Edmonton Oilers flag in the background. Thankfully, I have my coffee cup.

• (1230)

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're being told that the interpreter can summarize what is being said. It's a compromise, but it's not ideal.

[English]

**The Chair:** Grand Chief, we're going to try this with the interpreters. We understand there could be just a short summary. It won't be perfect.

If you can continue, I still have about two and a half minutes left for Mr. McLeod.

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** Okay.

When we look at indigenous nations, such as Whitecap Dakota, we see their ability in that environment to tax a large, non-resident, transient population accessing their programs and services. There needs to be an ability not only for tax revenues but also for tax exemptions to work hand in hand for the benefit of indigenous governments.

As you look at cases such as Whitecap Dakota's, they have been able to leverage their proximity to a major centre to provide services, and I believe in some of the rare cases.... It is a rare case that you have non-indigenous residents requesting access to services such as hospitals and schools as in Whitecap Dakota. That has been, in part, because of their ability to implement sales and excise taxes in their home community.

As you know, they are the most recent self-governing nation in this country, having made their agreement effective last September.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Grand Chief, I want to interrupt you, because I need to ask this next question regarding clawbacks.

How important is it to GTC that, as you increase your own-source revenue with taxation powers, for example, it doesn't impact other funding streams from the federal government?

We saw this as a challenge when the Tł̨ch̨ were trying to bring forward their self-government negotiations. The Conservative federal government of the day was insisting that they use own-source revenue. Anything generated would offset what was coming from the federal government.

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** It's incredibly important, because, as you know, unless it's tied to non-renewable resource extraction, we do not see private investment in our region. This is not to mention the fact that our low population does not present effective business cases for any entity, investment or industry that does not have large government subsidies.

It needs to be part of a broader discussion on our fiscal chapter as it relates to self-government.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. McLeod.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor for four minutes.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Grand Chief Kyikavichik, during our last meeting, you made some good suggestions for economic reconciliation, which are also in the strategy Ms. Ottmann presented.

Do you think the creation of an indigenous import and export organization is a suitable way to facilitate trade with the U.S. and assert free trade zones?

[English]

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** I do require an interpretation.

**The Chair:** Grand Chief, just so you know, on your Zoom screen, you will see a globe. If you click on that globe, you can select English and then you'll have live translation from the proceedings into English.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, could you repeat your question?

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** With pleasure, Mr. Chair.

Grand Chief Kyikavichik, during our meeting, you made some good suggestions for economic reconciliation, which are also in the strategy Ms. Ottmann presented.

Do you think the creation of an indigenous import and export organization is a suitable way to facilitate trade with the U.S. and assert free trade zones as well?

[English]

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** We certainly believe so.

For the Gwich'in nation, if we look prior to the establishment of the Canada-U.S. border, we spanned Alaska, Yukon and the Northwest Territories, and we numbered 9,000 strong in total. The implementation of this international border has restricted trade, whereas in the past it was very common.

Like other nations, such as Six Nations and the Mohawk in southern Canada, the Gwich'in also have that need for cross-border mobility. We believe that these types of agreements, whether through an organization or not, would help facilitate that trade, particularly in our region, where we have such limited access to supplies, groceries and lumber. If Alaska opens up a supply route for our communities, that certainly is a lot closer than places such as Edmonton, which we currently depend upon for the resupply of our communities. Logistically, especially with low water levels, it is incredibly important as we move forward.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** The government should adopt a law that guarantees first nations' inherent rights and eliminates all the loopholes that often lead to rights being violated or ignored by the people promoting projects on ancestral lands.

Is free, prior and informed consent an essential condition for first nations' development?

• (1235)

[English]

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** The question wasn't fully translated on the system.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I'll repeat the last part of my question.

Do you think that free, prior and informed consent is an essential condition for developing economic projects with first nations?

[English]

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** Absolutely. We look at free, prior and informed consent as shared decision-making with all levels of government. In our opinion, it does not compose a veto, but it opens up the discussion with governments and industry on potential investments in indigenous territories. However, without that early and frequent communication ahead of time, that makes things very difficult. When that is in place, it does allow for a beneficial discussion between all parties.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Ms. Ottmann or Grand Chief Abram, do you want to add anything regarding free, prior and informed consent?

[English]

**Grand Chief Joel Abram:** Sure. As we know that it has been recognized by the Supreme Court as now being federal law, now that UNDA has passed, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] that has to be quantified by individual first nations. What that means is that they're going to have their own guidelines as to what would constitute free, prior and informed consent for them.

That's something I cannot do. Each individual first nation is going to say, "Here are the kinds of discussions that we have to have on a particular subject." Once we have those discussions, then maybe we can have our free, prior and informed consent for whatever it is to go forward.

**The Chair:** You have my apologies, Mr. Lemire.

[Translation]

Your time is up. I know we could talk about this for many meetings.

[English]

With that, we'll go to our last speaker of the second round here.

Ms. Idlout, you have four minutes.

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

Thank you, Chairperson.

Thank you, Ken. I'm happy to see you again. I recognize you.

Ken and Dr. Ottmann, you can both respond. I will ask you the same question.

Indigenous Services Canada has indicated that they intend to "work with Indigenous partners to bring forward an economic reconciliation framework which will remove barriers and support Indigenous visions for economic prosperity."

What does economic reconciliation look like and mean to you?

Ken, you can go first.

**Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik:** *Màhsi'*, MP Idlout. It's great to see you again as well. I often appreciate our many discussions on issues impacting the northern territories.

The Gwich'in seek what every Canadian seeks and at times takes for granted: a good job, a quality home, proper schools, access to athletics and opportunities for our young people, sound infrastructure and a level of local economic development. In a western economy, this only occurs with major investment by existing levels of government and private industry. As I mentioned earlier, our communities are often prevented from...this private investment. That limits our local economic development.

In its simple form, I see economic reconciliation being the creation of an economy that allows entrepreneurs to set up local businesses to provide the amenities many of our communities do not have access to at the current time—the simple things I mentioned that are taken for granted, like a Tim Hortons, for example, in some of our major centres and the ability to access food and things people in southern Canada enjoy. Those are things many of our people look to have in the future. It's having the ability for that economy, whereby we are investing in local businesses and people have good jobs and live in good, energy-efficient homes. Right now, in the north, as you all know, heat and power are incredibly expensive. We need to change this for the benefit of our residents, moving forward, so they don't ever feel the need to move elsewhere—particularly to the south—for economic reasons.

Economic reconciliation, for us, means bringing a lot of what we see in southern Canada and the western economy into our communities, allowing for investment by our people and others.

*Màhsi'*.

• (1240)

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** Dr. Ottmann.

**Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann:** As was spoken of earlier, the economic engagement of indigenous peoples has been systematically legislated out. There were thriving and engaging economies and trade north, south, east and west before reserves were created. Past systems.... All of those barriers did not enable indigenous peoples to engage in the economy.

Now there is, I'd say, this awakening to economic reconciliation, which is very important. We have more entrepreneurship and a growing number of indigenous businesses. Indigenous governments have never stopped trying to engage in the economy and develop self-determining communities. The barrier is always....

There is a commitment to economic reconciliation by ISC. I believe it's about \$1.5 million. The—

**The Chair:** Dr. Ottmann, I'm afraid I'm going to have to do this again. I apologize for this, but we are very short on time and we are over time again.

Dr. Ottmann, Grand Chief Abram and Grand Chief Kyikavichik, thank you so much for your testimony today on our study. I'm sure it will inform a really important report and recommendations for the government, so I want to thank you.

At this time, we are going to suspend the meeting to go in camera for committee business.

Thank you very much, everybody.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]





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