



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Resource Stewardship

Ministry of Indigenous Relations
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, November 5, 2019
9 a.m.

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Ministry of Indigenous Relations

Hon. Rick D. Wilson, Minister

Lisa Tchir, QC, Assistant Deputy Minister, Consultation, Land and Policy

9 a.m.

Tuesday, November 5, 2019

[Mr. Loewen in the chair]

**Ministry of Indigenous Relations
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Acting Chair: Okay. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. I am Todd Loewen, MLA for Central Peace-Notley, and I am substituting for David Hanson as chair for this meeting. We will continue, starting at my right.

Ms Phillips: Shannon Phillips, MLA for Lethbridge-West and deputy chair. I'll be moving over there for the duration of the meeting. Thank you.

Mr. Rehn: Pat Rehn, MLA for Lesser Slave Lake.

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

Mr. Yaseen: Muhammad Yaseen, MLA for Calgary-North.

Mr. Sigurdson: R.J. Sigurdson, MLA, Highwood.

Ms Rosin: Miranda Rosin, MLA, Banff-Kananaskis.

Mr. Getson: Shane Getson, MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

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

Mr. Smith: Good morning. Mark Smith, MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Wilson: To my left I have Michael Lundquist. He is my senior financial officer. To my right I have Deputy Minister Donavon Young and the amazing Lisa Tchir, in charge of pretty much everything.

Mr. Feehan: Richard Feehan, MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, MLA for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Dach: Good morning. Lorne Dach, MLA for Edmonton-McClung.

Member Irwin: Good morning. Janis Irwin, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Acting Chair: Minister, did you introduce yourself, too?

Mr. Wilson: I'm Rick Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

I just want to note the following substitution for the record: Shannon Phillips for Joe Ceci as deputy chair, as already mentioned.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* and that the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set all your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation while the speaking time limits are

set out in Standing Order 59.02(1). In brief, the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of his comments we begin a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

The rotation of speaking time will then alternate between the Official Opposition and the government caucus, with individual speaking times set to five minutes, which, if combined with the minister's time, makes it a 10-minute block. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to either the chair or the committee clerk.

A total of three hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations. The scheduled end time of this meeting is 12 p.m. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having the break?

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn. Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the meeting clock will continue to run. However, the timer for the speaking block will be paused.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on November 19, 2019. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for the committee members and staff.

I now invite the Minister of Indigenous Relations to begin with his opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you for the time, Mr. Chair and all committee members. Let me just start by acknowledging that we are on Treaty 6 land and the land that the Métis have walked on. It's a privilege to be here today to discuss with you the Indigenous Relations spending limits. Joining me today are members of our department's senior leadership, as I've already introduced. Behind me we have Kristina Midbo, director of indigenous women's initiatives; Clay Buchanan, deputy minister of First Nations and Métis relationships; Monica Haekel, director of financial services; Olga Michailides, director of communications; and Justin Cenaiko, chief of staff for the deputy minister.

Budget 2019 is a balanced plan to create jobs, grow the economy, and protect vital services. I'm proud to be part of a government that is taking action to make life genuinely better for Albertans by doing this hard work. We know that growing the economy also comes with the need to balance our budget, so we're spending Albertans' hard-earned dollars on services, not on debt servicing. We also

know that protecting front-line services means clarifying what we can afford to fund. To prepare for Budget 2019, we've had to ask: what are the best ways for government to be involved in the lives and the livelihoods of Albertans? These are some of the conversations I've also been having with indigenous leaders since I was sworn in as minister.

Like my predecessor, the hon. MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford, I take the relations part of the ministry very seriously. Where we are less aligned is in our approach to stewarding Alberta's tax dollars. While they have a tax-and-spend mindset, we have a different frame of mind, one that sees more of a job-creation and growing-the-economy line of thinking. In this budget you will see our commitment to living within our means while taking bold action to stimulate indigenous economies.

I've been in constant contact with indigenous leaders, and I've been open with them about our government's approach. As the Grand Chief of Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta, Arthur Noskey, said to me: nothing about us without us. For them, for their communities, and their futures I've worked hard to make sure their needs are heard and funded as best we can responsibly manage. That is the work we know needs to be done today because tomorrow depends on it.

The outcomes I identified in the Indigenous Relations business plan get to the heart of what we are trying to accomplish. We work toward improved economic security and prosperity of indigenous peoples in Alberta. At the same time, we're trying to improve government of Alberta policies and direction that strengthen indigenous communities and promote Alberta's interests. As I've said many times, we're taking practical steps to increase opportunities for reconciliation with indigenous leadership and organizations: prosperity, policies, and practical reconciliation.

I'd like to spend the remainder of my time talking with you about how we have structured Budget 2019 and around those outcomes. I'd first like to talk about prosperity. One of this government's flagship announcements is the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. As a whole, we understand that indigenous communities have been unfairly penalized when it comes to accessing capital for large investments. That's the kind of penalty that's kept too many communities facing poverty and the effects of intergenerational trauma. As much as we like to think otherwise, the start of a healthy community is a healthy economy. The AIOC presents that opportunity in a way like no other has before because it's about standing up for indigenous communities as they join in the types of projects that have brought prosperity to other parts of the province. We'll have a further \$1 billion of government support as a guarantee to investors that indigenous-led projects have financial merit.

Much more than that, this government is stepping out of the way of those indigenous communities that want to participate in responsible development of the lands their ancestors walked upon. Supporting indigenous ownership and investment is intended to make significant changes, changes like boosted employment rates that just were not possible with small-grant programs. When faced with a decision about how we could best support communities, we opted to be bold, innovative, and supportive of indigenous aspirations. This year we have budgeted \$6 million for the operations of the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, which, I might say, has recently received royal assent and I expect will be running within the next few months.

Access to capital is one significant barrier. Another is the suppression of indigenous voices in legal actions that favour responsible natural resource development. It seems there is an idea, let's say a narrative, that indigenous peoples are all of one mind about favouring environmental protection over natural resource development. My experience tells me otherwise, and so do many

indigenous leaders. The previous administration in the ministry did not do much of anything to dispel this, however, except push their climate program onto First Nations. What I hear is a great desire to support environmental protection and develop resources. Realistically, these are the projects with significant payouts, projects that are game changers for indigenous communities. What the negative dispersion dwellers fail to see is that resource revenue that would return to Alberta's First Nations and Métis settlements will be used to lift up communities and invest in badly needed social supports. While we all agree solar panels are a wonderful thing when the sun is shining, investing in real resource revenue projects that will generate income is going to be a real game changer for the First Peoples that call Alberta home.

9:10

Hear the words of Chief Billy Morin from the Enoch Cree: this is needed; we're First Nations, we're treaty people, but we're also Albertans. Through the indigenous litigation fund there is financial support to help raise those pro-development voices in court cases, so we've budgeted \$5 million for this fiscal year. I'm proud to say that our work to reduce red tape is starting to yield benefits for resource development projects, and this year we're preserving the consultation funding commitment made to indigenous communities in 2018.

Changes made to the Alberta consultation office will allow Alberta to meet the legal duty to consult with indigenous communities and to continue giving clear timelines and legal certainty for communities and proponents. This is a continually improving process, and given that more than 3,000 consultations have already happened in 2019, it's vital for investor confidence in Alberta. Alberta needs to become an attractive destination for employers and investors once again. It's through their confidence in our economy that we can get more people working and contributing to our province's well-being. Recognizing how much Albertans need this, our government took office and took meaningful action by starting to reduce the regulatory burdens, shifting to a more competitive tax system and working hard to focus our budget on programs that support economic and job growth.

More indigenous people must be part of Alberta's economic growth as employers and employees, owners and investors. This is a job for Indigenous Relations and all ministries, and it goes beyond the economy. As a whole, this government is acting together to support strong relationships with indigenous peoples. We have a mandate to work together to engage the federal government, work with the new federal cabinet, and provide equitable funding for basic services such as health and education. At every step with every project my staff and I give strategic advice on appropriate protocols and methods for working within communities and keeping indigenous perspectives in government decision-making. Our aim is to work together to address issues that prevent reconciliation.

I know that across the table we approach things differently; on this, too. I know we have this in common, though, a belief that we have an obligation because of our positions to inspire a more inclusive society. I mean obligation in the highest sense rather than something we do begrudgingly. Our government sees inclusion of indigenous peoples as starting with the economy. People who have economic stability, a steady revenue stream have more freedom to plan for the future and the certainty about what they can do today.

We have taken action on a few fronts to be sure indigenous people benefit as broadly as possible from Alberta's prosperity. Ensuring Alberta's indigenous people benefit economically means other Albertans will benefit, too. We campaigned on a promise to end the punitive tax on everything that the carbon levy became, and

ending it became our very first bill as a government. I want to give the former minister kudos, though, on working to develop climate leadership initiatives specifically for our indigenous communities, because I truly believe it was an attempt to make life much better. Since Alberta no longer collects a carbon tax, we have successfully concluded those programs.

During our summer engagement with Alberta First Nations and Métis leadership we talked about the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. We spoke on mental health issues, supports, job creation, waterlines, road improvements, and food security amongst other issues. You know what didn't come up, though? Solar panels. Why is that? Where I would say that initiative fell down is that it did not go far enough to create meaningful opportunities for indigenous peoples. We know they are largely facing far higher unemployment rates than other people in Alberta.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. The timer will be set for 20-minute intervals so members are aware of the time.

Go ahead, Mr. Feehan.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate you and all of the staff from the ministry being here. Good to see so many of you again. I appreciate the opportunity to have a few hours to discuss the direction of the ministry and to get a sense – you'll find that the vast majority of the things I'm asking are just simple, straightforward questions about what the plan is moving forward. I'd be happy to receive even yes and no answers if that's the appropriate thing, but we can explore anything that you think is important as we move along.

One of the things that I wanted to start with is just sort of a reference to page 10 of the annual report, where it says that this ministry "acts as a focal point for the province's relationship with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit governments."

Mr. Wilson: Can you tell me the page you're on there?

Mr. Feehan: Page 10 of the annual report. It doesn't matter. I'm just pointing out that it says something that I think is important in terms of our discussion that we'll have this morning, that the ministry is really the focal point of conversations with the indigenous communities in this province and that in many ways it's a unique ministry, so our conversation is going to be a bit different. It's unique because it doesn't tend to run programs per se but tends to work with other government ministries. Would you agree that that's a reasonable interpretation?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. A lot of the work that's actually happening with indigenous communities is likely to be occurring in other ministries, not just this one, and your role is to facilitate that. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Wilson: That's very safe. I always say that we're here to open doors, and that's what I try to do for the indigenous people. I try to open as many doors for them as I can and help them through.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Thank you.

I would like to go through different aspects of the ministry piece by piece just to get a sense of what the intention is moving forward, and then we will get to some of the budget pieces – well, some throughout – a little bit later.

First of all, I'd like to start by asking you a little bit about the indigenous women's initiatives. As with many of these things, I just want to know whether or not things will be continuing or whether or not there will be changes coming forward. I just want to know if you will be continuing the First Nations and Métis women's councils on economic security over the next four years.

Mr. Wilson: It's going to be continuing, and it's going to be changing.

Mr. Feehan: Can you describe the changes briefly?

Mr. Wilson: I really rely on the security councils. I just met with them last week. I met with the indigenous women's security council as well as the Métis women's security council. They're a great asset to me, especially this year. As you've noticed, I've put a lot of emphasis on the murdered and missing indigenous women's report and actually declared October 4 as Sisters in Spirit Day. Then we did the presentation in the Legislature, as you know, of the red dress. That's where I got my first red dress, down in the Calgary area.

Mr. Feehan: But that had nothing to do with the security councils. Can you tell me what the changes are?

Mr. Wilson: Actually, it has something to do with the security councils because they are actually helping me with the report. They're part of our team working on putting together an action plan to work together on the missing and murdered indigenous women. We just discussed that last week, and that is one of the directions.

They asked me: what can we do to help you? That was their big thing, because they want to help. I said: well, where you can really help me is with this report because you understand a lot better than I do. They've been working on it for years; I've been at it for a few months.

Mr. Feehan: So they'll be working specifically on . . .

Mr. Wilson: Not specifically. Not specifically. No. They have other things in mind as well, but you were talking about . . .

Mr. Feehan: I do have some questions. Minister, I'm sorry; I'm going to have to interrupt you every once in a while.

Mr. Wilson: Well, I thought you wanted an answer on that.

Mr. Feehan: I don't want to be rude, but we do have almost a hundred questions I need to get through.

I have some questions about the MMIWG, and I will ask them later, but just with regard to the actual board itself, you indicate that there'd be some changes. Is the membership of the board itself going to be changing?

Mr. Wilson: No. The change is where they're helping me with some of the projects.

Mr. Feehan: So the membership will stay the same, then?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. Well, unless somebody wants to change it. It's up to them.

Mr. Feehan: So they'll be finishing out their current term?

Mr. Wilson: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. That's a great bunch of ladies.

Mr. Feehan: They'll be finishing out their current terms?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. That's what I said. They're a great bunch of ladies. Why would we change it? They're doing a great job for us, and I appreciate all the hard work they do for us.

Mr. Feehan: When they come to the end of their terms, can you tell me about the process for reappointing people? Will they be using the existing process of making an application and going through an interview to be on the committee?

Mr. Wilson: Well, that's down the road, but it's the same typical way it was done before. They make nominations, and they review it, and they're placed accordingly.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. So the process of applications and interviews will be maintained?

Mr. Wilson: Well, it's down the road, but however it was done in the past . . .

9:20

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Thank you. I'm just trying to get an understanding of things, so I have lots of things I'm going through.

Mr. Wilson: Well, they work great, so I don't see any point in making changes at this point. They're a great bunch of ladies, and I just appreciate all the hard work they do.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Can you tell me if there are any staffing changes or cost changes that your ministry is making in terms of support for these committees?

Mr. Wilson: Are you referring to a specific line on staffing?

Mr. Feehan: There are support staff that work with these committees.

Mr. Wilson: Well, Kristina works with them, and she does an awesome job. I can't see why I would change her.

Mr. Feehan: So there are no staffing changes or changes in terms of dollars available to these committees?

Mr. Wilson: It's actually going to be increasing. That's a budget line. Because they are so important to me and I work with them a lot, that's one thing I've asked the staff to do: allocate some extra funding in there.

Mr. Feehan: Right. I notice in the budget that there is an increase of somewhere in the neighbourhood of, depending on how you look at it, about \$300,000. Can you tell me the intention of that increase in dollars?

Mr. Wilson: It's for three staff and support to the ladies' groups as well.

Mr. Feehan: Why is there an increase? Are you increasing the number of staff?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. I find them so important that I wanted to help them. Like you say, they're helping me come forward. We're working crossministry on putting a report together on the missing and murdered women, with Justice and Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women.

Mr. Feehan: That's great. I'm not trying to trap you here. I'm just wanting to get a sense of what's happening. Thank you. I appreciate that.

I want to just move on and ask a little bit about the ongoing funding for the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. Because of the nature of the budgets that we get, I can't see whether or not the ongoing funding for the institute remains in the budget at the same level as it was in the past.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. That's staying the same. There's been no change on that. Like I said, they're an important group to me. I work closely with them.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. So there won't be any increases or decreases for the IAAW over the next year?

Mr. Wilson: No. Nothing significant. We're going to continue to provide core funding for 2019.

Mr. Feehan: Just for 2019?

Mr. Wilson: And '20.

Mr. Feehan: But we have no plans for 2020 on?

Mr. Wilson: Well, we're doing 2019, so what happens in the future – my ESP doesn't work so well.

Mr. Feehan: You have a five-year projection budget. Does that continue to remain in the five-year projection budget?

Mr. Wilson: Sorry. Can you say that again?

Mr. Feehan: You have a five-year projection budget. Does the money remain in the five-year projection budget?

Mr. Wilson: I can only talk about what's happened in the past, what's happening now. In the future, like I said, my ESP doesn't work too good. Things change. They're just targets. They're targets.

Mr. Feehan: Well, you have a forward-looking budget, a five-year projection plan, do you not?

Mr. Wilson: Targets.

Mr. Feehan: Targets. So there are no changes indicated in those?

Mr. Wilson: Who knows? I can't say at this point. What we're dealing with right now is 2019.

Mr. Feehan: You didn't put any changes in the IAAW into those projections for the five years. Is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: Like I said, that group remains a priority for me, so at this point that's all I can tell you.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Thanks. I just wanted to know where we're at with it. All my questions are going to be like that.

The next one I'd like to ask a little bit about is the Alberta indigenous intern program. Is that continuing to be run out of the women's initiatives group?

Mr. Wilson: That's actually been suspended for one year.

Mr. Feehan: Can you tell me how many interns there were in that program in the last year?

Mr. Wilson: I'll have to get back to you on that one. I'm not sure on that question.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Suspended for one year. Can you tell me if that's just a budget consideration or if there were other reasons for it?

Mr. Wilson: Well, I was focusing more on the women's issues at this point. It's something we'll look at in the future, but for now it's been suspended.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. I noticed you quoted Chief Billy Morin earlier. He was a successful graduate of that program. I don't know if he would be happy to hear that.

So it's just suspended without any particular reason for it at this point. Thank you.

I now want to move on a little bit to the First Nations development fund. I can see, looking at the budget, that you're not anticipating any significant changes to the First Nations development fund as per line 4 on page 130 of your budget. Can you tell me if you anticipate that there are going to be any changes in the FNDF, either in the process of how the monies are allocated or the actual number of dollars, with the elimination of the lottery corporation?

Mr. Wilson: It has nothing to do with that. We have an agreement with them, and we're going to honour that agreement.

Mr. Feehan: So the process will remain exactly the same?

Mr. Wilson: Yes. I can give you a hard yes on that.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. A hard yes. Okay. Well, that's simple and straightforward.

Can you tell me right now if there are any First Nations or Métis individuals on the board that determines the process and the dollar amounts of the lottery funds?

Mr. Wilson: There's not a board for FNDF. I'm not sure what you're referring to.

Mr. Feehan: Not for FNDF but for the lottery corporation.

Mr. Wilson: That's not my department. That's Culture and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Feehan: Would you be surprised to learn that the only First Nations individual who was on the lottery corporation, Chief Whitney-Onespot, had been removed from the board prior to . . .

Mr. Wilson: As I said, that's not my department. I can only speak to what I have in front of me here.

Mr. Feehan: Minister, at the beginning of our conversation we indicated that given the annual report – you indicated that the purpose often of this ministry was not to provide direct services but to open doors for indigenous people throughout government. I think that was the expression you used. I understand that that would include having input into people being put on boards. Were you not notified that Chief Whitney-Onespot was removed from the lottery corporation's board?

Mr. Sigurdson: Chair, point of order.

The Acting Chair: Yes.

Mr. Sigurdson: I don't see the relevance of this question to the estimates for Indigenous Relations. We're talking about another ministry in its entirety. I don't see this relating to a line item or anything within the estimates as far as Indigenous Relations goes.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

Yes. I think that when it comes to relevance, obviously, this committee is here to talk about the budget corresponding to Indigenous Relations, and I think that any questioning beyond that scope would be out of line. If the member could get back on track and stay within the ministry's budget and line items . . .

Mr. Feehan: Before you make a decision, I think I need an opportunity . . .

The Acting Chair: I haven't called it a point of order; I haven't accepted the point of order. I'm giving you direction to stay on track and stay within this ministry's budget. There is no point of order, but I am cautioning the member to stay on track and stay within the scope of the estimates that we're doing here today, which is Indigenous Relations. It doesn't relate to any other budget line items of any other ministry. If you would like to continue, I'd just ask you to stay on track for the remainder of your time.

Mr. Feehan: Let me just take a second, Mr. Chair, to reflect on that given a number of things. One is that, as we've said, the nature of this ministry is different than most other ministries. The minister agreed to that at the very beginning of our conversation, that it was different, and that the difference is that programs are not generally run through the ministry. Rather, the ministry has a responsibility to work with other ministries in order to enhance the well-being of indigenous people.

In fact, on page 95 of the ministry's business plan outcome 2 indicates that they want to achieve

improved Government of Alberta policies and direction that strengthen Indigenous communities and promote Alberta's interests.

It further goes on to say that

Indigenous Relations provides expert advice, guidance and specialized knowledge to other Government of Alberta ministries to enhance the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies, programs and initiatives.

It seems pretty clear to me that the role of this minister is to work outside this ministry to ensure the participation of indigenous people throughout the government. Is that incorrect?

The Acting Chair: No. I think that he's agreed that that is the case, and I think that is fine. But you realize that we are in estimates here, and in estimates we will be discussing what's before us here. As much as every government department is related to another government department somewhere along the way, we're in estimates here; we're not in a general discussion of government policy across the board. We're in discussion of Indigenous Relations' estimates here today.

Ms Phillips: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: What are you calling a point of order on?

Ms Phillips: I guess a question: are we allowed to query the business plans?

The Acting Chair: Everything in estimates is dealing with this . . .

Ms Phillips: Okay. I just wanted clarification that we were allowed to query the business plans.

The Acting Chair: Yeah. Absolutely, as long as it relates to Indigenous Relations. That's what we'll be discussing here today. Again, if you want to discuss other budget items, you need to go to

the estimates for those different departments. We're here to talk about Indigenous Relations, so let's stay on track here.

Mr. Smith: Question, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Smith: If I understand your direction, this is budget estimates.
9:30

The Acting Chair: Yes.

Mr. Smith: We're going to be asking questions that must refer to some of the documents that are a part of the budget, and while we understand that this ministry may be a unique ministry, it would be best if we referred to the fiscal plan or the budget estimates or to a document that is part of this budget estimates process. Correct?

The Acting Chair: Exactly.

Mr. Feehan: I assume that includes the ministry business plans. Is that correct?

The Acting Chair: Yeah. For this department.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you.

Okay. Outcome 2 indicates, as I read into the record, that you have a responsibility to work with other ministries.

Let's continue. I will just assume you didn't know anything about the removal of Chief Whitney-Onespot.

Mr. Wilson: You know what happens when you assume.

Mr. Feehan: Perhaps, then, you also don't know about the removal of Nicole Robertson from the Alberta tourism board.

Perhaps I can just ask you a general question, then. Does the Ministry of Indigenous Relations have any role in the appointment of people to boards across government ministries?

Mr. Wilson: Well, the new appointments: they are in line with the Public Agency Secretariat. Some boards require urgent appointments because they either had vacancies or they needed specific competencies, so we act quickly to fill those positions. We are appointing indigenous people to the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation board of directors. That's going to be a diverse board. The selection criteria is based on expertise. I want it to be a very competent board, but I also want it to be a very diverse board, so I'm looking at seven to nine members. I think we've talked about that before. I want it to be a cross-section of ladies, indigenous ladies.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. When the board gets created, then I'll ask you questions about that. Thank you, Minister.

Perhaps we can move on a little bit to consultation and land claims for a minute. Minister, I see that you anticipate an increase in the operating expenses of consultation and land claims. I guess I'm just wondering if that's a result of the successful completion of the Lubicon First Nations settlement by the previous NDP government.

Mr. Wilson: What line number are you on there? What page?

Mr. Feehan: Land claims: I'm just looking at line item 6 on page 130 of the budget.

Mr. Wilson: Those are for making settlements, and we did have a significant increase last year. That was a one-time payment of \$18 million. That was for the Lubicon Lake band. It's also contingent

on particular circumstances in a given year. It's hard to predict land claims. We've got some ongoing, and depending on negotiations – as you know, these things don't happen quickly – it could be a year; it could be 10 years. That's why we keep some money set aside there. But for the large amount, that was a one-time payment.

Mr. Feehan: For the Lubicon Nation?

Mr. Wilson: For the Lubicon, yes.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Good. Just checking to make sure I understand. I don't get the details that you get in the budget, so I'm being particularly . . .

Mr. Wilson: Also, that's supporting the ICCP, the indigenous consultation capacity program, as well.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Minister, can you tell me how many treaty land entitlements are outstanding in the province of Alberta at this time?

Mr. Wilson: Currently there are five treaty land claims by Canada for negotiation in Alberta.

Mr. Feehan: And do you anticipate being able to complete any of those land claims in the coming year?

Mr. Wilson: That's subject to negotiations. Like I said, it could be a year. It could be five. It could be 10.

Mr. Feehan: Right, but nothing that required you to put money into the budget for . . .

Mr. Wilson: No. We do have some money set aside there just in case, but if there was a big land settlement, of course, we'd have to go back to Treasury for that.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. I'm just wanting to understand the budget numbers there. Thank you.

Minister, I understand that the UCP government has decided to sell land in northern Alberta for the purpose of farming. Can you tell me if there'll be any commitment to exclude from that land sale any of the lands identified by the Beaver First Nations for their current TLE?

Mr. Wilson: There's currently consultation going on on that. A decision hasn't been reached yet as to amount or where.

Mr. Feehan: So is it possible that lands will be sold in northern Alberta for the purpose of farming that will remove them from availability for the Beaver First Nations?

Mr. Wilson: It's still too early to say. We're undertaking consultation. That's still going on, and we'll see how . . .

Mr. Feehan: The government hasn't made any explicit promise to the Beaver First Nations to protect the lands that are under consideration at this time?

Mr. Wilson: No. There's consultation going on, and we'll be discussing that with them.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. So that may or may not happen. Thank you.

Now, if I can turn our attention just a little bit to the aboriginal consultation office. As you know, there was a consultation process conducted over the last two years that involved every First Nation and dozens of municipalities and Alberta businesses. I'm just wanting to ask a little bit about some of the plans moving forward. I understand from your previous comment that the increase in the

capacity dollars that were allocated last year is in this budget. They are continuing. Is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah, they're continued till March 31. As you know, they increased substantially last year, a fourfold increase, but we are honouring that increase.

Mr. Feehan: And as far as your planning is going, that is an ongoing consideration, that they will continue to be honoured?

Mr. Wilson: Just till 2020. That's it. There were certain areas where they had to reach targets, and if they reach those targets, then they'll be funded under that program till March 31, 2020.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. So there are no changes in the ongoing forecasting, but for now this is part of it.

I'd just like to ask about some of the particular plans that are being moved forward. I'm wondering whether or not they are moving forward and whether or not there are any implications for the budget. Specifically, for example, there were plans in place, considerations – and I don't know if it's happening – for the ACO to require proponents to involve First Nations, Métis settlements in the development of level 3 consultation plans for large and complex projects. I'm just wondering whether or not the intention is to continue with that request by the First Nations, and if so, are there any implications for the budget?

Mr. Wilson: I'm going to pass that one to Lisa. She's in charge of our consultations.

Ms Tchir: At this time Alberta is not moving forward with the renewal of the Métis settlement consultation policy or the First Nation consultation policy, so we have no effect on the budget for that line item.

Mr. Feehan: Then, just to do this a bit quickly so that I don't get called out of order here, there will not be any changes in terms of First Nation, Métis settlements being involved in level 3 consultations, I'm assuming. You can just nod if you want.

Mr. Wilson: A hard yes.

Mr. Feehan: I'm sorry?

Mr. Wilson: A hard yes.

Mr. Feehan: A hard yes. Okay.

And the criteria to adjust consultation timelines to allow First Nations more time in the event of a death or ceremonies: again, that is also not being considered?

Mr. Wilson: No change there.

Mr. Feehan: No changes.

And the ministry will not be expanding the definition of accommodation to include measures such as: adjust projects, develop mitigation measures, change proposed activity, attach terms and conditions to authorizations, project rejection, or financial compensation. No changes on that? You're nodding. Not making a change to that definition?

Mr. Wilson: No change.

Mr. Feehan: No change. Thank you.

Mr. Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Smith: I would like to refer to Standing Order 23(b): "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." This is supposed to be about budget estimates. He's asking questions that go far beyond that, so I'd ask the relevance of this. If he can't express how it's actually going to impact the 2019 budget rather than future conversations about any other particular question that may run through his mind – I think we need to stick to budget estimates.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Member, would you like to comment?

Ms Phillips: May I? Clearly, the member is referring to page 94 of the business plan, in which the second sentence of the first paragraph under outcome 1 indicates:

The ministry provides certainty to regulators, industry and Indigenous communities through management of Alberta's consultation processes, and upholds the honour of the Crown by developing policies and initiatives to ensure the province fulfills its duty to consult . . .

on a number of matters. There are different levels of consultation within the aboriginal consultation office, which is funded by Indigenous Relations. There is a budget line in the estimates document as well for such an undertaking. It's very clear that the member is querying as to the nature of the statements in sentence 2, paragraph 1, outcome 1 of the business plan 2019-2023.

The Acting Chair: Yes. There's no point of order here, but obviously the caution is still there. I think you're on track still, but I just want to make sure that as we continue forward, we'll keep on track and keep within the budget plan. If you could, at all times possible please refer to a line item or to a portion of the business plan so that it's very clear where you're headed with your questioning.

9:40

Mr. Feehan: Sure. I gather, just as a summary comment, then, that there has been no decision to move forward with the consultation plan after the two-year consultation and that as a result . . .

The Acting Chair: The first 20 minutes are done. Carry on.

Mr. Feehan: . . . there is no implication for the budget in 2019 either way. Is there a decrease in monies put into consultation given the change, or is there an increase in any areas?

Mr. Wilson: Like we said before, we are maintaining that same budget till March 31. Like you say, it's been a huge increase from prior years, though. But we are upholding the honour of the Crown. We'll be doing that.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, I see that a decision was made to increase the budget of the stewardship and policy integration plan, line 6.3, just so you can follow, on page 130 of the budget. I just want to ask about the nature of the increase there. It's almost a 100 per cent increase. Can you tell me a little bit about why that line has changed so significantly?

Mr. Wilson: That's the increase to the indigenous consultation capacity programs.

Mr. Feehan: So that's where the monies for the capacity that was renegotiated by the previous NDP government are entered. Is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: Yes. I mean, they were huge increases, but we are honouring them.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. The increase that seems to be indicated here from the 2018-19 budget seems to be approximately \$9 million. Is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah, approximately.

Mr. Feehan: Yeah. I realize there's some small variation.

The amount of capacity increase that was actually provided to nations year over year is a \$9 million change. Is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: That's correct. It's substantial. But there were targets that they had to meet to get that funding. It could be everything from creating an office space and those types of things.

Mr. Feehan: Right.

Mr. Wilson: Before they get that funding, they have to meet those targets, and we're moving – well, we've passed the first target already, and now we're looking at some of the second target dates.

Mr. Feehan: Can you tell me what the nature of the targets is?

Mr. Wilson: I actually don't have that list of the targets with me, but like I said, they were broad targets, everything from creating an office space to participating in a survey, training plans. There were several issues where they had to meet not hard targets but – there was actually construction of an office building.

Mr. Feehan: Do you have a sense about the percentage of First Nations that have been meeting the targets? Will this money actually be spent this year?

Mr. Wilson: Our second target date: I think everyone has passed that at this point. So we're just looking to the third target date now.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Would you undertake to provide us with a copy of the targets and which nations have met those targets?

Mr. Wilson: We'd be able to do that. I'll have the staff get that for you.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. You'll provide that so I can follow up on that. Thank you.

But you don't anticipate, given the need to meet targets, that any of this money will be unclaimed over the next year?

Mr. Wilson: I can't say. They have to meet the targets to get the money. The deliverables: that is, I guess, actually the proper term for it.

Mr. Feehan: Deliverables. Okay. That's fine. I understood what you were telling us. Thank you.

I'd like, then, to move on a little bit to talk about the indigenous climate leadership initiatives. I see that in the budget, reading both line 11 under Operating Expense and, again, line 11 under Capital Grants, no new monies are being allocated to the indigenous climate leadership initiative, for a reduction of approximately \$53,869,000. Is that correct, that there will be no new monies for the climate leadership initiative?

Mr. Wilson: Well, that was based on the carbon levy – you know, the job-killing carbon tax, as we call it – which has been eliminated . . .

Mr. Feehan: Right.

Mr. Wilson: . . . and once that's been eliminated . . .

Mr. Feehan: We'll talk about the jobs in just a minute, Minister.

Mr. Wilson: But the programs were completed.

Mr. Feehan: I'm sorry?

Mr. Wilson: The programs were completed.

Mr. Feehan: They were completed, right?

Can you tell me about how many of the 48 First Nations accessed the programs from the indigenous climate leadership plan?

Mr. Wilson: I can go through some of them if you'd like? This is 2018-2019 stats for it. The Alberta indigenous community energy program: \$4.65 million approved to perform energy audits and identify energy efficiency opportunities.

Mr. Feehan: Do you know how many nations took advantage of it?

Mr. Wilson: I'm getting down to that.

Mr. Feehan: Oh, I'm sorry. You said that. I'll listen.

Mr. Wilson: Two thousand residents approximately, and approximately 187 commercial buildings. Seventeen million dollars was approved to deliver energy savings and reduce greenhouse gases: 37 commercial buildings, 397 residential homes. The Alberta indigenous green energy development program is at \$10.25 million approved, and two renewable energy projects were funded; a documentation stream of approximately \$1.7 million, five funded projects; the Alberta indigenous solar program, \$9 million approved to install 56 solar panels; and the Alberta indigenous community capacity program, \$3.7 million to fund 27 projects. There were 15 climate leadership co-ordinators hired under this program, and Indigenous Relations staff will meet with these organizations to ensure they are aware that there is no additional funding for these positions.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I didn't quite get it, but you mentioned \$9 million for solar. Do you know how many actual solar projects there were in that time?

Mr. Wilson: All I've got is that there were 56 solar panels installed. I'm not sure how many projects.

Mr. Feehan: Fifty-six solar panels? No, that can't be it.

Mr. Wilson: I don't have that number. We'd have to get back to you on that number.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. I wonder if you could just perhaps provide me with an update about just some basic numbers about the number of projects that were involved, and perhaps you can provide me information about a few other things that go with the projects.

Mr. Wilson: What other things?

Mr. Feehan: I'm sorry. The number of jobs that were associated with those projects.

Mr. Wilson: Jobs as far as internally or working outside?

Mr. Feehan: No. Jobs that were associated with the actual implementation of the programs. Also, the GHG reductions that resulted from those.

Mr. Wilson: Actually, Lisa has come up with the numbers for me if you'd like.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you.

Mr. Wilson: She's amazing.

An economic impact analysis was conducted by the climate leadership program to determine the impact on Alberta's economy since 2016-2017. Approximately 300 jobs have been created with program funding. The economic investment project across the province led to approximately a \$47 million increase in Alberta's GDP, and the economic investment projects resulted in government revenue of approximately \$20 million.

They're actually still working on the analysis, so they can get you the final numbers.

Mr. Feehan: That'd be great. I would appreciate that. I just want to have some understanding.

Minister, are you aware of any of the projects that had a greater uptake by indigenous communities than the indigenous climate leadership program?

Mr. Wilson: Sorry. I didn't hear you, unfortunately.

Mr. Feehan: Are you aware of any other programs in your ministry that had a greater uptake by indigenous communities than the indigenous climate leadership program?

Mr. Wilson: Are you talking about the – specifically, which program were you looking at?

Mr. Feehan: We had seven programs under the indigenous climate leadership program, correct?

Mr. Wilson: Yes. So you're wondering which one was more utilized than the others?

Mr. Feehan: No. I'm asking whether or not there is any other program in your ministry other than the indigenous climate leadership program that had the same level or greater intake than the indigenous climate leadership program.

Mr. Wilson: Well, we've got the First Nations development fund. There's 100 per cent uptake on that. They'll bring projects forward, and we'll review them. Mostly socioeconomic benefits for the communities.

Mr. Feehan: Can you tell me what percentage of First Nations actually accessed one or any of the programs in the indigenous climate leadership initiative?

Mr. Wilson: Are you still looking for the same number of how many First Nations, the question you asked?

Mr. Feehan: I'm just wondering what percentage of the 48 First Nations actually accessed that program at one point or another.

Mr. Wilson: I think we said that the staff would look into that for you.

9:50

Mr. Feehan: I'm sorry. You said what?

Mr. Wilson: We said that the staff would try to get that number for you. I think it's the same question you asked earlier.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Okay. That's fine.

Mr. Wilson: Just coming back to it again.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Just moving on a little bit here, Minister, directing your attention to line 8 on page 130 of your estimates. I see that there's an indication of about \$100,000 for investing in the Canada infrastructure program. Can you tell me: is that just simply flow-through money from the federal government?

Mr. Wilson: That's 100 per cent federal funding. Yeah.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. At this point, it's fair to say that the only monies that indigenous communities will be getting for any kind of green initiatives are from the federal government.

Mr. Wilson: Not necessarily. We're working with – of course, you realize we're setting up the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. That corporation is designed to stimulate our energy market. When we're talking energy that could be oil, gas. It could be forestry. It could be mining. It can also be renewables. When I talk to my friends in southern Alberta, they tell me they don't have a lot of oil and gas, but they've got wind and water. As long as it's a renewable project that makes business sense – it's got to be business viable. We're not talking just fluffy projects. We want something that's going to create jobs and create income for the First Nations. Because we're backstopping these projects – these will in fact be paid back – they have to be business-viable projects.

Mr. Feehan: This is interesting because it's not what was said in the House.

Mr. Wilson: It's exactly what was said.

Mr. Feehan: If a nation wanted to create a wind project, for example, in southern Alberta, they could apply to the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation?

Mr. Wilson: Technically, they can do that. It's got to meet the parameters.

Mr. Feehan: Of course.

Mr. Wilson: We've got a group set up that's going to be helping with these projects. On top of the \$1 billion we have another \$6 million for technical advice because not all First Nations are working at the same level. Some have economic development people onboard. They have lawyers onboard. Others, of course, as you know, are not working and would require some help to develop a business plan. In that business plan development we'd look at the viability of a project. Is it going to be economically viable? Is it going to create jobs? Is it going to create income for the First Nation? There's no point in having a bunch of solar panels that aren't making money.

Mr. Feehan: I'm wondering if this is a change in plans since we had the conversation in the House. At the time you indicated that you were hoping that in the future people would be allowed to use renewable projects as fitting in the program, and now you're saying that they can do it now.

Mr. Wilson: No. That's incorrect, actually. I'll just go back to the actual purpose of the Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. It's to enable First Nations to get past that barrier of accessing capital. Say that I want to go start up a business, and I can put my farm up for collateral. I can go to a bank, and now they'll lend me money on it. For a First Nation or Métis settlement it's not like that because that's a reserve and the bank won't lend them money. We're going

to backstop them so that they can be partners in prosperity with Alberta and then work together with us.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Let me ask you a few more questions about that indigenous . . .

Mr. Wilson: I think you were asking me the question about whether we are allowing renewables in the program.

Mr. Feehan: Right.

Mr. Wilson: In the House I did make it clear that it went beyond just – it is energy, but under energy we're looking at oil, gas, like I said, forestry, mining, and a renewable project. But it has to be a viable project. If it's a good, viable project, there's nothing wrong with a hydro project.

Mr. Feehan: But your definition now is being limited to energy projects as opposed to resource development. In the House we talked about . . .

Mr. Wilson: Well, I just made it very clear what it referred to. It was energy, which is oil, gas . . .

Mr. Feehan: Okay, good.

Mr. Wilson: . . . mining, forestry . . .

Mr. Feehan: Thank you.

Mr. Wilson: . . . and renewables if it's a good, viable project. I mean, solar panels are getting better all the time, the windmills are getting better all the time, and we've got a lot of hydro projects that are possible out there. If a First Nation comes forward with a good plan and it gets vetted through our group first to make sure that they've met all the viability, that it's got a good business plan to go with it, yeah, we'll look at that, and then that'll go forward to the board. The board is going to be a very competent board. I've got people there that are applying that have tons of . . . [A cellphone rang] Uh-oh. Whose phone is that?

Ms Rosin: Mine. Sorry.

Mr. Wilson: You have to dance because that's what happened to me. Grand Chief Willie Littlechild actually made me dance around my chair.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate it.

I would like to ask a little bit more about the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation because it's new to us this year and it's a new addition to the budget. On line 12, page 130 of the estimates, I notice that there is a \$6 million inclusion at that particular time. Can you tell me what the intended outcomes are for the \$6 million?

Mr. Wilson: What was that question again? Sorry.

Mr. Feehan: What is it that the \$6 million will be provided for?

Mr. Wilson: We want to make sure that that money is protected, so on top of the \$1 billion we have set aside \$6 million for capacity and technical training and advice. There'll be people there who will be able to help First Nations that maybe aren't as sophisticated to build a good business plan, and that money will be there to help them.

Mr. Feehan: Will that all be in-house, government money? Like, you're hiring staff to provide assistance?

Mr. Wilson: The in-house staff could go outside to a bank or an institution that can give them the advice that they need to make sure that it's a good, viable project.

Mr. Feehan: Right, so none of those dollars are actually flowing to First Nations; it's actually all for government staff.

Mr. Wilson: Well, it will all be for First Nations. I guess, it's for . . .

Mr. Feehan: No. But, I mean, you won't be sending a cheque to First Nations in order to help them develop a proposal or a plan or something; this is all in-house dollars and new staff?

Mr. Wilson: Well, not necessarily. It could be in-house; it could be working with their own people and helping them develop the business plan. That still hasn't been totally decided yet. We're still building the whole program.

Mr. Feehan: But the jobs will be government jobs.

Mr. Wilson: Well, not necessarily. Like I said, it's a big project. We've got a billion dollars here, so we could be looking at some big projects.

Mr. Feehan: I just mean of the \$6 million.

Mr. Wilson: Even with the \$6 million, we have to make sure that it's a good, viable project. When you're looking at big projects, you might have to go outside and get some better advice when . . .

Mr. Feehan: Let me word it slightly differently. Will any of that \$6 million actually be provided as cash to First Nations for capacity in this sort of program?

Mr. Wilson: There's availability for grants there, so some of it may go to First Nations to develop these business plans and make sure it's a viable project. So it's not all just going to . . .

Mr. Feehan: Right. So you may not provide actual dollars to First Nations.

Mr. Wilson: We've got nine staff, so it's not \$6 million for staff.

Mr. Feehan: Right. Well, all I get is that one line.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. Fair enough.

Mr. Feehan: That's why I'm trying to understand.

Mr. Wilson: Fair enough.

Mr. Feehan: The \$6 million may involve hiring some staff in the department to provide assistance and support to First Nations, Métis communities. It also may involve providing some capacity dollars to some First Nations to actually develop, like, a business plan or some other aspect of their proposal moving forward?

Mr. Wilson: On a limited basis it might do that because . . .

Mr. Feehan: That's not really the intent?

Mr. Wilson: Well, it's part of the intent. Yeah. Like I say, we're talking big projects here, so we have to make sure that they're vetted properly. They're going to need legal advice. You know, we have to go outside for legal advice. When you're developing a business plan for a hundred-million-dollar project, I mean, that's no small task. We may need outside help . . .

Mr. Feehan: Right. That's why I wondered whether you're providing cash for that.

Mr. Wilson: . . . and all types of things to go along with it.

Mr. Feehan: We'll look forward to see when that's going.

Minister, of course, you mentioned the \$1 billion a number of times now, but I obviously don't see \$1 billion in this budget, nor do I see it anywhere else in the government of Alberta's budget. Can you tell me if I've missed it? Is the \$1 billion posted as a liability anywhere in the government budget?

Mr. Wilson: No. We're putting up Alberta's balance sheet. The main objective of the AIOC is to backstop loans, so you won't see that as a budget line.

Mr. Feehan: If the project is indeed successful and loans are made and loans are paid back, the government of Alberta, hopefully, will not actually pay a single dime of that billion dollars. Is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: That is correct.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Wilson: What it's going to do is allow the First Nations or Métis to achieve a loan at a much better rate.

Mr. Feehan: But a successful program, from your point of view, will actually require zero dollars of that billion from the government of Alberta if it's really successful in the way that you hope it to be.

Mr. Wilson: Yes. They'll just be using the backstop of the government and using the strength of the government to . . .

Mr. Feehan: Does the ministry of red tape know about spending \$24 million over the next four years on a project that actually doesn't provide dollars to the indigenous communities?

Mr. Wilson: I work very closely with the associate minister of red tape. He's doing an awesome job. I walk by his office every morning . . .

Mr. Feehan: It's okay. I'm just being a smart ass. I'll cut that out.

Mr. Wilson: . . . and he gives me the scissors and says: let's make sure that red tape is being cut. We take it very seriously in our department, and I've actually challenged our department to see who can come up with the most red tape reductions.

10:00

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Minister.

Now, if these projects are applied for in this program, does the actual project that is being funded by the First Nations need to be on the First Nations land or the Métis settlement, or can it be anywhere in the province?

Mr. Wilson: We're still examining it, but it just has to benefit the First Nation. It could be a project in another area.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Second hour, and now we're in the last 20-minute period.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you.

So as long as it benefits the nation, it can be anywhere in the province. It wouldn't have to be anywhere in the treaty area or on the actual land of the nation or the Métis settlement.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. Like I said, it could be a project from a First Nation that – it's like any business. It's location, location, location, if you're located beside a big gas field or an oil field, I mean, or you're beside the city and you can have a successful casino. But not all First Nations are that lucky. Some are quite removed and don't have the ability to get in on some of these bigger projects. This will allow that. They can partner with other First Nations. They can partner with a business stakeholder. Like, you wouldn't believe the businesses that have been coming, looking to participate in this project.

I'm really seeing also a paradigm shift, where business wants to be involved with First Nations and Métis. I even saw it in our own caucus when we put the AIOC on the floor. Every member there wanted to speak to it. Everybody has got a story that they want to tell, and I'm seeing that all across the whole province.

Mr. Feehan: As an aside, I'm just curious, then: if your focus is to enhance indigenous businesses, why aren't indigenous people allowed to decide the nature of the business that they would like to be involved in?

Mr. Wilson: They're totally going to decide what type of . . .

Mr. Feehan: If they wanted to propose a grocery store, they would be able to do that?

Mr. Wilson: What I said before was that this was for energy projects, which could be oil and gas, it could be mining, it could be forestry, or it could be renewables.

Mr. Feehan: Right. That's my question.

Mr. Wilson: For the smaller business – I would consider a grocery store a smaller business – we have other tools in our tool boxes to help out with those types of projects. The tool box for the AIOC is not meant for small projects.

Mr. Feehan: If they wanted to be involved in growing cannabis or manufacturing or something, they couldn't use this program. Why is it that it's limited?

Mr. Wilson: Well, like I said, it's got to be a medium- to large-size business. For the smaller businesses . . .

Mr. Feehan: Cannabis, I believe, is quite large these days.

Mr. Wilson: It could be. That's a forestry- or mining-type operation, and that's something that would have to be looked at to see if it makes business sense.

Mr. Feehan: You'd consider cannabis operations as potentially . . .

Mr. Wilson: That wouldn't be up to me. That's going to be up to our board. We're putting a competency board in place to decide what types of business structures would be looked at. Our Premier has said: let's get this successful, and if it's successful, we'll look at expanding into other things. When we were out on our tour this summer talking to various First Nations, I heard everything from tourism – and I've talked to our minister of tourism about that. We have some of the greatest assets in the world for tourism.

Mr. Feehan: But they can't apply it for this . . .

Mr. Wilson: Not under this one, but as I said, I was just explaining that it could be expanded in the future to do those types of things. Another thing I heard about lots was food security. For a lot of First Nations, just having a good, secure food source is important. Maybe

there'd be a greenhouse opportunity in the future or something like that. But under this program specifically we're looking at creating jobs and getting Alberta's energy sector back on track.

Mr. Feehan: You're talking about that in the future there might be some other possibilities, but right now none of the things you just mentioned are actually viable.

Mr. Wilson: Sorry. You'll have to state that question again.

Mr. Feehan: Greenhouses are not viable under this particular project right now.

Mr. Wilson: Probably not. I said medium- to large-size projects. I mean, if you had a giant greenhouse, who knows? But those types of projects are going to have to be vetted. First, we have to go through our technical board to make sure they've got a good business plan. Then it has to go through the competency board to make sure that it's a viable business and is going to create jobs and get our energy sector back to work. Alberta is hurting right now. We need to get those markets opened up and get our energy sector back working.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Wilson: A lot of my own family is out of work right now just due to what's been happening to the economy.

Mr. Feehan: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: It's important.

Mr. Feehan: I read in the annual report on page 11 – just in case you wanted to know, I'm trying to give you numbers now – that you have an urban and special projects division, that has responsibility for a number of programs. I would just like to ask you questions about some of those specific ones.

The first one is the regional drinking water tie-in initiative. The First Nations regional water initiative was proposal 2(a) of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples program that was undertaken by the previous NDP government. At the time \$100 million was allocated, and if my memory is correct, 13 regional tie-in projects were identified. Can you tell me about how many of these projects have been completed to date?

Mr. Wilson: The exact numbers that have been completed: I can't say for sure, but I know I've talked with – oh, they're right there. So 10 projects completed to date.

Mr. Feehan: Have been completed?

Mr. Wilson: I've got three in construction phase right now.

Mr. Feehan: I understand it was a three-level process, that the nations can be in any one of either phase 1, phase 2, or phase 3 of this project, either the initial planning, the implementation, or the completion. Is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: You're talking about the design phase?

Mr. Feehan: Sorry. I don't have access to my old documents, so I can't always remember all the right language.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. So the detailed design phase, the feasibility study phase, and the construction phase.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Could you just tell me the names of which nations are in which of those phases?

Mr. Wilson: We'll start at the feasibility study phase. We've got four there. Alexander First Nation: that feasibility grant is approved and under way.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Great.

Mr. Wilson: Beaver Lake Cree Nation, and that one also includes Heart Lake First Nation.

Mr. Feehan: The Beaver Lake one is approved, did you say?

Mr. Wilson: I said that that's in the feasibility study phase. These ones I'm telling you are all at the feasibility study phase.

Mr. Feehan: Right. Okay.

Mr. Wilson: That feasibility study is under way as well.

Mr. Feehan: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: Mikisew Cree First Nation: that feasibility study is under way.

Mr. Feehan: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: And the Ermineskin Cree Nation: that feasibility study is approved but has not yet begun.

Mr. Feehan: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: In the detailed design phase – you talked about three phases, so this is another phase – Cold Lake First Nations: for that one the detailed design is complete.

Mr. Feehan: Does that mean it's been approved to move forward? Sorry. I just need to understand how that works.

Mr. Wilson: What was the question?

Mr. Feehan: Does that mean that it's been approved to move forward?

Mr. Wilson: That design is complete. Construction probably won't begin for another year, though.

Mr. Feehan: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: Dene Tha' First Nation: that design is under way.

Mr. Feehan: Is that for the Bushe?

Mr. Wilson: That construction is actually slated to begin in 2020. Frog Lake First Nation is in the design phase as well. I don't have a date of the construction start on that one.

Mr. Feehan: Those are the only three in design?

Mr. Wilson: That's the detailed design phase.

Mr. Feehan: Great. And the last phase?

Mr. Wilson: Then the other phase is the construction phase. Alexis Nakota Sioux: that construction to reserve boundary has been completed. We only do the line up to the boundary. Internal, of course, is going to be a federal program. I met with Minister Bennett earlier, before the election phase started, and she told me that she wanted to continue working with us on getting those projects moving forward.

Paul First Nation: the construction to the reserve boundary is completed there as well.

Whitefish (Goodfish) Lake No. 128 First Nation: that construction is under way right now. We were up there this summer and had a look at it. They're doing some great things up there.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Thank you. I really appreciate that.

Mr. Wilson: I've met with Ermineskin. Of course, that's part of my constituency as well out there, so I meet with them probably more than others just because they are part of my constituency. They're excited about moving that forward, because there are four First Nations encapsulated there. We've got, in Maskwacis, Ermineskin, Samson, Louis Bull, and Montana. Municipalities will benefit from that as well because, as it's coming to their First Nation, there could be some spinoff benefit from that. That's exciting as well.

10:10

What I'd like to see is to expand just from Ermineskin. I actually just talked with a lady last night. She sits on another board with me in my constituency there. Her mom is on dialysis with my dad in the hospital there. Their water, she said, actually comes out brown when they turn on the tap. I mean, when you're on dialysis, you can't have . . .

Mr. Feehan: No. You can't.

Mr. Wilson: I've told them they have to be very careful, and I'm going to be helping her to maybe set up some type of water program where they do a cistern-type or even bottled water because they're quite a way out. But I'm happy that they've expanded the dialysis in Wetaskiwin . . .

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much for that, Minister. I appreciate that this is an important project. I'm glad that you're continuing it as best you can.

Just as an aside, there was a decision to be made about a waterline route happening in eastern Alberta. I think it was between Cold Lake and Frog Lake, and there was a decision as to whether it might be an eastern or a western route. If it was the eastern route, it potentially may be able to involve two Métis settlements. I just want to know if a decision was made on that or if that's still pending.

Mr. Wilson: No decision is made, but they have contacted me about that. We're talking about that right now. That's something that we'll review and see if we can help them along with that as well. We want to help as many communities as we can with this. Like you said, it's \$100 million allocated. I think that to date \$38.6 million has been provided, so there's still a lot of capacity to get some projects done. We'll try to work and get as many projects done.

Mr. Feehan: Do you anticipate that all of the about 10 or 12 – sorry; I'm not sure what the ultimate number was – projects will be funded under that \$100 million?

Mr. Wilson: I'm not sure what the construction costs are yet because nothing has been tendered to date. But if the construction costs come in at a good rate and we can afford it, yes, we would move forward.

Mr. Feehan: That's fair. Okay. I noticed that there isn't any addition in the budget line item to the \$100 million. Is it anticipated that this project will just simply continue what was already previously started by the previous government, just the same as the climate leadership ones, and then disappear?

Mr. Wilson: Like I said, I can't speak to the future, but for now that's . . .

Mr. Feehan: But you haven't put in any new money this year, then.

Mr. Wilson: I guess that this is actually Transportation's budget, so you would have to discuss that with them.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Right.

Mr. Wilson: I just don't want to report rumour.

Mr. Feehan: But it is part of your report; it's the urban and special projects division. Okay. So no new monies as far as you know at this particular time.

Mr. Wilson: Well, I can't speak to their budget. I don't know.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Moving on, I'd like to ask about another special projects division piece of work, and that's the Sixties Scoop Indigenous Society of Alberta. As you know, in May 2018 then Premier Rachel Notley made an apology to survivors of the '60s scoop, and subsequently the government assisted in the creation of the Sixties Scoop Indigenous Society of Alberta. Can you tell us if the funding for SSISA, as it's often referred to, is going to be continued in this budget, and if so, where in the budget do I find it?

Mr. Wilson: Well, the '60s scoop is important to me as well. I've got a couple of really good friends that are part of that. So I've been doing quite a bit of work with that. Adam North Peigan, of course, is working hard on it. We had funded the Sixties Scoop Indigenous Society of Alberta through the urban initiatives program, but this year funding may be available through other government of Alberta departments, so I'm working with them to see what we can do.

And not everything is going to involve funding. Actually, Mark and I attended the '60s scoop in Devon, and they've been doing a great job. They've been finding funding. They got funding for their display that they had there. They were happy that they were able to get funding for that, and we'll continue to help them wherever we can and use the ministry's profile to support them and help them move forward.

Mr. Feehan: Can you tell me which department? The monies that were received in the past year: where would I find that in the line items? The money that was given up until now: where do I find that in the budget? Which department or which line?

Mr. Wilson: If you go to First Nations and Métis relations, you'll find it under there. It isn't broken out for me, so I can't see it for you.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Minister, perhaps while we're talking about the First Nations and Métis relations line: I noticed that there's a 20 per cent cut in that line, line 2 on page 130 of your budget, going from the actual last year of \$27 million, almost \$28 million, down to about almost \$19 million, so \$900,000. Can you explain the change in the budget for First Nations and Métis relations?

Mr. Wilson: First we had an increase, and then we had a decrease. We had a \$1,180,000 increase resulting from increased revenue projects from the federal government as part of the workforce development agreement, a 2.8 reduction in the AEPP, the aboriginal economic partnerships program.

Mr. Feehan: That's the employment partnership program that the federal government finances. Is that right?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. On the urban initiatives, we're going to be working to help them, where we can, to find granting, but some of the money has been reallocated to the women's initiatives because that's an important project right now. So we'll be working with them on that as well.

Mr. Feehan: Have you changed the goal, then, in terms of the number of urban initiatives that you anticipate over the next year as a result of the decrease in that \$900,000? Or is that a change . . .

Mr. Wilson: Can you repeat that question?

Mr. Feehan: Have you changed the goal that had been set, the target that had been set for the number of urban initiatives – I believe it was 14 originally – in a year?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. That program has basically been cut from the budget at this point, but we've reallocated it to other areas, I can say, for the women's initiatives and friendship centres and that type of thing. What we're focusing on is getting the Indigenous Opportunities Corporation going. That's for large-scale projects. By doing that, we were hoping to create a lot of employment for people and get them back to work in real, meaningful jobs.

Mr. Feehan: Minister, am I right in saying that approximately 50 per cent of all indigenous people are urban dwelling?

Mr. Wilson: Approximately. I can't say exactly for sure.

Mr. Feehan: Close enough, say? And there is no entity that would allow them to access the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation?

Mr. Wilson: Well, even though they're living off-reserve, they're still band members, so they would be eligible for the programs that are being done by the First Nations or Métis groups that they're a part of.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. I just want to be clear. There's basically a hundred per cent cut in the urban initiatives program over the next year. Is that right?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah, because we're focusing on actually getting people back to meaningful work and . . .

Mr. Feehan: Can you tell me what kind of programs were actually funded by the urban initiatives program in the previous year?

Mr. Wilson: It wasn't overprescribed, and that was one of the reasons that we kind of moved away from that, kind of moved away from grants and more into long-term, sustainable funding like the opportunities corporation . . .

Mr. Feehan: But not by the Alberta government. Long-term, sustainable funding by other sources: is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: Well, long-term, sustainable funding through the opportunities corporation. That's a billion-dollar fund to put people back to work.

Mr. Feehan: But it's not useful for somebody who was working on an urban initiative program that has nothing to do with resource extraction.

Mr. Wilson: Well, like I say, just because they're living in the city doesn't mean they can't benefit from the First Nations or Métis settlement that they're from.

Mr. Feehan: My memory may be wrong, but my understanding is that there were 14 projects funded by the urban initiatives in the previous year, and now none of those projects will be eligible for the new Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. Is that correct?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. It was actually just 11 projects.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you.

Mr. Wilson: But our government was elected to get the government back on track, and there were some hard decisions that had to be made.

10:20

Mr. Feehan: Can you tell me what those 11 projects were, give me an example of maybe one or two of them at least?

Mr. Wilson: The Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, some counselling services, nonindigenous organizations, some postsecondary.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Perhaps I could just ask . . .

Mr. Wilson: But we've also increased the funding in our employment by over \$1 million, so some of it's offset in other areas.

Mr. Feehan: I want to just ask the department to send me a list of those.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move over to the government side for questions now. Would you like to go back and forth with the minister?

Mr. Turton: Yes, if that's okay.

The Acting Chair: If that's okay with the minister, we'll go back and forth.

Mr. Turton: Okay. First of all, thank you very much, Minister, for coming before us today. Minister, do I have your permission to go back and forth?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, please.

Mr. Turton: Okay. Excellent. First of all, I would like just to apologize for my phone going off. I was actually thinking about doing a dance around my chair, like you said, Minister, but given that so many youth groups are already traumatized by my bad dancing ability in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, I will just simply give a donation to the Speaker moving forward. Thank you for your indulgence.

I guess just to kind of say where my question is eventually going to be going, it's on page 130, line 12. I'll just give a quick little bit of context before I actually ask the question. It really has to deal with the area out west. My riding of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain has been, you know, adversely affected by the accelerated coal phase-out, which was put forth by the previous government. One of the areas hardest hit in the entire province has actually been Paul First Nation, which is just located a couple of minutes west of my riding. One of the largest employers for residents from that one community was TransAlta. When the layoffs happened all through the areas out west of Edmonton, Paul First Nation was adversely affected disproportionately to their population. I mean, there are people that existed or came from the Paul band that relied on those jobs that are no longer there, so economic development opportunities for people living out west is of a huge importance.

I guess I really want to tie that in with the announcement by yourself, Minister, about the AIOC, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, and the impact that that can have on communities and First Nations groups, specifically, all over the province. I mean, as you know, Minister, Paul First Nation is one of the poorest communities in the entire province. You know, in my previous role as a city councillor I would talk with members of the council quite a bit and members of that community as I worked at TransAlta. They were looking and begging for opportunities to be able to expand the economic diversification of that area. Can you please just perhaps elaborate a little bit upon what impact it will have on First Nations groups when it comes to developing natural resources, to creating those economic opportunities and creating jobs in First Nations communities around the province?

Mr. Wilson: Thanks for the question. That's a big part of what this AIOC, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, was set up for. Some of the larger First Nations don't require a lot of help. Like I said, it's location, location, location. If you're sitting beside the city of Edmonton or if you're sitting beside a large oil field production, you probably don't need as much help. But, like I say, Paul band: I was out there this summer, and they were hurting bad, with a lot of unemployment out there. I mean, when you get a lot of unemployment, it leads to social problems and everything that goes along with that. That's why we really wanted to be able to help some of the First Nations that are struggling.

That's where the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, I think, is really going to shine because this is going to allow them to participate in projects where they normally would not even be able to participate in funding. But even to do the capacity or the technical training to see if they would be able to make money on something and then to access money to do a project: they've really been at a disadvantage. They've been having to go to equity funds that are high interest, which makes the projects not even viable for them. The province being able to backstop them is going to put them in a lot better shape for getting a loan at a much lower rate, where a project that might not have been viable all of a sudden becomes viable.

With the corporation as well, they'll be able to maybe partner with other First Nations that are moving forward to maybe have a little higher sophistication. Like I say, there have been a lot of projects coming forward, and through our other fund, the technical and capacity fund, we can possibly put the groups together. You know, there might be a business sitting there that's looking for a First Nation or Métis partner, and we can put the two together. That way, like we talked about, it doesn't have to be on their lands. That could be a project that's in a whole other part of the province. All of a sudden, where they never had the availability to do that, now they have that availability to participate in the economy and become what we call two partners in prosperity in Alberta.

That's the exciting part of the whole program, being able to help First Nations that didn't have the ability to even try to get into the bigger projects before. I know that I've talked with some of the bands, and a big project for them at one point was being able to afford a new tractor. All of a sudden now they can get into a new program where they're creating jobs. I mean, when you get to start creating jobs and then people start feeling better about themselves, you get stronger families, and then you get strong communities. But it takes a good economy and a good economic sense to get that pride and get people working.

Some of the First Nations: like, if you go up to Fort McKay, they've got zero unemployment. You get down to some of the other ones that aren't as close to an area where they can create that income, and it's as high as 90, 95 per cent unemployment. I mean,

it's hard to have self-worth when you've got unemployment that high out there. That's what we're really trying to do, help the families get jobs so we get stronger families, get strong communities. We've said: when the First Nations are thriving, all of Alberta thrives. That's why the whole program is exciting to me.

Like I say, you're seeing a whole paradigm shift of businesses coming forward and saying: "We want to get into this program. Like, is there any way we can partner with a First Nation?" Of course, that's something that we would definitely be looking at, but like I say, they have to be a viable business, because we don't want people to fail. We want them to succeed, and we want to see this program grow.

Even yesterday I was at the National Coalition of Chiefs. These are chiefs from Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, all First Nations, Métis that are pro development, and the energy in the room was amazing. Like, there's just so much hope out there for the future with this program. I felt like a rock star there. Everybody is excited about the program. They want to get involved with it. They're wanting to see when it's moving forward. Some of them who've put people forward for the board were wondering how the board selection was going. Like I say, it's a very exciting time, I think, right now in the province for the First Nation people. Even meeting with the energy minister from Saskatchewan: she's looking at our program, you know, to see how this works. The Premier has been out promoting. Like, he'd like to see the other provinces do a similar program to this so we get, right across the whole nation, everybody working together.

This is a game changer for the First Nations and Métis people. This is something new. It's historical. It's never been done at this level before. There have always been grants and that type of thing, but the grants don't get you over the line. That's what my Métis friend the president of the settlements tells me. He said: I don't want a handout, Minister; just give me a hand up. I've heard that a lot, right across the province. Those aren't my words. That came from the Métis and the First Nations peoples: "Just give us a hand up. Like, that's all we're looking for."

They're a proud people. Those are the first entrepreneurs in the province, I mean, right from the first trading that went on, and they've been in the game a long time. The capacity that's out there, like, the education: one chief told me that education is the new buffalo, that provides everything. Where the buffalo used to provide everything for them, everything from food to shelter, now they see that education is their new buffalo because that's going to provide the way to the future.

10:30

Mr. Turton: Minister, you said something interesting and fascinating about education. Years ago I was asked to speak at the school in Paul by some of the local teachers out there and talk about apprenticeships and kind of try to give a bit of a talk about, you know, the advantages of even graduating from high school. One of the comments from the students really resonated with me because he said: "Well, what's the point of me graduating from high school? There's no work anyways." And, Minister, what you're really talking about is creating that ability for youth to have hope that there are actually going to be those types of development projects after high school. So there's a motivation for them now to be able to graduate from high school. You know, for a lot of those kids that I was talking with back in the day, they didn't have a lot of hope that it would be better for them compared to the histories of their parents.

As you travelled around the province, Minister, what has been some of the feedback that you had from either Métis communities or other chiefs from around the province? Can you give a little bit

of feedback about what you've been hearing, both from the perspective of resource-heavy communities versus some areas that, like you said, maybe aren't blessed with the locations that have those types of development opportunities?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. First, maybe I'll go to your first comment about the kids. Just last week our Minister of Education – she's got a youth council; I think Mark was there, too – brought together youth from across the province, and I was blessed enough to be able to be part of that. There was a young fellow there from my constituency. He is a big kid. He is literally six foot six. I felt like a kid beside him.

When she introduced me as the Minister of Indigenous Relations, he just about spun around in his chair. He couldn't believe he was meeting the Minister of Indigenous Relations. It was a moving experience. Like, I said: how would you like to come down to my office and check it out? There were about three indigenous kids and a bunch of other kids there, and he says, "Could we do that?" I said, "Absolutely." So I took him on a little tour. We did our own little tour of the Leg. and got down to my office. I said: "Well, sit down in that chair. See how it feels to you." He said, "I couldn't do that, sir." I said, "What do you mean you can't do that?" He said: "Well, I'm just an indigenous guy. I could never be here." It broke my heart.

I think that a big part of our job is getting out there and showing the kids what they can do. So when he sat down in my chair and we were taking pictures, he said: "Well, what's it going to take? Do you think I could really do this?" I said, "Absolutely you could do this." And I said: "You're a lot smarter than me. You're going to have a lot more education than I've got. Just keep going to school. Finish your education. Work with your council. Maybe get on council. Start there. Get some experience. Work with your community. Volunteer in your community. People will see that you've got a good heart. Get out there, and there's no reason why you couldn't be an MLA or a minister." So that type of stuff is what I find really rewarding, to be honest with you.

And what was your other question, about the chiefs? We were going around and . . .

Mr. Turton: Well, I was just hoping that perhaps, Minister, you could elaborate on some of the feedback that you've had as you travelled around the province.

For the record I can attest that Minister Wilson has a great deal of style. I've seen him at almost every powwow in the province. It's been incredible to see him travel around the province.

But just if you can describe a little bit about the feedback you've had from leadership, both from communities that have ample opportunities for resource development around their respective First Nations even compared to areas that might not have those same opportunities. I used Paul band as an example, but I think it was referenced about potentially some areas in southern Alberta. Perhaps just kind of talk about the contrast and how the AIOC can actually benefit them.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. That was quite an eye-opener. I grew up in the middle of Maskwacis, out there, so I understand my area really well, but to get out to the rest of the province was quite amazing. You get up to some of the, say, Fort McKays, for instance, that have zero unemployment, and you say, "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help." But they say, "We don't need your help." They're doing quite fine, just basically: get out of our way, and leave us alone. That's kind of their approach.

Then you get down to some of the other First Nations or Métis settlements where they're really struggling. I mean, it's poverty. It's

poverty, and it's tough. So now to see that they've got hope, where they can participate and be part of something on a big scale that could benefit their community and give them sustainable, long-lasting funding and not just grants, that's what they're looking for. They're proud people. You go from northern Alberta to southern Alberta, and there's everything in between, even some of the Métis settlements doing not too badly. Some of them are hurting. These people need the jobs. They need the energy sector to be working so that they can work and give their kids futures.

I get down to southern Alberta. Like I say, they've got wind and water, and they want to be involved in projects as well. They've already started moving forward in partnerships with ATCO and what have you, and the companies are seeing the benefit of being able to partner with indigenous and First Nations and Métis people. That's what's really encouraging, to see this whole change. You know, everybody talks about big business being the bad guy. They're not the bad guy. Suncor spent more than the entire federal government helping on indigenous issues, like, I have to say, the \$500 million that they put towards indigenous projects. Our Alberta companies are going above and beyond compared to what the federal government should be doing.

Mr. Turton: I know we talked and I made some specific reference to Paul out west, but I was hoping maybe just to go the opposite way in my riding and go a little bit further east. As you probably know, Minister, Edmonton has one of the larger urban indigenous populations in the country, right up there with Saskatoon and Winnipeg. You've talked quite a bit about AIOC and the impact it can have on these First Nations communities around the province, but what is your department doing – and I just, for example, reference page 130, line 2 – in terms of supporting urban indigenous populations moving forward, and how is that approach different compared to the previous government's?

Mr. Wilson: Well, we do have friendship centres. Most of the larger centres have their friendship centres, and I work a lot with them, too. We're trying to help them wherever we can, and they're helping me. I guess they probably help me more than I help them, to be honest with you, some great people out there, some great ideas. I've met with NorQuest College. They've got a great training program over there, and one of the ladies that set up the whole program is actually from my area. She's been helping me a lot in understanding what we can do to improve things. I think they put – just don't hold me to this number – around 2,000 people through their training program, with, like, a 90 per cent success rate to get people to work. And that's not just from Alberta; that's people coming from all around Canada. So there are some great initiatives out there in the urban areas as well.

It's probably an area where we could do more because it's tough for the indigenous people. I think racism is alive and well out there. I mean, it's a tough thing. Passing Clare's Law last week: that's a good start to help indigenous ladies out there to be protected. That's a critical area, I think. Where we really have to do a lot of work is around protecting indigenous women in urban settings.

Mr. Turton: My last question. Again, to go back to economic development, you know, since it has been clearly described as being like a focus for this government and your ministry, can you address the request from First Nations communities for the casino moratorium to be lifted? Just to put that in context, the second First Nations group that's closest to Spruce Grove-Stony Plain that I have a lot of experience with is Enoch First Nation. That's on the borders of Edmonton. I know the impact that, for example, the casino and that recreation development has had on Enoch First

Nation in kind of creating that economic vibrancy that Chief Morin has talked about. Can you just kind of perhaps talk about those discussions moving forward to give other First Nations communities around the province the same type of opportunities, for example, that Enoch First Nation has been able to experience?

10:40

Mr. Wilson: I'm getting all kinds of notes here.

Mr. Turton: Okay.

Mr. Wilson: As you know, the casino moratorium remains in place right now. We're not accepting new casinos or racing entertainment applications. I think the feeling is that it might be saturated right now, with just a lot of it because of our depressed economy. I mean, in the future that could change, obviously. Right now there's only one application under review, that's actually in my area, the Louis Bull Tribe. Right along highway 2 there they have a proposal. I was back on county council probably 25 years ago when that first came in. They made the proposal, and I was actually on the development board, and we gave them permission to do . . .

The Acting Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Minister.

We'll go to the government side for questions. Go ahead. Oh, sorry. A five-minute break now. We're going to hit that first, and then we'll go to the government side.

[The committee adjourned from 10:41 a.m. to 10:46 a.m.]

The Acting Chair: Okay. We're going to get started here again. We'll go to the opposition side, and there'll be a 10-minute slot. Would you like to go back and forth with the minister?

Member Irwin: Yes, please, if that works for you.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah.

Member Irwin: Great.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to, Minister, return to what my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford was just talking about prior to being interrupted. That was the urban and special projects division, so I'll refer to page 11 of the annual report.

You had noted that a number of programs are going to be impacted, including Bent Arrow. My ears perked up. Bent Arrow is a couple of blocks from my house. It's an extremely important organization that does some of the most important work for urban indigenous folks in my neighbourhood and beyond. So I'd like to ask a few more questions about that. What I'd like to know is: how, specifically, is Bent Arrow being impacted? You may know that they have the new in town program, which is a service that offers a whole number of supports for indigenous folks, particularly in my neighbourhood, and they work in partnership with Boyle Street Community Services, so a really effective program. Could you please explain how Bent Arrow is being impacted?

Mr. Wilson: We don't provide the core funding; that's federal. This was more for project funding, so it really shouldn't impact them at all, as I can see.

Member Irwin: Would it not have an impact on their projects such as the new in town program?

Mr. Wilson: It depends on what they were using their funding for. If they were using it for that, then it would be affected.

Member Irwin: So how, I mean . . .

Mr. Wilson: That's up to them. Like, I'm not sure how the funding model works over there.

Member Irwin: Yeah. I understand that it is project funding, so it will have an impact, but I'm quite worried because, as I said, they provide an invaluable service in my neighbourhood and beyond. We would like to just reiterate the need, because I know my colleague was cut off there, for a list of the projects impacted. I know you'd started to talk about that, so if we could have that under the urban and special projects division. Again, that's on page 11 of the annual report.

I'd like to shift gears to another topic that's incredibly important to me. My riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has one of the largest urban indigenous populations, so I was quite concerned to hear that the indigenous housing capital program has been killed – and there's a connection here to this budget; we've talked in the House about the importance of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples – and part of that proposal was to increase the supply of affordable housing. So I was quite proud to see that the former minister, my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford, had announced that indigenous housing capital program. I was in the estimates for the Ministry of Seniors and Housing when that minister announced that that program has been eliminated. I just want to point out why this is such a pressing issue right now. Again, as I noted, a number of indigenous folks who I call friends and neighbours in my own community are going to be impacted by this decision. We've seen an increase in tent cities; we've seen a whole heck of a lot of folks who are in desperate need of affordable housing. Can you confirm for me, Minister, that no new money has been made available for indigenous housing in this budget?

Mr. Wilson: That's through Seniors and Housing. But you did hear that we are putting a large amount of money into Hope Mission as well for housing for everyone. I think it was \$10 million. Well, it's not in the budget . . .

Member Irwin: Yeah. I mean, that's more shelter, and there are some concerns.

In fact, a good friend of mine – his name is John; I'm sure he wouldn't mind my sharing this because he's been quite public about it – an indigenous person, has felt quite exploited and treated quite poorly at Hope Mission. I've also heard some concerns from folks in the LGBTQ2S-plus community, two-spirit folks in particular, who have also been marginalized at Hope Mission. So I'm not sure that that's an appropriate solution.

I will pass my time over to my colleague.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. I want to jump in and ask a couple of questions. Thank you again for being here. My question is related to the indigenous litigation fund. That's line 10 on page 130 of your estimates document. It's nice to see the introduction of a \$10 million litigation fund. The question I have is: who will decide which projects will be funded through this fund? Who will have the decision-making authority?

Mr. Wilson: As that comes forward, that will go to cabinet for a final decision.

Mr. Sabir: So it will be government deciding which projects will be funded.

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. You also mentioned in explanatory notes in your business plan, in your outcomes that it will be only used for pro-development groups and indigenous communities. In other words, if government doesn't view the project as pro development regardless of what indigenous communities think – it will be a government decision which projects they will fund.

Mr. Wilson: Let me just take an opportunity. The litigation fund: it's not a method of pitting one indigenous community against another. Pro-development indigenous communities will have the opportunity to have their voices heard in the courts. There are many communities who are vocal about Bill C-48, including Woodland Cree. Bills C-48 and C-69: they're potentially disastrous to Alberta's resource economy. We now have a government that's implementing a unique strategy to defend our sector.

Mr. Sabir: Minister, you said that you're using pro development. Are there any First Nations that you think are antidevelopment?

Mr. Wilson: There's lots of funding from foreign-funded entities to fund antidevelopment, but nobody has got a voice out there for pro development, and that's what we're standing up for.

Just yesterday I was at the National Coalition of Chiefs. That's all the chiefs from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and B.C. That's the majority of chiefs. They're all pro development, and they're very anxious to be helping out with looking at taking part in the litigation fund.

We've stood up for them before, and now they . . .

Mr. Sabir: Are there any First Nations that you view as antidevelopment?

Mr. Wilson: There are groups out there that are trying to do that.

What I've heard out there is that everybody needs development, and everybody realizes they need development, but they want responsible development. All Albertans want responsible development. Who does it better than Alberta? Who's got more ethical oil than Alberta? I mean, you could get oil from Russia; you could get oil from Saudi Arabia. They don't look after the people's needs or their health or their safety. And where does all of the industry come from? Our industry is one of the best in the world for creating new ways of carbon reduction. Like, the carbon reduction programs that are coming forward from our industry are just amazing.

Mr. Sabir: The question I have is more specific. For instance, at this point Mikisew First Nation has a lawsuit against Fort McKay First Nation over the placement of a gravel pit. What I'm wondering is: will this fund be available to one party in that lawsuit to use against the other First Nation?

Mr. Wilson: As far as specifics, I can't comment on that.

The fund is set up to help pro-development nations fight back against foreign-funded entities or federal government policies that are trying to stop them from participating in Alberta's economy and being partners in prosperity with us.

Mr. Sabir: It appears that the government will pit one First Nation against another for the benefit of the government agenda, what they view as development.

Mr. Wilson: Absolutely not. I never said that at all. I never said that at all. That's what you're saying, but that's not the truth.

Mr. Sabir: We can switch gears. Just another question about the inquiry into the missing and murdered indigenous women. The

question I have is: will there be a formal response from the government to that inquiry?

10:55

Mr. Wilson: We are working at building a province where indigenous women and girls are valued, respected, and safe to live lives filled with hope and promise, and we are committed to working with indigenous people to address root causes of violence through inclusion and reconciliation.

I've been working very closely with a lot of different groups out there. We've also sat with the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. She and I have read the report in its entirety at least twice to focus on the calls for justice that will have the greatest effect on ensuring that indigenous women are treated with dignity, humanity, and respect. We're also working, like I said earlier, with the indigenous women's security council and the Métis women's security council, and they're bringing forward ideas and some calls for justice.

Mr. Sabir: Will there be a formal response to this report? Yes or no?

Mr. Wilson: Absolutely. We're working on that response as we speak. There are groups out there working on that.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. The other question I have . . .

Mr. Wilson: You can see how important it is to me. Like, if you walked into the Federal Building this morning, you couldn't miss it. Did you see the red dress down there?

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

Mr. Wilson: When I walk by that, I'm amazed. To have all our members who supported me so much in that movement: that's what it's all about. That's where I got my first red dress, down in Calgary at the Awo Taan women's shelter there.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Sorry to interrupt, Minister.

We will now go to the government side for 10 minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you, Minister, to you and to your staff for working hard to bring Alberta back on track and to have fiscal balance. Thank you for your commitment and dedication and emotions and tears, which indicate that you're so focused on your ministry and on your people.

My question is with respect to page 94 of the business plan. What is your ministry doing to support indigenous representation in land and natural resources management?

Mr. Wilson: Thank you for the question, and thank you for your comments. I appreciate that. Indigenous Relations provides the leadership and strategic guidance to support expert advice to other government ministries, and that will improve the inclusion of indigenous perspectives in government policies and programs. We also lead the development of strategic policy positions and province-wide policies for consultation on land and natural resource management, and Indigenous Relations supports other ministries to effectively engage and consult with indigenous communities across a range of government priorities. We've got a tool box full of tools and education resources to enhance government staff capacity to support effective and efficient engagement in consultation with indigenous communities.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Minister.

What are you doing to create further indigenous awareness across government?

Mr. Wilson: We are committed to that path of reconciliation across government, and all departments of the Alberta government have increased engagement and continued to move beyond just symbolic gestures to real, practical measures that help indigenous people to determine and support the well-being of their families and communities. Like I said, Grand Chief Willie Littlechild for Treaty 6 told me on many occasions: “Rick, this isn’t about reconciliation. I want to see reconcili-action.” And that’s what we’re up to. We’re doing reconcili-action, and they’re happy to do see that.

We partner with indigenous peoples to secure economic participation and pursue opportunities. It’s an economic imperative, and as the Premier said, it’s a moral obligation. We’ve proven it already through the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation and the litigation fund, that we were just talking about as well. Our department continues to support the indigenous learning initiative for government staff. That’s ongoing, and we’ve taken a lead role in delivering these sessions.

We’ve also declared Orange Shirt Day and Sisters in Spirit Day. It’s a new way to acknowledge and raise awareness about the harms inflicted upon indigenous people. We’ve got Louis Riel Day coming up, and we’ll be doing a ceremony surrounding that as well. Some of you attended our indigenous boot camp last year, and we’re hoping that we can continue that and put another boot camp on just to help all of our members be more aware of what’s happening and of proper protocols and that type of thing.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you.

My next question will be on the estimates, page 130, line 10, I think it is, where you have \$5 million for the indigenous litigation fund. How much grant money have you delivered through that litigation fund?

Mr. Wilson: To date we’re just accepting applications at this point. We have two really good applications that have come in, and we’ll be looking at funding those. First, we’ll vet them and make sure that they are proper applications, and then it’ll go forward to cabinet for a final decision. But to date no actual money has been put out.

We set it up at \$5 million for this budget and \$5 million for the future. We’ll be looking to help those First Nations that want to be prodevelopment and fight back. That’s what the program is set up for. Like I say, when we get a good application in, it’s vetted, and then we take it to cabinet before actual approval, and money is given out at that point.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you.

Thank you. I’ll pass it on to my colleague here.

Mr. Smith: Chair, can I go back and forth with the minister?

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, please.

Mr. Smith: Okay. First of all, I want to say thank you for all of the opportunities you’ve given me to engage with the First Nations, both in my constituency and outside of it. It has been an honour and a pleasure to work with you, so thank you very much.

You know, you often don’t know what you don’t know, and you don’t know what’s in a lot of people’s lives. I’m going to be speaking to page 130 and to line 2, First Nations and Métis relations. I believe it’s under that line that you’ve done some work through the ’60s scoop.

I want to say thank you for inviting me out to and making sure that I had the opportunity to attend the ’60s scoop at the Devon library. I said that you don’t know what you don’t know. I had the opportunity that morning to visit with one of the ladies there that had been a part

of the ’60s scoop, and it was an amazing thing for me to see the strength, the character, and the resilience in that woman, the quiet and the strong dignity that characterized everything about our conversation. I will take that with me for a long time.

I want to talk a little bit about the ’60s scoop. The Sixties Scoop Indigenous Society of Alberta, that was presenting on that morning, has an important mandate, you know. What are you going to do as Minister of Indigenous Relations to support them and to ensure that the voices of the ’60s scoop survivors are heard?

Mr. Wilson: That’s a good question, Mark. Like you said, I have been trying to involve as many members in functions, and even the opposition I’ve invited to the functions. I appreciate the member coming out to some of our events out there. It’s been very rewarding. It’s been a journey.

Like I said, I grew up in the middle of the Pigeon Lake reserve out there, which is part of the Maskwacis.

Mr. Smith: Yeah, a former part of my constituency.

11:05

Mr. Wilson: A former part of your constituency. That’s right.

Growing up, I saw a lot of my friends disappear. I thought they moved. But, no, some of them went to residential school. Some of them were ’60s scoop. I didn’t know till years later. The government – sorry.

Mr. Smith: That’s okay, Minister. I sometimes wonder whether you’re going to be the first one to cry or me.

Mr. Wilson: I never used to be this soft.

Mr. Smith: My kids will tell you – and this is God’s honest truth – that I cry at *Little House on the Prairie*.

Mr. Wilson: I know.

Mr. Smith: So, you know, emotions are okay. As a matter of fact, I think they let people know that we’re human, even when sometimes maybe we try not to let that get out.

Mr. Wilson: As a kid I didn’t know, and as an adult I feel guilty that I didn’t know. That’s probably why I have the passion for this that I do. As I’ve been travelling around the province, I’ve been meeting old friends and hearing their stories, so anything I can do to help with the ’60s scoop and the intergenerational trauma that’s being going on because of that and the residential schools – I guess that’s my real passion for it. I saw it first-hand, and it’s not that long ago. I mean, this has happened in my lifetime. This isn’t something that happened a hundred years ago or 200 years ago. I think that’s a big part of what I’m trying to do, to just make people aware of what’s going on out there and help wherever we can.

Mr. Smith: Well, I know that one of the conversations that I had on that day in Devon with the head of the – we’ll get back to you.

Mr. Wilson: Thanks, Mark.

The Acting Chair: Very sorry.

We’ll go back to the opposition side here for 10 minutes again.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Minister, and I also want to concur. I think the emotion is completely appropriate, so I support you in that.

I’d just like to keep going on with some of the other initiatives. I know that, as we’ve said previously, your outcome 2 in your business plan indicates that you’re responsible to provide

advice, guidance and specialized knowledge to . . . ministries to enhance the inclusion of Indigenous [people and] perspectives in the development, implementation . . . of [government] policies.

As a result, you know, of course, a number of my questions and, of course, my actions when I was in your chair were with other ministries. It's just the reality of the job, a bit unique, quite wonderful in that way.

I'm just wondering about some of the other decisions that have been made across government, whether you've had involvement; for example, the recent reduction in age, from age 24 to 22, for students who are leaving Children's Services. We know that the vast majority of children in care are indigenous, approximately 70 per cent or so, and this particular decision is going to be impacting about 500 students, which means that, on average, that would be about 350 indigenous students that will be losing funding between the ages of 22 and 24. I'm just wondering if you had a part in this decision or if you can help me understand how that fits the mandate.

Mr. Wilson: Thanks. Our staff work, of course, as you know, across government to improve Alberta policies and direction to strengthen indigenous communities and promote Alberta's interests. As you know, indigenous children and youth in care fall under Children's Services. Let me defer this question to my colleague. I mean, we've got a mandate on a pathway to balance, and some strategic reductions are going to have to be made in various areas.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. I'll pass that along to the indigenous community.

Let me ask about some of the other initiatives that are out there; for example, the antiracism initiative and the creation of that board. Can you tell me if your department is involved, as mine was when I was in that chair, in the antiracism initiative?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. I've been working with the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, and we're working on a racism policy. I'd say that racism is alive and well. It's sad to say that. I can talk about my own campaign when I was running. I took some people from Wetaskiwin. I said: "Let's go. We'll do some campaigning in Maskwacis today. We'll go down to the mall and meet a bunch of people." One fellow told me, "Well, we can't go there." I said: "Why? Is there a car accident and we can't get down the road? It's, like, five minutes away." He said, "Well, that's the reserve." I thought: "Oh, my God. Now you are going."

So we went down, and I said, "Well, we'll go to Robin's Donuts." He said, "They have a Robin's Donuts?" I thought: "Oh, my God. You've lived here all your life, and you've never been five minutes down the road to Maskwacis." We went in, and literally everybody in there knew me. We were getting hugs and high fives, and everybody was congratulating, saying, "Let's get this province back on track" When we left, he really thanked me. He said, "You've opened my eyes to a world that I didn't know existed."

Mr. Feehan: So the board for the antiracism program: is that going to be continuing, specifically?

Mr. Wilson: Sorry? The which?

Mr. Feehan: The antiracism board that people were appointed to with the help of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: I'm not sure on the board. It's not in my department at all, but we are promoting antiracism against all cultures that are out there. That's the best way to put this, isn't it?

Mr. Feehan: I've asked a number of times about appointments to various other boards. I realize they are outside of your ministry, but in the past there's been a tradition of coming to the Ministry of Indigenous Relations to seek input to ensure that there are indigenous people on various boards, whether it be the ALCB or the antiracism board and so on. Is that a practice that's continuing? Are you involved in appointing people to boards?

Mr. Wilson: I could say a hundred per cent that our Premier is probably the most open person I've ever met, and his direction is clear: he wants the boards to be diversified as much as possible, to represent a good cross-section of our society, especially with women, especially on racism and these types of boards, to make sure that there is representation.

Mr. Feehan: As part of your business plan do you have a goal at all related to the number of indigenous people that are on boards like the Anti-Racism Advisory Council?

Mr. Wilson: I don't like to put an actual number on it. Like, you want to have the best people on . . .

Mr. Feehan: A percentage?

Mr. Wilson: No. Of course, it might be 100 per cent. Like, I'm not going to put a target over that and say that one group should be represented while the other one shouldn't.

Mr. Feehan: So you're satisfied right now that the number of indigenous people on the various boards is an appropriate number?

Mr. Wilson: I can speak to my board.

Mr. Smith: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Smith: I refer to Standing Order 23(b), "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." We've given a lot of latitude for you to be able to ask the questions, but when you start to question the makeup of boards that are completely not under his ministry, I think that you're moving down a path that speaks to 23(b).

The Acting Chair: Thank you.
Go ahead.

Mr. Sabir: I think we have talked about this before, that this ministry exists to "provide expert advice, guidance and specialized knowledge to . . . Government of Alberta ministries." I think it's completely a fair question to ask about what advice this minister has given to other ministries for the inclusion of the indigenous perspective. It's well within their business plan, and I don't think this point of order is well founded. It's just eating up our time and opportunity to ask the minister questions.

The Acting Chair: It actually doesn't eat up your time, so that point is wrong.

I think the line of questioning goes a little bit beyond the scope of the ministry and as far as the estimates we're dealing with today. Any advice going back and forth between ministries: I don't believe that's a part of the process we're here to do today. I think we're going beyond what the scope is here, obviously. You know, if we wanted to talk about advice going back and forth between all the ministries, then I think we could spend days talking about things other than what's relevant here today.

Mr. Feehan: Well, as I've indicated, when I was in the chair, that was a significant part of the role, and it is outcome 2 in the business plan. But I appreciate that you don't want to hear those questions.

Let me ask a little bit about the indigenous learning initiative. You know, the previous NDP government established the indigenous learning initiative to implement mandatory indigenous training for employees of the Alberta public service. The fulfillment of this plan was to take a number of years given the significant number of people to participate. Can you tell me if the training will continue until all or perhaps nearly all of the public service has successfully completed the training? Is that intended to continue?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. Thanks for the question. That is an excellent program, and we're still committed to that path of reconciliation and shared prosperity with indigenous people.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Thank you.

11:15

Mr. Wilson: All departments of the Alberta government have increased engagement and continue to move beyond just symbolic gestures to real, practical measures to help indigenous people. We partner with indigenous people to secure economic participation and pursue opportunities. It's an economic imperative and, as I said before, the Premier has told us that it's a moral obligation that we have. We've already proven that through the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation and the litigation fund and our protocol agreements.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I'm glad to hear that the initiative is continuing and is part of the budget program. That initiative, actually, had three different parts to it: the introductory training, which is going on right now; and then there was a second part, which is continuous learning and exploration; and the third part, which was community learning and relationship building. Can you tell me if there are funds in the present budget or anticipated perhaps, if you want to talk about your projections, for the completion of the next few phases of the plan?

Mr. Wilson: At this point just part 1 is proceeding.

Mr. Feehan: So there are no monies in the budget to expand.

Mr. Wilson: Well, it's not in our budget, so I can't speak to their budget.

Mr. Feehan: So help me understand. Is the . . .

Mr. Wilson: That's the PSC budget. That's not our budget.

Mr. Feehan: It's not your budget, but is your ministry involved in the design and implementation of this program, as it was previously?

Mr. Wilson: We are directly involved, and part 1 is proceeding as we speak, actually.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. But you're not directly involved in the implementation of the next two phases.

Mr. Wilson: Not at this point.

Mr. Feehan: Not at this point. Okay. Thank you.

Moving on, I wanted to ask about another piece, Minister. Under proposal 5(a) of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples implementation program was a commitment to the enhancement of cumulative effects of resource development,

with an emphasis on cumulative impacts on treaty or aboriginal rights and land uses. Part of the fulfillment of that obligation was the regional cumulative effects management project in the Ministry of Environment and Parks. I see that that project has been reduced by approximately 40 per cent. Can you tell me if the reduction in the cumulative effects program was one that was advised on by this ministry?

Mr. Wilson: Thanks for the question. We have heard from the First Nations and the Métis settlements, and we do understand the critical importance of meaningful consideration. I've heard them talk before about the cumulative impacts on traditional land-use activities. We recognize the cumulative impacts on traditional land-use activity. That's an increasingly consistent concern raised by First Nations and Métis settlements in consultation. The government is committed to the regional land-use planning process. It's going to enable long-term management of cumulative effects while maintaining strong connections to indigenous values and to their land uses.

Mr. Feehan: Let me move on and ask a little bit about the renewable energy program that happened, Minister, in December 2018. The AESO announced the results of the second round of the renewable energy program, which was designed . . .

The Acting Chair: Sorry to interrupt again.

We'll go to the government side now, again, for 10 minutes.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can pick up back and forth with the minister if that's okay with him?

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Thank you. I'm going to be referring to page 130 of the budget estimates, specifically line 12. Are you ready there, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah.

Mr. Smith: Okay. On page 130 you reference the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. We talked a little bit about it today. But I can tell you this. When we got together before the election and we were talking about the kinds of policies that were going to be rolled out and the kind of campaign that we were going to have, when this idea of the Indigenous Opportunities Corporation came up, I thought it was a brilliant idea and I thought that it was exactly where we needed to move forward. Maybe you could, for Albertans today and for us, please outline how this budget line in your budget is going to be rolled out. It's a new program. So how is it going to roll out? What are the kinds of timelines that you're going to look at, the parameters for accessing and applying for this program? I've got another question after that, but I'd like you to just sort of outline for us how that's all going to roll out.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. As you know, we've got royal assent on our bill now, so our first initiative is to get the board selected. We're going through that selection process. People are going to start being interviewed very shortly. I think some have already been interviewed. It's going to be a competency board. These people are going to have to be highly educated; versed in banking, accounting, business experience; and we need a good cross-section of people from across the province. We want a diverse board. I mean, it's for indigenous people, so there should be a lot of indigenous people on it. You know, if we've got some good people that have good experience, they don't necessarily have to be indigenous, but I'd like to have a good cross-section there.

That'll be the first thing we'll be rolling out, getting the board in place. I'm hoping by, let's say, the end of November, first part of December we'll have the board selected to get them in place, and then they're going to be tasked with the job of selecting a CEO, somebody that's going to be able to manage the whole corporation. It's a billion dollars of taxpayers' money, so, I mean, this board has to be competent, and you have to be strong. We need somebody in there that really knows what they're doing to vet projects and make sure that we've got winners coming out of the gate.

Once they get the CEO selected, first part of the new year – we've already got an interim CEO in place, a staff member so that it didn't have any extra cost to it. We're just using somebody internal. There are already projects starting to come in through the door. We've encouraged companies and First Nations to come forward with ideas so that we can begin prescreening and get things in place, because come late winter, early spring, I want to see the first projects rolling out.

Alberta needs to get back on track. We need to get people working again. We need to get the energy working again. I mean, that was our platform: jobs and the economy. Let's get people out there. Let's get them working. That applies to everybody: First Nations, Métis, all of Alberta. This program will not only benefit Alberta; it benefits Canada. I mean, Canada is a net winner on everything that Alberta does, so it's important to get this project up and running as quick as we can. Even just to take it through legislation as fast as we did and to get the legislation passed this fall, I think it was Chief Billy Morin, he said: you didn't just sit around for months in committee; you actually went out there and you got it done. That's what this government is about. It's about getting it done. It's about action. It's about putting people to work.

Mr. Smith: I have really enjoyed getting to know Chief Billy, who's actually in my constituency.

This program isn't actually a grant program; it's a loan guarantee program. Could you explain how that works?

Mr. Wilson: We're trying to move beyond grants and get into longer, sustainable funding, is what we're looking at, and this is what this can provide. This can provide long-term, sustainable funding for communities into the future so they've got money to look after those socioeconomic programs and put their people to work.

What was your question?

Mr. Smith: Well, just that I don't believe you're actually handing money to the First Nations or the Métis settlements. This is a loan guarantee, I think, or something like that, similar to that.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. Like I said, what we've been told is: a hand up, not a handout. And that is exactly what this is. This is a hand up. We'll be backstopping projects.

Mr. Smith: Backstopping loans?

Mr. Wilson: Backstopping loans. Like I said, the First Nations and Métis settlements and Métis Nation, they don't really have the same access to capital that other companies might have the benefit of, just because of the relationship and the way things are set up, so when they have been getting loans, they've been high-interest loans. To take on a project of, you know, tens of millions if not hundreds of millions of dollars at a high-interest rate, it can take a viable project and make it not viable. By now having the strength of the Alberta government behind these loan applications, they'll be able to access capital at a much better rate and be able to participate in larger

projects at a rate that is manageable and become a profitable business and put people back to work.

Mr. Smith: Okay. I want to talk about that for a little bit here, because as soon as I heard of this, and through the Chair to you, I've been having conversations with several First Nations bands and representatives of Métis settlements as well about providing them with the opportunity to connect with an Alberta company. This speaks, I think, to something that you were talking about earlier: to repurpose some of the abandoned and discontinued wells that are no longer in production on their property and repurpose them for geothermal electricity. The average deep-well continuous loop geothermal project will keep drillers drilling for six to eight months.

11:25

Mr. Wilson: Wow.

Mr. Smith: All of the third-party contractors will be kept busy along with that. These geothermal projects will produce approximately three to four megawatts of energy, and will cost about \$40 million a project. Would this be the kind of project that First Nations and Métis could access through the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation?

Mr. Wilson: Well, let me start with saying that I'm really excited hearing about this programming. Abandoned wells are a huge issue in Alberta, and if we can actually put them to work and basically create power with zero carbon if I understand you correctly – is that right?

Mr. Smith: Yes. That's correct. Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: It's going to be business viable? It's going to create income?

Mr. Smith: This would be a corporation or a company that the First Nations would own. It would provide them with heat and electricity. It would allow them to partner with greenhouses, for instance. I was out visiting with the Paul First Nations, and the shock that I had when I went out there: this is a golden opportunity for them. I know they've got land set aside that they could use for a greenhouse operation. They're 40 kilometres away from Edmonton, so this heat and this electricity could be used to not only provide them with the heat and electricity they need for their band, but for a business. I just think it's a great opportunity, but I want to make sure that they have the opportunity through this program to be able to apply when you're ready to roll this out.

Mr. Wilson: First of all, of course, they would have to come through our vetting process to make sure it's viable and that there's a good business plan behind it. Then the board would actually make the decision as to whether it's a viable project or not.

But just getting back to the project: you talk about greenhouses. That was one thing I really heard when I was travelling around the province, especially even in my area, was food security. Food is a huge issue out there for some of the First Nations. If you actually had a way of creating income and creating electricity without creating carbon, and you're saying that could be used to heat a greenhouse?

Mr. Smith: Oh, absolutely. As a matter of fact, it will produce four times as much heat as it will electricity.

Mr. Wilson: Wow. I mean, that's a game changer. That would be something that could be set up across the whole province?

Mr. Smith: Absolutely.

Mr. Wilson: I was up in Fort Chipewyan this summer and it was pretty cool. We were sitting on the bank of the lake there, the Minister of Education and I, carving a rib off of a moose.

Mr. Smith: That's a picture.

Mr. Wilson: It was. It was amazing. But their access to fresh fruit and vegetables is very limited. They're looking at a couple of different ideas for a greenhouse operation. This would possibly allow them to get into food production as well.

Mr. Smith: They're telling me that they can produce the electricity at the price point for coal, so under the 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour. Their business plan actually envisions moving all the way up into the north of Canada where you would be able to do exactly what you've just said. They would be able to provide themselves with heat, electricity, and this company would like to see the greenhouses attached with it so that they can provide, you know, fruits and vegetables.

Mr. Wilson: And you're talking zero carbon?

Mr. Smith: It's zero carbon.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We're going to move over to the opposition for 10 minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I reference page 93 of the business plan for all three of the ministry outcomes with my questions, that lead up to issues around education of indigenous populations.

I know that the minister likes to talk about his commitment to reconciliation by calling it reconcili-action. I wonder if one of those action points would be supporting the right of indigenous people to collaborate in writing their own history and having oversight and input into ensuring that an indigenous perspective is embedded into the process when provincial school curriculum is being developed as part of your ministry outcomes in ensuring reconciliation. Is there any effort being expended by your ministry to ensure that the indigenous population is reflected in the curriculum?

Mr. Wilson: Well, I certainly support it in spirit, but it's not my ministry, so I can't . . .

Mr. Dach: I understand that, sir, but there are certainly three outcomes that would directly relate to that question, so I thought that you might have some input on that and suggest that your ministry is actually working towards influencing the Education ministry to ensure that the aboriginal perspective is embedded in that context.

Mr. Wilson: I work closely with the minister. Like I just said, the Minister of Education, she was with me touring northern Alberta this summer. I was just amazed at her openness to work with indigenous communities and hear their stories . . .

Mr. Dach: Well, I was wondering if she was actually going to embed the curriculum with an indigenous perspective, but it seems as though that's not the case.

Mr. Wilson: I never said that. I never said that at all.

Mr. Dach: I also wanted to ask about – considering, sir, that 30 per cent of some of the schools in my constituency are FNMI, First

Nations, students and that a large population of indigenous people live in the riding, I'm wondering about any initiative, once again with reference to your business plan on page 93 and opportunities for reconciliation, if there's any effort to try to improve the percentage of indigenous home ownership because most of those urban indigenous people, 50 per cent of those living off-reserve or living in urban areas, are renters. In my experience in 30 years as a realtor I didn't find a whole lot of participation in the housing market and purchasing homes. I'm wondering if there's any effort to follow up on that and see if there are ways that your ministry, as part of this reconcili-action, could facilitate urban indigenous home ownership and home purchasing versus maintaining that percentage of renters?

Mr. Wilson: Was your first question around education, or were we past that?

Mr. Dach: Pardon me?

Mr. Wilson: Was the first part of this question about education still, or are we past that? We're just into housing now?

Mr. Dach: Yeah, the first part was education. I'm moving on to the housing end of things now and asking if there's any effort on your part as far as reconciliation efforts to ensure that every pathway is made open that's possible and every support is given by your ministry to encourage home ownership and purchase by indigenous people who live in the cities.

Mr. Wilson: I've heard that brought up by a lot of different reserves, housing as a priority issue. It's been raised as an urban on/off – Indigenous Services Canada is responsible for infrastructure including housing of First Nations. Indigenous Relations, of course, we keep the appropriate ministers informed on all the nations' requests regarding . . .

Mr. Dach: So nothing direct. All right.
I'll pass my time to my colleague.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Minister. Just before I got cut off last time, I was just beginning to ask you a little bit about the renewable energy program, so maybe I'll start that again. You remember in December of 2018 the AESO announced the results of the second round of their renewable energy program, which was designed to include indigenous equity ownership components in the renewable energy projects. The result was an astonishing low price for Albertans and successful bids by First Nations in treaties 6, 7, and 8, including the Sawridge First Nation, Paul band First Nation, and the Kainai First Nation, for a total of 363 megawatts of energy. Our ministry was deeply involved in that project at the time, and I'm just wanting to know if you could tell me if the government will be honouring those three contracts for those three nations.

Mr. Wilson: Apparently that's with the department of Energy, honouring those three contracts.

Mr. Feehan: Yes. I am aware of that. Can you tell me at this time: does the Department of Energy inform the Ministry of Indigenous Relations?

Mr. Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Feehan: We were deeply involved in that for years. Ridiculous.

The Acting Chair: You'll have your opportunity to respond.
Go ahead.

Mr. Smith: I speak to 23(b)(i), "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." It's clear that this is the minister of indigenous affairs; this is not the Minister of Energy or parks and environment or the minister of any other department. To be asking him what another department is going to do, the decisions that they're going to be making, is off topic. I would respectfully say that he needs to get back on topic.

The Acting Chair: Okay.
Go ahead.

11:35

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will refer the member to page 95 of the Indigenous Relations business plan 2019-23, bottom of the page, second sentence: "The ministry is central to facilitating cross-government collaboration, responding to and reporting on major Indigenous policies and drivers." I'll further direct the members to the performance metrics of a "number of indigenous employment initiatives," and "average employment income . . ." at 1(a) and 1(c) and further argue that the renewable energy program fed into the achievement of both of those performance measures. The chair has established that querying the contents of the business plan is in fact in order. That is part of the standing orders. It's very clear that there is a link. While the minister may not be able to speak directly to the decisions being made, he can discuss his department's efforts with respect to crossgovernment collaboration and providing expert advice, guidance, and specialized knowledge to other government of Alberta ministries, which is also listed in outcome 2 of the business plan.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Yeah. There's no point of order here but, again, I'll caution the member. The minister had already answered the question, that that was under the purview of the Energy minister. If you're looking for another answer, I would suggest you ask a different question. Obviously, this was an issue where it was a different ministry in charge of the decision-making process. Of course, there's still an opportunity to ask questions under the business plan, but obviously decisions made under a different ministry require a different ministry to be here in the room to answer, and that's not happening.

Mr. Getson: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure if I can ask a question. A point of clarity?

The Acting Chair: You can add additional information to the discussion.

Mr. Getson: Just so we all don't shoot up the shot clock with points of order going back and forth and for my own edification if possible: the ministry is centrally facilitating crossgovernmental collaboration responding to any reporting on major indigenous policies and drivers. In the context of major, that would be the high-level items, I would assume. Once we start getting down into the weeds, then I think that steps out of the intent of the business plan if I was to objectively look at that. Again, I'm just trying to understand so we don't ask too many questions back and forth.

The Acting Chair: Okay. No. Thanks for that information. Again, I appreciate that, but we'll go back to my previous comments as far as that the minister has already answered the question, that this was under the Minister of Energy. I think that clarifies that for you. Obviously, if you want further information, then you need to go to the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Feehan: Minister, let me just ask you, then, whether or not you have any resources dedicated from your ministry to the design of a new REP program for the involvement of First Nations around the province.

Mr. Wilson: We're involved with REP 1 and REP 2.

Mr. Feehan: That's come to an end from your ministry's perspective?

Mr. Wilson: Yes. Yes.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that.

I would like to ask you a little bit about the full-time equivalent status of your department. Can you tell me, given that if you take out some of the flow-through money from the FNDF, the reduction in your ministry's budget, somewhere around 36 per cent from the previous years – and there are specific cuts, for example, to the First Nations and Métis relations of approximately 20 per cent and so on. It seems to me like there's a fair amount of cutting going on. You've indicated that the urban indigenous programs are being cut and that a number of other programs, which I suggested to you along the way, will either just be wrapped up from whatever work was done by the previous government and no new monies have been initiated such as the water tie-in. All of this would seem to indicate that there is a reduction in FTEs across the ministry, and I wonder if you can tell me how many FTEs across the ministry. Then I'll ask you specifically about different departments.

Mr. Wilson: Clearly, our government is on a pathway to balance, so we have had to make some strategic reductions. We have, as you know, one of the smallest ministries out there. We've got 230 full-time equivalents. We're going to be reducing that full-time equivalent count by 22 FTEs, or 10 per cent. Twelve of the FTE reductions consist of both management and nonmanagement positions. I was actually quite shocked when I first started that we had one manager for every two people, which I thought was incredible, so we'll be working at fixing that problem. As part of the cost-saving strategy to eliminate vacant positions for attrition, the ministry is undergoing internal reorganization. There are also 10 FTE reductions resulting from cancelling the climate change program. Employees there that occupied the 10 FTEs were redeployed to other vacancies. I'm not sure where you're getting your numbers from, but it's actually an 18 per cent decrease. But if you take out the climate initiative, you're actually looking at a result of a 16 per cent increase in budget funding for the 2019 estimate.

Mr. Feehan: If you take out the cuts, then there are no cuts. I appreciate your argument there, although my argument, of course, is that the 36 per cent is from the fact that the First Nation development money is not government money. It's flow-through money.

Mr. Wilson: And if we want to look at the \$1 billion backstop, I mean, that's a billion-dollar increase.

Mr. Feehan: Which you've indicated today is not actually posted anywhere in the government budget.

Mr. Wilson: It's there. That's a backstop. It's up to a billion dollars.

Mr. Feehan: It's not actually a billion dollars in existence.

Mr. Wilson: It's actually a billion-dollar backstop, actually a billion dollars.

Mr. Feehan: Back to the questions of the full-time equivalents, Minister. You've indicated that this department is losing approximately 10 per cent of its staff. Can you tell me if that is different than the number of FTEs across government? Is this ministry different than other ministries across government?

Mr. Wilson: I can't comment on other ministries, but I know my ministry was management heavy, so I looked at that right from day one and I thought: we have to rectify that. In private business – I've owned several businesses, and if I had that many managers, I mean, it just doesn't work.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. You're not aware if this is a particular hit on the indigenous community as opposed to other people? I appreciate that . . .

Mr. Wilson: It's not a hit at all. We're providing all the services. I'm just saying that maybe the previous minister may have overstaffed.

Mr. Feehan: Can I just get some clarity about where those FTE reductions are located? You said that 10 of the 22 are from the climate leadership, so that leaves us with another 12. Can you tell me if there are any reductions in terms of ministry support services, for example?

Mr. Wilson: It's generally across the department. It's mostly through attrition or vacant positions that weren't filled.

Mr. Feehan: Well, the mechanism is irrelevant. You're reducing it . . .

Mr. Wilson: It's across the board.

Mr. Feehan: . . . by another 12 across the board.

Mr. Wilson: If there was an opening, it wasn't filled. But all the departments are making sure that there's enough staff to make sure that things are being delivered properly.

Mr. Feehan: So there wasn't an administrative decision to actually . . .

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We'll move back to the government side of the House for 10 minutes.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Chair. I've got questions for the minister. I would like to have your permission to go back and forth with the minister.

The Acting Chair: Yeah. Go ahead. Minister, it's okay with me.

Mr. Singh: Through the chair to the minister, first of all, Minister, you and your team are doing great work . . .

Mr. Wilson: Thank you.

Mr. Singh: . . . helping build partnerships between indigenous communities, organizations, industries, and other levels of government. My question is in reference to page 130, line 3, of the estimates. There's an increase in funding for the indigenous women's initiatives. Can the minister explain how these initiatives will benefit from this increase?

Mr. Wilson: Thank you for the question. As you know, because I've spoken to it in the Legislature quite a bit, the women's initiatives are an important part of what we're working on there, so

that's why we've budgeted extra staff to work on the missing and murdered indigenous women's report. I was actually lucky enough to go to Ottawa this spring, and I received the report down there. I think this is where it all started. I sat with two women that had lost daughters. We sat for six hours, and we listened to stories one after another of people that had lost daughters and children. It was a very emotional time. Her name was Winnie. I'm not embarrassed we cried. We laughed a lot that day. At the end of the day she said to me: "Just please do something. You've started my healing process." For years she had just been walking. She says: I don't even feel human, but I feel hope that you're actually going to do something on this. I promised her that I'm going to do something about it. That's where it came from.

11:45

Like I say, if you walk through the Federal Building, you can't miss it. The Speaker was generous enough to allow us to display the regalia red dress that was made for us by the women down in the Awo Taan women's shelter down there. That's part of our whole healing process, where we started.

It's part of the action plans for the murdered and missing women. Actually, if you look on, I guess, page 199, 15.1, of the calls for action for all Canadians to start, it's that awareness and bringing that awareness to other people that this is actually happening and did happen. It's happening today. This summer when I was travelling up north, another woman went missing when we were up there. I mean, we've got to make a change some place, and if that's one thing that I can do, that's what I'm going to do.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Minister.

Through the chair to the minister, given budget restrictions I'm happy to see that the ministry is keeping the women's council on economic security. Can the minister please explain to the committee its value?

Mr. Wilson: We've got two councils. We've got the indigenous women's security council, and we've got the Métis Women's Economic Security Council, just an amazing group of women. These women all have business backgrounds – they've got MBAs, they're teachers, they're lawyers – and they're doing this for free. They're doing this to help their communities, so anything that we can do as a ministry to support them, I do it. Like I said, when I met with them, their response to me is: how can we help you? We talked a lot about that as to what their role would be. I'm going to try to meet with them as often as I can.

They're working with us on putting the report together for action plans for the murdered and missing women, but they're also working on other areas as far as racism and bullying, like, all the things that affect all communities. I mean, it's prevalent everywhere. To have a group of ladies out there that are – and our staff member Kristina is with us here; she works closely with them. I've just gotten to know them on such a personal basis and seen their work that they're doing out in the communities. Our staff is so dedicated to helping them. It's just an honour to be part of the whole thing and to see some of these action plans coming forward, and I'm really excited to see the report that they come forward with as to what action plans our government can take to implement the plans in the report.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Minister, for answering my questions. I'm sure that all Albertans are also enlightened and were able to get to see the picture about the topics I have asked about, which shows that the minister and his team are doing a great job and have very meaningful plans within the Indigenous Relations ministry.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Getson: Permission to go back and forth again as well?

Mr. Wilson: Okay.

Mr. Getson: Firstly, Minister, again, thank you. I'm going to mention the Paul band again. We seem to have the full-court press between a few of our MLAs on our side of the table.

Mr. Wilson: I love them. They're great people.

Mr. Getson: Well, it's good. It's the electoral boundaries, and we have trade routes and, obviously, folks in the communities back and forth and also have the Alexander and the Alexis in my area. One of the things out there that we notice: obviously, the fine work you did – at one point earlier on someone had asked me if the NDP did any good: I couldn't answer them; now I can – specifically on the indigenous files and the interaction with them, the water for life program. Credit to you, sir. Thank you so much for what you've started, and I'm really looking forward to us carrying on with a bunch of those initiatives. I appreciate that.

One of the other things that I noticed out there, too, was when we were talking about the new indigenous opportunities program. For me, that was a game changer coming from the energy side of things. You know, a little tongue in cheek here: we've taken a bunch of folks that were designed to be grant hunters, not an MLA or a red tape reduction minister but groups that were counselling those First Nation folks on how to get the best grants out there, and changed that mindset. When one individual is telling me about, "If we gave him a million dollars, they'd put up solar panels, and in 20 years they'd have a return on investment," I turned to Chief Tony and said, "Would you take that deal, or would you take a million bucks and do something else with it?" And he goes, "I'd invest it somewhere else; there's no profit in that." Again, it comes back to changing that paradigm. What can we do with the capital that best affects the communities being able to give it back? You know, the Paul band and Alexis band have done a great job with Backwoods Energy, et cetera. All of these things are really exciting.

I want to tie back, if I can, to the skilled trades, also tying in there giving meaningful work for these folks. If I can just jump back to the business plan – sorry for the preamble – page 94, 1.6. It says that there's going to be more funding to the employment partnerships budget. Where do we see that reflected? How does that work?

Mr. Wilson: Well, thanks for the comments. The employment partnerships program is actually receiving an additional \$1 million, and that's going to support labour and market research, strategic plans, and partnership development activities. Like I said, when I met with the federal minister this summer, Minister Bennett, I asked her if there was some way that they could help us with some of these programs, and this is one of the ways that they started. I'll be contacting her because they're re-elected, but I found her to be very open to helping indigenous people, especially some of our Métis settlements that are in dire need of infrastructure projects.

I'm hoping to set up, like, a trilateral where we can work with the federal government and find some additional funding for some of those projects as well. We're going to have a total of 21 agreement holders, and that's expected to increase to 22 in the coming months, up from 13 holders from the year prior. There'll be more projects funded this year overall, and each of our organizations will likely have one project funded because of the increase in the number of agreement holders.

Our staff will continue to support communities and organizations by providing referrals for any funding program that could support employment and training projects because training projects are so important. Like, in my area Maskwacis has got a great program set up there. Even just training and getting people a driver's licence is huge. They live literally five minutes up the road from Wetaskiwin, but to get to work if you don't have a driver's licence – that's huge, just getting stuff that we wouldn't even think about normally like access to transportation. That's why I've been working with the city of Wetaskiwin and area. They're looking at setting up a bus service. In my riding there are literally 18,000 people that live five to 10 minutes away from a city where they need employment.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We'll move back to the opposition caucus for just shy of seven minutes.

Mr. Feehan: Yeah. I just have a few minutes left, so kind of a random smattering of questions. Sorry. I'm going to indulge myself a little bit at the end. Just to follow up a little bit on that, the employment partnerships program. You indicated that there is a little over \$1 million. I didn't quite catch the amount of money. Is that all new federal dollars?

Mr. Wilson: The \$1.2 million is new, but there was already an existing \$2 million approximately in there.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. It's \$1.2 million, and that's all coming from the feds.

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

Mr. Feehan: There isn't any addition from the province of Alberta into that program?

Mr. Wilson: No.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Great. I'm glad the feds are stepping up. They don't always do that with indigenous people, as I'm sure you've learned by now.

Mr. Wilson: I found that, like, the two ministers – they have two federal ministers, as you know. I shouldn't say this about Liberals, but they were actually nice – okay; I won't even go there – actually not bad people. They're open to working with us to help increase some of the funding and work on these trilateral agreements, especially with our Métis settlements. As you know, Alberta is the only province that actually has Métis settlements, and we've got eight of them out there. I think that if you take their land base, it's equivalent to the size of Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Feehan: On that, I understand that the federal government backed out of their agreement with the Métis settlements. Is that not right?

Mr. Wilson: I haven't heard that. I work very closely with the president, Herb Lehr, as you know. He calls me dad because of the relationship with the government. We've become actually great friends. I work closely with him on that, and he's asked me to help him go to the federal government to achieve some more funding there. They have some real infrastructure problems out there. We helped them this summer. As you know, in the big fires up at Paddle Prairie, we lost a lot of houses. I was lucky enough . . .

Mr. Feehan: I was going to ask specifically about that. Is the provincial government going to be providing any kind of resource or help in rebuilding those houses?

11:55

Mr. Wilson: I'm working with the Minister of Seniors and Housing on that right now. What we were able to do is that there was some additional funding in the settlements themselves, and we were able to transfer some funding very quickly to help them. I think that there were 17 houses that were lost. When I was up there, it was really nice to see, actually, houses coming up out of the ashes. I just talked to one of the ladies I've gotten to know very well up there on council, and she said that now her sister is one of the last ones to move in. They got 13 people back in houses for the winter. Some people decided not to come back to the community. They moved out of the community, so they're staying out of the community. We basically got housing for all the people that wanted to come back. Their houses have been reconstructed. It was amazing to see it happen so fast, and it was a fun project to be part of. Getting to know the community up there: just great people, hard-working people.

Mr. Feehan: Is there a particular fund that that came from? Is that coming from the ministry? If it's coming from another ministry, I'm not supposed to ask about that.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. It was their funds, but of course, because of the relationship, we have to replace them.

Mr. Feehan: From the LTA, then?

Mr. Wilson: The future fund, I believe.

Mr. Feehan: Oh, the future fund. Right. Okay. I should ask a little bit about that. Has there been any decision to increase monies in the future fund at all or the LTA?

Mr. Wilson: Well, they've still got money there at this point, so it's in the future. The future fund is in the future.

Mr. Feehan: Right. So this budget doesn't include any changes to either the future fund or the LTA?

Mr. Wilson: Not at this point, no.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. I know that two members have asked about the Paul band a little bit, and I guess I'm also very concerned about them. I know their circumstances as well. Following up on their questions, they were receiving monies from the coal transition fund. Of course, that was being funded through the carbon levy, and that's now extinct. Can you tell me if the Paul band will be continuing to receive any assistance during, well, the transition out of coal?

Mr. Wilson: What we're looking at with them is that we've set up – of course, we've been talking about it a lot – the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. I know they've got some projects that they're looking at, and I'll be working closely with them to bring those projects forward and get them involved in becoming partners in prosperity with all of Alberta.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. I'd like to pass on my last two minutes.

Ms Phillips: Just quickly, there is \$4.7 million allocated within Labour's budget, which was a carry-over from previous coal transition funds, and the Paul band benefited from some of those. Can the department follow up in an undertaking as to whether those are continuing? That's the first request for a written undertaking prior to – we vote on the estimates on November 19.

The second request for an undertaking that I'd like is a list of the 11 projects that are cancelled under the urban indigenous initiatives program, how much, what they were for, and which organizations received them.

Thank you.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. Could I just get you to go – just the two points again, the \$4.7 million from . . .

Ms Phillips: Well, there's a \$4.7 million allocation within Labour for the coal transition programs that were under way. Paul band was a beneficiary of one of them. The query is, then: will those programs continue for the Paul band, again, part of this crossministry collaboration? There was a specific program that was put together through Indigenous Relations as a subset of that \$4.7 million ongoing program for communities that were affected both by the 2012 phase-out of 12 of 18 plants and the remaining eight plants, that were to be running between 2030 and 2062.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. Good questions. I'll have to have one of the staff check with Labour to see where that's at.

Mr. Feehan: You can provide those later.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah.

Mr. Feehan: I have one minute, so I'm going to ask a totally indulgent question here for myself. One of the projects we were looking at is a modification of the South Saskatchewan regional plan to allow Eden Valley to build a gas station and other businesses on the highway in that area, and I'm wondering if you can just tell me if there's any advancement on the potential of them getting that moderation to the plan so that they can build businesses, which is right in line with what you're talking about. We don't have time for your answer, obviously, so perhaps you can have someone from the department fill me in at a later time.

Mr. Wilson: Of course. Yeah. I appreciate your concern on that.

Mr. Feehan: One of those many projects we were working on. I'd just like to know where it's going.

I see that we're out of time, so I'll turn back to the chair.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Five seconds. Any comments?

Mr. Wilson: Thanks for the great questions, everybody.

The Acting Chair: Good job. Thank you very much.

I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded. I would like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet next on Thursday, November 7, at 8 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

