



# Tabling of Documents

**Joe Enook, MLA**

Tununiq

February 21, 2017

*Excerpt from Senate Hansard of February 7, 2017*

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Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to table today an excerpt from the Senate *Hansard* of February 7, 2017. Members will note that the federal Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs responded to a number of questions concerning the Nutrition North Canada Program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Feb 21/17

[English]

I have no doubt that you have the best of intentions, but my concern today is with the administrative structure to achieve that goal. I realize some things are confidential, so I will not ask you to comment on a recent confidential Privy Council report card that gave your department an incomplete mark. That was from the *National Post*, as you know. But those critics are, unfortunately, recurrent.

For years, Aboriginal leaders have had the same perception. In the most recent report, the Auditor General complained about what he called a long history of inaction and indifference at your department that failed to effectively serve Canada's indigenous people. We all want to see results, impact, improvements. Is this bureaucratic situation or perception being acknowledged, and how is it being addressed?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs:** Thank you, senator for the question. As you know, leadership starts at the top, and the Prime Minister has stated that this is the most important relationship — with indigenous people — to him and to Canada.

As you know, in the mandate letters of ministers, it was clear that all ministers have to take this nation-to-nation relationship and to renew the relationship based on a recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership. I believe that the public service now is very excited by the loyal implementation of that expectation and those aspirational goals for our department but also in taking concrete steps that can actually get the irritants out of there for us to be able to actually meet these kinds of goals that are about health, economic and educational outcomes.

But part of it is us really, I believe, underlining the need for language and culture, the understanding that, for these outcomes that you referred to at the beginning, we will only get there when young people have a secure personal cultural identity that's about self-esteem and about being a proud indigenous person. I believe that all of our policies, from putting language and culture dollars into curricula, to on-the-land programming, to the kinds of things that we know, to the new legislation that will be coming on indigenous languages, represent a big shift, and I think we're really moving in the right direction.

#### STANDARD OF LIVING IN THE NORTH

[Editor's Note: Senator Watt spoke in Inuktitut.]

**Hon. Charlie Watt:** Minister, thank you for being here, and you're very welcome in the Senate.

Last week, Statistics Canada released a new report called *Food insecurity among Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat*. A 2012 overall study found more than half, or about 52 per cent, of Inuit adults in Inuit Nunangat suffered from food insecurity. What is this government doing to improve the reality of northerners?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs:** Senator, thank you for all of the amazing work that you have done over the years in terms of the needs of the

Inuit people and our understanding of the North as being not only land and sea but ice, and how that is hugely important to how we go forward.

Food security in the North, or insecurity, has been a preoccupation of mine for a very long time, and we know that the solutions will be found in the North. It is about us having to revamp Nutrition North, listening to northerners. It is about making sure that hunters and fishermen have what it takes to be able to feed their families as they used to in the past.

As you know, we've been consulting coast to coast about what the changes to Nutrition North need to be. I will have a report shortly from my department, as well as other reports, and we hope that we will have your advice on this as well.

As you know, my parliamentary secretary, Yvonne Jones, from Labrador is very involved in this file, but it is going to have to be a different way of thinking about this in that the system was broken. Leese Papatsie from Feeding My Family says that it used to be that they could feed their families. These subsidies don't seem to have worked because other prices went up for laundry detergent or diapers, so as they move their shopping cart out at the end of the week, it costs more. Again, this is actually devastating for family members.

I think that our investments in housing also matter because, again, it's around disposable income, as you know. So we're trying to make sure, by working with northerners and the land claim organizations — the Prime Minister will be in Iqaluit on Thursday with ITK — that we will work in partnership with northerners to get this fixed.

• (1610)

**Senator Watt:** Thank you for your response, minister. It is an important matter to the people in the North — very much so. The price and the high cost are not getting any better. It's getting worse and worse as the years go by.

On that account, we might have to start looking outside the box and see how we can improve the quality of life in the North. I think this is an urgent matter, and I'm sure that your department is going to deal with that. You mentioned the fact that you're coming out with a report. I'm looking forward to reading it. Maybe I will have an opportunity to provide some input for it. Thank you for your report that is coming.

**Ms. Bennett:** Again, this is also about mental health and dignity. People need to be able to feed their families, and the sea and ice were places of abundance. There is this change in life that has been devastating to northerners.

The difficult challenge — and we would appreciate the help of you and all honourable senators — will be: Are things like Nutrition North, a fairness program for northerners who also get a northern subsidy, particularly for the people from the South living and working up there, or should it be an actual food security social policy that is about the preschoolers, 70 per cent of whom are food insecure?

We're going to have to decide whether this is a social program or a fairness issue. As we look at some of the foods in the grocery stores that, again, maybe we're going to have to handle a little

differently if we're going to make this work. That will have to be after listening to northerners to help us make that difficult decision.

#### YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

**Hon. Murray Sinclair:** Good afternoon, minister, and welcome. I want to pick up on the issue of mental health for youth in the North, particularly. As was the case with many Canadians, I was particularly concerned to learn that Health Canada had decided not to fund the youth mental health initiative in the community of Wapekeka last year, despite the stated certainty of leaders in the community that such a program was needed in order to address the increased potential and increasing risk of youth suicide in the community. Either by coincidence or result, two young 12-year-old girls took their own lives earlier this year following that decision.

Does your department accept as part of its special responsibility for indigenous people, and given it's a special relationship with indigenous people, that, within government, you as a minister also have a special responsibility to ensure that other ministries act in a manner that is more consistent with that responsibility and with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to ensure that the legacy of residential schools, of which youth suicide is clearly one, is halted and not exacerbated through government inaction?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs:** Unfortunately, there are those tragic events that are teachable moments for all of us. As you know, Wapekeka was the centre of activity of Ralph Rowe, who abused over 500 boys in northwestern Ontario, 100 of whom are dead, either from suicide or overdose. This is a terrible, terrible legacy of child abuse, as you heard so often in your amazing work.

I take my job in explaining trauma and the way we make decisions, but I am also in the business, across all of government, of getting out of funding programs and building institutions that are First Nations-, Inuit- and Metis-led. I don't think it should be our departments making those kinds of decisions of red light/green light on a proposal. We're going to have to do much better on this.

Dr. Philpott and I met 10 days ago with some of the indigenous health leaders. We met again this morning with Dr. Alika Lafontaine. We can do this in a much better way, but we have to understand our responsibility, as we did through the gatherings on missing and murdered indigenous women. It's not what's the matter with them; it's what happened to them that should be the questions we're asking in all of this kind of programming. We're going to have to do a much better job as we build the capacity and the health systems that will deal with this.

We also need to look at what happens now — the idea of a closed Facebook chat with a suicide pact in La Ronge, Saskatchewan or what seems to have been a suicide pact in Wapekeka and other places. We're going to have to find out the role of bullying and what is happening online. We need trusted people for how we get help into those communities.

It was very interesting that a number of health professionals suggested that midwives would be a very important way of

building trust through a community as a safe place to disclose and a safe place to build capacity back in. I look for your advice.

But these terrible stories about lives — that just ripples through communities and through a whole region — we have to stop it at the root causes.

#### LAWS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

**Hon. Murray Sinclair:** In keeping with my question with regard to your special responsibility, I note that, in your mandate letter from the Prime Minister, you were given 13 priorities to focus upon. The third priority stated that your department ought to:

Undertake, with advice from the Minister of Justice, in full partnership and consultation with First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation, a review of laws, policies, and operational practices to ensure that the Crown is fully executing its consultation and accommodation obligations, in accordance with its constitutional and international human rights obligations, including Aboriginal and Treaty rights.

Could you explain what it is that you as minister are doing to implement this particular priority?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs:** This project ended up being a much bigger project than we could ever have known, from the Species at Risk Act, which is very irritating to certain First Nations, to all the others, like the First Nations Financial Transparency Act that we are now in the process of. The Department of Justice will lead this initiative now with our assistance, so there has been a bit of a flip in how we do this in a good way. But it will be in full cooperation with First Nations, Inuit and Metis. It's mainly First Nations, the laws of the nation — in the bilateral relationships that the Prime Minister has sorted out in terms of distinctions, First Nations separate from Metis separate from Inuit, that there will be opportunities in those bilateral processes to identify the real irritants and priorities of getting the laws and policies changed.

But it is about us working every day to get people out from under the Indian Act. You will be happy to hear that we have over 40 exploratory tables now — that would be almost a third of First Nations — beginning to think about which jurisdictions they want to draw down and that makes me very happy.

• (1620)

#### REGULATION REVIEW

**Hon. Daniel Lang:** Minister, once again, welcome. I'd like to ask a question about the region that I represent, which is Yukon. As you know, over the past week, members of the Yukon First Nations and the territorial government have been in Ottawa and I want to say that your attendance last evening at the Yukon Nights reception was very much appreciated.

Minister, it's estimated that Yukon has approximately \$3 billion worth of mining projects poised to come on stream in the next number of years, which is a very bright light, I think, for