

## **Dennis Bevington at Aboriginal Affairs Committee meeting**

**October 15, 2012**

Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for appearing in front of us on this particular bill.

I am a little confused by some of the things you've said here. I'd like to understand what you consider the relationship between the federal government and first nations. Is it nation to nation? Is it government to government? Is that the relationship you see?

**Hon. John Duncan:**

Yes, I think we very much have a government-to-government relationship. That is very apparent, even in multiple documents we've jointly signed.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

Okay.

Some of your argument for taking this particular tack with first nations is based on provincial and territorial governments having adopted similar practices. The vast majority have legislation that requires their municipal governments to do so as well. Did the federal government insist on the provinces providing financial disclosure practices, or was that something they came to themselves under their understanding of what they need for their government to run properly?

**Hon. John Duncan:**

If you're referencing municipal governments....

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

No. I'm referencing provincial and territorial governments. Municipal governments are creatures of those two bodies.

**Hon. John Duncan:**

That's correct.

No, we had no role to play in the—

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

You had no role to play in that.

**Hon. John Duncan:**

—transparency and accountability of the provinces and territories.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

But you didn't make a choice for those governments, did you? And you're making a choice for these governments, first nations governments, about how they should portray themselves in the public eye, open to every single Canadian.

Now you say that what we're asking of chiefs and councillors is no different from what we ask of ourselves as parliamentarians. Chiefs and councillors are not parliamentarians. They're not elected by the public of Canada. They are elected by first

nations people. They have a different relationship than what a parliamentarian has with the public of Canada. Don't you agree?

**Hon. John Duncan:**

Sure.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

Well then....

**Hon. John Duncan:**

I'm not sure what you're suggesting, though.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

I'm going to the basic principle.

**Hon. John Duncan:**

Are you suggesting that they don't report publicly?

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

The basic principle of this bill, I think, is what turns off most first nations. They expect that they will make the rules for their conduct, just as other governments make the rules for their conduct.

What you've done is taken a very paternalistic approach to this, in that you've said that these are the rules by which you will govern yourself. That's the problem that I think the AFN referenced as well in their opposition to this legislation. They want to be treated as governments. As governments, they would expect that they make their rules for disclosure, not the federal government.

The federal government has some financial accounting requirements that are from a relationship between the aboriginal government and the federal government. For those to be made public should be the responsibility of both parties, not an individual party, as you have put forward with this legislation.

**Hon. John Duncan:**

Dennis, we have 34 self-governing first nations across the country. Under their agreements, they have their reporting mechanisms. For the other 582 first nations, the Indian Act is silent on transparency and accountability.

We are bringing the 21st century to first nations governments, whose citizens and members are currently asking the department for information that should be coming from the first nations governments themselves, in some cases.

This is inappropriate. We have an obligation, as the senior level of government, to ensure that those Canadian citizens have the same rights as other Canadian citizens.

(1810)

**The Chair:**

You have about 20 seconds. We could certainly use that for our next witness.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

I would say quite clearly that if moving into the 21st century means we're going to make more decisions for first nations, I think it is the wrong attitude. I think we have to treat first nations as governments, just as we treat the provinces and territories as governments, and the relationship should be encouraged in that direction.