



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Indigenous Relations

Tuesday, May 3, 2022
8 a.m.

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Michael Lundquist, Assistant Deputy Minister, Consultation, Land and Policy

Kristina Midbo, Director, Indigenous Women's Initiatives

Howard Wong, Director, Financial Services and Corporate Planning

Donavon Young, Deputy Minister

8 a.m.

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

[Ms Phillips in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Shannon Phillips. I'm the MLA for Lethbridge-West and the chair of this committee. As we begin this morning, I'll invite those participating in the committee room to introduce themselves, beginning on my right.

Mr. Reid: Good morning. Roger Reid, MLA for Livingstone-Macleod and deputy chair of the committee.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Turton: Good morning. Searle Turton, MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Good morning. Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Singh: Good morning, everyone. Peter Singh, MLA, Calgary-East.

Ms Lovely: Good morning, everyone. Jackie Lovely, MLA, Camrose constituency.

Mr. Walker: Good morning, everyone. Jordan Walker, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Lundquist: Good morning. Michael Lundquist, ADM, consultation, land and policy with Indigenous Relations.

Ms Midbo: Good morning. Kristina Midbo, Indigenous women's initiatives.

Mr. Young: Good morning, everyone. Donavon Young, Deputy Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Kwas: Good morning. Don Kwas. I'm the ADM of First Nations and Métis relations in Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wong: Good morning. I'm Howard Wong, director of financial services and corporate planning for Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wylie: Good morning. I'm Doug Wylie, Auditor General.

Ms Hayes: Good morning. Patty Hayes, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Schmidt: Marlin Schmidt, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Ms Pancholi: Good morning. Rakhi Pancholi, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Robert: Good morning. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Mr. Roth: Good morning. Aaron Roth, committee clerk.

The Chair: We don't have anyone joining us via videoconference this morning for the first time in quite a while, and I do not believe we have any substitutions, so we will just move on to the approval of the agenda. Are there any changes or additions to the agenda this morning?

Looking to the floor and seeing none, I'll ask that someone move – Mr. Turton – that the agenda for the May 3 meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed. Is there any discussion on this motion? Seeing none, I'll ask: all in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. That motion is carried.

We'll move to the approval of the minutes. We have the minutes from the April 26 meeting in front of us. Do members have any errors or omissions to note?

Seeing none, I'll ask that a member move that the minutes of the April 26 meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed. Moved by Member Rowswell. Is there any discussion on this motion? Seeing none, I'll ask: all in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. That motion is carried.

Friends, we do have an in-session two-hour meeting this morning, so I will ask our friends from the Ministry of Indigenous Relations to address the ministry's annual report in opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes.

Please proceed.

Mr. Young: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, everyone, and thanks to all the members participating today. I'm Donavon Young, Deputy Minister of Indigenous Relations, and you met the folks with me today already. Other representatives from our ministry are also available to assist in answering any questions if necessary.

We really appreciate this opportunity to appear before the committee today. Fiscal year '20-21 – and I believe that's the year in front us – began with much of the world being locked down, unsure of how the future would unfold in the face of a global pandemic. COVID-19 touched everyone's lives in one way or another. Plans were upended, loved ones became ill, and the world as we knew it changed quickly. COVID-19 also changed the way our ministry could operate and carry out its important work.

Meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities, as you likely know, is often undertaken in person. This personal aspect is very important, so shifting our approach where possible took some time. Many plans were delayed, and of course this did result in some funds going unspent. But as our ministry and Indigenous communities across the province were forced to reassess our priorities, I personally saw incredible resilience, collaboration, and ingenuity.

We worked together to ensure Indigenous communities were supported as we faced historic uncertainty. Over the course of '20-21 Minister Wilson held nearly 150 meetings, virtual or by teleconference in the vast majority of those cases, with Indigenous leadership and organizations. In March 2020 he also began to issue a weekly newsletter to ensure Indigenous people across the province had access to vital COVID-19 information. This has been really well received by the communities, by the leadership, and he has continued sending out his weekly newsletter to this day.

Internally, our ministry worked across government, taking a, quote, all-hands-on-deck approach to ensure Indigenous communities were well equipped to stay safe and healthy during the course of this tumultuous year. Indigenous Relations was part of the government's pandemic response planning team and the COVID-19 Indigenous Coordination Committee. Our goal was to make sure government included and considered Indigenous perspectives and considerations in its response planning, and I believe we succeeded. I'm very proud of the results we achieved through this dedicated collaboration and partnership.

We were also pleased to prioritize Indigenous people in government's vaccine rollout, starting with phase I in February 2021. It was imperative to do this because many Indigenous people have an increased risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 due to pre-existing

health conditions and socioeconomic factors. Sometimes this is because of overcrowded intergenerational housing arrangements, remote locations, or a lack of trust in the health care system, but COVID-19 also exacerbated other epidemics in Indigenous communities such as higher rates of chronic diseases like COPD, diabetes, and heart disease.

Our ministry also helped co-ordinate the distribution of vaccines, supporting vaccine clinics on reserves and in Métis settlements, in friendship centres, and through pop-up clinics in more urban areas. The situation demanded a comprehensive and collaborative approach, and we believe we saw great success.

You may hear me use the word “collaboration” today because it’s a constant and necessary theme in our ministry. We strive to build better partnerships with Indigenous peoples but also with our colleagues across government in an effort to improve our services to Indigenous communities. Many of the resources – policy, program, and otherwise – are really located in other departments, and our job is to make those connections.

In 2020-21, despite the onset of the pandemic, we took part in a variety of crossministry initiatives, and these included working with First Nations and the federal government to improve support for Indigenous families who have children with disabilities, helping extend federal supports to people with developmental disabilities living on-reserve, providing guidance as Children’s Services negotiated the implementation of the federal Bill C-92, partnering with Advanced Education to provide learning initiatives to seven of the eight Métis settlements in Alberta, and working with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency to address disaster recovery issues on the Buffalo Lake and Paddle Prairie Métis settlements and the Fort Vermilion Métis local, who were impacted by disasters in 2019 and 2020.

Some of the ministry highlights. Moving on from our achievements working with ministries across government, I’d like to reflect on a few of our highlights led by Indigenous Relations in ’20-21. In September 2020 the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, or the AIOC, provided its first loan guarantee. This project, put forward by a coalition of six First Nations in Alberta, is an investment in the Cascade power project. This is already having a significant impact and will create more than 600 jobs, but it also shows the early potential of the AIOC, which is unique across Canada in the way it helps address the barriers facing Indigenous investment. Our ministry is proud to have helped create the AIOC, and since that first loan guarantee in 2020 it has continued to provide backing to more Indigenous investments and recently expanded its mandate to include more industries.

In ’20-21 another program we facilitate, the Aboriginal business investment fund, provided \$5 million to nine Indigenous community projects across the province. These projects spanned a variety of sectors like tourism, agriculture, hospitality, and construction. Of course, this funding has helped create jobs and stimulate local economies, but these kinds of programs are also an important part of economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

8:10

Additionally, I was pleased to find that despite casinos being significantly affected by COVID-19 health measures, the First Nations development fund still saw more than \$60 million in proceeds and community grants in ’20-21. FNDF grants supported 27 economic, 87 social, and 189 community development initiatives in First Nations across the province.

Indigenous Relations has also led the development of Alberta’s response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ final report. On March 5, 2020, Minister Wilson announced the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The working

group began its important work soon after to provide recommendations about Alberta’s actions that it can take to address the national inquiry’s calls for justice. Throughout ’20-21 and, in fact, for 20 months they spent hundreds of hours developing a final report and meeting with survivors and families, experts in the field, and countless other stakeholders. Their report was submitted to the government in December 2021, and while I’m focusing on 2020-21 today, I want to mention that the Alberta government’s response to this important report will be coming very soon. I would like to express our gratitude to the working group for taking on such a monumental task. It’s been an honour to support their work.

In ’20-21 our ministry also secured two historic protocol agreements with the government of Alberta, one with the Stoney Nakoda-Tsuut’ina Tribal Council and one with the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations. Additionally, chiefs and ministers signed six out of the seven tabled work plans for the renewed Blackfoot Confederacy protocol agreement. During this time Indigenous Relations was also proud to be awarded the red tape reduction champion award for red tape reduction.

In ’20-21 our ministry allocated 100 per cent of the federal funds for the employment partnership program, providing \$3.7 million. Economic supports continued throughout the Aboriginal consultation office. We processed 10,000 consultation activities in ’20-21. We provided \$1.5 million to the Métis Nation of Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you.

I’ll now turn things over to the office of the Auditor General. Mr. Wylie, you have five minutes.

Mr. Wylie: Good morning again, Chair. Thank you. We have no outstanding recommendations related to this ministry, so I’m very pleased to report that. We do audit one financial statement, and that is the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. We issued a clean audit opinion on those financial statements, and those financial statements are also included in the ministry annual report.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We’ll now move to our first rotation. The Official Opposition will begin, and you have 12 minutes.

Mr. Schmidt: Great. Thank you very much. My first questions are about the litigation fund, which is described on pages 22 and 23 of the annual report. You highlight that delivery of dollars through the fund was delayed in part because of a lack of receipt of, quote, credible projects. How many applications in total did Indigenous Relations get for the litigation fund in this year?

Mr. Young: I believe in that year we received one viable application.

Mr. Schmidt: What’s the difference between viable and credible, I guess?

Mr. Young: Well, there were a number of sort of inquiries, if you will, that we worked with communities on, so a number of inquiries, but I believe we had one application.

Mr. Schmidt: One application?

Mr. Young: And we funded that application.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. So you only received one application in total to the fund, and it . . .

Mr. Young: As I say, one complete final application. That is correct.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. There were no applications that the ministry deemed not credible and rejected. Is that correct?

Mr. Young: Well, you have to appreciate sort of the to-ing and fro-ing, the back and forth. I mean, it was a new fund, so communities would express interest, they'd make phone calls, we'd work together on answering their questions, but in the end, you know, the bar was reasonably high in that the legal interests of the community must also align with the government's interests. So throughout the application process I think some communities, as I say, were sort of testing the water. In the end, we worked with Woodland Cree for one completed application.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Thank you very much.

You talked about the necessity of the interests of the government and the Indigenous groups who are applying for the funds to be aligned. I guess: would the ministry ever approve funding through the litigation fund in circumstances where a First Nation did not approve of a resource development project; you know, for example, if they wanted to legally challenge a project because the duty to consult hadn't been met?

Mr. Young: If they were not in favour of a project?

Mr. Schmidt: That's right.

Mr. Young: No. The purpose of the fund was to support pro resource development communities who were being, quote, hindered or held back by legal issues, legal problems, to provide those communities with funds to undertake a legal challenge. It is meant to support resource development in and around those communities.

Mr. Schmidt: So Indigenous groups who have legitimate concerns about the negative impacts of potential natural resource development projects in their communities are on their own in terms of getting . . .

Mr. Young: No, not at all, sir. I mean, the Aboriginal consultation office is meant to undertake robust consultation on resource development as it impacts treaty and Aboriginal rights. As I said in my opening remarks, we processed 10,000 applications in consultation. If there are concerns – and certainly there are – the Aboriginal consultation office undertakes to address those concerns. We work with our crossministry partners, especially Environment and Parks, on those concerns. But that's quite different, if you will, than the litigation fund.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you for that.

I guess: who in the ministry picks which legal battles to support? I mean, obviously, this fund is solving a problem that doesn't exist in that there aren't many Indigenous groups even coming forward for applications. But let's say, hypothetically, that there was a demand for this program. How would the ministry determine which legal fights to support? How can taxpayers be assured that funding isn't being used for political gains for the government? And, you know, what safeguards are in place to make sure that these litigation cases are actually in Indigenous nations' interests?

Mr. Young: Sure. Rather than address a hypothetical, let me just address, really, the transparent established process for reviewing applications. It starts in the department. As I say, we work closely with the community in their application. But then there's a crossministry group of ADMs, assistant deputy ministers – and I'm quite sure I've got the membership right; it's Indigenous Relations, Justice and Sol Gen, likely Energy, Environment and Parks – who review the merits of those applications. From there it goes to me

and then ultimately to the minister, and then the minister takes it to a cabinet committee. But it first comes forward as a recommendation from a crossministry group of ADMs and myself to the political level before it's approved. The established criteria is, again, transparent for all to see.

Mr. Schmidt: Is there a list of the criteria that you can provide to the committee, table it at a later date?

Mr. Young: Sure. Yeah, we'll provide that at a later date.

Mr. Schmidt: Great. Thank you very much.

Mr. Young: I can tell you generally, if you don't mind, just very quickly, that, again, it's supportive of resource development projects by those communities, but their interests and the government's interests must be in alignment going forward.

Mr. Schmidt: Right. Thank you.

Turning now to page 21 of the annual report, key objective 1.1 is to "provide oversight to the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation." My first question is related to the selection process for board members. What process did the ministry use to screen potential board candidates before making the appointments?

8:20

Mr. Young: Thank you. Yeah. First of all, it was advertised, I believe, for a period of two weeks at the Public Service Commission through, you know, their Public Agency Secretariat. So a public posting. As applications came in – again, there were criteria around being competent in business investment, in financial investment, understanding Indigenous communities, and so on – the screening would have taken place with the Public Agency Secretariat. Then, really, there's a process of interviews and back and forth with potential candidates between the Public Agency Secretariat, the minister's office, and the Premier's office, ultimately, before they go to cabinet. Then they're approved at cabinet.

Mr. Schmidt: Were there background checks done on people?

Mr. Young: Yes, yes.

Mr. Schmidt: What was included in those background checks?

Mr. Young: Well, the Public Agency Secretariat undertakes – my understanding is that they undertake routine criminal record checks and financial checks.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

Mr. Young: And academic credentials.

Mr. Schmidt: We know that in 2021 there were court proceedings involving one board member of AIOC, Strater Crowfoot, accusing him of workplace racism and sexual harassment between the years of 2015 and 2020. Was anyone in Indigenous Relations aware of these allegations of sexual harassment and racism prior to Mr. Crowfoot being named to the board?

Mr. Young: I don't believe so, because they did not come to light until the fall of 2021.

Mr. Schmidt: Would you say that that was a failing of the candidate selection process?

Mr. Young: Not at all.

Mr. Schmidt: Why not?

Mr. Young: Because, as I say, it wasn't – my understanding, and I'm not going to go too far down this road because those, quote, allegations are at another organization, not the AIOC. I want to make that abundantly clear. The statement of claim did not come forward until the fall of 2021, so his selection was prior to the statement of claim.

Mr. Schmidt: Right.

Mr. Young: So how would we know? How would we know?

Mr. Schmidt: Well, maybe you had an adequate selection process to screen out these kinds of things. It's not as though this kind of workplace behaviour is a secret until somebody files a lawsuit against him.

When allegations like this come to light against board members at AIOC, what processes are in place to mitigate the risk, allow for free and fair investigation into the allegations?

Mr. Young: First of all, again, I need to remind you that these allegations are not at the AIOC.

Mr. Schmidt: So you're saying that one board member's behaviour...

The Chair: I'm just going to bust in here, hon. member, just to remind both the deputy and the hon. member to speak through the chair. Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Wonderful. So, Madam Chair, the deputy minister is saying that the allegations of this person's behaviour in one workplace has no bearing on his ability to conduct his work in another workplace. Is that what the deputy minister is saying?

Mr. Young: Madam Chair, I'm also saying that background checks were undertaken by the Public Agency Secretariat and that the statement of claim bringing this to light at a different organization, unproven in court, took place after he was selected and appointed to the AIOC board.

Mr. Schmidt: So what processes are in place to handle allegations of this type when they're made against a board member for conducting an investigation, protecting the interests of the corporation?

Mr. Young: Madam Chair, the AIOC has a code of conduct at its disposal that they have developed. There's a mandate and role document between the government and the agency, but I would point to the code of conduct especially that they've developed that the chair and the board viewed and utilized in this matter. But, again, as I say, this was not during the period of '20-21 which is before us.

Mr. Schmidt: No, but my question is about the processes that are in place.

I appreciate that there is a code of conduct. Can you make that available to the committee, please?

Mr. Young: I believe I can. Yes.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

If a member is believed to have violated the code of conduct, what processes are in place to ensure compliance with the code of conduct on the board?

Mr. Young: Well, it's stipulated in the code of conduct, which I do not have in front of me.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to the government side for 12 minutes.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I want to acknowledge the vital work that this department does and acknowledge that not having any outstanding recommendations reflects the excellent work that Indigenous Relations does to improve exceptional support for First Nations and Métis communities in Alberta.

This government made key campaign promises to take meaningful action to improve the lives of Indigenous people in Alberta. Reconciliation relies on working with Indigenous people on tangible steps that can lead to more equitable outcomes. What did your ministry do in 2020-2021 to specifically move towards and promote reconciliation with Indigenous people in Alberta?

Mr. Young: Thank you for the question. In '20-21 Indigenous Relations' main initiatives to advance reconciliation included that the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation provided the first loan guarantee to six First Nations for the Cascade power project; that will create 600 jobs in the short term. Indigenous Relations expanded the litigation fund criteria to include seed funding that supports Indigenous communities to undertake preliminary research before engaging in legal action or court challenges. Indigenous Relations continued to lead the development of Alberta's response to the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Funding of \$5 million was awarded through the Aboriginal business investment fund program to eight Indigenous community projects that span the province in industry. The First Nations development fund supported 27 economic, 87 social, and 189 community development initiatives in First Nations communities across Alberta. The employment partnership program, or EPP, funded \$3.7 million towards 24 projects across the province.

Inaugural protocol agreements were established with Stoney Nakoda-Tsuut'ina Tribal Council, the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, and the Blackfoot Confederacy agreement was renewed. The protocol agreements enable meaningful discussion, information sharing, and exploration of issues of mutual concern such as economic development, health, education, environment, justice, and child and family services. Indigenous Relations tabled amendments to the 30-year-old legislation under the Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2021, to enable sustainable and self-governing communities, create greater governance and fiscal autonomy, and increase Métis settlement council accountability.

Mr. Singh: Thanks for answering.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted certain groups in our communities, one of them being Indigenous people. On page 18 it briefly talks about the COVID-19 pandemic response concerning Indigenous communities in Alberta. What role did the COVID-19 Indigenous Coordination Committee play in working and connecting with Indigenous communities to support them through the pandemic?

Mr. Young: Thank you for the question. Indigenous Relations took a whole-of-government approach to working with Indigenous communities and supporting them comprehensively through the COVID-19 pandemic. Our ministry participated in the government's pandemic response planning team, the COVID-19 Indigenous Coordination Committee, and the Provincial Operations Centre to ensure the government included and considered Indigenous issues and perspectives in its planning. In 2020-21 Minister Wilson and the department led engagement with Indigenous leadership, communities, and organizations during the

COVID-19 pandemic response through nearly 150 virtual meetings, teleconferences, and visits when it was safe to do so.

We focused our work with Health, Alberta Health Services, Indigenous Services Canada, and the Indigenous leadership to ensure that accurate and timely information was provided about federal and provincial roles and responsibilities, provincial and federal supports for First Nations and Métis communities in Alberta, resolving emerging issues, and determining how Alberta's government could help.

8:30

Mr. Singh: Thanks for the answer.

What were some of the supports that were made available to Indigenous people during 2020 and 2021?

Mr. Young: Thank you for the question. Accurate, timely information on the status of COVID-19 was provided to Indigenous leadership throughout the pandemic; frequent meetings with senior staff and ministers and the Premier to address emerging issues and co-ordinate responses; prioritization in vaccine rollout; pop-up clinics on-reserve and on-settlement; clinics to support vaccine rollout; PPE and rapid tests provided directly to Indigenous communities; Alberta Health provided isolation support, including a hotel room and meals to those exposed or who had tested positive for COVID-19.

Mr. Singh: Thanks for the answer.

Can you further elaborate on the vaccine rollout for Indigenous people?

Mr. Young: Indigenous people were prioritized to receive vaccines as they became available. Vaccines were offered at urban clinics, on-reserve clinics, on-settlement clinics, at friendship centres, and through mobile clinics that could be booked by Indigenous leadership at no cost to the nations or to the settlements.

Mr. Singh: Thanks for the answer.

With that, I will cede my time to MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, everybody. First of all, I'd like to thank you for all the good work you do. You are, obviously, very stellar in your job. I thank you for all the good work you do.

I see on page 18 that in 2020-2021 Indigenous Relations tabled amendments to the 30-year-old legislation under the Metis Settlements Amendment Act, 2021. Can you describe the main changes made to this act and the rationale behind them?

Mr. Young: Thank you for the question. Prior to passing the Metis Settlements Amendment Act, we heard consistently from the settlements and their members that they wanted to see changes. We heard their concerns, specifically about the cost of governance and council accountability and transparency. The Metis Settlements Amendment Act addresses these concerns. The Metis Settlements Amendment Act is built to sustain self-governing communities, create greater governance and fiscal autonomy, and increase Métis settlement council accountability.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

Can you expand a little bit more on how these changes have allowed the Métis settlement to achieve greater governance and fiscal autonomy?

Mr. Young: Sure. As the Metis Settlements Amendment Act did not receive royal assent until June 17, 2021, we would not have

examples of how these changes achieved greater governance and fiscal autonomy in fiscal year '20-21, but some of the amendments to the MSA included increasing Métis settlement councils' responsibility to charge for services such as water, sewage, and roads; limit councillor remuneration to 50 per cent of the chair's salary; allow councils to determine the number of elected councillors for their community from a minimum of three to a maximum of five; reduce the size of the Metis Settlements General Council executive from four officers to a maximum of two; remove the Minister of Indigenous Relations from any decision-making powers related to the MSGC's financial policies; and require settlements to produce annual balanced operating budgets for each fiscal year.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

The Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was established on March 4, 2020. How did the pandemic impact the working group's activity?

Mr. Young: It slowed down the work of the group, for sure. As I said in my opening remarks, I believe the minister appointed the committee early in March, and we were hit with the pandemic about two weeks later. They were hoping to conclude their work in about a year, but we gave a nine-month extension, and in total it was about 20 months for them to undertake their work. So it slowed it down, but we don't believe it compromised at all the quality of their work. They still met with families, they met with survivors, they met with some stakeholders, and they really sifted through the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to give the government their best advice, which they did just prior to Christmas.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

Can you provide an overview of the work done by the group and the main lessons learned as a result of the work?

Mr. Young: Sorry; could you just repeat that?

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Could you provide an overview of the work done by the group, the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the main lessons learned as a result of the work?

Mr. Young: Thank you. The Alberta joint working group was appointed in March 2020 to inform Alberta's response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. During the fiscal year 2020-2021 the working group selected its co-chairs, established its terms of reference and procedures, identified priority areas to consider, and began their examination and discussions regarding the national inquiry's final report and calls for justice in an Alberta context.

The working group also put forward a recommendation to ministers that the government of Alberta declare October 4, 2020, as Sisters in Spirit Day in Alberta, which Minister Wilson did in October of that year, and the working group members also participated in a ceremony to honour the spirit of the red dress, which was gifted to the minister in October 2019, when the first declaration of Sisters in Spirit Day was made in Calgary.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

Outcome 1 of the annual report was to improve the "economic security and prosperity of Indigenous Peoples in Alberta." Can the department elaborate on the main initiatives that improve the economic security and prosperity of Indigenous peoples?

Mr. Young: Thank you for the question. The main initiatives that improve the economic security and prosperity of Indigenous

peoples are the Aboriginal business investment fund, or ABIF, and the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, AIOC. Since its inception in 2014 . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

We'll go to the Official Opposition for nine minutes, please.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. On page 36 outcome 2.3 states that the ministry will

work with other government of Alberta ministries to engage the federal government to provide equitable funding for key services such as health care and education, and advocate for on-reserve services for persons with disabilities, addiction, and/or mental health issues.

I'd like to specifically focus on on-reserve services for persons with disabilities. Can you describe for the committee what work was done specifically to engage the federal government?

Mr. Young: Thank you. I'll ask Don Kwas, the ADM of First Nations and Métis relations, to answer.

Mr. Kwas: Sure. So the main things that our ministry did was work with, of course, the lead ministries in this area – the ministries of Community and Social Services, Children's Services, and the Ministry of Health – to explore opportunities to work with the federal government to better provide services for adults with developmental disabilities or children with developmental disabilities on-reserve. Our minister very much played an advocacy role, talking with his federal counterparts, at the time Minister Miller mainly, and trying to make sure that there was co-ordination among the Alberta government departments.

Ms Renaud: How many meetings were between the Minister of Indigenous Relations and federal counterparts?

Mr. Kwas: I don't have the number of meetings in front of me, but we would be able to . . .

Ms Renaud: Would you be able to table minutes from those meetings for the committee?

Mr. Young: Formal minutes are not taken between ministers.

Ms Renaud: So there are no minutes, no recordings, or no outcomes or progress, no discussion notes, nothing?

Mr. Young: Well, discussion but no formal minute notes.

Ms Renaud: Is there a summary of the meeting, of the activities of any kind? It was just an informal chat about this?

Mr. Young: No. I'd say that it was more than an informal chat, but I think you can appreciate that when ministers meet, I mean, it's fairly . . .

Ms Renaud: Well, it's my assumption that if it's in the annual report and if this is something that's an outcome that Indigenous Relations is talking about, there has to be something to be able to measure progress, so my question: is there anything that you could share with this committee that would help us understand that progress?

8:40

Mr. Young: Well, we would have to check with the department who is responsible because, as the ADM pointed out, we're not the lead department in this.

Ms Renaud: Oh, I understand that. I understand that. But this outcome 2.3 is actually quite specific about the work. In any event, let's move on.

Also on page 36 the ministry states: "Government of Alberta is [also] working as a whole to increase access supports for Indigenous families who have children with disabilities, by working with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and disabilities communities." Can you tell me specifically what work was undertaken and by whom in the Indigenous Relations ministry?

Mr. Young: I'll ask Don Kwas to address that question.

Mr. Kwas: Again, we're not the lead ministry with respect to the provision of these services. Those would be: on-reserve our federal counterparts are responsible for providing those services and working with the First Nations agencies; off-reserve, in cities and in other communities, it would be the Ministry of Children's Services for people under 18.

Ms Renaud: So if you're evaluating your progress for the year, like, how do you evaluate if you're not the lead ministry, you don't have notes, but it's clearly identified in the annual report that this is an activity that this ministry has undertaken? I understand that you're not the lead ministry, but how is it that you evaluate the progress of the work that you're doing?

Mr. Young: Our job in many of these crossministry initiatives is really to bring an Aboriginal lens to the problem or to the issue in front of us. Many times it's to advocate for the community. It's to ensure that their issues, concerns are being addressed by the lead ministry. Our job is not – as I said in my remarks, we don't have the policy and program resources to apply to an issue, but we shine a flashlight, in many times, on the concern. We advocate where it makes sense, and we bring a lens to the issue.

Ms Renaud: Who did you advocate to? Who did the ministry advocate to?

Mr. Young: Well, we always advocate to the federal government, certainly when it's on-reserve. We also advocate to lead ministries who are responsible for the issue at hand.

Ms Renaud: Is it possible to get a listing of specifically what you are advocating for as it relates to families with children with disabilities on-reserve? If your role is advocacy, I'm assuming that there's an understanding of what you're advocating for.

Mr. Young: Well, absolutely. But, you know, I think we sort of understand inherently what the issues and concerns are. We don't sort of have a menu or a recipe to follow. I mean, many of these folks have worked in Indigenous Relations for years and years and years, so we understand the issues and concerns, and when we shine a flashlight, we don't have to refer to kind of a menu or a recipe. We know what the community needs and asks for.

Ms Renaud: I'm just going to go more specifically. Maybe this will help. In your report on page 37 you talk about your work identifying and removing barriers, because there are significant barriers to providing disability supports for adults and for children on-reserve. So can you tell me specifically what barriers you're referring to?

Mr. Young: Go ahead, Don.

Mr. Kwas: Sure. Well, the main barrier, again, for the lead ministry involved for dealing with persons with developmental disabilities, adults, is the lack of service provision and funding that the federal

government has not been providing to families on-reserve for the services that the individuals who are requiring the needs receive.

Ms Renaud: Can you tell me if you've made or you have noted any progress? I know that you're not the lead ministry. Has there been any progress towards removing these barriers? Are there additional people living on-reserve now that are receiving these supports that didn't the year before?

Mr. Kwass: That, again, would be information that the ministry most directly responsible, Community and Social Services, would be better able to provide.

Ms Renaud: Can I just ask a general question? As I look through the annual report, it's difficult for me as a committee member to determine, you know: how would we evaluate next year any progress made? Do you have any clarity to provide the committee on how you will evaluate your progress next year when you look back?

Mr. Young: Yeah. Again, in terms of real tangible outcomes, whether it's disabilities or mental health improvement, those indicators of success are left with the lead ministries. For us, our performance objective, if we're reviewing year over year, is really around shining a flashlight on those issues for both the federal government and the provincial department.

Ms Renaud: On page 37 I note that Indigenous Relations monitored inclusion initiatives to ensure targeted engagement and evaluation took place, so could you tell me which groups or organizations were consulted, and how does Indigenous Relations know progress is made? If possible, would you table the crossministry analysis of those effects?

Mr. Kwass: Again, we're not the ministry that's responsible for leading on the crossministry analysis. That is the service-providing ministry, again, in this case Community and Social Services or . . .

Ms Renaud: As a partner with GOA – I know you're not the lead – I'm assuming that there would be some knowledge of the progress being made other than shining a spotlight or a flashlight on a problem. I'm assuming that there have to be some metrics in place to be able to know if progress is being made even if you're not the lead ministry.

Mr. Kwass: We are more than happy to follow up with our colleagues in Community and Social Services.

Ms Renaud: Okay. If you would table any information at all about progress, that would be very much appreciated.
Thank you.

The Chair: Very good. We'll go to the government caucus for nine minutes.

Oh, just before we proceed, we've been joined by MLA Toor. MLA Toor, could you take a moment to just introduce yourself for the record, please.

Mr. Toor: Good morning. Devinder Toor, MLA, Calgary-Falconridge.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We'll now proceed to the government side. MLA Armstrong-Homeniuk.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Chair. I'll just repeat the question again for you. Outcome 1 of the annual report was to improve the economic security and prosperity of Indigenous peoples in Alberta. The question you were on was: can the department elaborate on the main initiatives that improve the economic security and prosperity of Indigenous peoples? Was there any more you wanted to add to that question?

Mr. Young: Sure. Thank you very much for the question. Since its inception, in 2014, the Aboriginal business investment fund has partnered in prosperity with Indigenous peoples by providing \$5 million annually in capital grants to support Indigenous communities to fund capital costs of community-owned business initiatives that are close to starting, expanding operations, or breaking ground for building projects within the funding year.

Launched by the government of Alberta in the fall of 2019, the AIOC is a Crown corporation designed to bridge the gap between Indigenous groups seeking commercial partnerships in natural resource sectors and their financial capacity. The AIOC has been delegated the authority to provide up to \$1 billion in loan guarantees to reduce the cost of capital for Indigenous groups and to support their ability to raise capital to invest in natural resource projects.

[Ms Phillips in the chair]

The employment partnership program, or EPP: Indigenous Relations supports labour force development activities that increase the workforce participation of Indigenous peoples. The EPP program supports demand-driven skills training and helps build collaborative partnerships between Indigenous communities and the private sector. The EPP helps Indigenous organizations address systemic barriers to Indigenous employment through connecting Indigenous organizations with industry stakeholders and providing funding for training and employment initiatives.

Maybe I'll just highlight one other thing, under the area of Indigenous women's initiatives. In addition, in 2021 Indigenous Relations signed a five-year grant agreement with the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women to support their core operations – we provided \$100,000 – and the annual Esquao awards, for which we provided \$15,000 annually, which acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of Indigenous women to their communities and the province. This funding supports the IAAW's work in areas such as financial literacy, youth leadership, development, transition services, and access to justice. The ministry also provided a one-time contribution of \$25,000 to assist with COVID-19 recovery supports for Indigenous women leaving corrections, fleeing violence, and experiencing poverty.

8:50

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

How can we measure the improvements made towards this objective compared to previous years?

Mr. Young: Thank you. We can measure year-over-year improvements to program outcomes by assessing the number of Indigenous-owned businesses that create jobs, promote economic growth, and further the social well-being of Indigenous communities by diversifying local economies. In '20-21 Indigenous Relations supported 24 employment partnership program projects, totalling \$3.67 million. The ministry measures the number of Indigenous skills and employment training, or ISET, agreement holders that get funding per year. In 2020-21 24 ISET agreement holders applied for employment partnership program funding. However, these numbers do fluctuate annually. Indigenous Relations' priority is to distribute 100 per cent of the funds, which

it has done every year since the program began. These grants provide approximately 520 Indigenous people in Alberta with direct training or employment supports while 5,000-plus Indigenous community members and students will benefit from job fairs, labour market planning, and industry engagement events.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

I'm going to skip over the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain to MLA Rowswell.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Thank you very much.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: I cede my time to you.

Thank you.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Thank you. On page 17 of the annual report: Alberta's Indigenous Opportunities Corporation and how it was designed to help Indigenous communities participate in commercially viable, major resource projects to support Alberta's economic recovery and work towards Indigenous groups' ownership of significant resource projects.

I've got to tell you that one of the interesting things that I've enjoyed as an MLA is that you learn stuff. I know that when the bill on the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation was being put through the Legislature, one of my questions was: why doesn't the Indigenous community just use the equity in their own land on-reserve? Of course, the answer was: because they don't own it. I thought it was just me. I've been bouncing it off a number of people throughout since we passed that bill, and the majority of people that I've broached this with don't know that. You know, they think – it's not theirs, so they don't have that equity in order to utilize in order to get involved in business. That was the purpose of the AIOC in the first place. I just thought it's important to bring that up.

The annual report all explains that in '20-21 AIOC has provided the first loan guarantee, like you mentioned a bit in your introduction, to the six First Nations in Alberta for the Cascade power project, which would bring 600 jobs in the short term. If you could, I'd like to go back and forth a little bit. Can the ministry further elaborate and provide an update on this project and how many jobs it has in fact produced?

Mr. Young: Thank you. Yes. In September 2020 the AIOC provided \$93 million in a loan guarantee to facilitate six First Nations to become equity partners or owners in the Cascade power project, which is a major natural gas fired power facility being constructed near Edson, Alberta. It's a 900-megawatt, I believe – I'm drawing from memory – power plant, very significant. The six First Nations were Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Enoch Cree Nation, Kehewin Cree Nation, O'Chiese First Nation, Paul First Nation, and Whitefish Lake First Nation. Six hundred jobs will be created at the peak of construction and about 25 to 30 direct long-term skilled jobs when it's in full operation. As you may know, the Cascade power project is currently under construction as we speak.

Mr. Rowswell: So the total value of the project – and maybe you can't tell me the details. What would the total value of the project be?

Mr. Young: One point five billion. I'm quite certain.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. So the \$93 million: what per cent of the project do they hold?

Mr. Young: I can't say for sure. It was a fairly complicated deal structure, so I would not want to say, you know, that these six

nations own X per cent of the power plant, but certainly they have a stake in it, an ownership stake in the power plant.

Mr. Rowswell: Who's the other partner? Or is it . . .

Mr. Young: Well, Cascade is the . . .

Mr. Rowswell: . . . Cascade itself?

Mr. Young: . . . is the proponent.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Great. Yeah. All right. Is it built on reserve land, or it's off-reserve land?

Mr. Young: No. It's off-reserve land. The reason those six communities were selected, if you will, or were brought in – maybe that's a better way of putting it – is really because where the project is being built is really considered the traditional territory of those six communities. Those six communities historically would have hunted, trapped, fished, undertaken, you know, picking of berries, cultural ceremonies and sites, and so on. This was really considered their traditional territory. They were the six communities most affected, directly impacted, if you will, by the project, so an offer was made to include them.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to the Official Opposition for the third rotation, please.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, everybody, for being here today. I want to build a little bit off the questions from my colleague the Member for St. Albert. Key objective 2.5, which is on page 39 of the annual report, talks about the role of Indigenous Relations to advise other GOA ministries on Indigenous perspectives to support the development of policies, programs, and initiatives. In the fiscal year under consideration, 2020, the number of Indigenous children in care went up 5 per cent, and the percentage of children in care who were Indigenous increased by 2 per cent, to 71 per cent. This is at a time when, actually, intakes of all other children in care dropped, but with Indigenous children it continued to rise at a sharp level. Devastatingly, in that year the number of Indigenous children and youth who died while receiving child intervention services was the highest in 10 years although we know now that this year is even worse. This was particularly the case for young Indigenous youth who are transitioning out of government care.

This was also – 2020 was the year that the Ministry of Children's Services was moving forward with its decision to cut off supports under the support and financial assistance agreement program, which disproportionately affected Indigenous youth. They were only prevented from doing so in this fiscal year because of a court injunction, so I assume, given the close relationship that your ministry has with Indigenous communities, that this would have been an issue of incredible concern, the alarming rise of Indigenous children and youth and deaths in care. What advice did your ministry provide to the Ministry of Children's Services on the implications of the cuts to the support and financial assistance agreement program? What were you hearing from Indigenous communities as a result of what those cuts would mean for their youth? Perhaps you can answer that, begin with that.

Mr. Young: Well, thank you. Again, you know, that question is really best placed to Children's Services. We, as I say – and you'll forgive me, but the answer is essentially going to be the same, that the leadership, the responsibility for those programs rest with the lead department. They don't come to Indigenous Relations and ask:

if we do A, B, and C, what about this? We shine a flashlight. We bring an Indigenous lens, or we urge an Indigenous lens, but we don't . . .

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Young.

What I'm asking, though, is what advice – this key strategy or key objective talks about bringing Indigenous perspectives to work that the GOA is doing. I'm asking: in your work with Indigenous communities, were you hearing feedback about (a) the rise in the number of Indigenous youth in care and children in care, the rise in deaths, and the implications of these cuts to the support and financial assistance program? Was there any perspective, as your ministry performs, that you were receiving from these communities on these issues?

Mr. Young: I do not recall in '20-21 receiving any direct feedback from Indigenous communities, and they likely, if they were concerned, would have provided that feedback to the Department of Children's Services.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I want to build on that, however, because we do know that in – and it's mentioned in your annual report. The February 12, 2020, meeting related to the protocol, where we know that media reports indicated that Treaty 8 First Nations actually walked out of that meeting with the Premier, with the Minister of Children's Services, with the Minister of Indigenous Relations, and that meeting was about the issue of children in care and child and family intervention services. Clearly, there was some concern coming from Indigenous communities related to this issue. Are you saying that you didn't hear any of that as a result of, for example, that walkout of that meeting?

9:00

Mr. Young: Absolutely. I was at that meeting, and truthfully you've mischaracterized the purpose of that meeting. That was a meeting of all 48 First Nations in Alberta. It included Treaty 6, Treaty 7, Treaty 8, so all 48 First Nations. It was the second meeting between the Premier and members of cabinet with all 48 nations. The first one took place about a month after the new government was elected. Treaty 8, after we said the opening prayer – the agenda was not specifically about children in care; it was a broader meeting on issues of mutual concern. One of the questions we were going to talk about was the impact of C-92. Treaty 8, after the opening prayer, read a statement and got up and walked out, so the meeting didn't even really take place with Treaty 8. They left before the meeting started. But the meeting was not specifically about the rising rates of children in care. It was much broader than that.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I didn't say that it was about the rising number of deaths. I said that it was about children in care, which is precisely what Bill C-92 references.

Mr. Young: That was one of many agenda items.

Ms Pancholi: Would you table with this committee any minutes from that specific meeting and any other meetings that were held in the 2020 fiscal year related to child and family intervention services on-reserve as well as off-reserve, because we know that those go together, that your ministry would have had on those issues? Will you table with this committee those reports?

Mr. Young: We will check to see if there were any broad summary outcome statements related to that meeting that you've referenced. I don't have those in front of me. We'll check to see if, like I say, a summary report is available.

Ms Pancholi: Were there any other meetings held between the Minister of Indigenous Relations and First Nations, Indigenous groups related to child intervention in the 2020 fiscal year?

Mr. Young: Well, as I said in my opening remarks, the minister had 150 meetings in '20-21 related to COVID and ancillary items. He would not have been meeting directly around Indigenous children in care because that's not his portfolio, and we do not keep minutes of 150 meetings that the minister held with Indigenous leaders.

Ms Pancholi: So the ministry tracks the number of meetings but not the content of those meetings?

Mr. Young: No. I didn't say that we don't track the content of those meetings, but those meetings are much broader. He's not the Minister of Children's Services. He's the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Ms Pancholi: Through the chair, I just want to clarify: is the ministry's position that in the 2020 fiscal year the ministry did not have any conversations with Indigenous groups, First Nations communities on the issue of child and family services, children in care, any of those topics, other than specific negotiations on Bill C-92? Is that the ministry's position?

Mr. Young: I can't say that in 150 meetings there wasn't a conversation on child and family services or children in care. If it was raised, I'm sure the minister would have taken note and he would have passed it on to the Minister of Children's Services, but he is not the lead minister on those. Indigenous leaders are fairly sophisticated, and they realize that if they want to make, you know, progress on some of these issues, they raise them with the Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Young. I'm going to go back. Outcome 2 of your annual report is "improved Government of Alberta policies and direction that strengthen Indigenous communities and promote Alberta's interests." The provision of child and family services, the high number of Indigenous children in the child intervention system both on-reserve and off-reserve, the legacy of residential schools, the intergenerational trauma: what I'm hearing is that this is not a key issue for your ministry. This is not something that your ministry as the Ministry of Indigenous Relations – despite your outcomes, despite your key objectives in this annual report this was not a key issue.

Mr. Young: You're mischaracterizing what I've said. What I've said is that, one, we are not the lead ministry. That's not to say that we're not concerned, that it is not raised with the minister, but he does not have lead responsibility, so he would have conversations with his partnering ministry. But with respect to C-92, which was passed during the year before the year that's in front of us today, the minister's responsibility was to bring forward to cabinet, which he did, a self-government policy which gave Children's Services the authority to negotiate with the federal government and with partnering First Nations a law-making authority for those First Nations.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I appreciate it. I understand that.

I'm just trying to understand how we measure progress for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations when there seems to be no direct – you're not acknowledging the issues that were being addressed. You're referring to the lead ministry. How do we measure progress for your ministry?

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move to the government side for nine minutes.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you very much. Key objective 1.2, found on page 22, was to “administer the Litigation Fund to support Indigenous Peoples’ advocacy for responsible resource development that advances Alberta’s interests” as well. As stated on page 22, our government is “committed to ensuring Indigenous communities can participate in and benefit from . . . natural resource development projects.” You’ve answered some of these questions, but I’ll just allow you to expand a little bit if you see room in some of the questions that I’m asking.

How does the litigation fund help support this commitment?

Mr. Young: Thank you for the question. I will take the opportunity to correct an answer I provided a bit earlier. When Member Schmidt asked how many applications came into the litigation fund in the year 2020-21, I had said one. My ADM has indicated to me that three applications were actually submitted that year, and we funded one of those. I just wanted to take the chance to correct an earlier answer.

Indigenous communities can participate in and benefit from responsible natural resource development in the province if they choose. The Indigenous litigation fund ensured the voices of Indigenous peoples were heard in legal actions that prevented responsible resource development and decreased market access. Indigenous communities already face more barriers to economic security than other communities in Alberta, and this fund is to help those communities to pursue their economic interests.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you very much. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the approval process, if at all, and what has been done to overcome any of these challenges that you might have seen?

Mr. Young: Approvals were not affected by the pandemic. Three applications came in. We were busy working with those communities on those three applications, and in the end one was funded. One of our ongoing challenges, if you will, was to really continue to raise the awareness of the program, of the litigation fund, and to really sort of describe for communities its main purpose. I think there was perhaps some misunderstanding to begin with, so we raised awareness especially.

Mr. Rowswell: Is that possibly why two of the applications weren’t approved, just a misunderstanding of what it was for?

Mr. Young: Exactly.

Mr. Rowswell: I understand. Okay. Very good.

I see on page 23 that “the Litigation Fund awarded its first successful application in February 2020,” like you mentioned, “to the Woodland Cree First Nation.” Can you elaborate or expand a little bit on the case that they were dealing with?

Mr. Young: Sure. Funding in the amount of \$187,663 helped the Woodland Cree First Nation to intervene in Alberta’s constitutional challenge of the federal Impact Assessment Act in late February 2021. That is Bill C-69, that the federal government introduced. They undertook, really, a constitutional challenge, and that is that the federal government was intruding into provincial jurisdiction and was impeding the provincial government from developing its resources under section 92 of Canada’s Constitution, the provincial government’s constitutional responsibility, and that in fact C-69, or the federal Impact Assessment Act, intruded, impeded, interfered with provincial jurisdiction, provided a roadblock to developing Alberta’s natural resources.

The Woodland Cree agreed completely with that assessment and asked for funding. We provided funding, and they were provided intervenor status in Alberta’s constitutional challenge of Bill C-69.

Mr. Rowswell: How’s it going? Is that still ongoing?

Mr. Young: It’s still ongoing. I don’t have – sorry – the most recent update, but it is still before the courts in terms of that constitutional challenge.

Mr. Rowswell: All right. Thank you very much for that update.

I see on page 22 that the ministry has expanded the criteria to include seed funding and increasing access to the fund. Can you further elaborate on the importance of these increased eligibility criteria?

9:10

Mr. Young: Yes. Thank you for the question. As I indicated earlier and has been talked about here, in the early days of the litigation fund I think there was a lack of awareness of the fund itself in terms of its main purposes and intentions, and the applications were slow to come in. So we thought that if we provided a bit of seed funding, you know, sort of in the range of about \$25,000, it would support preliminary research before Indigenous communities or organizations actually engage in legal action or before they actually applied for funding under the program. We would provide a bit of seed capital for them to really do sort of some preliminary research to see if an application could be coming forward.

Mr. Rowswell: Has that been accessed, then?

Mr. Young: Do you recall, Michael, if seed funding was accessed in ’20-21?

Mr. Lundquist: Not in ’20-21. In the most recent one, this past year, it was.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Very good. All right. Thank you very much. I will cede the rest of my time to MLA Walker.

Mr. Walker: Thank you so much, Chair and MLA Rowswell, and thank you to the staff and the deputy minister for being here and for all the great work you do. I was particularly interested listening to the information around the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. It’s a real game changer for Indigenous communities and Albertans being partners in prosperity. I’m really excited to watch this grow and develop over time. Thank you for what you have done to develop, if you will, the policy architecture to make this model successful.

My questions, Chair, will be focused on outcome 2 of the annual report, which was improving “Government of Alberta policies and direction that strengthen Indigenous communities and promote Alberta’s interests.” Key objective 2.6 was to “work with the First Nations, the federal government, municipalities or water commissions and other Government of Alberta ministries to improve access to safe and clean drinking water.” Can the department provide more details and an update on the eight projects described on page 40 which are listed as under construction?

Mr. Young: Yes. Thank you for the question. In Budget 2019 the government of Alberta reaffirmed its \$100 million commitment to provide reliable access to clean drinking water to First Nations through the First Nations regional drinking water tie-in project. We have collaborated with First Nations municipalities or water commissions, and our provincial and federal government partners made progress on the overall project goal. In June 2020 Alberta

Transportation announced an additional \$13 million for the Ermineskin waterline project as part of the water infrastructure grants. Further questions on the water infrastructure grants could be directed to Alberta Transportation.

But in answer to your question, sir, the Beaver Lake Cree Nation: the feasibility study is complete. That was \$50,000. The Frog Lake First Nation feasibility study is complete. The Alexander First Nation, which is a West Inter Lake District regional water services commission: again, feasibility study is complete. The Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation regional water services main waterline to Onoway and Alexis: that construction is completed. The Paul First Nation waterline to Wabamun: that construction is completed. The Dene Tha' First Nation waterline is substantially completed, \$2.2 million. The Cold Lake First Nation Bonnyville waterline: again, construction substantially completed, \$3.2 million. The Whitefish (Goodfish) First Nation . . .

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to the fourth rotation and the Official Opposition side. Member Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. Key objective 3.4 on page 45 says: "support the First Nations and Métis . . . Councils on Economic Security to provide advice to government on ways to improve the economic security of Indigenous women and families." I note that the ministry oversees the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and the Métis Women's Economic Security Council. If you could just briefly tell me: to which ministries did these two councils provide advice?

Mr. Young: I'll ask Kristina Midbo, who is the senior director of Indigenous women's initiatives, to address that question, please.

Ms Midbo: Thank you for your question. The women's councils certainly provide a unique perspective, and they have interests across all ministries, I'm sure. In that particular year they did provide some information and advice to the minister around the impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous women and girls and their families, so we shared that information with those relevant ministries.

They also considered issues, I believe, that year around violence against Indigenous women and girls. They did have their chairs serve on the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, so the councils both had several conversations about that work and the causes of violence that they experienced. I believe that they examined entrepreneurship, and we would have shared some information with that ministry. It's a broad . . .

Ms Renaud: If I could just ask: would it be possible for the ministry to table with the committee a list of the specific ministries that were given advice by these two groups?

Ms Midbo: Some of it would have been shared informally through conversations, which are . . .

Ms Renaud: Sure. Even a note about those conversations would be most helpful.

Ms Midbo: It may have just been verbal. We had conversations around a committee table. There may not have been written, but we'll certainly check.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Thank you.

So neither performance indicator for outcome 3 or objective 3.4 measure improvement of economic security of Indigenous women. Can any of the officials explain how they evaluate progress of this

specific objective, which is quite specific? How is it that you measure improvement? What work was done? What was improved?

Ms Midbo: Thank you for that question. It's really important that we are able to consider our work and how we are supporting Indigenous women and their families. Most of the issues are not necessarily within the Ministry of Indigenous Relations. The mandate sits elsewhere, as my colleagues have been saying. The reality, really, is that we can look at outputs, but I think that since we are not the ministry responsible, we don't have that decision-making authority to make those decisions on issues and initiatives that are going to move forward. It's really difficult to measure outcomes in many ways, and I think that when we . . .

Ms Renaud: Maybe if I could clarify my question. What I'm looking for is if you could table with the committee anything that you use, that the ministry uses, to evaluate the progress made within the fiscal year. When you sit down to write the report, how is it that you measure progress? Anything at all would be most helpful for the committee. If you could agree to table any of that information, that would be helpful.

Ms Midbo: We'll certainly take it back and consider.

Ms Renaud: Thank you.

The annual report on page 49, performance indicator 3(b), based on the most recent census data, tells us what we know to be true, that average employment income for Alberta's Indigenous female population lags far behind male counterparts. Employment earnings in the latest census data on page 49 of the annual report notes that Indigenous women earned 32 per cent less than Indigenous males.

All of us have heard about what this pandemic has done. It has exacerbated all kinds of problems. So other than consulting on murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, Clare's law, and human trafficking, which was noted in the report, what work specifically has this ministry undertaken to improve the economic prosperity of Indigenous and Métis women?

Ms Midbo: I think when we consider Indigenous women and the circumstances they find themselves in, there are a number of factors that contribute to that, and that includes the lack of consideration of the agency and expertise of Indigenous women and girls. Part of that work is through the women's councils, where we can hear directly from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women about the impacts their families and communities are experiencing, and then we take that information and we – part of our role is to share it across ministries and with our minister so that when he's having conversations with his counterparts, he's able to speak from a more informed place. We certainly try to share that information.

Again, when we're looking at things like employment, poverty, it is a whole-of-government response that's needed. Again, our role is to provide . . .

9:20

Ms Renaud: I'm sorry. I'm just running out of time. I understand that, and I appreciate the whole-of-government approach, but specifically this Public Accounts Committee is looking at: how do you evaluate progress? There are resources invested. How do we evaluate progress made? Specifically, how does this ministry evaluate the progress in any given year about the advancement of economic prosperity other than the census data, which, you know, we're only seeing every five years?

Ms Midbo: Again, I would say that the nature of advice is that we can simply provide that advice to those ministries that are

responsible, so we look at the number of meetings that are held, we look at the individuals or the organizations that are met with that are also informing us so that we can, in turn, share that information and advocate across government. But the nature of advice is that you can take it or leave it, and we don't have control over that.

Ms Renaud: I'm going to turn my time over to my other colleague.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I just wanted to follow up with respect to Bill C-92. So in the fiscal year in question Mikisew Cree, Enoch Cree, Ermineskin Cree all expressed that they served notice that they wanted to exercise their legislative authority over child and family services. As well, Whitefish Lake and Louis Bull both requested to enter into a co-ordination agreement with the province on the delivery of child and family services. So what advocacy did Indigenous Relations do as a ministry for the province to resource First Nations or Indigenous governing bodies to be able to do this, to actually exercise their legislative authority under Bill C-92? What advocacy was done at the Indigenous Relations level?

Mr. Young: Yeah. Thanks very much for the question. We actually undertook a very significant part of laying the foundation for success. As I tried to mention earlier, Minister Wilson took forward a self-government policy framework to cabinet because government had to first have a self-government framework or a First Nations jurisdiction framework in mind before we could begin the negotiations specifically on child and family services. So that was our role.

We're not the expert at – let me finish. We're not the expert in child services. We are the experts in self-government. That was our role, to have cabinet approval so negotiations could take place at a tripartite level so that a First Nation law could be successfully . . .

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. My question is: what advocacy did Indigenous Relations give to financially resource First Nations to be able to exercise their legislative authority? Was there any advocacy done to actually financially fund these First Nations to be able to exercise their authority? We know that the government of Alberta was providing a litigation fund – right? – funding . . .

Mr. Young: Absolutely. Absolutely. We advocate with the federal government every day, all day long. Minister Wilson would have had various . . .

Ms Pancholi: What advocacy did you do at the provincial level to actually advocate that the provincial government provide resources, financial resources?

Mr. Young: Well, the first obligation – I think you would know the first obligation is for the federal government to continue its fiduciary responsibility, to continue its funding priority to the First Nation, and we were not looking at this. I'll let Children's Services really address the core funding question. The provincial government was not trying to save money.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

We'll go to the government side for nine minutes. Mr. Walker.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Chair. Deputy Minister, you were in the midst of finishing a list based on the question I had asked you. What I would like you to do for the edification of the committee, including myself, if you could reread that list – or would you like me to re-ask the question, I would say, through the chair?

Mr. Young: No. I'm fine. Thanks very much. Beaver Lake Cree First Nation feasibility study: complete. Frog Lake First Nation

feasibility study: complete. Alexander First Nation feasibility study: complete. Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation: the waterline construction completed. Paul First Nation: waterline construction completed. Dene Tha' First Nation: the waterline is substantially completed; \$2.2 million. Cold Lake First Nation: Bonnyville waterline construction substantially completed; \$3.2 million. The Whitefish (Goodfish) First Nation: a waterline connecting highways 28 and 63 to the regional water services commission construction substantially completed; \$26.2 million. The Mikisew Cree First Nation: that project is in progress; \$20 million. The really big one involving the four nations at Maskwacis, Ermineskin, Louis Bull, Montana, Samson First Nation: \$26 million. That project is well under way and in progress.

So we've made some pretty good progress over the last three years in bringing fresh, clean drinking water to impacted communities.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you for pointing all that out and all the projects that are being completed. Canada, as you know, Deputy Minister and officials, is a freshwater superpower. I think we're third or fourth in the world in terms of the world's supply of fresh water, I think about 10 per cent with only 1 per cent of the world's population. Everyone deserves the right to that important resource for their own quality of life and, frankly, sustenance. So thank you for completing those projects and where some of them are at.

I'll move on, Deputy Minister, to performance metric 2(a), a measure of the "percentage of Indigenous communities participating in an enhanced engagement process contributing to land-use planning." The 2020-2021 target was 53 per cent, but the actual result was zero per cent. I see on page 43 that this was due to the pandemic and no meetings being held during the 2020 calendar year. What has been done to ensure the participation of Indigenous communities?

Mr. Young: Yes. Thank you for that question. Performance measure 2(a) only includes engagement at formally established regional Indigenous tables led by the Land Use Secretariat in Environment and Parks. Results analysis excludes engagement or consultation activities that occurred for other processes like those related to land-use planning. We set a 53 per cent target for Indigenous participation in these formal tables during '20-21, and, as you mentioned, we did not meet that target. For one, we paused the regional Indigenous tables in 2019 to assess government priorities leading up to and following the provincial election, and then the COVID-19 pandemic extended that pause throughout the next fiscal year and really even beyond. There had been an increase in Indigenous participation every year between 2016 and 2019, reflecting the efforts of all parties to build relationships. Indigenous peoples need to be part of land-use planning in Alberta. I expect that we will see a renewed interest in these tables in the future.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much, Deputy Minister, for answering my questions. Regardless of where our First Nation communities live in Alberta, across our beautiful province, I know that you guys are doing a great job to serve them as best you can, so thank you, guys, so much.

Chair, with that, I will cede the rest of my time to MLA Lovely from Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you so much, Member.

Wow. I'm just so impressed, Madam Chair, through you, that there has been so much advancement made in the delivery of good-quality water to these different nations. They all deserve that, so I'm thrilled to hear that our government has been able to make that progress. There has been such a delay for decades, and I really don't understand why that's happened. I'm glad that the progress is being made now.

That leads me to my questions here. Looking at outcome 3 in the annual report, which was having “increased opportunities for reconciliation with Indigenous leadership and organizations,” I’m interested in key objective 3.1, laid out on page 44, which explains some of the ways protocol agreements were used to improve economic, social, and environmental outcomes. Can you go into more detail about how these protocol agreements have helped achieve the ministry’s desired economic, social, and environmental outcomes?

Mr. Young: Yes. Thank you very much for the question. First of all, let me just say, as a bit of background, that the protocol agreement and then the resulting tables that flow from each of those agreements are a really effective way of advancing the relationship between First Nations on a collective level or in an aggregate form with the provincial government. Really, it’s an organized, structured way of discussing concerns and issues of mutual concern. You know, you don’t address issues sort of just as they arise; we have organization, structure at these tables, where we have chiefs and ministers together meeting to discuss those concerns of mutual concern.

We provide some seed funding for each of the tables, \$300,000 at the treaty level, \$200,000 at the tribal council level, for those communities to have capacity to undertake research, to form their agendas, and then to meet with ministers. They meet annually with the Premier. Those are built into the protocol agreements. They’re just a really effective way of crystallizing the relationship at a working level and advancing issues systematically in an organized fashion. You know, for the tribal councils and treaty organizations that have protocol agreements with the government, we hear really good feedback.

9:30

Might I also say that, just as it relates to sort of an earlier question, we have measurements and evaluate outcomes on those items that we’re responsible for such as protocol agreements. Whether it’s the litigation fund or the AIOC or protocol agreements, those issues that we are responsible for, we evaluate and we have progress reports and so on. Those that we do not have lead responsibility for, we do not report on evaluation or on outcomes because we’re not responsible for those issues.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you so much for the full answer.

With that, I’d like to cede my time over to MLA Reid.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, and again thank you to all of you for your time today. It’s so great to finally be able to meet with ministries in person and hear what you’re doing directly.

Just tight on time, so one quick question, really, related to outcome 3.3, related to work with the Métis Nation of Alberta in terms of facilitating discussions between them and other ministries, like you’ve mentioned, Deputy Minister, you know, advocating with them across the breadth of the ministries. Can you share with us, the committee, any details on initiatives or projects that your

ministry is overseeing or has been involved with in terms of those relationships with other ministries and the Métis nations?

Mr. Young: Yes. Thanks very much for the question. We’ve actually had a bilateral relationship, bilateral agreements with the Métis Nation of Alberta for between 35 and 40 years. In fact, Alberta, I believe, is one of the first if not the first provincial government in Canada to have a formal bilateral agreement with the Métis Nation of Alberta. They find it really effective because they see Indigenous Relations as, really, one window into government.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

We will now move on to the three-minute blocks to read questions in to the record. We’re in the fifth rotation. Can I just ask the Official Opposition if they have any questions to read into the record?

Seeing none, we’ll move it over to the government side. Questions to read in to the record? You have three minutes.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I see on page 20 that during 2020-2021 there was a change to the timing of First Nations development fund grant payments from quarterly to monthly. My first question is: can you describe what type of projects this fund supports and why this change was necessary and how it has benefited Indigenous peoples?

Also, page 20 of the annual report explains that Indigenous Relations has been focusing on reducing red tape to continue to provide better support for Indigenous peoples and meet the government’s target. My question is: can the department highlight some of the main red tape initiatives that Indigenous Relations undertook during 2020-2021? How has cutting red tape benefited Indigenous peoples, and how are you able to track that?

And could you provide some additional details on the Aboriginal consultation office digital service?

That’s all I have, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I’d like to thank officials from the Ministry of Indigenous Relations for attending today and responding to our questions. We ask that any outstanding questions be responded to in writing within 30 days and forwarded to the committee clerk.

Hon. members, the committee has received written responses to questions asked of officials from the Ministry of Infrastructure during the committee’s meeting with them on March 29, as per the ordinary process. Those are posted to the committee’s external website.

Are there any other items for discussion under other business?

Seeing none, our next meeting is May 10 with Culture and Status of Women.

I’ll now call for a motion to adjourn. Moved by Member Reid. All in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:34 a.m.]

