

THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY

EVIDENCE

OTTAWA, Wednesday, March 31, 2010

The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, met this day at 4:15 p.m. to study the accessibility of post-secondary education in Canada.

Senator Art Eggleton (*Chair*) in the chair.

The Chair: Welcome to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. We have had a bit of a late start. I had a few remarks to make in the Senate, but we are under way with a terrific panel today. We have four people, and we have until 6:15. Let me introduce them and then I will call on them to speak to us.

The subject today is access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples. We dealt with this topic in one session in December 2009 and are back to it today.

First of all, let me introduce Michael Mendelson, Senior Scholar with the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. He is no stranger to this committee. He helped us considerably on the poverty, housing and homeless report and has appeared here many times.

It is interesting to point out in this context that he published [*Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada*](#) back in 2006, and it addresses the academic achievement of Aboriginal students in the PSE system and includes strategies to improve these results. He more recently has written [*Improving Education on Reserves: A First Nations Education Authority Act*](#), so we will hear from him on those.

Jane Preston appears here as an individual as a PhD candidate at the University of Saskatchewan. Her research interests include parent and community involvement with schools, rural education and Aboriginal issues. She has published [*The Urgency of Postsecondary Education for Aboriginal Peoples*](#) and [*Overcoming the Obstacles: Postsecondary Education and Aboriginal Peoples*](#). She has also prepared a report for the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education on the issue of post-secondary education for First Nations and Inuit students.

Andrew Sharpe is also no stranger to our committee. He is the Executive Director of the Centre for the Study of Living Standards, a research organization he founded in 1995. He has held a variety of earlier positions, including head of research and editor, quarterly labour market and productivity, review at the Canadian labour market and productivity centre. He recently co-authored a report entitled [*The Effect of Increasing Aboriginal Education Attainment on the Labour Force, Output and the Fiscal Balance*](#), and he recently gave a hearing to Senator Segal and me on our poverty, housing and homeless report.

David Snow is also here as an individual. He is a researcher with the Macdonald-Laurier Institute for Public Policy. He is a PhD student in the Department of Political Science at the University of Calgary specializing in constitutional law and comparative politics. He is a graduate fellow at the Institute for Advanced Policy Research, research associated with the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, and he has

published a report on affordable housing and homelessness with the Canada West Foundation.

However, what we have been hearing more recently is, with Calvin Helin, he co-authored [*Free to Learn: Giving Aboriginal Youth Control over Their Post-Secondary Education*](#), and so we will hear about that very interesting piece of work in a few moments.

We will start with Mr. Mendelson, and you each have seven minutes, please.

Michael Mendelson, Senior Scholar, Caledon Institute of Social Policy:

Honourable senators, I passed out a little sheet that I did, several years ago actually, which I call the map of Aboriginal Peoples Postsecondary Education Policy Issues. It should be in your package and up at the table for those of us sitting here who have not got it. I found this a useful overview of where issues can be found that might not be quite comprehensive because I just did it out of my own head, and we all know I am fallible, including my wife.

In the middle is the first set of issues around access, and then I tried, in the middle box, to outline the kinds of barriers that Aboriginal students face, and I divided it up into financial barriers and non-financial barriers, and under non-financial barriers, educational barriers and social barriers, and my list of social barriers, as I said, might not quite be complete. It is useful to try and get an overview of an inventory of what the terrain looks like, because we often have a habit of focusing in our attention quite narrowly on one set of issues and overlooking other issues. Even though it is valid to pay attention to one particular issue, it is always important to remember that there might be other kinds of barriers facing students.

When I look at this map, I ask myself what the most important barriers are that Aboriginal students face. The most we hear about are financial barriers, but when I look for empirical evidence, I do not find much empirical evidence. Perhaps my colleagues sitting at the table are aware of some empirical studies that I do not know about. When I informally chat with Aboriginal students I meet at universities when giving talks and so forth, they are likely to say that social barriers are as important, particularly the sense of not being in their home communities if they have come from a relatively small First Nation that is relatively isolated or just the whole aspect of living in the city and being part of this city life all of a sudden in university that they were not part of before. They are as likely to talk about social issues and familial issues as financial issues, but I would like to see more empirical evidence and studies that would at the very least, if not look at administrative data, interview a good selection, a representative sample of Aboriginal students as to speak retrospectively of what their own experience is. If these studies have been done, I am not aware of them myself, but that does not mean they do not exist.

One of the questions I ask myself is what is the real comparative dropout rate for Aboriginal students who have been admitted to a university or a community college? I have heard some astounding figures about the dropout rates of non-Aboriginal students in universities. I have been told that in some universities as many as 50 per cent of students who are admitted to first year never complete a degree, so I do not know if that is correct in all instances.

Particularly with less-selective universities, I expect that if it is not 50 per cent it is probably 40 per cent, but I have never seen an analysis of what the dropout rate is for Aboriginal students compared to non-Aboriginal students. If the dropout rate is 50 per

cent among non-Aboriginal students, is the Aboriginal rate 60 per cent or 70 per cent or 80 per cent, or is it also 50 per cent?

Getting some empirical evidence would be useful, and in that respect, I want to speak to the issue of financial assistance, because we have had recently in the news a very innovative proposal from Mr. Snow and Mr. Helin, and for those of you who know Mr. Helin, he is an interesting and dynamic person, and I am sure Mr. Snow is too.

It is an interesting and certainly provocative proposal, but I ask myself in looking at that proposal if we have any evidence as to whether this would work better than community-based support. Do we know? Do we have something that would show us that this works better or not, assuming that they were equal costs?

I do not have an answer to that. Perhaps Mr. Snow does, but my own sense is that whatever we do we should not impose a change on First Nations. I think that the history of the last hundred and something years should tell us that imposition and coercion are just not the right way to go. There are extreme circumstances where it may be necessary to intervene, but they have to be, in my view, certainly extreme and visibly extreme circumstances, and I do not think that we are in that situation with respect to the current post-secondary support program.

I propose to develop an alternative program and let First Nation communities decide to opt in or opt out. Let them have a vote and make a decision. I do not know if anyone has expressed that idea before, but there is a new idea for you. They could have a choice and the band itself could make a choice as to what kind of program to adopt. If they are fiscally equivalent, then I think that is the right way to go about making the decision. It should not be us who decides. It should be the community that decides. Now, that does not address First Nations students who are not on a reserve, and that is something else we need to think about.

I suspect I am coming to the end of my time, and I did not want to spend my time on this. I want to spend my time on what I see as the most important barrier to post-secondary education for First Nations and Aboriginal students in general, and that most important barrier, I suspect, is the educational barrier, and that is incomplete high school. If you do not graduate from high school, the odds are highly against going on to get a college diploma or university degree. Some people do manage to get accepted as mature students, but this is the rare exception.

When I looked at the 2001 census data, I found that the number of students with post-secondary diplomas or degrees among high school graduates was the same for Aboriginal students as non-Aboriginal students, and that is a very important finding. I have not gone back and looked at the more recent census, so it might not continue to bear up, but what that told me is the gap in graduation from post-secondary institutions was almost entirely attributable to non-graduation from high school.

I just want to add one addendum to that, and that is the graduation rate from colleges was much higher than from universities, but overall post-secondary.

My point would be -- and I will end here, Mr. Chair -- we will never get parity. If our goal is parity among First Nations, Metis and Inuit students in respect of their degrees or diplomas as the rest of the population, you cannot get there until you increase the rate of graduation from high school.

Every Aboriginal kid who can get out of high school, get into a university or college is great, a precious resource and should be cherished and hopefully will go in and finish, but even if every kid does finish, you will never get the parity unless you can get more kids graduating from high school. In my view, the real problem is K-12 and particularly on-reserve. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That will bring about some questions as to exactly what we would do at the high school level. We will get to that a little later. Jane Preston is next.

Jane Preston, Ph.D. candidate, University of Saskatchewan, as an individual: Thank you. I would like to start by thanking the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology for this opportunity to articulate my views pertaining to barriers in post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples.

I believe education is the centre pillar needed to sustain a strong, fortified nation. Education empowers an individual and, in turn, invigorates a community. Education is related to greater employment satisfaction and higher incomes. Education reduces the need for social assistance and improves health and longevity of life. Education fosters social cohesion between groups of people, a statement that I think is very important for our country. Education is the pathway to not only intellectual advancement but to physical, spiritual and social advancement of a society as well.

In particular, the impact of education has far-reaching potential for Canada's Aboriginal peoples. According to statistical information, Aboriginal peoples are the fastest-growing and youngest ethno-cultural group in Canada. Between 1996 and 2006, the First Nations and Inuit populations grew 29 per cent and 26 per cent respectively compared to an 8 per cent increase among non-Aboriginals. The median age for Canadian Aboriginal peoples is 26.5 years as compared to 39.7 years for the non-Aboriginal population. Societal implications abound these data. The economic vitality and social well-being of the Canadian society are dependent upon the educational successes of Aboriginal peoples.

Unfortunately, for many Aboriginal peoples, there currently exists a multitude of barriers blocking their pathway to post-secondary education. I collate these key obstacles into the four following groups: educational, as Mr. Mendelson has talked about; social/economical barriers; cultural pedagogical barriers; and financial barriers.

On the topic of educational barriers, I am in sole agreement with Mr. Mendelson in saying in order for Aboriginal peoples to enrol in post-secondary education they need to complete high school. According to the 2006 Canadian census, the high school completion rate for non-Aboriginal peoples aged 20 to 24 is approximately 40 per cent as compared to 13 per cent for Aboriginal peoples. [This data was contested by a Senator, and is clarified by Jane Preston later in the document.] Many Aboriginal youth live in remote communities where the quality of education is often below the services rendered in larger, more central regions. Lack of foundational knowledge, especially in math, science and IT, or computer sciences, prevent Aboriginal students from entering post-secondary education. In association with this statement, the selection process of post-secondary institutions is disconnected from the realities that many First Nation schools face.

Social/economical issues. As we know, Aboriginal peoples have long endured a host of social and economic barriers which have had detrimental effects on Aboriginal peoples and their family. Compared to the rest of the nation, infant mortality is doubled. As a mother, that statement horrifies me. Suicide rates are five to seven

times higher for First Nations youth as compared to non-Aboriginal youth; and among Inuit youth, suicide rates are up to 11 times higher than the national average, and once again, as a mother this horrifies me.

Aboriginal street gangs have ruthlessly escalated; 96 per cent of street gang members within Saskatchewan and 58 per cent of street gang members in Manitoba and Alberta are Aboriginal. Unemployment, poverty and poor health conditions are common for Aboriginal peoples. Of those Aboriginal peoples who do attempt to access higher education, many are forced to migrate to urban areas. When arriving in the cities, Aboriginal peoples are faced with a myriad of additional challenges including housing shortage, lack of quality child care and an escalated cost of living. Such horrific manifestations of inequality have an obvious impact upon post-secondary success rates for Aboriginal peoples.

With respect to cultural pedagogical issues, the language, teaching methods and learning styles reflected in most post-secondary programs differ dramatically from the culture and traditional pedagogy of Aboriginal peoples. As reflected by 2006 statistics, 51 per cent of First Nations people living on a reserve predominantly converse in their indigenous language. Nonetheless, few post-secondary institutions provide instruction in an indigenous language.

The educational paradigm reflected in post-secondary programs predominantly epitomizes learning as an individualized, competitive, testable process. In contrast, Aboriginal pedagogy prioritizes learning acquired through cooperation, storytelling, group discussions, modeling and observations. In many post-secondary institutions, the programs, curricula and presentation of content are misaligned with Aboriginal culture and pedagogy.

The last area is barriers to financial issues. Attaining higher education is expensive, and many Aboriginal students do not have the finances needed to pursue post-secondary education. Although the federal government provides funding opportunities for First Nations and Inuit peoples through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, several requirements must be met before these aspiring students can secure funding. First, to receive financial assistance, the prospective student must be a registered member of a band. Funding is then subject to band council approval.

A quote by Lyle Whitefish, a former vice chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations: "There is a wait list on every reserve of students wanting to continue on past grade 12 and [due to lack of funding] we can't accommodate them all." First Nations people who live off-reserve and Aboriginal peoples who are not affiliated with a reserve have little chance of securing funding.

In this time of economic uneasiness, it is paramount that government leaders make savvy investment choices. I understand that. There are considerable economic and social returns to investing in post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples. The bleak social and economic realities of many Aboriginal peoples underscore the grave importance of post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples and their future well-being. In sum, investing in Aboriginal post-secondary education is solely aligned with investing in a prosperous future for all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you. That was a very good presentation. I will now move to Andrew Sharpe, Executive Director, Centre for the Study of Living Standards.

Andrew Sharpe, Executive Director, Centre for the Study of Living Standards: I would like to thank the committee for the invitation to appear here today. I will talk

about Aboriginal post-secondary education. Some of the focus will be on access, but not as much as the other speakers.

I will go through four sections. First I want to talk about this large gap in post-secondary education between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. Then I want to look at the implications of that gap for the well-being of Aboriginal populations, then look at the role of remoteness in the educational attainment and finally look at implications of closing the gap for the well-being of Aboriginal Canadians.

In terms of the gap, it is very important to disaggregate this post-secondary gap between the educational attainment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Almost all of it is concentrated at the university level. In fact, in trades and apprenticeship programs, the percentage of Aboriginals who have completed those types of programs is actually slightly greater than non-Aboriginals. College is about a 3 percentage point difference, which is not that much. It is university where the gap lies. According to the 2006 census, 23 per cent of non-Aboriginal Canadians aged 20 and over had a university degree compared to only 9 per cent of Aboriginal Canadians. That gap in absolute terms is actually increasing over time because more and more non-Aboriginal Canadians are attaining university education. It is going up for Aboriginals, but certainly the gap in absolute terms is increasing. It is even worse if you look at the reserve level where only around 3 per cent of the Aboriginal population has a university education.

What are the implications of the gap? It is pretty obvious that when you have lower educational attainment, you observe lower employment rates, lower participation rates and higher unemployment rates. The employment rate for Aboriginal Canadians is basically almost 10 percentage points below that of non-Aboriginal Canadians. The participation rate is 4 per cent below. The unemployment rate of Aboriginal Canadians in 2006 was 15 per cent and for non-Aboriginal Canadians it was 6 per cent. Those gaps are largely attributed to the differences in educational attainment.

National experiments have shown that if you have a policy intervention that raises the educational attainment of a population, you have beneficial life term effects on that population. Of course, it is linked to income and labour force participation, but there are also many indirect effects of education in terms of spillovers.

The overall leadership of Aboriginal communities are largely university educated. We need stronger leaders and more leaders; therefore, university education is particularly important in developing these leaders. There are also many non-market external benefits. Crime is associated with lack of education, lack of high school in particular. If we had higher levels of educational attainment, crime rates associated with Aboriginals would fall.

There is also health. There is a strong relationship between education and health independent of income as well as intergenerational effects. If you have parents educated, they will have the same expectations for their children, and the children in turn will get more educated. Again, this is a good news story of education for all members of society.

In terms of looking at remoteness, we recently did a study for INAC entitled *The Labour Market and Economic Performance of Canada's First Nation Reserves: The Effect of Educational Attainment on Remoteness*. I hope I can release that study through the committee soon.

We looked at reserve-specific data from the census on income, educational attainment, labour force participation and so on. We have very detailed data. One of the variables we did was remoteness. You can divide reserves into three categories: First, one within 50 kilometres of a major urban centre; second, one more than 50 kilometres from a major urban centre but with full road access; and, third, special access via fly-in, no road access. If you look at the educational attainment by those different types of communities in terms of remoteness, not surprisingly, almost 4 per cent of the people on reserves near urban centres have a university degree, around 3 per cent with road access and only about 2 per cent with special access. Remoteness has an effect on educational attainment.

This is not surprising because if you are from a remote reserve, you go away to obtain a university education and you would not come back. Then there is also the decision that if you are living on a remote reserve and you get a post-secondary education, are there any employment opportunities for you there? If there are not many employment opportunities, there is less incentive to invest in education. We find that in remote areas. Of course, the remote reserves have a much weaker labour market and economic outcomes than the urban reserves.

Finally turning to the implications of closing the gap, we have done econometric analysis based on the reserves on what determines the overall level of labour market participation and other labour force variables on the reserve, and we looked at university education. It is surprising how powerful increasing the share of university educated Aboriginals is on overall well-being. For example, if you went down one percentage point, from 3 to 4 per cent of the population with university education, you would basically increase the employment rate by 0.9 percentage points, reduce the unemployment rate by 0.9 percentage points and raise the labour force participation rate by 0.5 percentage points. We have a gap of around 3 percentage points of the population on reserve that have university education. If you removed that gap, which is wishful thinking because it will not happen for many years, you would reduce many economic disparities facing the Aboriginal population.

It is the same thing with respect to earnings. If there is one percentage point increase in the university share of the population, it would result in an average earnings increase of \$383. In terms of GDP per capita, it would increase by \$567. The bottom line is that we can demonstrate with data the impact of greater educational attainment in the Aboriginal population.

I encourage the committee to look at this administrative data from INAC on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program. That is the main program that INAC operates. I am not sure if that data is in the public domain. It certainly should be. I encourage the committee to look at that administrative data to see the trends in financing for Aboriginal students.

To conclude, university education is crucial to improving the economic well-being of the Aboriginal community. I do not think there is a better investment society can make than investing in Aboriginal education.

The Chair: Thank you. We now come to Mr. Snow, co-author of *Free to Learn*, which has suggested a new direction in terms of how we fund getting people in the Aboriginal communities to post-secondary education. We are anxious to hear from you.

Dave Snow, Researcher, Macdonald-Laurier Institute for Public Policy, as an individual: Thank you for having me here. On behalf of my co-author, Calvin Helin, who unfortunately could not be here, I thank you as well.

We just heard from my three fellow panellists very good moral reasons for increasing Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada, some of which I have written down and will refrain from repeating a second time. Before going on to the specifics of our proposal, I will state there are good demographic reasons for increasing educational attainment for all Aboriginal students.

Canada is undergoing a profound demographic shift in which the retirement of baby boomers, the shrinking labour force and low fertility rates mean the population growth will begin to exceed labour force growth for 40 years starting in 2011. As the workers-to-retirees ratio is shrinking, in the words of Brian Lee Crowley: "We are teetering at the edge of a demographic cliff, and we have one foot out in the air."

However, in contrast to the Canadian population, the Aboriginal population is booming. There is a high birthrate among Aboriginals, and they are much younger as a population. Aboriginals are 3.3 per cent of the Canadian population but make up 5.6 per cent of Canadian children. My co-author, Calvin Helin, in one of his books refers to this as the looming "demographic tsunami." This creates a paradox in which there are high levels of Aboriginal unemployment, yet Aboriginals are needed in the Canadian workforce more than ever. As the three other panellists have shown already, the implications of increased Aboriginal labour force participation and education are enormous.

Funding is an issue in an era particularly of increased tuition costs. We know that Aboriginal students and Aboriginals in general have lower incomes than non-Aboriginals. I point to a report completed by Dr. Blair Stonechild and R.W. Malatest and Associates for the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, which through 40 focus groups found that an unwillingness to take on debt and financial burden were among the highest reasons for Aboriginals saying they did not want to go through post-secondary education.

However, the federal government does have a program. The Post-Secondary Student Support Program is the biggest component of it, in which each year, \$314 million goes to this program designed for post-secondary education for registered Indian students. The money, however, does not go to individual students. Instead, it goes to band councils who then distribute the money to students themselves.

This program, as our report shows, is fundamentally failing the tests of accountability and transparency. Among the problems with the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, or the PSSSP, are surplus funds being used by band councils for non-eligible expenses, including things such as administration costs, child care costs, staff salaries and benefits, travel costs for band council members, office expenses and utility costs, this for a program designed for post-secondary education for registered Indian students.

Students are increasingly being wait-listed. In the words of Shawn Atleo, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, over 10,000 students' dreams have been delayed or denied. There is substantial regional variation in student funding, some evidence showing that per capita of potential students in Ontario, Ontario receives twice as much money as Atlantic Canada, in spite of the fact that some Atlantic Canadian provinces have among the highest tuition rates in the country. There are allegations, again from the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation

report and various others, including the INAC internal audit, of nepotism and favouritism with off-reserve registered Indians in particular not receiving funding, and the program as a whole suffers from a complete lack of any kind of performance measurement and accountability. Bands are only required to say how many students receive funding. They are not required to say how many students did not, nor are they required to say how much funding each student received.

Our opinion, myself and Calvin Helin, is that this is a scandalous state of affairs where some bands have wait-listed students and others have surplus funds. Some students, indeed, receive full funding for post-secondary education and living expenses, while other students receive nothing. Of course, some bands do disburse the funding fairly. However, as countless pieces of anecdotal evidence and the study from R.W. Malatest and Associates shows, many do not. A program whose accountability structure relies entirely on the goodwill of the administrators, in our view, is not an effective program.

Power has been devolved from the government to individual bands but, in our view, it has not been devolved far enough to where it truly belongs, which is with registered Indian youth.

We propose the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Savings Account, or the APSSA. We propose phasing out the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and replacing it with a savings account, and for each registered Indian student, an account will be set up at birth, where the sum of \$4,000 will be put into this account. For the completion of each grade, 6 through 12, an additional \$3,000 would be put into this account, which would be held at a registered financial institution. At the time of graduation, this account would be at least \$25,000, not taking into account any accumulation of interest or, indeed, any form of private, non-profit or other forms of top-ups that would be easy to administer with such an account.

While I agree this would not overcome every barrier to Aboriginal post-secondary education, the knowledge of \$3,000 per grade completed and \$25,000, at least, at the completion of high school would create a powerful incentive for students and for the parents of students to want to finish high school.

Once a student were to join a bona fide post-secondary education program -- be it a trade school, college, university or the like -- money would be available through a payment system similar to payment systems done now for grants, bursaries and scholarships, and there would be strict controls to ensure that tuition would go directly to the post-secondary institution in monthly or semesterly payments dependent upon the student maintaining status in the program. Monthly living allowances could be disbursed as well.

We have estimated that with the information we have been given from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, with roughly 105,000 Aboriginal students set to go through Grade 6 or 12 this year and in the coming years, this would cost roughly \$350 million, or precisely what the program costs now. There would, of course, be transition costs, which we say would be temporary but substantial, with setting up these accounts and funding students who are currently in Grade 6 or 12 or later and want to attend post-secondary education. In our paper, we propose that any student in that situation would receive the \$25,000 in an account set up.

Lapsed funds from students who choose not to take up post-secondary education could repay some of these transition costs. The repayment, I should point out, would go to individual students, not to some other form of funding, as has been suggested by

critics of our report. Or, if the government felt willing to deal with the transition costs head on, they could be used to top up other students' accounts. The reward would be an efficient, transparent and universal system, students would know of the funding they receive and leadership with chief and council would not determine funding.

It is worth pointing out as well that these numbers are flexible. We are certainly not advocating that this is the only money that can be spent. We merely look to see how the current money could be spent more effectively.

There have been predictable responses to our proposal, particularly criticism from several chiefs and organizations composed of chiefs, who fear they will lose power and the rhetoric of self-government. Indian control of education is in all these responses. Our response to that, as it says in the paper, is that the best way to maintain Indian control of education is to empower individual Aboriginal students. I would ask if grassroots economic empowerment does not constitute Indian control of education, then what does? How does the current system empower those thousands of students who are currently on waiting lists and give them control over their education?

We found that it is met with overwhelming support from grassroots Aboriginal students. We have had many students come forward and sign our statement of support, as well as educators, even some chiefs and your colleague, Senator Patrick Brazeau. We have received countless emails from students, many of whom were unwilling to come forward and support publicly for fear of not receiving funding from their band in the future.

To conclude, given the extreme poverty and limited opportunities facing many Aboriginals, we have seen there is a moral imperative for Canadian policy-makers to work to improve post-secondary education. The Post-Secondary Student Support Program is leaving far too many prospective Aboriginal students out in the cold and is not achieving its goal. The fact that we have a program designed to help post-secondary education and we have no idea how much of this money is actually being spent on post-secondary education is scandalous.

On behalf of my co-author, Calvin Helin, and the Macdonald-Laurier Institute for Public Policy, we urge this committee to look seriously at our proposal as a way to improve post-secondary education for Aboriginal students in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your initial presentations. We will now engage with the committee.

Committee members, I have six of us down so far. If anyone else wants to get on the list, please do so as soon as possible so I can divide the time accordingly.

I also want to welcome Senator Rivard, who is here substituting for Senator Demers, and Senator Mercer, who is here substituting for Senator Cordy.

I want start of and focus, first, on some of the comments that Ms. Preston and Mr. Mendelson made about a statistic that is attributable to Mr. Mendelson. If an Aboriginal graduates from high school, they do go on to post-secondary education at about the same rate as the general population, and the problem, as you both pointed out, is at the secondary level. They are dropping out of high school.

We are a federal entity here. The educational system per se is under provincial jurisdiction, but there is much more of an involvement at the federal level at the post-secondary education, but if the problem is deeper down than that earlier, at the

high school level and maybe even earlier than that, what might we as a federal entity consider doing about that?

It is obviously in our interests to get more Aboriginals going through the post-secondary education system. If we could bring the number of Aboriginals graduating from post-secondary education, both university and colleges, up to the same level as the rest of the population, we would probably save billions in terms of costs in social assistance to the system, et cetera. We would certainly have more productivity. We would certainly be solving our problem of the demographic challenge that we are facing of a shrinking workforce because of the aging condition of our population, with a population that is younger and growing at a faster rate than the rest of the country.

There are all sorts of good reasons why we would want to get the Aboriginal post-secondary rate up. What do we do? What do you suggest we do in terms of that high school level?

Mr. Mendelson: Let me speak directly to that. First Nations reserves are within federal jurisdiction. You do have an education system within federal jurisdiction to the extent that it can be spoken of as in any order of government's jurisdiction. There are approximately 540 schools on reserve, and there are many more students who are resident on reserve who are attending non-reserve schools, mainly high schools, but whose tuition is paid by the federal government through bands.

There is a federally supported school system and, if I may say so, there are some significant problems with that. I hate to turn to money right away, but money is an issue. In Ontario, funding for K-12 has gone up about 50 per cent since 2003, plus there are a lot of add-ons. Today I was looking at a program that provides targeted grants based on socio-economic data to individual schools; a \$300-million program, so not insignificant.

Comparatively, on reserve, I believe that in Ontario probably a 25 per cent increase in funding on reserve since 2003, just at a guess. It might be 26 per cent. In fact one of the issues here is that data is very hard to get.

I do not think that financing is the only issue, but I would be very specific about it and clear about it. There is a system for which the federal government has at least shared responsibility with First Nations, and it is on reserve, and that is where the main problem lies.

In Manitoba, in 2001 -- and you have more recent data -- 70 per cent of young adults between the age of 20 and 24 had not completed high school. That is an astonishing number, and it has astonishing implications for Canadian society because most of those young adults will not be significantly employed for the rest of their lives. That is the reality of not getting a high school degree.

I will just stop there.

The Chair: Of course the majority of Aboriginals now live off reserve, so that does bring the provinces in.

Mr. Mendelson: Yes. The provinces are responsible. However, when we say the majority of Aboriginals, there has been a large increase in people who are identifying themselves as Aboriginal. In each census there are more and more people who are willing to identify themselves as Aboriginal, so the figures of a population growth are partially what we call natural population growth, but they are also partially more people identifying themselves as Aboriginal, and that is almost all off reserve.

Therefore it would almost all be people who have identification with being Aboriginal or who see themselves as Metis, but the First Nations communities are not growing that quickly but they are growing on reserve. Population is growing on reserve.

Ms. Preston: Your question dealt with what the federal government can do about the high school graduation rates.

I am a teacher by trade. I have taught for about 10 to 12 years in the public school system. Actually, I taught in a band school as well. I believe your best teachers need to be put in those band schools. I believe the quality of education in the band schools, the quality of teaching, needs to be improved. I think the teachers need to be better prepared for the realities of First Nations.

For a lot of First Nations communities there is remoteness and there are the cultural aspects. Our education and our teaching pedagogy are improving on the whole, but there are brilliant and wonderful things about Aboriginal pedagogy that goes across Canada for all students that are very effective. There is narrative storytelling, discussion, hands-on group work and that type of thing. A lot of what I see in our teacher education program -- I am from the Department of Education -- is working towards that to making all of our graduates from the U of S in the teaching program teach in a new way, and a lot of that pedagogy is from Aboriginal pedagogy. The black and white of that is I think we need to support teachers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in band schools.

One of the statistics that I can give you, in Saskatchewan, four out of five Aboriginal students are attending publicly funded schools. Again and again I hear from First Nation parents that are on reserve that they send their children to Saskatchewan-funded public schools because they prefer the education in the public school system.

In Saskatchewan, the funding per student is \$8,500 to \$9,000 per student and the funding in these band schools is substantially lower. I know I am talking about funding again, but those are black-and-white details of the band schools and how we can improve the education. They need the resources and they need the professional development. They need all of those supports to improve the education in band schools.

Another aspect that goes along with that is we need to support ITEP programs: Indian teacher education programs. There are a number of TEP programs, teacher education programs, or ITEP programs, Indian teacher education programs, across the country. We need to assist in the post-secondary part of training more Aboriginal peoples to be teachers, and along with that, again, is support in the post-secondary institutions and not soft funding so that these ITEP programs can create consistency in their programs in teaching Aboriginal teachers to go back, if they choose, to the band schools to teach.

The retention rates in ITEP programs I know about from the University of Saskatchewan. Mr. Mendelson talked about retention rates and they are very hard to get. I did a search of retention rates of post-secondary students and I found one that I can talk about that I can quote.

This is based in the University of Saskatchewan, in their arts and science program. In 1988 to 1999, the University of Saskatchewan, which hosts the largest population of Aboriginal students in Canada, reported that 43.9 per cent of Aboriginal first-year students in the College of Arts and Science either withdrew from their program or

were required to discontinue. This number compares to 20 per cent of non-Aboriginal students who withdraw or are required to discontinue.

In the ITPE program at the University of Saskatchewan, they have some supports. The director is talking about supporting the emotional, the cultural and the physical – the whole student of their ITEP post-secondary teachers. That support needs to be there. He told me it was 80 to 90 per cent retention rate in that ITEP program, which is much different than the 43.9 per cent in the College of Arts and Science. I will stop there.

The Chair: Thank you. Again, let me reiterate. I am trying to get some feel of what needs to be done to keep Aboriginal kids from dropping out of high school – particularly what we at the federal level might be able to do about it.

Let me ask Mr. Sharpe and Mr. Snow if they have anything they want to contribute to this discussion.

Mr. Snow: Our study focuses primarily on post-secondary education. I think the incentive we offer is important, although I realize a mere financial incentive will not allow everyone to complete high school.

However, I would point out that this idea about post-secondary education being a federal responsibility is very clearly accepted by all parties – parties not as in the political parties, but as in all parties to this debate – that for primary and secondary school, it is a federal responsibility.

The information we have from a standing committee report with the House of Commons in 2007 or 2008, I believe, entitled "No Higher Priority," indicates that the position of this being a treaty right for post-secondary education is disputed, to say the least, by the federal government.

It is our position that regardless of whether or not post-secondary education being funded by the federal government is a treaty right, this is something that the federal government should do anyway. This is a sideways way of addressing that idea that this program would be imposed on Aboriginal students.

As it stands now, the federal government's view, as I understand it, is that the current program is discretionary and can be increased, decreased or scrapped as the federal government pleases. In that sense, our program would be no different.

Senator Eaton: Mr. Snow, I think what you are doing or what you have thought up is wonderful, absolutely first class. Thank you for doing that.

The government, it was said in the Throne Speech, is very committed to working with Aboriginal communities and provinces to reform and strengthen the education system. Perhaps your program will take off.

Ms. Preston, I thought you made some very interesting points about cultural pedagogical issues. We should really think in two streams, should we not? We should think off-reserve high school; getting Aboriginal kids off reserve in cities through high school is going to take one kind of program, whether it is mentoring or you might have some suggestions. I would think that living in a bilingual country, if you are an off-reserve student, indigenous language is wonderful for your own culture but not necessarily a tool that you will bring into the mainstream workplace.

Then you were talking about on-reserve education where indigenous languages are used. That would require a different kind of programming or teaching, would it not?

Ms. Preston: At the University of Saskatchewan, in our newly revised teacher education program, one stream that we have going throughout all of our interns – that means our teachers going out to do their internship; we have a four-month block where they do that – is that we have mandated they must have an Aboriginal focus in the units that they teach.

Senator Eaton: Can you explain that?

Ms. Preston: Here is another example. In Saskatchewan, in the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, we have just put together a package and K-to-12 treaty education is mandatory. In every grade, they teach about Aboriginal peoples and the treaties. The teachers need to know that too. They need to review the packages. They need to address Aboriginal content into the units that they prepare.

Senator Eaton: So this is in mainstream downtown schools?

Ms. Preston: That is correct. The idea of talking circles, of modeling things, of student-focused self assessment, those are all ideas incorporated into Aboriginal teaching pedagogy – how we teach. Those ideas are also in our mainstream teacher education programs.

I do not know if I addressed your question, but that is the background.

Senator Eaton: That is for city schools. Do you find that having those packages is helpful to an Aboriginal student going to the local neighbourhood public school?

Ms. Preston: It addresses the point that I do believe in that social cohesion among all peoples in Canada. I think especially the marginalization and the discrimination that Aboriginal peoples face is part of the reason that we do not see them in post-secondary education as much as we would like to. They do not identify themselves, some of them do not, in that sphere; and it is everyone's responsibility to welcome Aboriginal peoples into post-secondary education.

I am connecting the dots in this way, in that education among mainstream public education students will help directly and indirectly that social cohesion between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples. That will create a more welcoming environment for Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education.

Senator Eaton: When you were talking about the band, we have a Committee of the Whole in the Senate every year where the AFN comes and makes a report to us. What kind of things do you think the band can do? It is all very well to come to us, but we are looking at them. What about them helping them?

Are they taking concrete steps to mentor their young people? Forget Mr. Snow's financial thing, which I think is an excellent idea, but are they doing things to mentor students or to work with schools?

Ms. Preston: I know, for example, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council had partnerships with various universities, one being the University of Victoria; they had a partnership with that university in an outreach program. That means people from the university came into their community and, together, the people of that community – the elders of that community, the chief, the directors of education in the band school – they all worked to create a post-secondary curriculum that would address high

academic standards at a university and also the realities on that band, so that their post-secondary program reflected the curriculum and the realities of that band. There were partnerships with the band and the university to create post-secondary programs; and the large part, if not all, of that program – First Nations Partnership Program, it was called – was an outreach program.

That is an example of the band and the universities working together to train Aboriginal teachers. We are not talking about carpenters or any other colleges. That is specifically Aboriginal teachers, and it was focused on early childhood education – elementary and early childhood teachers to teach within their community. They could stay in their community and access post-secondary education.

Senator Seidman: Thank you very much for coming here to discuss these very serious issues in Aboriginal educational access. Obviously the obstacles the Aboriginals face are many, but clearly among the most challenging are the educational barriers, as you have presented here to us – specifically, their lack of completion of post-secondary education. The statistics you have presented have really borne this out.

The tendency when discussing access to post-secondary education is to discuss it inside the box as the classic university programs for students graduating from high school at the age of 18 or so.

I would like you to tell us more about access to post-secondary education from the vantage of the older adult. I think it is important to consider the older learner in all situations, especially in cases such as you present here where the greatest barrier is incomplete secondary education.

There is a whole segment of Aboriginal society that could benefit from post-secondary education that offers retraining or focuses on non-traditional post-secondary programs, trades, new technologies or even on high school completion.

Mr. Mendelson: The data does show that Aboriginal students are older overall and graduate at an older age when they do graduate. There are many initiatives across Canada to allow adults, particularly younger adults, to have a second chance to get back to school, get a high school diploma and then go on to university as a mature student. They must have a certain level of knowledge and skill before they can make use of that.

There are currently many ongoing initiatives. They are not on-reserve per se as far as I know, although some of the larger reserves probably do have some initiatives. I know that Manitoba has an entire adult learning centre in Winnipeg, Brandon and other areas. I am sure that Saskatchewan and Ontario have similar programs.

Having said that, it is not going to do the trick. We should not delude ourselves. It means that there will be a second chance, and I am a big believer in second chances. I had a few myself and am grateful for that. However, that will only make things 10 per cent better, perhaps. It will not address the core issue, which is that students have to graduate with a good high school education in more or less the normal time so that they can go on to post-secondary education in more or less the normal time.

It is important to raise that, but I am worried that in this discussion we often get distracted. We start talking about post-secondary financing, which is important, but it is not the core issue. We start talking about adult education, which is important, but it is not the core issue. The core issue is kindergarten to grade 12 and graduation.

You asked me a question that I did not answer correctly. I have a specific proposal on what to do about kindergarten to grade 12. It is in my last paper on this issue, which is called *Why We Need a First Nations Education Act*. It draws from nearly everyone from the former Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Mr. Prentice, to The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People. We have all pointed out that, in the words of Mr. Prentice, First Nation students are the only students who do not have an education system. My proposal was about how to construct an education system on reserves, which is what is missing.

In my view, financing is one issue, but the financing must be financing of an effective education system.

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to speak to that? There is an issue of the older Aboriginal people as well.

Mr. Sharpe: We did a study on closing the gap in educational attainment between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. It is extremely hard to do if you are only dealing with the young people coming on stream. It takes literally generations to do it that way. I do not know up to what age people can they go back to school, but we can do a lot to close the education gap if we can get people in their twenties back to school.

It is difficult to do, and there are initiatives in that area, but that should be a key emphasis. I think it would be more than 10 per cent. I believe that improving the educational attainment of older Aboriginals is a key to reducing the gap.

Mr. Snow: I failed to mention that under our proposal, for the 10 years following completion of high school the account would be available to the student, who would now, of course, be a young adult, at which time the funding would lapse and be redistributed to other students' accounts. Ten years is obviously a flexible number. As Mr. Sharpe was saying, how high do you go? It is not exactly clear, but we think that would be a good number.

In order to head off some other criticisms that have been made of our report, there is nothing in our report that precludes complementary programs. There is nothing in our report that precludes an effective kindergarten to grade 12 system or precludes something like the university/college entrance program which currently exists for upgrading in order to go to universities and colleges.

This could certainly be the type of program that coexists with other effective programs, like adult education.

Senator Seidman: That is very interesting, Mr. Snow. The program extends for 10 years beyond what age?

Mr. Snow: Under our proposal, it would be the completion of high school, which is generally age 17 to 19, but it depends upon when the student completed high school. The account would be in the young adult's name for 10 years after.

Senator Seidman: Often a young adult decides within five or six years that they want to go back and have a second chance, although there are, of course, much older adults who do that as well. It is interesting because obviously the financial issues are much greater for older adults. They might have some form of income and would have to give that up.

Ms. Preston: On the topic of access to post-secondary education as an older learner, a number of Aboriginal people aged 40 and older are assuming the position of grandparent, so child care services is also an important thing to think about.

Transition programs, as Mr. Snow spoke of, for an older adult going into post-secondary education would be important, i.e, tutors and supplementary workshops. There is also need for healing support. I say that for older Aboriginal adults as well as Aboriginals in general. Because of the horrific statistics that I have given, I think that an important part of an Aboriginal post-secondary program is some kind of healing support directed in that way.

The Chair: For anyone watching who is wondering why all these people are wearing the same ties and the same scarves, it is because today we are commemorating the efforts to raise money for research into prostate cancer.

Senator Ogilvie: Ms. Preston, on page 2 of your document, under "Educational Issues", you say that for Aboriginal peoples aged 20 to 24 the high school completion rate is approximately 40 per cent compared to approximately 13 per cent for non-Aboriginal peoples. It strikes me that that is backwards.

Ms. Preston: Yes, it is. I apologize.

Senator Ogilvie: I would have left it, but you read it that way as well, so I wanted to make certain that that was clear.

Ms. Preston: I apologize.

Senator Ogilvie: That reduces the subsequent questions I would have put to you, because you would have had a lot of lessons for us.

Mr. Snow, I find your proposal very interesting.

Not only is it aimed at a particular clear focus, but it could deal with a very substantial number of other issues, including the whole concept of democracy and so on as we practice it in different areas. Are you successful in this? I assume the idea would be that the individual student could choose which post-secondary educational institution to attend.

Mr. Snow: Absolutely, yes.

Senator Ogilvie: Which obviously would be a model or first example of the idea that has been talked about in the idea that funding for post-secondary education generally should be student-centred as opposed to institutional-centred, that is, the student should be given the subsidy that effectively deals with tuition so they can take that packet and choose the institution themselves that they would like to attend. Would you be interested in commenting on that in any way?

Mr. Snow: Certainly. It is interesting that you point that out. This is not perhaps what we anticipated but probably the most frequent response to our paper that I have seen, whether from emails to the institute, to myself, comment boards, letters to the editor, was, "This is a great idea. Why not do it for other students as well?" I cannot speak for Calvin Helin or the institute, but my personal view is this is an excellent idea, that this would provide an incentive for universities and other post-secondary education institutions to prove to students that this is why they should attend their institutions, because, if they do not get the students coming, they will not fill their

quotas. In short, yes, I think this is a great model and would be a good example, if it were instituted and worked, of how to deal with student funding in the future.

Senator Ogilvie: Thank you. There is a wide range of educational opportunities within the package of post-secondary education. Mr. Mendelson pointed out that the attendance of First Nations people within the PSE sector was higher in college, if I heard you correctly. I wanted to make the observation, however, and we heard it from some of you, when you talk about that, you tend to talk about the value of a university education. I want to emphasize, as I did in another session, that I believe in Canada we have undervalued the PSE opportunities other than a university education. I will not in any way criticize the idea of the value of a university education, but I think, to our detriment and with regard to a number of these issues, we have undervalued those other sectors.

I appreciate what all of you presented. I understood it all. It fits within the general pattern of issues we are seeing across the areas of society with regard to PSE issues but with certain emphasis in the sector. Thank you.

Mr. Sharpe: I do not think one is undervaluing the college. The gap really is in the university sector between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. In terms of college, there is almost the same overall participation rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. In terms of overall improvement of post-secondary Aboriginal performance, the university sector is where there is a shortfall.

Senator Ogilvie: I appreciate you making the point, but part of our study clearly understands that we have an issue with regard to post-secondary education across all sectors of society. In that general context, when talk about PSE, we often talk about the value of higher education. I understand the statistic you are referring to because you have made that point, but that does not mean we do not have a very substantial social issue with regard to getting more and more Canadians across the board into post-secondary education and training. That was really my point in that regard. Our tendency to focus on the high value of university education in our discussions tends to dominate that discussion, and that was my point, nothing greater than that.

Mr. Mendelson: As a quick addendum to that, it is important to disaggregate some of the data by Aboriginal identity group. If you do, you will find that the so-called North American Indian, First Nation, will be less successful in community colleges than Metis. It is really the high degree of success in the community college sector of the non-North American Indian or Inuit Aboriginal identity groups that has resulted in that equivalence. Sometimes you have to look a little deeper to find where some of the issues are.

Senator Callbeck: Thank you all for coming today. Mr. Mendelson, you said that the most important barrier is that Aboriginals are not completing high school. Then you went on to say that your solution or your proposal, as far as reserves go, is that we have an education system in the reserves. What do we have there now? Does every reserve decide what they will have in their education system?

Mr. Mendelson: Yes, we have what I call the village school model. I am not alone in this, by the way. To the extent that anyone has looked at this, and I go back to the Royal Commission who said the same thing, we have what used to exist in rural societies in all of Canada, and that is a school essentially run by the mayor, if you remember this. I am actually old enough to remember some of the change when the rural school consolidation occurred, over a lot of objections, by the way. I am from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

In every province, we went about reorganizing our rural school districts and created consolidated districts with a size and professionalism enough so they could develop a cadre of principles from their teachers and develop a good teaching staff. At the end of the day, it is the quality of the teaching. It is the teacher in the classroom where it really happens, but to get good teaching in the classroom requires a good structure above that, and we do not have any of that. We have a model of education among First Nations that we discarded among non-First Nations I suppose about 70 or 80 years ago.

There are many initiatives of bands around Canada. It is not as if they are not trying to do something. I think I counted a couple of dozen specific initiatives where bands were trying to get together in various aggregations and create a better education system. It is very difficult for them to do that under the current system of funding and of support for First Nations education.

In fact, INAC tries to help them. It is very difficult for INAC to be effective in assisting bands in improving their education system because of the way this is structured. That is why I put forward a proposal, which I think is non-partisan because it is consistent with what this government has said and what previous governments have said, which is a proposal to try to structure a system that is consistent with First Nations' authority and responsibility but that reflects the best of how we understand the school system will function.

Senator Callbeck: In other words, now within a province, if you have five different reserves, you have five different systems?

Mr. Mendelson: There are 608 or so reserves, depending upon who is counting, and it is incredibly heterogeneous. In Nova Scotia, the Mi'kmaq has an association of eight schools, and they run it as a school board. It has gone through a lot of ups and downs, mainly downs, but I think it is in an up now and is working. There are examples of functioning aggregations, but in the main there are individual bands running individual schools or maybe two schools.

Senator Callbeck: Dr. Preston, you talked about the need to train more Aboriginals to teach in their schools. Are we doing anything about that now?

Ms. Preston: I do not have comparative data such that I can answer that question. I do know that there are a number of [ITEP](#) programs in Saskatchewan and there are [SUNTEP](#) programs for Metis people. At least at the University of Saskatchewan, the retention rates are good. There is a community feeling in the office. There are big celebrations when the Aboriginal teachers graduate. I see progress.

Senator Callbeck: You listed four barriers. Are they in order of priority?

Ms. Preston: I agree with Mr. Mendelson. With regard to the first barrier of educational issues, whether you go on to college or university after high school, graduating from high school is paramount. I would put that as number one. The others are not in order.

Senator Callbeck: Mr. Sharpe, you suggested that we look at a document with regard to the financial trends for Aboriginal students.

Mr. Sharpe: Right. INAC puts together administrative data on the programs. I have been working with INAC this past year on a study for the [National Aboriginal Economic Development Board](#). We have had access to a number of documents. Those statistics are useful in terms of the number of students receiving funding. It is

not as much the financial aspect as the number of students. I think that data would be useful for the committee to look at in terms of the research agenda. To my knowledge, I do not think the information is in the public domain yet, but it should be.

Senator Callbeck: Mr. Snow, you made the comment that in Ontario students get twice as much as those in Atlantic Canada. Is that because of the band council?

Mr. Snow: It was not exactly clear what it was. This data was from a 2009 internal audit from INAC. The precise numbers I do not have, but it was something like per registered Indian student in the 18 to 34 cohort, Ontario was receiving about \$1,600 and Atlantic Canada was receiving about \$800. Of course, \$1,600 is not a lot of money, and a small percentage of these students end up getting the money, but that was the number in the INAC audit. This was the money going from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to the bands.

Senator Callbeck: You say that the council only has to report back to Indian and Northern Affairs how many students they helped, not how much they gave them and so on, no other particulars. How does the government determine how much they will give that council?

Mr. Snow: It is based on the reports of how many students they had, how much money was required to fund these students and that next year they project this many students plus X. That is how I understand it. Perhaps some of my colleagues here could speak to this more than I could. Most of the information I am relying on is from this INAC internal audit and a previous one.

With respect to what is reported to the public or through this audit, it is not broken down, from any information I was able to receive, by a particular band. We are just told that about 21,000 or 22,000 students were funded in 2008. We are not told how many in Ontario, how many in Northern Ontario, and so on.

Senator Callbeck: With regard to audits, [Kathleen Keenan](#) appeared here as a witness before prorogation. She is the director general of education for INAC. She spoke about a review of the educational programs that is going on within the department, which was committed in the budget of 2008. The department released an audit to the public with 14 recommendations, which led to more reviews.

Do you know what those recommendations are? If so, do you have any comments on them?

Mr. Snow: I certainly read through the recommendations. Much of them dealt with INAC's internal structure. In my view, none of the recommendations got to the core of the problem. Many of them were general. I am speaking about the 2009 audit. Many of the recommendations were about increasing accountability in this area. There were not many specifics. With regard to the reports dealing with the [Post-Secondary Students' Support Program](#), I was least satisfied with INAC's proposals for reform.

Senator Mercer: Thank you to the panel for being here. I have a follow-up to Senator Ogilvie's comment earlier about the money perhaps following the students rather than the institution. This is a long-standing complaint of Nova Scotia because we have more students per capita than any other province in the country. They do not all come from Nova Scotia. The money that follows a student from Ontario goes to Ontario, not to Nova Scotia, where he or she is using the facility. However, that is off topic.

I really only have one question. Where I grew up, in Halifax, the single largest visible minority were African Nova Scotians. I went to school with a lot of young men and women from that community. When we went to school, the people standing at the front of the classroom all looked like me or my sister. That is true; it is a pity. I was saying that in the most global sense.

As the African Nova Scotians looked to the front of the classroom, they saw no one who reflected who they were.

When I listen to what Dr. Preston and others have said, that is the same situation in Aboriginal schools. Should our emphasis not be to ensure that we create role models and ensure that schools across the country are reaching out? I met the other day with some medical students from Dalhousie Memorial Medical School. They spoke specifically about reaching out to Aboriginal communities and, in the case of the students from Dalhousie, to African Nova Scotian students who qualify.

These schools -- law schools, medical schools, and so on -- are turning away thousands of students who apply, many of whom do qualify. Should we not be making a special effort to ensure that our Aboriginal people get into medical school, law school and, in particular, into education schools, so we can put someone at the front of the classroom who reflects who they are?

I was in a school in the inner city of Winnipeg a number of years ago, and what fascinated me was the program they had where in the classroom was not just the teacher and the students, but also an elder. I met with the administration and spoke to the teachers who had been there before the elders came and who had remained since the elders came. They said it was like night and day, like someone had flipped a switch. Suddenly it all started to mean more to the young people. The teachers learned a lot too, because the elders helped in reflecting the culture. As we all know, much of the Aboriginal culture is communicated through stories, and history is by word of mouth.

Is this one of the major issues we should be talking about, trying to create those role models? That is my only question.

Ms. Preston: Thank you for that comment. I agree with you. That is the black-and-white answer to your question. Those role models in the classroom, participating alongside students, are very important. This is partially again in relation to promoting the Indian Teacher Education Programs.

You spoke about elders in the classroom. A couple of weeks ago, INAC and the Province of Saskatchewan funded an Aboriginal conference in Saskatchewan that I participated in. I met with an elder and talked with her for about an hour. She was working in the schools. When she first went into the schools, swearing was rampant. She asked the principal for a minute of everyone's classroom time to allow elders to go into the classrooms. Many Aboriginal people have a special respect for elders. When this elder went into the classrooms, she talked about their language in the school. Within a couple of weeks, she had the language under control because an elder, not a teacher, had talked to them.

That is an example of why I agree with your statement. Making a place for Aboriginal peoples to be successful role models is paramount.

Mr. Mendelson: I agree totally. However, here is the "but."

It is very hard for reserve schools to retain good teachers. Currently financing is deteriorating and they are paying less than off-reserve schools or they have a lot of difficulty competing in almost all situations. Reserves are some of the most difficult teaching circumstances.

Aboriginal teachers are in demand, especially as they gain experience. If they have families, want a decent salary like everyone else and the Winnipeg school board is offering a good teaching position with security and potential for professional promotion, it is very hard to retain teachers. We have to consider the systemic problem on reserve.

There are a lot of initiatives off reserve. In my view, all kinds of public school boards have been quite innovative, creative and, relatively speaking, are well funded. Examples of great programs are found in Winnipeg, Vancouver and with the Edmonton Catholic school board.

Senator Mercer: Another good program was not funded by the school board; it was funded by the Winnipeg Foundation.

Mr. Mendelson: Getting community funding and participation is good.

Senator Champagne: Your presentations were interesting. For someone new on this committee that has not had the opportunity to hear other witnesses over the last months or year, it was quite an education.

I think we all agree that having young Aboriginal people finish high school is a must. The problems between young persons living on or off reserve are huge.

Bill C-33 in the late 1980s that gave back Indian status to many women that had married and lived off the reserve. Status was given to them and one subsequent generation. We are now talking about their grandchildren.

Suppose a student that had lived off the reserve and graduated high school easily because it was outside the reserve wanted to go to university. That student is admissible to a program that would pay for schooling, a good fraternity house and provide generous pocket money. The student living on reserve would be subject to band council politics to determine whether they would get money to go to university.

Would someone living on reserve have an advantage to move off reserve in applying for this program that allows someone from off reserve with Indian status to receive the benefit of all that free schooling?

Mr. Snow: Again, I point to the focus group study done by R. A. Malatest and Blair Stonechild for the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation. We found most frequently under our proposal that registered Indians living off reserve were more likely to say their off-reserve status precluded them from receiving funding through the post-secondary student support program. Knowing someone on the band council was important to receive funding, particularly if that funding was perceived as scarce.

I do not recall hearing if the reverse is occurring for whatever reason in which students are able to exploit their off-reserve status in order to receive funding. Even if that is occurring, both of those situations would be rectified under our proposal. All registered Indian students, regardless of whether they lived off reserve or on reserve or whether they had good or poor relationships with chief and council could receive this funding.

Senator Champagne: It is a very good idea. Let us start it.

The Chair: I would like to go ask Mr. Snow a couple of questions about his proposal. You talk about registered Indian students. Does this not apply to Metis or Inuit students?

Mr. Snow: That is correct for the purposes of this program. If you were to ask if this is also a good idea to apply to Metis or Inuit students, I would say absolutely.

The vast majority of funding under this program dealt with registered Indian students. It also does not deal with non-status Indian students. We tried to determine how we can better fund students under the current program, given the current levels of funding and who the funding is directed towards.

An earlier question asked if this is a good example for non-Aboriginal students. It is also a good example for Metis and Inuit.

The Chair: Your figures indicate that this program would provide \$25,000 per student. Additional interest could increase that to \$30,000. How does this relate to the cost of education for the student? Is this sufficient?

Some students might go to university and others might go to community colleges. Travel and residency costs would vary, particularly for those who come from remote areas, whether on reserve or off reserve.

Mr. Snow: Depending on the individual, their status and whether they have children, this would not cover all expenses associated with the life of a two-year or four-year post-secondary education in all instances. The current tuition level at universities on average costs the country is \$4,900 based on data released from Statistics Canada a few weeks ago. At the very least, this would cover more than the average of four years of university tuition.

Our report was criticized by Alex Usher who also wrote a report on the post-secondary students' support program. He suggested some policies for reform. He said that this program does not provide nearly enough, particularly for Aboriginal students with children. When you take into account living expenses, et cetera, it is clearly not enough. He also criticized our proposal for potentially raising costs.

If someone wants to make the argument that expenses should be raised to cover full living expenses for every registered Indian or Aboriginal student in general, that would be one argument. If costs are to remain the same, I prefer a proposal that funds at least four full years of tuition for each registered Indian student than one that funds full tuition and living expenses for some and nothing for others.

The Chair: Under the current post-secondary student support program, how does the average amount a student would get compare to your proposal? I know you are critical of the program. Some of the funds are not taken advantage of. There is a ceiling and many people do not get them. Put all those factors aside.

Mr. Snow: The only number I heard was by Alex Usher in his response to our paper. He said the average was something like \$13,000 per student.

I am not sure where he got his data, but his report on reforming the post-secondary student program was done directly for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. While I do not agree with Mr. Usher on the content of his response to our paper, I would guess that there is some accuracy to that number.

The Chair: That is a valid comparison, you feel, in terms of the cost items that are covered between the two? You are saying yours is virtually double.

Mr. Snow: This is \$13,000 per year. Over the course of a four-year degree it would be \$52,000, which would be double the costs.

The Chair: All right, I understand. Finally, on the administration of this, you have been critical of the bands in terms of the administrative costs, but somebody has to administer this. How would you see this administered?

Mr. Snow: That is a good question; it is one of the most common questions we have seen. Under our proposal, the money would go from the federal government to accounts that are administered by registered financial institutions, not unlike other accounts for individuals such as RESPs, RRSPs and RDSPs.

Some sort of arrangement would be set up with the institution where money would go directly from that account. As long as there was evidence that the student was enrolled in the program, then a certain amount would come out per month.

This has also been criticized as potentially being this huge administrative framework, very difficult to administer. I would point out that for many bursaries – scholarships and grants that come from sources outside of universities – right now universities are more than capable of administering these.

For example, for grants from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, NSERC and CIHR – the three major federal granting agencies – universities have a framework where this money coming from elsewhere is administered by the universities. Money is given directly for tuition and then X dollars a month comes out, provided the student is still registered at the university.

That is one example with which I, as a student in post-secondary education knowing other students in post-secondary education who receive funding, am most familiar. We are certainly open to any other arrangement that currently exists that is working.

The Chair: You obviously feel that this is a better way of administering it; it is more open, transparent and is directed to the student as opposed to the band council. However, we are also interested in getting more Aboriginals into post-secondary education. How do you see that helping to achieve that goal?

Mr. Snow: As I have said earlier, our proposal is not a panacea for K-to-12 education. However, it is worth noting the financial incentive for students to complete grades 6 through 12, when they know that there will be \$3,000 into this account, and when they know with certainty that when they come out they will receive at least \$25,000 to go on to post-secondary education. I think that provides a powerful incentive.

That focus group study to which I keep referring mentioned that part of the reason that certain students said they did not want to pursue post-secondary education is they knew other people who had gone through the process of trying to get funding and they just did not think that they would get it.

The Chair: That is interesting.

Senator Callbeck: What about the Metis? Are you suggesting that they would be covered by your proposal?

Mr. Snow: Under ours, no. This would be registered status Indians. Under the current program, the Metis are not covered by the post-secondary student support program.

Senator Callbeck: Do you have any suggestions as to how to get more Metis to attend university?

Mr. Snow: If the federal government or any provincial government were interested in a program to get more Metis to attend university, and if they were content with the idea of funding only Metis students in this program, I think that our framework provides a good framework for Metis or for any other group which the federal government would decide to fund.

Senator Callbeck: Would any of our other witnesses care to comment on Mr. Snow's proposal?

Mr. Mendelson: There are technical issues that I would address, but I will not right now. I am not entirely critical of the proposal per se. I think it is interesting, innovative and useful.

However, we have 100 and some years of colonial history in Canada, and if there is one lesson we have to learn, it is not to use coercion and force. We all think this is a good idea so we will change it and wipe out the program, which has been paying money through bands, because we think it is a great idea. You do not have anything to say. We hold the purse. We will make the decision. It is not up to you. This is a way better program. You have not been accountable, so tough luck. You do not have any power.

I believe that would be a huge error. It would set back the relationship between First Nations and the Government of Canada for certain, but it would also set back a lot of the progress that has been made in First Nations taking responsibility for their own futures.

I have a lot of good ideas too about how a First Nation could be governed better. In fact, I have ideas about how Canada could be governed better than it is now, but I do not have the ability to impose it. Unfortunately, the Government of Canada does have the ability to impose it.

Even if it is a great idea – and it is a good idea – do not impose it. I would say set up a program like that program and let bands vote, or even require a vote.

You need to have the proportionality when you are looking at Charter issues or other issues in law. There are times when you have to use coercive intervention on a First Nation, but it has to be proportional to the problem. It has to be a very serious issue. It has to be criminal gangs taking over the reserve.

We cannot just step in as colonialists and say we have a better idea. I have technical issues too, but that is my main objection to this proposal.

The Chair: I will let Mr. Snow respond to that, but before I do, does anyone else want to weigh in before he responds on that?

Mr. Snow, do you want to respond to Mr. Mendelson?

Mr. Snow: I would say that this program is no more coercive than the program that currently exists. We are [currently] telling First Nations here is \$314 million from

the federal government and here is how you have to spend it. We are saying we will give it to individual bands. We will decide how much goes to each individual band, and we will determine that you have to submit reports each year if you want funding.

As it turns out, the accountability in these reports is not rigorous. There certainly could be more rigorous demands on bands, but this is still a program that the federal government views as discretionary. It views it as a program that they could easily change, and ours would be no different in that respect.

In terms of coercing individual Aboriginals, I do not see anything coercive about saying here is \$25,000-plus; use it if you want. If you do not want, then someone else will use it.

Therefore, I do not agree; and my co-author, Calvin Helin, himself a First Nations, thinks this is also a good proposal – obviously, since he is a co-author. I think this would not necessarily set back relations between First Nations and the rest of Canada.

Shawn Atleo himself, on "The Current," had issues with our report, but refused to categorically say that he did not like this proposal. Of course, the many Aboriginal students who spoke up in our statement of support, and who have written us letters and commented in letters to the editor of newspapers, have said that this is a good idea. I think there are many Aboriginals who would think this would be a step forward for relations with the rest of Canada.

The Chair: There is no doubt consultation would take place, whatever way we end up going.

Senator Martin: I am sorry that I was detained in the chamber, so I came in after your presentations were already done. I feel like I am interjecting at this point, not fully having heard everything, but I have a question for Mr. Snow and a comment to all of the presenters today – to, first of all, thank you.

One of the things that I heard in your answers is a certain sense of hope, and the potential of finding solutions based on resources that already exist. What you were talking about in terms of mentorship or role models is an age-old concept. We know, as Senator Mercer talked about, the importance of having someone standing in front of you to reflect back something that is of you. When you see that, it can be very powerful. That is very important.

Mr. Mendelson, I am curious to read more, or talk to you more, about this Aboriginal Education Act. I am an educator of 21 years, and I understand the importance of the system. I find it ironic and unfortunate that the mainstream schools, outside of the reserves, off reserves, are doing more for these Aboriginal students than perhaps what is happening on the reserves.

The resources are there and it is a matter of providing perhaps, like you say, a framework or a system or a template that may work while respecting the cultural differences and respecting the traditions of the people. My question is to Mr. Snow.

I am sorry that I have not fully read your report but I know of your report because I watched a part of your presentation on CPAC, and I know Calvin Helin actually.

The program you are talking about, is it a completely new model or has it been successfully done elsewhere? I am not sure whether it is business or in other jurisdictions where you know that it has been successful and, therefore, this is

something that could work here as well. Do you know whether it is an entirely new program?

Mr. Snow: I am unfamiliar of any program that is across the board for a particular group, whether it be a regional, ethnic group, or anything like that, for each particular student with funding offered to one group and particularly that group. Part of the reason it makes it easy to do with registered Indians in Canada is that they are registered under the Indian Act and therefore a list of students would be eligibly funded.

However, Calvin Helin speaks about this quite a bit in his book. There was a high school, I believe, in Grandview, called the Grandview High School in Vancouver, which was something like 40 per cent to 50 per cent ethnic minorities, many of which were Aboriginal students, and it introduced a financial incentive program. The principal of the school at the time was one of our signatories to our statement of support. She said in her statement of support that she has seen these financial incentives work for Aboriginal students in Canada in particular. Students know if they finish this grade, if they do this assignment, there will be a reward at the end and then this works. I believe that is a big reason she is a proponent of our report.

Like any potentially innovative policy proposal, it has to be tried at some point, even if it has not been used across the board.

The Chair: We are out of time, but I will give anyone who wishes a chance to respond to that or say anything else they want in a minute.

Mr. Mendelson: My last comment is that I do not want to seem too negative to Mr. Snow and others. I think it is a good proposal and there might be a lot in it. I would like to see some bands adopting it, and I think they would, actually. However, I am opposed to what will come across as a coercive measure if this program were cancelled, and the budget seemed to be indicating that that is what was underway.

I have a final comment. I do not want to give a wrong impression. The K-12 system on reserve is underfunded currently. If those schools are to ever catch up, one of the elements that will be needed is more money. We are not talking about billions, we are talking about hundreds of millions so it is not irrelevant, but it is not outsized. It is my own view of what Mr. Sharpe was saying that there is probably no better dollar of investment that we can make anywhere in Canada right now in terms of the future than a dollar that can improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, but there will be extra dollars required.

The Chair: That is a good comment to end on. Ms. Preston.

Ms. Preston: My closing remark would be, again, focusing on the kindergarten to grade 12 as well. That is big for increasing post-secondary education.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much to all of you for your presentations and your answers to questions. You have helped our consideration of the matter of post-secondary access, particularly for Aboriginals.

With that, honourable senators, we stand adjourned.

(The committee adjourned.)