



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
First Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Resource Stewardship

Indigenous Relations  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 11, 2025  
3:30 p.m.

Transcript No. 31-1-15

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 31st Legislature  
First Session**

**Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC), Chair  
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP), Deputy Chair  
Loyola, Rodrigo, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP),\* Acting Deputy Chair

Al-Guneid, Nagwan, Calgary-Glenmore (NDP)  
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)  
Boitchenko, Andrew, Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)  
Calahoo Stonehouse, Jodi, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Dyck, Nolan B., Grande Prairie (UC)  
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP)  
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)  
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP)\*\*  
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)

\* substitution for Heather Sweet

\*\* substitution for Nagwan Al-Guneid

**Also in Attendance**

Arcand-Paul, Brooks, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)

**Support Staff**

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Law Clerk
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Executive Director of Parliamentary Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Abdul Bhurgri	Research Officer
Rachel McGraw	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Christina Steenbergen	Supervisor of Communications Services
Amanda LeBlanc	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

## **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

### **Participants**

Ministry of Indigenous Relations

Hon. Rick D. Wilson, Minister

Thomas Djurfors, Assistant Deputy Minister, Consultation, Land and Policy

Don Kwas, Assistant Deputy Minister, First Nations and Metis Relations

Kristina Midbo, Director, Indigenous Women's Initiatives

Donavon Young, Deputy Minister



3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

[Mr. Rowswell in the chair]

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

**The Chair:** I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table. My name is Garth Rowswell. I'm the MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright and the chair of the committee. We will begin on my right.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** MLA Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. Good afternoon, everyone.

**Mr. Yao:** Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Dyck:** Nolan Dyck, MLA for Grande Prairie.

**Mr. Hunter:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. Grant Hunter, MLA for Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Boitchenko:** Good evening. Andrew Boitchenko, Drayton Valley-Devon.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm Rick Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations. I'm joined by my deputy minister, Donavon Young; our assistant deputy minister of financial services, Shakeeb Siddiqui; assistant deputy minister of First Nations and Métis relations, Don Kwas; and the amazing executive director of Indigenous women's initiatives, Kristina Midbo.

Thank you.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** [Remarks in Cree] MLA Brooks Arcand-Paul, Edmonton-West Henday.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** [Remarks in Cree] MLA Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse, Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Mr. Sabir:** Irfan Sabir, MLA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

**Member Loyola:** Loyola, Edmonton-Ellerslie and deputy chair.

**The Chair:** I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: hon. Mr. Sabir for Ms Al-Guneid and Member Loyola for Ms Sweet as deputy chair.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of the meeting can be accessed by the Legislative Assembly website. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the main estimates for the ministry of Indigenous affairs shall be considered for three hours. Standing Order 59.01 sets out the process for consideration of the main estimates in legislative policy committees. Suborder 59.01(6) sets out the speaking rotation for this meeting. The speaking rotation chart is available on the committee's internal website, and hard copies have been provided to the ministry officials at the table. For each segment of the meeting blocks of speaking time will be combined

only if both the minister and the member speaking agree. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the main estimates schedule and the committee will adjourn. Should members have any concerns regarding speaking times or the rotation, please e-mail or message the committee clerk about the process.

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 a break? I guess not. Okay.

Ministry officials who are present may, at the discretion of the minister, address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting.

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.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the block of speaking time and the overall three-hour meeting clock will continue to run.

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

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both the questions and the answers without interruption during estimates debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, including instances when speaking time is shared between a member and the minister.

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

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you again, Mr. Chair and committee members for calling this meeting. It's my pleasure to discuss Indigenous Relations' budget estimates for the '25-26 fiscal year. First, I want to acknowledge that we are gathered here on Treaty 6 territory, which has been home to First Nations people for countless generations. I also recognize the Métis people, who have a deep connection with this land.

Before we begin, I also would like to introduce the other members of my team who are with me in the gallery: my chief of staff, who you probably know, Riley Braun; my press secretary, Callum Reid; ministerial assistant, Kaylee Townend; assistant deputy minister of consultation, land, and policy, Thomas Djurfors; finance director, Howard Wong; and communications director, Chas Anderson.

Budget 2025 is a responsible plan that meets the challenges of our growing province, and it will help Indigenous Relations sustain and build on the progress that we've made with our partners. By providing steady funding to our ministry, Budget 2025 gives us the ability to continue strengthening relationships with Indigenous peoples and working together to improve social and economic outcomes.

This budget maintains funding for all of our major grant programs, including \$10 million for the Aboriginal business investment fund, or what we call ABIF, which we doubled in size over the previous two budgets. The ABIF program provides capital grants to Indigenous community-owned businesses so they can invest in the equipment or infrastructure needed to continue to thrive and create jobs. Since 2014 ABIF has supported more than 100 projects with more than \$58 million in grants, helping create

nearly 1,000 permanent jobs for Indigenous people in Alberta. Jobs change lives, and that's a big part of what economic reconciliation is all about, which is exactly what the ABIF program is intended to do.

Budget 2025 also maintains nearly \$8 million in support for Indigenous-led projects through the Indigenous reconciliation initiative and the community support fund, both of which we launched just two years ago. The community support fund, or CSF, provides \$4 million each year to support Indigenous-led initiatives that address violence and increase the safety and economic security of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited plus people. Through the CSF we support projects that are making a profound difference in communities. This includes everything from healing retreats to educational programs and emotional support groups, and we're proud of the projects we're supporting through the CSF.

The same goes for the Indigenous reconciliation initiative, or what we call the IRI. The IRI has a budget of nearly \$4 million per year for Indigenous-led reconciliation initiatives through cultural and economic funding streams. Sixty-five IRI grants were approved over the past fiscal year, supporting a wide variety of projects from cultural celebrations to strategic business planning support.

It's been wonderful to watch the CSF and the IRI grant programs blossom and see the Indigenous-led initiatives they have supported come to life. They're making a real difference, and with our suite of grant programs we've created pathways for Indigenous businesses and organizations to grow and move from one economic support to another.

We've seen some impressive examples of communities moving from developmental funding through the economic stream of the IRI to larger ABIF grants once the projects are ready to break ground. There are a few examples that come to mind, like the joint venture between the Whitecourt Isga Tourism Association and the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation. They're building a teepee village up in Carson-Pegasus provincial park that's going to anchor Indigenous-led ecotourism initiatives centred around traditional learning sessions with Nakota knowledge keepers.

In 2023-24 this project received an \$83,000 IRI grant that supported strategic planning, creation of a governance structure, and a marketing plan, among other foundational pieces to help get this project off the ground. This initial funding set the stage, but now we are proud to continue supporting this exciting project with an ABIF grant of more than \$530,000 to help build the teepee village and surrounding amenities and the infrastructure. I'm eager to see the progress they make this year, and I'm so happy that Alberta's government has been there to help along the way.

Another example of an Indigenous community that's taken the stepping stone approach to our grant programs is Paddle Prairie Métis settlement. In 2023-24 Paddle Prairie received a \$100,000 IRI grant for a feasibility study about a potential new farming project in the community. The study showed this initiative was viable and helped identify suitable land and a path forward, so later that year they applied for and received a \$750,000 ABIF grant to help buy the equipment they needed to clear the land, and now we're pleased to be providing Paddle Prairie with further ABIF support in 2024-25 to buy root raking and mulching equipment so they can begin seeding. This project is going to be a game changer for this Métis community, creating jobs, revenue streams, and providing food security.

These are just two of the many outstanding projects we're funding in 2024-25. I'm looking forward to announcing the others soon and to opening a new round of applications later this spring.

### 3:40

Now moving from grant programs to our flagship Crown corporation, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation or

the AIOC. Budget 2025 increases the AIOC spending authority by \$500,000 so it can hire more team members to help capitalize on its expanded mandate to support more Indigenous investments in a wider range of industries. The AIOC helps create long-term revenue streams for Indigenous communities by providing loan guarantees for large investments. It is a major part of our focus on economic reconciliation, which is about ensuring Indigenous peoples are included at every level of the economy as owners, as workers, and as partners. I'm eager to see the progress AIOC will make this year, with potential new deals to be announced in the near future.

Budget 2025 is also helping us maintain momentum by providing stable funding for the protocol and relationship agreements we've established with Indigenous governments and communities and organizations all across Alberta. Stability is the key to building long-lasting beneficial partnerships and to making true progress, and this budget delivers on that. It also maintains support for the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit Plus People and our councils on Indigenous women's economic security.

Budget 2025 will also ensure that Indigenous communities continue to participate in consultations on land use and major development projects through our consultation capacity grants, which remain fully funded. This ensures that Indigenous communities can meaningfully participate in Alberta's consultation process, which is critical for ensuring legal certainty around the Crown's duty to consult and creating a stable regulatory environment to stimulate economic activity.

Budget 2025 also maintains our many other programs and services, ranging from internal programs like the Indigenous learning initiative, which educates public servants about Indigenous perspectives and experiences, to external supports like our ongoing financial commitment to the native friendship centres, which are there to provide critical services and supports for Indigenous people living in urban and rural municipalities all across Alberta.

Despite the steady funding, every budget includes fluctuations that are out of our control, and you may have noticed our statement of operations expenses has risen by nearly \$18 million compared to last year's budget. This is mainly due to an expected increase of \$19.2 million compared to a budget estimate last year in gaming revenue from government-owned slot machines in First Nations casinos. This revenue goes into the First Nations development fund – you'll hear me talk about this later – that we call the FNDF, and this is then disbursed to First Nations to support economic, social, and community development projects in First Nations communities all across Alberta.

It's important to note that this is an estimate. Gaming revenue forecasts are provided by Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis, and they are based on consumer trends, which means they can change over relatively short periods of time. When more people use slot machines in First Nations casinos, the FNDF has more money to spend. This makes it difficult to predict the size of the FNDF exactly, but we expect to receive \$161 million for the program in 2025-26. While we may not be able to control these estimates, I can assure you we will continue to get every cent out of the door and back into First Nations to support development priorities that are set out by chiefs and councils.

This considerable increase to the FNDF is partially off-set by a few smaller decreases, including a \$780,000 decline in land and legal settlements funding, and that's just related to the ongoing scheduling and completion of land remediation work. Another significant change is a \$500,000 decrease in federal funding for the employment partnership program, which supports training and employment opportunities for Indigenous workers. That decline is

out of our hands, unfortunately – EPP is funded by Ottawa – but we still expect to receive just over \$4 million for this program, and we will ensure that every dollar flows to eligible recipients.

Overall, Budget 2025 provides Indigenous Relations with consistency, and consistency is vital to the work we do and the partnerships we are building and strengthening with Indigenous peoples, communities, and organizations. By maintaining the increases we've seen over the past few years, this budget lets us build on the groundwork we've laid in collaboration with our partners. There are some very exciting projects just around that corner that I can't wait to announce, and I'm very much looking forward to the year ahead and seeing all the beneficial initiatives that we can support.

Supporting strong and vibrant Indigenous communities and promoting social and economic opportunities is central to my ministry's mandate. Together with Indigenous peoples across Alberta we're committed to working towards . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will now begin the question-and-answer portion of the meeting. For the first 60 minutes members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block both in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams.

The first member that wants to speak: did you want to share time?

**Member Arcand-Paul:** It's to the minister, if he chooses to share or block time.

**The Chair:** Okay. Minister, what would you rather . . .

**Mr. Wilson:** I prefer block time.

**The Chair:** Block time. Okay.

Given that, Member, you have up to 10 minutes to ask questions or make comments to the minister. Once you have done so, the minister will have up to 10 minutes to respond.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** [Remarks in Cree] Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do also want to acknowledge that we are here on Treaty 6 territory, territory that was shared between my people, the Nehiyawak, with the Blackfoot, Saulteaux, the Dene, the Haudenosaunee, the Métis, and many diverse Indigenous people who now call this place home.

I'd like to thank the elders who pray over these discussions, and I'd like to thank the creator for giving us another day to do good work for Albertans. I'd like to thank the staff, the deputy minister, and the minister for being here today. While this work is important work that we are undertaking, I want to remind us all that we have a duty to represent all Albertans, and that includes Indigenous peoples in Alberta, whose sovereignty remains strong and is acknowledged through treaty.

At the outset of my questions, I'd like to, through you, Mr. Chair, also remind those in the room today that there are 46 First Nations in Alberta, eight Métis settlements, and two credibly asserted Métis communities in this province. While I appreciate that there have been inroads with some nations in this province, I'm saddened to see the same status quo with the same nations repeated in funding announcements from this government. I would urge you, through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister, that this be rectified through this budget and moving forward.

On page 93 of the ministry business plan '25-28 Indigenous Relations states that it will "work with Indigenous people, communities, organizations and other stakeholders to support economic development and social and cultural revitalization of Indigenous communities." It does not list one or two nations. It

stipulates the broader obligations it has to all First Nations and Métis communities in this province.

And I will take the time to also note in the strategic plan, page 27: this government knows that there are well over 55 First Nations, Métis settlements, credibly asserted Métis communities in this province, and many, many Indigenous peoples in this province who are not connected to any of these communities. These are especially so in our urban and rural centres. But for the purpose of this question, I bring up this number as the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation boasts to have supported 43 communities across Alberta through its loan guarantee program, which I will discuss in greater detail during these estimate proceedings in my next block.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I ask this ministry whether this budget is aware that there is more than a small handful of Indigenous nations which need programs in this province like treatment centres, health centres, and other social supports for their people. This is especially so given the Premier's message in the outset of the strategic plan, which highlights the rapid growth of our province over the past two years. If provincial roads, schools, and hospitals are feeling the strain, you can only imagine what the nations are feeling, because I'd like to remind folks our nations are feeling all of these same pressures as non-Indigenous peoples, oftentimes more acutely because of the dispossession of our people's land from colonial governments.

Mr. Chair, through you to the minister – and bear with me; I'm setting the context for the question which I will tie to this very important budget, that the government has tabled a few weeks ago – I'd like to spend this first block talking about a major theme that popped out at me, reconciliation. On page 27 of the strategic plan and pages 91 and 95 of the ministry business plan, reconciliation was highlighted as a priority of this budget, and I raise this intentionally because of these budget items. I had the deep honour of visiting many beautiful First Nations and Métis communities as well as hosting various stakeholder groups to discuss reconciliation, which would put Alberta on the map for advancing reconciliation through the Reconciliation Implementation Act. I did this work in collaboration and in true partnership with First Nations and Métis leadership, as treaty and the legislative framework requires respectively. In doing this work, I was able to pull together the expertise of Indigenous leadership and their experts in developing a framework for this government to advance reconciliation in a meaningful and deep way.

3:50

Now, thank you, Mr. Chair; I'll turn to the budget documents. While I look at this budget and the 2.2 per cent real cut to the small budget of \$230 million for this ministry, as evidenced on page 129 in the '25-26 estimates, and in light of the tariffs being threatened by the President of the United States, it is difficult to see that the pathway of reconciliation is going to be stable or predictable, given the Premier's intimations in the introduction of the strategic plan around our rapid pace of growth: the pressures on public services, infrastructure, and programs and the strain on same.

First Nations and Métis governments are no different, Mr. Chair, and for this I am concerned that without any significant increases Indigenous peoples are going to feel these cuts very deeply because of this government's inability to adequately respond to those tariff threats threatened by the United States. If the Reconciliation Implementation Act is passed, which I urge all members in this meeting today to support because it was conducted in partnership with Indigenous nations and is a pathway for this government to do what is right – but with this budget, it does not look like the important work that must be done will, in fact, be done. It will be

status quo and Indigenous peoples in Alberta deserve so much better.

My question to the minister, through you, Mr. Chair, is what exactly the rationale was for not increasing the budget for reconciliation, when this government has lauded itself in its efforts for reconciliation. And I'm not just talking about economic reconciliation, which I do acknowledge is one important component of many areas of work that this government has to do.

In particular, again, through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister and his deputies, the Indigenous reconciliation initiative is poised to receive \$3.9 million for the business plan '25-28 on page 95 and the minister's comments a few moments ago. While I recognized that last year, this number remained stagnant again this year. Through you, Mr. Chair, can the minister explain why this has not increased, given the work that remains to be done? Again, I link this back to the work I've done for the Reconciliation Implementation Act, which would require much more in terms of support for reconciliation outside of the areas that solely relate to enhancing culture, traditions, and languages, which are also critically important.

Reconciliation is a much bigger responsibility than this \$3.9 million can support. It includes areas that require much more investment such as Justice, particularly when you're addressing offenders with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or in child and family services to bring the amount of Indigenous children in care down rather than up, which this government has done. Sadly, this \$3.9 million will certainly not do that, and I'm looking at the crossministry work you must do, minister, as stipulated in your own business plan on page 91.

The Indigenous kids in care have gone up to 72 per cent in the last year and that number is unconscionable. We should be doing more in terms of reconciliation to bring this number down. The quote on page 91 says that the "department provides guidance, specialized knowledge and expert advice to other ministries . . . Indigenous Relations' work involves leading the facilitation of cross-government" programs, services, and initiatives, including priorities such as child and family services. I'm focusing this on child and family services because I have other questions about crossministry matters in a different block.

I'd like to ask, through you, Mr. Chair, that the ministry also consider, in conjunction with all budget documents, including the fiscal plan, government strategic plan, and estimates, to commit to this work. Further, through you to the minister, will you push at your cabinet table for this much-needed, crossministry reconciliation work in areas such as Justice, child and family services, and Health?

Mr. Chair, through you to the minister, how do Albertans expect that reconciliation will be accomplished with only \$3.9 million and no corresponding investments in any of these crossministries that the ministry is supposed to be working with? I've gone through these documents, and Justice does not have a budget line item for considering offenders with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, per the calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And I won't broach the subject of reducing the amount of Indigenous peoples incarcerated because I do not think this government is prepared for that conversation yet.

Further, it is heartening to hear between 1,500 and 2,625 Alberta public service employees participated in the ILI. My question through you, Mr. Chair: what about the balance of the Alberta public service? Are the 29,550 FTEs in the APS all trained through the ILI? Is there a plan to ensure the balance of these individuals receive this training? I can accept an answer in writing if the minister prefers.

Thank you. Those are my questions for the first block.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

You have 10 minutes to respond, Minister.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thanks so much for the great questions. That's right on the mark with what we're doing, so I'm excited to tell you some of the things that are happening there, especially around reconciliation and working with the other ministries.

I don't know if you're aware, but we set up a few years ago, when I got started with this great group of people here – we call them protocol tables. I was finding that it was difficult for me to interact with other ministries. Like, I was the minister of everything to the First Nations and Métis people. I was transportation, I was community services, I was children's services, and it was difficult. It was a little bit overwhelming, to be honest with you, but I've been lucky enough to get a great parliamentary secretary now, who happens to be with us, that is helping me out and doing a lot of visits to communities and doing great work with the Métis settlements, I might add.

What we do around these protocol tables – and we're just actually starting that with the Métis groups now, too. I'll bring in the other ministers and invite them to sign on on our protocol tables because if it's just me, something is going to get lost along the line. Now, what we do is that we have our great technicians, a lot of these people that are here, work with the technicians from the various First Nations and Métis communities. Say, a big issue might be policing. Then we'll bring in the Justice minister and public safety, and we'll set up a protocol table just around that. We'll bring in environment – that's always a big one – energy, and we'll set up these protocol tables. Now, the technicians from the First Nation or Métis settlement have their subject matter expertise, and I have my people, and they can see what the problem is and work towards a solution.

What we do then with these protocol tables: each minister will come in, and the ministries themselves provide additional funding. You may not know this. Let's say that I bring transportation in to work at one of these protocol tables. They will provide the First Nation with up to \$200,000 so that it will help off-set the costs to the communities so that they are not using their own funds to work with these people.

This has been very successful, and we've been able to get some great projects going like the highway up north that just got announced. That came from the protocol tables. That's how this all started. Siksika, we just had them in our office here two days ago, and a big issue with them is around policing and around courts. We have a whole protocol table around that. We'll get together. I'll have all the various ministers in the room, and part of the protocol table as well is that they get an opportunity to sit face-to-face with each minister and not just me. Now they can work directly with the other ministers. Plus the Premier has agreed to meet with them a minimum of once a year, each group. That's a big commitment on her part to meet with all these different groups.

We'll get everybody at the table. We'll decide on how we're going to approach these protocol tables, and then we sign off on it. Every minister signs off. The First Nation or Métis community will sign off, and we have an actual protocol agreement on how to move forward. Like I say, some of the stuff that's come out of there is – oh, my goodness. We actually signed one with Tsuu T'ina. They took a buffalo hide and they etched the agreement on the buffalo hide. Donavon's keeping it in his office. We got to get that thing mounted; it's pretty cool. We have a whole agreement on a buffalo hide, which is very sacred, as you know, to the Indigenous people. It lays out on there how we're going to work together throughout the year and how funding will flow through.



By doing that, everything from, of course, the missing and murdered Indigenous women to – transportation is always a big item, especially up north with the Métis communities, say, Fox Lake, where they had all the fires and that kind of stuff. Now our people can work with them to see where we can do everything, even, I'm thinking, with Minister Loewen, around fire, how we can protect the communities, fireguarding them.

We talked about Paddle Prairie earlier, their farming, how they're going to move forward. The Métis communities have over a million acres of land between them, 1.25 million acres of land, so there's a lot of land that could be utilized. They haven't been doing too much with it other than forestry up to this point, but Paddle Prairie came up with the idea – that's some of the best soil in the province up there – that they should get into the farming business. They decided that not only does that create income from the farming, but that's also going to create fireguards around their communities. Some of these communities, as you know, are very remote up there, and if you've got a community that's situated right in the middle of the bush, when these fires hit, it's scary stuff. I get calls in the middle of the night: "Minister, help." It's all hands on deck. We just go to work. I got a great team here. We start getting the safety people out there and getting people evacuated.

4:00

That all kind of came from these protocol tables that we developed. That's how we work with all the other ministries. That's been, probably, one of the most successful things we've done. What do you think, Donavon? Yeah. I would call it a foundation issue with us. Like, it's a way to move forward rather than just getting together and we sit around the table and then talk, and then I leave and they leave and nothing happens. Now the people get to work, roll up their sleeves, and actually get the work done. I really would like to talk to you more about that sometime, just so you can see how the whole project comes together.

Around reconciliation, as you know, you hear me say reconciliation. I didn't make up that word. I borrowed it from Dr. Wilton Littlechild. He said I can use it, so that's why I use it. He gave me permission. He used to call me when I first got in here, and his secretary, Bobbi – this is going to make me cry; sorry – she passed this year. She was an amazing lady. She would literally call me up after I'd make a tough decision, and she'd say: well, Minister, that's really nice, but what's your action on this? So that's where we came up with the whole reconcili-action. God bless Bobbi. She was a great person. I don't know if you knew her or not, but she was amazing.

I've lost her this year, but Dr. Littlechild still calls me up and he says: Minister, we need to have a meeting. When the doctor calls, I answer. I've got a meeting coming up with him right away talking around reconciliation and how we're moving forward with a lot of our projects.

That's where our team came up with the idea of a reconciliation garden. We worked with a group of elders. As you know, we opened it a couple of years ago there. I think that was one of the most successful things we had done around reconciliation. We created this place for Indigenous people to come to. It's their place. They can come and can make an offering or see the monument that was made there. I think Stew Steinhauer calls it Mother Earth circling. It's a little baby that's being held by Mother Earth. That's been, I think, a really important thing we've done. That's part of the calls to action on truth and reconciliation, to erect monuments, and that's why we did that.

Now I've got a group working out of Calgary, down by Fish Lake park there. They want to create a reconciliation garden down there. We're working with a group down there. They got off to a bit of a

rough start. They were not working with the elders, and I said: nothing happens without the elders. Then they brought in just the Blackfoot elders. I said: "Well, this is not just Blackfoot country. We've got Tsuu T'ina. We've got Stoney Nakoda. Let's get everybody at the table."

So with the help of a young girl down there – I don't know if you know her, Stephanie Eagletail. She's a fashion designer, does all the work for Ashley Callingbull, actually, who won Miss Universe Canada this year. Then she competed in Miss Universe. I think she came in number 8 on that. She was wearing some of her clothing that Stephanie makes. I don't know if you've seen these coats that they make out of the blankets. She'll make a coat out of it. Not from her, but I got one from Leonard Saddleback. That's what Ashley wore in one of her fashion contests down there and did very well in it.

Anyway, Stephanie has been great. She was able to bridge between the Blackfoot and Tsuu T'ina and the Stony Nakoda, which is not always that easy to do. But she was able to get everybody together, so now we're working on how we can develop one of these reconciliation gardens down in the Treaty 7 area. We're pretty excited that we can hopefully get working on that this year and create another garden for southern Alberta where we can hold events. In June there are a lot of events that come forward, National Indigenous Peoples Day. So we can do one in northern and southern Alberta. We're excited to get that going. That's part of the whole reconciliation journey that I've been on.

Some of the grants you talked about: we talked about the IRI grant and some of our ABIF grants, which, like you said, are economic, which are important. But, you know, what I find with the Indigenous people, the things that I get the most compliments on or thanks for is the stuff around the cultural. That's why we came up with what we call the community support grant. I had groups coming to me that wanted some help with the different projects.

I think one of them started with the YWCA. They came to us looking for a grant. They put together a camp for kids. They shouldn't have to have this big of a camp but a camp for kids that have siblings or parents that have lost people to missing and murdered Indigenous women. They set up a camp just for these kids so they've got a safe place to come to. They can get together with other kids and feel normal again. I didn't have a grant for that. I always come to Donavon and I say, "Buddy, I need some dough." We went to cabinet. We put together the IRI grant. That's where we're able to fund that from now. The YWCA, that's one of my pet projects because they started this camp for Indigenous kids that have . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now go to the second 10-minute block. Go ahead.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I get started, I want to acknowledge that we did all lose the late Bobbi Herrera. She was a true giant, although maybe not physically in stature. She was a wonderful human being, who was a firecracker and did so much for our communities and for this province.

My next set of questions relates to – you guessed it, Mr. Chair – consultation as well as the AIOC. The Aboriginal consultation office received a 2.1 per cent real cut in this year's budget, in the budget estimates '25-26 on page 129. The members in this room have heard me and Indigenous leadership loud and clear that this government's work in consultation is paltry at best. This government has sadly not accomplished what it is legally bound to do in so many different areas. The most recent was raised as a concern by the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation due to a proposed AI data centre, where it was not only alleged but confirmed by the

developer himself on Fox News and from the Premier's own lips that the AI data centre at wonder valley was greenlit by this government.

Other ministers of this government have openly admitted that their offices have gone on to help with the licensing and regulatory processes for this developer. Where in this budget will consultation be captured if this budget decreased by a 2.1 per cent real cut from the Aboriginal consultation office? Through you, Mr. Chair, can you confirm whether this cut was a result of the loss of personnel, and if so which position or positions? I'm happy to get that answer in writing if it's unable to be answered today.

Further in the strategic plan, page 10, through you, Mr. Chair, did the minister encourage his colleagues prior to this budget being tabled to also keep Indigenous consultation in mind when it came to the Alberta artificial intelligence data centre's strategy? This, coupled with the current budget, would leave one to think that if the province is moving to include more projects such as AI data centres, that consultation will be heavily required for the effects these projects will have not only on the land but our very precious water and our treaty rights. Through you to the minister, water is life, and it is not something my relatives will be giving up as willingly as this government is in this budget or at any time.

What is also concerning in that same strategic plan, Mr. Chair, through you to the minister: why was the very first mention of Indigenous peoples in this province made on page 11 of the strategic plan to "standing up for Alberta's natural resources"? In particular, why were First Nations, Métis settlements, and credibly asserted Métis communities only included as a facilitated participant in the province's natural resource development sector rather than as a partner under treaty where legal duties exist, per this budget, as referenced at page 11 of the strategic plan?

Further, through you, Mr. Chair, can the ministry elaborate on who the \$90 billion of economic activity was going to enrich? I sure hope it was not this government's buddies, but I suppose that in this era of corrupt care anything is possible.

On the very next page of the strategic plan, Mr. Chair, page 12, the government states:

Alberta is committed to continuing to work with Indigenous communities and organizations on environmental issues to develop and maintain long-term, trust-based relationships and recognize the unique perspective and priorities of the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

My question through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister: how is this going to be possible when the ACO has received a real cut and is arguably ineffective currently in recording and responding to the issues of First Nations and Métis leadership? Instead of cutting this office's operating expenses, your ministry should be incorporating growth to reflect the direction the province is moving to attract business such as artificial intelligence or tech sectors and including areas of tourism, all-season resorts, et cetera.

Further, through you, Mr. Chair, on page 91 of the business plan '25-28 it states that the Indigenous Relations department "ensures that Alberta's legal duty to consult [is] met where land and natural resource management may adversely impact the continued exercise of First Nations' Treaty [and Métis] rights and traditional uses." Further, and this is important to my associated question, Mr. Chair, "the department ensures coordination with other provincial government ministries, the federal government and First Nations in response to and negotiation of land-related claims."

Through you, Mr. Chair, can the minister clarify what is meant in this business plan and if there is an expectation that Indigenous leadership will have to continue to bring shame to the government when it comes to their failures in consultation as we have seen in all areas of this province when it comes to the decisions that have

been made, including just last fall sitting when the All-season Resorts Act was passed without Indigenous consultation?

4:10

I'd now like to ask a question about the Indigenous consultation capacity development fund, or the ICCDF. On page 94 of the ministry business plan '25-28 the figure of \$7 million is allocated for the ICCDF, which is steady from the previous year. My question through you, Mr. Chair: how many Indigenous nations were successful in receiving this funding, and how much roughly was given out in each circumstance?

Further, Mr. Chair, on page 94 of the business plan '25-28 it states that the ACO has "consistently met its performance timelines for these measures 100 per cent of the time." Through you, Mr. Chair, I would just comment that from the Indigenous nations I speak to, they do not share that perspective.

I want to now point to the vision statement in the strategic plan, Mr. Chair. You will appreciate that this is in the relevant budget documents, a little nod to last year. I'd like to draw attention to the sentence in the fifth paragraph of page 5 of the strategic plan: "Albertans care deeply about responsible environmental stewardship and are proud of our environmental leadership." It goes on to further state, "Alberta's natural resources are foundational to our prosperity. Canada and the world need Alberta's world-class natural energy resources" and support "access to training and career development opportunities." It then paraphrases this on page 11 of the strategic plan.

I see that expense line item with the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation has increased by about \$53,000, but the operating expense on page 129 of the estimates has decreased by \$2 million. Through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister: what are these changes related to? Are we seeing less personnel in the AIOC offices? If so, why was there no corresponding shift of these dollars into the AIOC? If this shift did not actually occur, why did the ministry not stress this need to continue funding this self-referenced jewel in this government's very rough exterior?

Further, as I stated earlier, the strategic plan on page 27 has stated that the AIOC has "backstopped" 43 communities. Through you, Mr. Chair, can the ministry provide that listing of all of the communities that the AIOC has gone to, quote, backstop, end quote?

Additionally, on page 93 of the business plan '25-28 and actually throughout many of the budget documents it states that the AIOC will continue to allocate loan guarantees, not grants, for Indigenous nations to participate in natural resources, including energy, forestry, and mining, as well as agriculture, telecommunication, transportation, related infrastructure projects, and tourism, which is an interesting inclusion since last year's budget documents. My question through you, Mr. Chair: are Indigenous nations prevented per this list from accessing the AIOC for renewable energy projects?

Further, has the ministry looked at an alternative distribution of funds through this program to allow Indigenous nations to remove the burden of going into debt while the province continues to receive a forecast of \$21.5 billion in '24-25, per the fiscal plan revenue section on page 52, from the natural resources which our people were divested from illegally and without consultation when the Natural Resources Transfer Act was forced on treaty lands?

Through you, Mr. Chair, from the budget documents, particularly the fiscal plan's economic outlook on pages 22 and 24, the government is acutely aware of the uncertainty that the United States tariffs will pose onto our industries here in Alberta as I mentioned prior. My question through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister is: what, if any, preparations have been built into this budget for Indigenous Relations to reflect these tariffs? I bring this

up because it is concerning that the AIOC, a loan guarantee and not a grant, will tie Indigenous nations into this volatile economic situation that is brewing with our largest trade partner. Within this budget for the AIOC I do not see any corresponding forecasting for this uncertainty. It is concerning. Through you, Mr. Chair, does the ministry have a plan for addressing these tariffs, and if so can they be provided in writing as well as spoken to today?

We must look for new ways to diversify our economies. Canada is a resource-based country. Critical minerals, energy resources, grains, forestry, and water are embedded into our treaty territories. We remind governments across the country that resource extraction requires the involvement of First Nations. Governments have a duty to consult First Nations before any project is undertaken, and it cannot break ground, develop, or build on our land until we allow it. It's from Confederacy of Treaty Six just yesterday.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Minister, you have 10 minutes to respond.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you. That was a lot of stuff in there. I'll do my best to catch every point. First, you talked about consultation, that there have been some cuts. I can guarantee there have been no cuts. They may have shifted some staff, so that's why you might see a small change in the number there. I think it was an actual increase this year from the year before. It went from \$4.817 million up to \$4.981 million, so actually an increase for this year. The decrease was from the year before, but that was just shifting people around in there.

Our consultation department: Thomas is like our head guy there, and he's in the back. He might jump in if I mess up here a little bit. Around Sturgeon and Chief Sunshine up there, I've contacted him and we're setting up a meeting. I tried to do a phone-in with him, but he wanted to do it in person, so we're setting up a meeting with myself and Energy to talk about some of the issues he's got. We'll be having an in-person meeting probably at the Leg. here because we can't get away right now, but he's said he's in Edmonton quite often. He's agreed to come in and chat with us about some of the issues that he had around the AI centre. A lot of the stuff that you heard was just one of the dragons or sharks, or whatever he is, just throwing some stuff against the wall, I think, to see how much would stick. At this point there is not an AI centre going forward, maybe never. I don't know. At some point hopefully there would be, because it would be great for the area, but nothing – nothing – would ever go forward without consultation.

We don't even have an actual formal application, and I can't start the consultation process until there's an actual application to do an AI centre, so at this point it's just – I used to call it when farmers are kicking dirt to see what's going to stick out there. We used to talk about, "I want to buy some hay off you," but we'd talk for a half hour about something else before we ever got around to seeing how much the hay was worth. I think that's kind of what's happening on this project. This is two guys kicking dirt to see what's going to stick.

At this point there hasn't been a formal application, so that's why no consultation process has started, but they have been engaged. All the First Nations up there have been engaged. I think he was up there himself, talking to the people and talking with the municipality. At this point it's just talk, and nothing has moved forward at this point. But if an actual formal application does come in, that's when the actual legal duty to consult would kick in. There's a big difference between engagement and consultation.

The consultation part is actually when it gets down to our team putting boots on the ground and seeing which First Nations – the consultation map is really complicated. It's been decided in the

province that every First Nation has areas that they say that they should be consulted on. This has all been done and worked out as to where who's going to be consulted on. For this project I can't remember how many First Nations would be involved, but as the map overlaps, that's when you see there'd be one, two, three, maybe four or five First Nations involved in the consultation process. Our team would then get the information out to them. We've streamlined it. We've put it all online now. As soon as we get the papers, man, within minutes we can have that out to all the First Nations that are involved and all the paperwork, so there are no delays in getting information out. They know exactly what's going on and what consultation would be involved on their half.

Before anything would go forward, that's the first stage. We get the information out to them. Our department starts working with them. We've got a whole team of people that's going to go into the field and make sure that everybody that needs to be consulted is consulted. Nothing will ever move forward until we've come back from our team and said that consultation is done and it's thorough. Rest assured that that's not going to happen until that takes place.

We talked about the AI centres. This is getting to be a big thing. Like, this is not the only project. I can't tell you where there are others, but I have been contacted by other First Nations, and they're leading it. Those are the ones that really excite me, where you've got a First Nation that's leading the way on what's coming forward with some of these AI centres. You'll see fairly soon a couple of spots where some of these AI centres have been being looked at and proposed.

4:20

You talked about water and that. This is a big issue because an AI centre isn't just a room full of computers. It requires a power plant to go with it. They require tremendous amounts of electricity. I remember me talking about out by Edson here a few years ago. We did the – it's called the Cascade power plant out there. This is six First Nations that are partners in that Cascade power plant. That's online now. It's providing 8 per cent of Alberta's power. Six First Nations: full partners in that. This is creating a lot of income coming into that group.

Now, if we're going to do another one of these AI centres, it's going to require tremendous power capacity to go with it. Like, you can't do this with solar or something like that because on these AI centres the power has to be steady all the time. It can't have fluctuations in it, so it would have to be a natural gas power plant. The ones that I've seen proposed: they've all got carbon capture with them. They've got the best technology to go with it. And the new ones don't require much water, which kind of surprised me. They recycle and reuse, so the amount of water that's actually needed is a lot smaller than I thought. We were trying to look at where they would be located, because they need natural gas for the power plant, so it's got to be located where there is a lot of natural gas. I assumed that they would need a huge water supply with it, but they really don't, so it doesn't have to fall on that line.

The big thing is that it has to be – power is kind of complicated, but they call it behind the fence. If it's behind the fence, they're creating electricity just for themselves. But they also want to put back into the power stream, so then they have to be located where there is a spot where they can tie in to the main line and provide it back that way, because we don't want to get into a bind where, from previous governments, the power plants are located in other spots, and now we've got this huge problem with – what's that called? – the transmission portion of it. We don't want to have a huge cost associated with it, because now the power plants are responsible for that cost.

You're going to see some of these coming forward this year. I'm pretty positive that a couple of them are going to start making waves. They've come to me and asked which First Nations they could partner with, which I really like doing. With the AIOC one of the things that I really kind of mandated with them is that I don't want to just have one group coming in, because some of the First Nations have more capacity than others to get into business. It's just the way it is. They're really good at writing grants, so they could come in. That's why you're talking about maybe some groups are getting more than others. Well, they're really good at writing grants. But they've all kind of come to the conclusion now that if they're going to move forward with something, we need to help our brothers out there, too. That's even with the Cascade plant. One of the groups could have done it on their own, but they didn't; they chose to bring others in. Some of the projects you're going to see coming forward: the group could have done it on their own, but now they've reached out to other First Nations and they've got partners that will be coming in as a group to present to us.

I'm really excited about what's going to happen there. It could be a huge boom for a lot of the First Nations, especially in the remote areas that – it's like a business. Location, location, location. If you're located beside Edmonton, a casino does really well. If you're out in the middle of nowhere, it doesn't do so good. That's why I'm hoping to bring in some of these other First Nations and Métis communities that are quite remote and just don't have the ability or the capacity in their staff to be able to write these grants and move forward with some of the bigger projects. That's been my big push: to get everybody involved, to make sure that everybody is going to get an AIOC, everybody is going to get an ABIF grant, and move forward.

Even on our ABIFs I was finding that some of the Métis settlements didn't have the capacity to do that, so we make sure that we give four a year, ABIF grants, up to them, that they're guaranteed that. That way every other year one of them is going to get something. It's been working really well that way.

We talked about the ABIF and AIOC. You'd be familiar with the Alexander band, of course. What we've done with the Alexander band – they've been really good at being really proactive in business. I think it was last year we did the valve company with them. They partnered in with an oil field company that actually manufactures valves for the oil field business, and it's been very successful. That's set up, as Brooks would know, right at the First Nation there, where they've got the valve company set up. Next week I'm actually going down to Calgary. They've partnered up with another company – it's called Alexander Chemical – producing all sorts of different things. I know they brought me a bottle of hand sanitizer. That's in my office already. So that's going to be exciting. It's really moving them forward and creating a lot of employment, doing these types of initiatives.

We talked around some cuts, you were saying, in the AIOC. There have been no cuts, actually. If you look through the budget carefully, you'll see that it's actually a \$500,000 increase, and that increase was to put more staff into the office so that when we – say that a group comes to us, and they want to do something in tourism. We need to have people that have expertise in that field, that can move forward with that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll go to the last 10-minute block in this segment. Go ahead. Oh. I just have to ask – it's part of the procedure – would you like to share time?

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** I believe the minister would like to do block time.

Would you like to do block time?

**Mr. Wilson:** Block time? Yeah.

**The Chair:** Okay. For the purposes of this meeting I'm going to go block time all the time unless someone asks to do differently.

Okay. Carry on. Sorry about that.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Chair. [Remarks in Cree] Nanaskamon for the land, the water.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I want to thank the ministry and their staff for this budget; for the consideration; for the Alberta government, that they continue to spend money in Indigenous communities, building First Nations and Métis relationships and driving Indigenous and economic, social development. I want to thank my fellow Member for Edmonton-West Henday for such thoughtful and insightful questions regarding reconciliation in this time.

When Grand Chief Dr. Wilton Littlechild and the dearly departed Justice Murray Sinclair along with Dr. Marie Wilson gifted us the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report in 2015 and the 94 calls to action, they didn't just give us a guidebook for reversing the impacts of residential schools; they gave us and our non-Indigenous allies and relatives in government, churches, and institutions across the country the permission to be ambitious in the pursuit of reconciliation. Reconciliation in a budgetary sense, then, Mr. Chairperson, starts with setting key performance metrics that move the needle on reconciliation, not just subsidize it. The Alberta government could be a national leader in reconciliation by setting KPMs or KPIs that actually signify reconciliatory growth, not just meet the floor for ministerial operational success.

Mr. Chairperson, through you, in regard to key performance metrics in the business plan, pages 25 and 28, I ask: on page 93, in regard to the allocation of \$4 million to the community support fund, through you, Mr. Chairperson, why does this ministry not commit to increasing KPM 1(c) of funded projects from 20 to 30 given that in '23-24 Indigenous-led organizations successfully exceeded this number? Through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister: would it not be an appropriate number, like 30 or even 40, to be reflective of the strong interest of Indigenous organizations in accessing these reconciliation dollars?

Further to this point, in reviewing the distribution of CSF funding to all three streams – economic security, increasing safety, and addressing violence – from the '23-24 CSF plan online, it would seem that allocating \$4 million is insufficient for forecasting for inflationary pressure on the \$200,000 per year funding cap. Mr. Chair, through you to the ministry: is shifting funding allocations to account for inflation? Further, how is the ministry shifting funding allocations to maintain interest from Indigenous organizations and further keep competitive with private donors and NGOs funding in the same sector?

4:30

Mr. Chairperson, through you, I have a question regarding: would increasing the \$4 million allocation make the CSF more attractive for Indigenous organizations to apply for, and if so, will the ministry share the total number of CSF applications started, how many applications were completed, and how many applications were denied?

In '23-24, according to the documents online, the CSF allocated nearly \$6 million on Indigenous-led projects. Mr. Chair, through you, is the ministry intentionally setting low funding standards to preserve its minimum standard of funding? Are these KPMs actually a reflection of a cynically low standard of ability for the ministry to distribute reconciliation money?

Mr. Chair, through you, given that the ministry's key objective 1.2 on page 93 of the business plan '25-28 is, quote, revitalization, would this low KPM be more accurately called subsidization?

In some cases this business plan leaves out entire sections of KPMs on core ministry work like the Indigenous women's initiatives. Through you, Mr. Chair, I would like to ask in the case where there are no KPMs listed at all, like on page 95 of the business plan, how is the ministry measuring its own success when it comes to supporting the resiliency and well-being of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people?

Mr. Chair, I would like to ask what are the KPMs for the allocation of \$1.9 million to the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and two-spirit-plus people, along with the First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security? Compensation disclosures publicly available online for the Premier's council are less than \$60,000.

Mr. Chair, through you, I would like to ask: does the ministry agree that more accountability in this budget could deliver results on addressing violence against Indigenous women?

Given that this government has a road map for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and 113 pathways for addressing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people, Mr. Chair, through you, I would like to ask: will this ministry commit to at least one KPM from these resources? For instance, I'll suggest one here: leading the campaign to establish a missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls province-wide alert system, page 71.

Mr. Chair, additionally, through you, I would like to ask why the ministry has not committed a budget line in the business plan '25-28 to broad-based public service campaigns and public health and education initiatives that clearly demonstrate we are all united in ending gender-based violence while educating on the disproportionate rates for gender-based violence against Indigenous women and Indigenous-identifying folks.

Mr. Chair, through you, I would like to ask: if Indigenous women's initiatives approximately account for 3 per cent, \$7.74 million out of the \$238.1 million of operational funding by the ministry according to the budget estimates on page 97 of the business plan '25 - 28, why won't this ministry commit to a base allocation percentage number for IWI proportional to operational growth to ensure that economic success means ministerial success in this portfolio?

Those are my questions for this block. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Did you want to cede time to anybody or no? No? Okay. Fair enough.

All right. That'll give me a little bit of time. Just for future reference, Minister, if someone, like, from the gallery can't come and talk to you directly, there are pages to deliver notes back and forth. Just for future reference.

Okay. We'll go with the next 10-minute block, the final block of this segment, and carry on with your answers to those questions.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you so much. Thank you for the good, caring questions. I appreciate that. A big part of what I do is around the missing and murdered file. If you make me cry, it's your fault.

When you talk about leaders in reconciliation, I believe we are the leaders in reconciliation in Alberta. We started the AIOC. Nobody else was doing that. We started off with a billion-dollar fund to help. As you know, the First Nations don't own the land that they're on; that belongs to the federal government, so it makes it difficult to get that collateral you need to get started in the bigger projects like building a power plant or something like that.

That's where we came up with the idea to create the AIOC to backstop so that First Nations, especially some of the smaller ones, could get involved in these bigger projects. When we started that program, nobody else was doing that. We invented it. I literally had the minister from B.C. call me last year when they started their program. I'd been out to talk to him about it. I literally was out talking to the minister from B.C. about our programming, and I'm talking about the AIOC and the ABIF and all the different grants we're doing. He's looking at his people and he says: why aren't we doing this? They're all taking notes.

He called me up last spring when they were sitting in their Chamber and he said: minister, I just want to give you a heads up; turn your TV on and watch us today. I said: why? He said: just watch. The minister from B.C. in their Legislature introduces their bill to start their own Indigenous Opportunities Corporation in British Columbia, and he gave me full credit for it, an NDP government giving us full credit for what we're doing. I thought that was pretty cool.

Then Saskatchewan came on board. They did a little program. Now the federal government has come on board, and they're doing a program. I've literally had people from around the world. I had the grand chancellor from New Zealand come and talk to me about what we're doing with the AIOC and how they could maybe do something like that there.

I've had – which group was it from down in the States? A couple of the First Nations have come up and talked to me: how did you guys get this involved? Like, where did this come from? I said: well, we just made it up. They were pretty impressed that Alberta was the leader in that. I would say that we're actually one of the leaders of reconciliation probably around the world. Like, I literally get calls from around the world.

On the community support fund, I think we got 24 projects going ahead this year, and that's going to use up the \$4 million. My staff, they work with the applicants to help them get a successful application. Sometimes not every group is successful in getting their application through, but if they aren't, we'll reach out to them. We'll actually go right out to their community and help them put a grant together, because grant writing is kind of an art, too. You have to make sure that you do it correctly. We have some criteria. Because it's taxpayers' money, we want to make sure that it's spent correctly. We make sure that when they're filling out the grants they are meeting all the standards, because I have to answer to the Auditor General to make sure that everything we do is on the up and up. The staff does this. I don't get involved with who gets the grants because I try not to interfere with that. We've got a group of people, the deputy ministers, that get together and decide who the successful applicants are on that. That's how that part of it works.

You talked about the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, again, a first anywhere, doing something like that. This came from their own report. Like, after the national report came out on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, we did our own report in Alberta to see what we should do from the national report that would fit just for Albertans.

One of the first things in there was that they came out with this and said: we want to have a Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. So that's what I did. I set that up. We set up the council. We put out applications for people to apply to sit on this board. We picked out a cross-section from across the province. We made sure we had the two-spirited people and transgender people sit on this committee. They literally have an opportunity to meet with the Premier a minimum of once a year. She loves it so much. I don't know how many times she's met with them already. That's moving forward there.

From that a lot of things have come forward already. Kaylee and I just attended not too long ago a group that's developed an app that's called Aboriginal Alert. I don't know if you've looked into that yet. We helped them fund this to put it together. What it does, it will – the numbers will stagger you. They have a breakdown of how many women and girls are missing, and in a 90-day period, maybe shoot me a note. How many people? It was ridiculous the number of women that were missing. Like, we're not talking 10 or 20. We're talking large numbers.

4:40

This is horrible. We have to make a difference there, and I agree with you. If this were happening in a small community, there would be an outcry. That's why we wear our pins, to make sure people ask us what's this is all about. I always wear my pin. I can see a lot of people are wearing pins, and I see most of them are dress pins. We work hard on that. That's been one of the most important files I work on, because, like you talked about economic security, but we have to do that cultural one as well. I think that's one of the things I get most thanks for from various groups is that we do pay attention to that.

We'll probably get into this later, but the FNDF funding, First Nation development fund funding: about \$155 million this year went into the FNDF funding, and that's what you'll see in my budget. It looks like there's this huge number, but a big chunk of that is the FNDF funding, and that comes from the First Nations casinos, and that's a percentage that they put into there. When the casinos do really well, that fund does really well, and that's why it increased so much this year, plus we put another First Nation casino online. The Maskwacis one is online now as well. So that all adds to that.

Of that FNDF funding, they have the opportunity to use that. We don't dictate how it's spent. It has to be on their own social programs, whatever. First Nations can use that for the missing and murdered file or community buildings, whatever they like. I just put gas in the bus. I don't tell them how to drive it or where to go. There is an opportunity to get a lot of extra money for any program they want through the FNDF funding.

Around the community support grant, I was at an opening here – when did we do that? Last fall? Last summer? – it's called mistamim journey. As some of my colleagues would know, mistamim means horse in Cree. This is delivered by Skydancer Indigenous Cultural Centre. This program supports Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people on their journey towards healing, well-being, and safe relationships. They do it through traditional teachings; they do it through art; and the really interesting thing is through equine therapy, so they use horses. I've seen it. Out where I live Hope Mission has what is called horses of hope. They take kids there for the summer. The kids work with the horses, and they all of a sudden come out of their shell. You know, some of these people have been through a lot of trauma, but working with the horses, they can work their way through it.

This a program, the mis Tamim journey. There are a bunch of amazing women that we met with, and they were on their journey of healing there. Oh, my goodness. We helped them get started with this program. Spruce Grove or Stoney Plain? I can't remember.

**Mr. Young:** Spruce Grove.

**Mr. Wilson:** Spruce Grove. They've got a great program. If you get a chance to go out there and talk to them, it's really worthwhile. You can see how, like, some of these women are really traumatized, but to be out there working with the horses, brushing them, and looking after them. Now they have an arts program.

One of the things that you might get as a gift, they gifted me with a clay horse that they sculpted, and you'll see it in my office if you come in there.

You can see that the women that would normally not even be able to talk to you all of a sudden are coming out of their shell, and they're able to move forward.

I just got these numbers. Now, this is going to be horrible. On that Aboriginal Alert site: recently missing, this is like in the last three months, 96; and still missing, 107. These are horrible statistics, and that's why we developed this program to try to make a difference there. I've been working hard. It's one of my main focuses. I'm hoping, and I'm actually seeing it, that we're making a difference, and the groups that we work with like the Aboriginal Alert program I think are going to make a difference. You can go on there and you can see where people went missing. Then if you have some information, you put that on the site, and that goes out to everybody right away so they can see where the women and girls have gone missing from. It really speeds up the process. You wouldn't even have known about it before, but now there's a site you can go to. I think it's just [aboriginalalert.com](http://aboriginalalert.com), isn't it? Yeah. If you get a chance, look on that site, and you'll see why I cry.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll now move to 20 minutes for the government caucus members and the minister. I am going to assume that we're going to do block time. So what we'll do is you'll have 10 minutes to ask your questions; the minister will have 10 minutes to answer. Then after this block is done, we'll take our five-minute break and then get back to the rotation after that.

Member Dyck, you've got 10 minutes. Go ahead.

**Mr. Dyck:** Excellent. Well, thank you so very much for being here, Minister, just to discuss Indigenous Relations in our 2025-2026 budget and answer some of our questions. I just want to thank you, first and foremost, and your team for your excellent work this last year. You've been on this file for several years, and it shows your depth of knowledge, your character. I just want to pinpoint something as well. The longer I'm at this, the amount of trust that you have, the amount of care that you have is showcased. People deeply understand that you're listening, so I just want to thank you for your work and also your dedication to this.

Your dedication to building a better future for all Albertans and, obviously, particularly this file is notable, so I just want to thank you for that. I understand reconciliation is a journey and that we all have to take it together. We all have to be part of this together and in partnership, and I just want to commend the progress you're making in this area. It is significant, as you've mentioned here today.

On to questions as well. You do have a larger budget. In your opening statement you mentioned that Indigenous Relations was provided with steady funding, which is excellent; happy for that. We can also see on page 97 of the business plan the year-over-year increase. Your ministry is getting is an extra \$17 million for the ministry for their net operating funding. Through the chair, can the minister please expand upon the necessity for this increase in funding from the previous years going into 2025-2026? There is \$17 million more. I'd just love to see kind of the necessity for that increase.

Then also in the business plan here as well there seem to be a number of changes when it comes to outcomes and performance measures. I have a question here. I'm all for changing metrics and not changing outcomes when they bring clarity and, in essence, upgrade these KPIs. It's very important that we continue to do these things and make sure that there's clarity for everyone working in

your ministry. Now, I believe, on pages 93 to 96 in the business plan, the ministry has changed some of their outcomes and have added a new performance measure for this budget. Through the chair, my question is: can the minister please explain and expand on some of these changes through the business plan. Specifically, why is there a new performance measure included in the 2025-2026 reporting period?

As well, still on the Aboriginal business investment fund, ABIF, which you've mentioned a few times, the fund itself helps partially or completely fund capital costs for Indigenous community-owned economic development projects. Projects like these can improve social and economic outcomes for Indigenous peoples and their communities. This is another great example of how the government is putting Indigenous people in control of their futures by partnering with them in generating the types of economic opportunities they are looking for. Now, I see on page 93 of the business plan that \$10 million of capital spending will be for the ABIF. Through the chair, can the minister please highlight some ABIF projects that have received funding in the past year and the impacts these projects have had and will have going forward with their local communities?

As well, on page 91 of the business plan it also mentions access to safe drinking water. I truly believe that safe drinking water is key. It keeps all Albertans healthy; it keeps us safe. There's study upon study upon that. Safe drinking water, I believe at least – feel free to correct – is a federal jurisdiction issue, and I am proud that we're taking care of our folks here in Alberta to make sure that they have access to clean drinking water. My question in this, through the chair: can you please tell us how you are giving access to clean drinking water to our friends in the 2025-26 reporting period, and how is the federal government helping, if at all, in this venture?

4:50

Then, carrying on, a couple of pages later in the business plan, page 94, under key objective 2.2, I see the ministry is overseeing and managing Alberta's legal duty to consult First Nations groups across the province. This includes a lot of synergies and work together, I believe, with the federal government, which is really important in this conversation. To the minister, through the chair: can you expand upon how the process of advocating for a streamlined federal Indigenous consultation process is going? And how are we supporting this work going into the 2025-2026 reporting period, specifically upon the streamlined federal Indigenous consulting process? I would just like some clarity on that both on the business plan and also if there are any financial implications of how we are supporting that.

Then my final question before I cede some time here: page 129 of the government estimates shows that despite only requiring \$1.2 million in this last year's reporting period, land and legal settlement will be seeing \$3.49 million in the 2025-26 reporting period. I believe it was budgeted around the \$4 million mark. I would just love some expansion. Here's my question. Can you expand upon the variables for land and legal settlement going into the 2025-26 reporting period? There just seems to be a few million dollars there between what was – yeah. So \$4.275 million was what was budgeted. What was spent was one \$1,219,000, and then what we have estimated is \$3,495,000. There seem to be some variables there. I just want to clarify what that money is being spent on as well as why there's in essence a \$3 million variable about what was budgeted and what the forecast for this year is.

With my remaining couple of minutes I'll cede my time to MLA Yao.

**Mr. Yao:** Minister, thank you so much for the opportunity. Again, I echo my colleague's comments about the great work that you're doing and your ministry.

The Aboriginal business investment fund: this has proven to be a strong vehicle for bringing prosperous economic opportunities to Indigenous communities right across the province. As shown on page 93 of the '25-28 business plan, we can see that the ABIF was able to help create an additional 168 permanent full-time employment opportunities in Indigenous-led businesses for communities across Alberta. My question to you, Minister, through the chair: could the minister please explain to this committee how the Aboriginal business investment fund continues to improve the social and economic outcomes for Indigenous communities right across Alberta?

The second part to my question is: could the minister explain to this committee what changes that we could expect from the Aboriginal business investment fund program for the future and what targets the ministry is aiming for in the context of permanent full-time job creation?

I see the value of this business investment fund. It's absolutely fantastic. To use an analogy, it's teaching people to fish instead of gathering them a fish every day. I think this is a fantastic fund. It really does support, I think, the concept of reconciliation and giving our Indigenous peoples what they want, which is independence. I know the communities in my region have been very well supported by you through these endeavours, and my understanding is they are among some of the most successful in our entire nation. I'm quite proud of all that. They continue to look for more business ventures, and I hope that moving forward, you are able to support them in such things.

That said, I have heard that my First Nations are some of the biggest recipients of a lot of the largest support that the province has, so I'm wondering how we try to balance that out with some of the other First Nations. Again, working off the question that my good friend from across the aisle here mentioned, I'm kind of curious how those conversations do go as we do try to encourage others to step up and access these things. I've seen the benefits; they are fantastic. If the minister was able to give an answer on that, that would be absolutely great.

**The Chair:** We will carry on. You have 10 minutes for your responses.

**Mr. Wilson:** Okay. Thanks. That's a lot. But thanks for the great questions, and thanks for the compliments. I really appreciate that.

When it gets to around the ABIF, this has been such a successful program for us. Since the inception we've created over 1,000 full-time jobs. Over 1,000. That's a lot. I'll tell you what, when I travel around the province, I can start to see the difference in some of these communities. I'll talk about this one first because it's in my backyard.

It's called akamihk. For my Cree friends that means – this is a pop quiz. Akamihk. Jodi? Across the water. Across the river. That's what it's called, the one in Montana. It's because the Battle River runs through there. That's why they called it that.

They first came to me – I knew the first chief, Leonard Standingontheroad, since I was a kid. We kind of grew up together. When I was on county council, he came to me, and he said: "Okay. I need help with my roads here." And I said: "Well, I can't help you. That's a federal problem." Then when I became an MLA, he, finally, came and said: "All right. Now you can help me with my roads." I said: "Sorry. I still can't help you, but what I can do for you is I can help you buy a grader. I'll help you do that." He said: "Well, the government buys the county stuff." I said: "No. The county does that on their own. They charge taxes, and people buy the graders, and they do the

work. But I'm going to help you." We helped him get a grader. He said: "How am I going to pay for that?" I said: "There are oil companies around. Whatever. Go talk to them. Tell them you'll plow the roads or do some snow plowing. Whatever."

Then with COVID he was really concerned about food security, so he came to me again: "What are we going to do for food security for these kids in school?" Again, I said: "You got some of the best land in Alberta here. It's three feet of black soil. Farm it. This is a huge opportunity, sir." He used to have farm equipment, but they'd gotten rid of it over the years, so I said: "We'll help you do that. We'll get into the farming operation." But I said: "Why don't you start a greenhouse? Then you can grow food year-round." We helped them get a grant for a greenhouse. Well, they went out and put together the most high-tech greenhouse that was available out there.

When I first started working with Montana First Nation, they had two public servant employees to do the public works. Two. That was it. Last spring when I went there: 116 full-time employees. Their greenhouse has been so successful that one company, a store in Calgary, has said: we'll take all you've got, but we need four times as much. So they're in the process right now of expanding this greenhouse into a major operation.

By the time I go back in spring, they'll have over 150 full-time employees. They don't have one grader anymore. This is huge. [interjection] Thank you. Yeah. They don't have one grader anymore. He's got two graders, he's got two rock trucks, two Cats, a fleet – a fleet – of gravel trucks, oil field trucks, heavy – like, hot oil units. Like, they went into it. Now when you drive out there, he's got some nice roads when you drive out to Montana First Nation, and you could see the pride. The people that work there and especially the people working in the greenhouse: it's very culturally correct, growing food for their people. They're so proud of the work they're doing there. You can just see it in the whole community. I go out there a lot, and I've talked to other First Nations about this.

Now we've got a whole greenhouse program going for any other First Nations. We've got a couple more on the go this year, I think, for communities that want to get into the greenhouse operation and start not only growing food for food security for themselves but expanding that out and selling it and creating jobs. Like, to create 150 full-time jobs – I had kind of a study done. That dollar is going to circulate around the community seven times. So that's not just 150; it's like times seven. Everybody in the community has an opportunity to do something now. These are great success stories that we've had with our ABIF program.

5:00

Well, there's some more of them here. I have a whole list of things. Oh, yeah. Up at Saddle Lake – we call it the smoke eaters partnership – they got \$366,000 to purchase equipment and finance a facility for personal protective equipment sales, furnace and duct cleaning services. It's going to help diversify their business operations by adding equipment and staff to provide furnace vent cleaning, and it's going to generate income within the community.

Big Stone: awarded \$750,000 to purchase heavy equipment for a gravel pit operation.

The Bear Hills Casino: awarded \$550,000 to assist in the construction of the restaurant and lounge. I'll tell you, I literally had the best chicken sandwich I've ever had in my life the other day. I stopped at the casino there. I'm not kidding you. Like, they are doing an amazing job there at the restaurant. I was a little worried. Right along the highway there: really, there's no community that's close. Wetaskiwin is the closest. But that little thing is starting to really pump it out. Over a hundred full-time employees there right now. Over 50 of them are off the First Nation, and they're just

getting started. What a boon to that little community this has been and a great service. Like, for people stopping along the highway there, all of a sudden you got this great restaurant to pull into. If you ever want to go watch a hockey game on a giant screen TV, they got that all set up.

Probably one of the cleanest facilities I've ever been in my life. The fellow that's in charge of maintenance there: I went into the washroom, and he's just hovering. If somebody drops a paper, he's picking it up, you know. I've never seen a guy so proud to be a maintenance engineer in my life. He was so proud to have this job and that he was the guy that's keeping this place clean. The pride was pretty amazing to see. How people can – all of a sudden they've got a job where they can earn income for their families, and it just changes the whole community around.

Alexander First Nation: Brooks, you probably know about this. Brooks, pay attention here. Sorry. Just teasing. Up in Alexander First Nation the valve company that's going up there, that was an ABIF project. Next week I'm going down to Calgary. They're opening up their chemical – what's it called? Alexander Chemical. They're opening that up in Calgary.

Some of the ones up in Tany's area with Chief Powder up there: I went to one of their functions where they had invited all of the companies that they're doing business with. Oh, my goodness. I don't even know how many – 17? 18? – companies that they're involved with. Like, it's amazing what they can get into. Some of the biggest companies in Alberta are owned by First Nations people up north. The one group, they have over 1,000 employees. It's pretty impressive, what's going on across the province.

A big part of what I try to do is just – the problem is that in my area, or even in Edmonton here, you go down the street and: "Well, look at those First Nation people. They're homeless again." You know, or whatever. That's a big issue in my area. To the people that say that I say: "Yeah. Well, we've got 50 homeless people here. Go down the street. There are 15,000 people down there that are better educated than you or I. They've got MBAs and PhDs. Like, open your eyes." That's kind of what I've been trying to do, just change people's opinions of this whole status of what they think Indigenous people are. Some of the biggest businesspeople in the province are Indigenous people. They've got some of the biggest businesses. Lawyers. Doctors. It's pretty impressive.

The little bit of help that I've been able to do in these communities through our ABIF program has been so rewarding. To see the number of jobs – how many jobs do you think we're creating this year? Over 100 this year, just with the programs that we got out, on top of the 1,000 that we've already created. If you go to your Indigenous communities, you're going to start seeing the difference.

Like, the housing is improving. That's probably still one of the biggest areas we have concerns around, housing. There's still a big shortage there, and we have to keep working on that and working with our federal counterparts around that as well. We work with other ministries around housing. Minister Nixon has got a big program that we're working on Indigenous housing with him.

You know, we're not perfect, but we've sure been trying. We've been doing our best to really help as many communities as we can. I'm trying to spread the ABIF grants around the best that we can. When the grants come in, again, we have a team of people that go through these grants. You know, you may not be successful one year, but we always tell them, "Enter soon and enter often," and we'll have our team work with the community to make sure that they've put their grant together properly, because we want them to be successful. I don't want these to be white elephants out there. Every project that we've done has been incredibly successful.



I'm thinking of the service centre we did down at Piikani, a little service centre along the side of the road there. I think there are, like, 20 people that work there now. They've got a little restaurant. They've got a service station. Again, when I go in there, I'm treated like a king. They're so thankful for what we've done to help them out.

You get this whole training aspect with it, too. You're training kids to become businesspeople and how to work out in the community, and you can really see the difference. These young people are so proud.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

That concludes the government members' first block of questions. We'll take our five-minute break right now, and we'll come back at about 11 after. So we've got a five-minute break.

[The committee adjourned from 5:06 p.m. to 5:11 p.m.]

**The Chair:** Okay. Now we move to our second round of questions and responses. The speaking rotation going forward will be the same as the first, starting with the Official Opposition and then we go on to government caucus. Speaking times are now reduced to five minutes in duration. We will begin this rotation with the Official Opposition. There will be no ability to cede time this way, so if you're doing your five minutes and you run out of questions, we just go to the five minutes and then we carry on from there, just so everyone knows that. We'll go with block time, five minutes of questions and five minutes of answers, and then we'll go back and forth, just like we were doing before.

Carry on, opposition members. Go ahead.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. While this budget tells a pretty interesting picture to First Nations and Métis people in this province, it is readily apparent that the AIOC is the show pony for the government. Through you, Mr. Chair, I do worry about other programming that may have resulted in a corresponding real cut in this budget. Further, while we see an increase of 16.1 per cent to the AIOC's budget of \$9.7 million, we see other real cuts to such areas such as 17.1 per cent real cut to the Indigenous women's initiatives, 4 per cent real cut to the First Nations and Métis relations budgets, and a 1.1 per cent real cut to the Métis credible assertion capacity funding. My question through you, Mr. Chair, to the ministry: why are we seeing this change of priorities from this ministry?

I'd like to ask further about the 17.1 per cent real cut to the Indigenous women's initiatives, which is mentioned throughout the budget documents, including on 129 of the Indigenous Relations government estimates. While on the face it looks as though it is steady funding as usual, if we compare with the forecast, Indigenous women's initiatives appear to have received a 17.1 per cent real cut. My question through you to the minister: why?

In terms of the real cut to the Métis credible assertion capacity funding, through you to the minister: what was the reason for this cut?

I'd also like to inquire about the reason for these cuts, especially when per page 86 of the fiscal plan \$11 million were allocated for moving bonuses for the Alberta Is Calling campaign. Through you, Mr. Chair, are these initiatives in Indigenous Relations not a priority of this government and that a bonus of that sort would be a priority of the government? Why was the ministry forced to cut these incredibly necessary programs?

Through you, Mr. Chair, I'd like to turn also now to the First Nations development fund on page 70 of the fiscal plan, which stated that an increase in the entire Indigenous Relations budget was due to the FNDF to the tune of what the minister referred to as \$18

million, but on page 70 it states \$13 million. That's in the fiscal plan '25-28. But I digress.

Also, during my wonderful colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's questions the minister responded by indicating that the FNDF distributed \$155 million forecast, but this year's estimates I just want us to focus on, and they're at \$161 million, just as a point of clarity. So my question through you to the minister: was the government trying to hide behind these aforementioned cuts because First Nations casinos were doing really well this year? If I recall correctly, and I think it was mentioned earlier this session, the minister asked us to spend more money at First Nations casinos in this very room just last year and a few moments ago. Well, it looks like we did, and your government was able to get away with cutting the budget in so doing, so maybe we should be a little bit more cautious about how much we spend at a casino in an affordability crisis, might I add.

I'd like to ask, through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister or the ministry staff, how the FNDF represents over almost 70 per cent of the Indigenous Relations budget while this government is failing in so many other areas. You can see this on page 129 of the government's estimates '25-26. Of the \$161 million that will be allocated through the First Nations development fund – a question that has always hovered in First Nation country, and I'm sure the minister is aware of this. Why does a portion of the revenue generated in First Nations casinos get diverted to the general revenue fund? If my math is correct here, that would be approximately \$110 million this year alone which will be diverted to the general revenue fund rather than to the FNDF and then subsequently down to the First Nations in Alberta.

Through you, Mr. Chair, can the minister elaborate on how funding is allocated under the FNDF? While I appreciate, on page 88 of the fiscal plan, that a portion does flow to the FNDF, I'm curious as to why the full portion of the revenue obtained from casinos on-reserve does not go to all First Nations rather than a portion, keeping in mind that a good chunk of change does end up in the host First Nations' coffers and the FNDF distributes amongst non casino-owning First Nations such as mine, which the minister continues to refer to.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I would offer to deliver the minister's answers to the chief, but if he does not want to answer today, I look forward to an answer in writing to not only myself but also to the chiefs here in Alberta.

To restate the questions missed above: why do the full funds from revenue generated through casinos on-reserve not flow directly for the benefit of all First Nations and instead a portion goes to the general revenue fund?

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thanks for the questions again, especially around the women's initiative stuff. I made that kind of a priority for my ministry, to start developing these programs because when I started, there were no programs. The previous government had no programs there at all. I thought that somehow I've got to make a difference.

That's where we initially came up with the whole around the red dress. I had a red dress presented to me. You're probably familiar with the Awo Taan society down in Calgary. It's an Indigenous women's shelter down there, and they started me on the whole red dress journey. I was down there, and they showed me what they were doing, and they presented me with my first red dress. Then they actually made – you'll see it downstairs in this building – a full-size regalia red dress that's been on display for six years now. Typically those things are on display here for two months, but the

Speaker has really been backing me on this. He's put our own glass display case down there. You can come; once a year we get together with the group and we smudge it and we put other articles in there. We've put little moccasins in there and some feathers and just always try to keep it alive so it doesn't get lost.

We do a lot of work with women's groups. Kristina has been key in this whole journey that I'm on, and she's done an amazing job in there. I don't want to put her on the spot; she's kind of shy. But she has done an amazing job there.

Some of the programs that we've come forward with. I talked about the mistamim journey, the horse journey, the work they're doing there. How many programs we've got going this year: 24 projects this year, \$4 million budget. Fort MacKay Métis have done a traditional Métis healing practice with support groups and workshops to address domestic violence, to foster safety and strengthen the community. We've got our Indigenous Knowledge & Wisdom Centre. That's a program for Indigenous girls and two-spirit-plus youth focusing on wellness, cultural teachings, and leadership development.

We've got our Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society. That's focusing on education, financial literacy, and empowerment, and they use the Blackfoot language and culture to address poverty, gender equality, and well-being. Peerless Trout First Nation developed a community safety and transition housing initiative that includes recovery programs and healing retreats to support women and girls experiencing intimate partner violence. Wiwipson Iyiniw Healing and Training Association is going to train 23 Indigenous women in traditional Cree healing and parenting practice, promoting emotional, spiritual, and cultural well-being for future generations. So you can see there are a lot of programs going on across the entire province where we're trying to help Indigenous women.

5:20

We did one in Lethbridge. I don't remember the name of it, but it was for the young moms coming off the reserve into Lethbridge there. Not a lot of support when they got there, so we took an old church and converted it into a condo. Now when they come in, they've got a safe place to go. They've got daycare for the kids. We'll help them do a resume, help them get into the workforce and start working so that they can eventually get into some low-rent housing and just keep improving their condition, maybe increase their schooling.

When you see these types of projects that the province has put together, working with other ministries to get this done, it's pretty rewarding, and you can see – I think their success rate is like 100 per cent. It doesn't get much better than that, so we're pretty excited about those.

Around the FNDF – or do you want to talk?

**Mr. Young:** Do you want me to do the split?

**Mr. Wilson:** Yeah.

I'll talk about the FNDF a little bit. Donavon has got a better handle on how the money is split out of there, so I'll just get him to explain it to you on the splits and how it all falls out.

**Mr. Young:** Thanks, Minister. Just quickly, of the FNDF, which comes from slot machine revenue, 40 per cent, as you say, goes into the First Nations development fund, and of that 40 per cent 75 per cent goes to the six host nations and 25 per cent goes to the remaining 40 nonhost nations. Fifteen per cent goes to the local operator; 15 per cent goes to the local First Nation charity; 30 per cent goes to the government general revenue fund, but that's to capitalize the slot machines. When we put in slot machines and

swap out slot machines, the government takes care of that, and that's what our 30 per cent is for. When you look at it sort of holistically, 70 per cent of slot machine revenues go to the community through the operator, through the charity, through FNDF, and 30 per cent goes to the government.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Our next set of questions on the government side will come from Member Yao. Go ahead. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Yao:** Thank you so much for that, Chair. I'll just continue on, Minister, if that's all right with you, sir. Through the chair to the minister, on page 97 of your ministry business plans it's mentioned that the total net operating amount for Indigenous Relations will be about \$225 million. I just want to reiterate some things. You know, your ministry is truly leading the way on economic reconciliation, something that's often talked across the country. Our province, Alberta, is creating pathways for Indigenous people to participate in the economy through programs that you deliver, whether it be the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, the Aboriginal business investment fund, amongst others.

That said, a friend of mine reminded me. He's Indigenous, and he was congratulating me. He was saying: "You know what? I want to give your government credit." He was acknowledging the fact that we are paying attention to the Indigenous peoples, and he mentioned that in prior provincial governments they actually didn't put much effort, are the words he used, into Indigenous peoples, and he reminded me that by rights this is federal jurisdiction. I guess that is my question, sir, in particular. Where is the federal government in this?

If I can use an example, up in Fort Chipewyan, we have a health centre run by Nunee Health. That's the federally made arm that delivers health. A few years ago the community was asking about dialysis, increasing dialysis treatments. The feds didn't touch that. You know, we brought it to our Health minister here in Alberta, and they were actually able to increase the number of dialyses in the north, starting off with Lac La Biche but also Fort McMurray got some increases in its ability to provide dialysis and so forth. Again, the feds didn't seem to put any effort into that file, into ensuring that the community had adequate dialysis. I have no doubt that we still have some people that still have to travel far away, but at least we can get it in Fort McMurray now.

My question is: where is the federal government in this? Do we hold them accountable? What are your conversations when you speak with the federal government? How much are they going to participate in this process? I mean, it's acknowledged that even at the federal level they're looking at duplicating the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. Again, we seem to come up with some great initiatives, but I wonder if we're not doing the federal government's work for them and truly without any of the recognition, and they don't seem to be willing to compensate. So I'm wondering about that.

My next set of questions is on community policing. I just want to bring attention to the Métis settlements' enhanced community policing initiative. I understand we're going to be allocating \$2 million in Budget '25-26 in order to continue this initiative. I'm just wondering if you could explain to our committee some of the concerns that were shared by the Métis settlements in this regard to the point that we're going to continue this funding for the development, I guess, of the policing initiative that's going to go on through the next year or so.

Then the second part to that question is if you could explain how this initiative is working to ensure that Métis people across the province feel safer, more secure. I certainly wonder when these

small communities develop their own police agencies if they're not too small to have their own. There can sometimes be conflicts of interest when you have such a tiny community and you're a local member on that, so I'm wondering if you could help us navigate that. For a lot of these smaller communities I can't help but wonder if something like the RCMP might be better, who have a force that they can rotate through. They can get members from everywhere. I'm wondering if you can just help me understand that whole perspective on policing. I think it's very important; I know the First Nations in my community would desire such an initiative up in the north, and they'd like to see that. I'm hoping that you'll continue on with this initiative, but I'm hoping that you can maybe help us understand those things.

Again, thank you and your entire team for all the hard work you do. It's fantastic, and it's being recognized.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond. Maybe relate the federal funding to your budget when you're answering that question.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you so much. Great questions, Tany. I appreciate that.

The federal government a lot of times drops the ball. I can remember when the Pope's visit was here and I got tasked with the job of putting it all together. There was a pretty good bill that went along with that, and the federal government was taking all the credit for doing stuff, and they did nothing. Past Premier Kenney sent me with my shoebox of bills to Ottawa to go collect, and they basically laughed me out of the room. I mean, somebody had to do it, and the federal government didn't do it, so we stepped up, and we did it. I was proud that we did that because that meant a lot to people. I don't know if you remember the moment when Chief Littlechild presented a headdress to the Pope. It was pretty incredible.

We've been doing a lot of work around Jordan's principle, and it's right in my mandate. Premier Smith is very strong on this. She says that if something needs to be done, we're not going to have a kid that goes untreated, we're not going to have a community that doesn't get water just because the federal government doesn't do it; we're going to step up, we're going to do it, and then we're going to go after the federal government to pay for it. That's a big part of what we do, always working with the federal government to try to get extra funding out of them.

Around water projects especially, what we do is we'll supply the water up to the First Nation. Right now we're working on a line from Lacombe all the way up to Ermineskin, and we're going to be providing the funding to get the line there. Once it gets to the First Nation, then the federal government is supposed to step up and do the internal work, so we're pressing them to do that. We've got a couple of other projects up north that we're working on right now to get water to them, too. We get the water to them, and if nothing else it's a water transfer site where they can have the trucks haul until the federal government steps up and actually puts the lines into the community.

That's kind of our relationship with the federal government. If we try to press them to do their job and if they don't do it, then we'll have to step up in certain cases to do help out and then try to get reimbursed from the federal government.

5:30

Around policing what we did with the Métis settlements: we used to have what they called a long-term agreement with them. This was an agreement that went way back. We provided X amount of dollars. It was an agreement that was signed off by both governments as to

how they would get funded. That agreement ran out in 2023, but they weren't quite ready to move right in and move forward with it. I've got to thank Mr. Boitchenko. He's been working hard with the Métis settlements to get a lot of these projects moving forward.

I can tell you that they always tell me they don't want a handout; they want a hand up. I've seen that. I can give you an example. This year Paddle Prairie literally ran out of water. The river went dry. So what they did on their own: they got a water truck. They went out and were literally sucking water out of dugouts along the road to fill up their reservoir. They built an extra reservoir so they can make sure it's clean water going into the community. We monitor it to make sure it's all clean. I was prepared to try to run them a waterline. It's 30 kilometres to get them some water. They said: "No, Minister. We don't need that help. We'll get it done on our own." So, I mean, you can see the shift, like: we want to be proud; we want to do this on our own. They're starting the whole farm operation up there.

Around the policing, Donovan was able to come up in our budget and find money to help them out with the RCMP policing. They know that they're not big enough to start their own police force unless maybe they did something with everybody all combined.

I can tell you that it's not safe out there. I pulled into one of the settlements – I won't say which one – and one of the members coming to the meeting had just got his window shot out, and he was, like, two minutes behind us. This stuff happens up there. It's real. I was at one of the settlements and all of a sudden they were calling for a lockdown. There was a guy with a gun in the settlement. We were locked down in the building. I said, "Where's the RCMP?" He said, "Well, I can't get a hold of him." I was able to call the head cop at the time, Zablocki, and I said, "We need help," and within five minutes we had a car there.

That's the kind of stuff they deal with. That's why we want to make sure that they are getting the policing that they need, because there is some bad stuff happening out there. People take advantage of these little communities. Like, there's a lot of bad people out there that think that just because it's a First Nation or a Métis settlement, they can go in there and do some bad stuff. We have to make sure that we give them help. Maybe it's not our total responsibility, but somebody's got to do it, so this province steps up.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll go to the opposition for the next set of questions. Go ahead.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Next I'd like to turn to the various agreements as referenced on page 96 of the business plan '25-28, the agreements in place with the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Stoney Nakoda-Tsuut'ina Tribal Council, Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, and the Métis Nation of Alberta, now known as Otipemisiwak Métis Government.

Through you, Mr. Chair, again, throughout this sitting I've highlighted that there are more than a couple of nations that need a direct relationship with the provincial government. I'm heartened to hear that – I think the minister referenced Siksika was into a new agreement, and I would also urge that these additional First Nations and Métis governments require financial support through these relationship agreements, arguably, I would say even through resource revenue sharing, personally.

What is the status with Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta? I did not see an update in a protocol agreement there, particularly in the last year. I asked this question of the ministry last year. Through you, Mr. Chair, does the ministry have plans in place to ensure that Treaty 8 First Nations are included in one of these agreements in the near future? If not, then why not?

I'd now like to also turn to the Aboriginal business investment fund, ABIF, which is referenced at page 93 of the business plan '25-28. I take note of members opposite also asking this question. I'm heartened to hear their enthusiasm with this. It is interesting to note on page 93 of the ministry business plan that there was an increase of one full-time employee from the self-reporting of Indigenous-owned businesses compared to last year's reporting. I know the minister mentioned 1,000 jobs were allocated through the ABIF since its inception, but only one was allocated last year. Through you, Mr. Chair, can the minister clarify why this number has not increased over the last year and whether further investment in the Aboriginal business investment fund will be required to hire more full-time employees for Indigenous businesses but, more importantly, to support additional Indigenous-owned businesses?

Further, in addition to my concerns with the tariffs from the United States, what is the Aboriginal business investment fund doing or the ministry doing through ABIF to ready Indigenous business owners to prepare for the oncoming threat of tariffs? As I relayed in earlier moments during my questioning here, the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations issued their concern about including Indigenous businesses and Indigenous peoples in that conversation when it comes to the threat of tariffs. I would urge this government and this ministry, through you, Mr. Chair, to make those plans for future budgets and for future reference.

We know this government is very well aware that the tariff situation is going to cause acrimony across economies in this province, and Indigenous economies are no different. I ask, through you, Mr. Chair, that the ministry speak to this on how this movement has been contemplated. If it hasn't been contemplated, why not? Throughout the budget document it's very clear that tariffs have been calculated into the forecasting for the fall for the next year. I'm sad to not see it in any of the ministry documents. I think it deserves a conversation, and I think Indigenous nations in this province deserve those answers.

I would ask the ministry, very pointedly, this question: will ABIF or AIOC or any of the businesses or programs that the province has in place contemplate this tariff addition and these concerns that the Confederacy of Treaty Six has raised just yesterday but certainly that other Indigenous nations will raise in the near future? It will trickle down, it will affect them, and we need to have a plan as a province and as a provincial government to move forward. I raise these concerns very seriously because, again, I do not see it in the budget documents in front of us today.

Lastly, to the member opposite's point, Member Dyck, through you, will the ministry disclose all of the ABIF-funded programs from this budget? I see '23-24 online; just anticipating that it will be for '24-25.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thanks so much, and thanks for the great questions, as always. When it comes to Treaty 8 and around the protocol agreements, I've got the Premier coming down later this month, and we're going to meet with the Treaty 8 group and develop a relationship agreement with them as well. That is going forward, and a great group of chiefs down there as well. We work with, of course, the Blackfoot, the Kainai, Siksika, Piikani.

I actually have two Blackfoot names. I was pretty honoured to be able to receive those from the late Chief Grier, who was a dear friend of mine. He named me. It was his name. In Blackfoot it means the warrior who goes out to protect his people. He called me the gentle warrior. It was pretty powerful.

When the Blackfoot give you a name – I don't know if you've ever had a Blackfoot name given to you. I didn't even know this was happening. The whole community was there, and they do a capture dance. The Blackfoot are very big people. The dancer came up to me and literally picked me up – and I'm an old guy – and took me up to the chief. He gave me his name and he wrapped me in a blanket, and then the other guy picked me up and threw me out into the crowd, and they caught me. That means they accepted me into their community. I'm glad they caught me because that would have really hurt. I was given that Blackfoot name, the warrior.

Then when we opened the reconciliation garden, Elder Charlie Fox was here. We did a ceremony here, and he gave me his father's name, which was his name, and he gave it to me. He named me takes the gun at night. His father was a sniper in the war if you can imagine, but he didn't like to shoot people, so he would go out at night, sneak into the enemy camp, and take their rifles so that he wouldn't have to shoot them the next day. They tried to get him, but they could never shoot him. Like, he was impervious to bullets. So he named his son that, and then they passed that name on to me. It was a great honour to be given that name down there.

5:40

Yeah. The Blackfoot Confederacy has been very kind to me. We're working very closely with them on a lot of different projects. Like I say, we do have the Premier coming down later this month. I'm not sure when it's going to be. In a week or so we're going down there to enter into that agreement with them.

We did do one agreement earlier on right at Blackfoot Crossing. I don't know if you've ever been down there. It's where the original treaty was signed. You're looking down over the valley to where the Blackfoot people decided whether they're going to have a war or sign the treaty. Thank goodness they signed a treaty, because there were a lot of them. That's where the original treaty was signed, right at Blackfoot Crossing.

It was pretty special to do these agreements with the people down there. Of course, the Tsuut'ina and the Stoney Nakoda are part of that as well, but they've kind of broken away and do their own thing now. We have a separate agreement with the Tsuut'ina. There'll still be an agreement with the Blackfoot people down there.

When it comes to "What are we doing for the future?" we have been so dependent on the States, and we've realized that we need to find other markets. I don't know if you know Chief Isaac from way up north there. He's a good friend of mine. He's been helping us, and he's kind of leading the path on what we're calling economic corridors. What we want to create is an economic corridor from Alberta through B.C. to hit their ports out there. We were looking at going to Alaska, but I don't think we should do that now. I think we should focus on Prince Rupert and work on getting our products out through them. With his help we've made some good contacts with the B.C. First Nations. All along the line everybody is liking our proposal.

What I'm going to be working on and pitching to all of my colleagues is an economic corridor from Alberta to B.C. This would be an economic corridor that would basically belong to the Indigenous people. This could be a huge economic impact for the Indigenous people, for shipping our goods. They would basically have the say as to kind of like a preapproval almost. So if you're going to build a road or a highway or . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We now go to the government side. Member Hunter, please go ahead.

**Mr. Hunter:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and through you to the minister. I also want to echo what my colleagues have said, that it is so nice to work with you and to see how you work with our First Nations people throughout Alberta. Your heart: you wear it on your sleeve. There's a genuineness to you that I believe helps in very difficult decisions and difficult situations. So thank you so much for your work.

Now, Minister, the first time I got to work with you is when we were first put into cabinet together. I was in the role of red tape reduction minister, and you were in your current role. I remember talking to you about the importance of red tape reduction and how everybody, you know, the government needs to get out of the way of our job creators and our innovators. Regular Albertans and First Nations are no different than everybody else in that way.

I talked to you about – one of the problems that was brought to me by a friend of mine was that they had two treaty cards, and you were able to work through that. Rather than having to have two, you got it down to one rather than being able to have both of those. So I thank you for that work that you did.

I really just wanted to have you maybe provide some information about some of the new red tape reduction initiatives that you're working on and provide maybe a little bit more flavour and help us understand what you're doing. Also, if I remember correctly, Minister, you were, I think, the first ministry to be able to reach your 33 per cent reduction, which is fantastic. I'm pretty sure you probably still have the award that I had for the first ministry to get that. You probably still have it in your office there. So if you can maybe provide some information about that, that would be great.

I also wanted to ask a question about page 95 of the 2025-28 business plan in terms of the Indigenous reconciliation initiative funding. I see that you've got a \$3.9 million budget line item that will continue to provide support for many communities across the province. My question there is: could you please expand on the Indigenous reconciliation initiative fund and how this funding will go on to support Indigenous communities all across Alberta in the future?

Then I have a question in regard to reconciliation on page 96 of the 2025-2028 business plan. In your opening speech you mentioned how Budget 2025 maintains the funding for protocol and relationship agreements between Indigenous communities and Alberta's government. I've got a couple of questions there, through you, Mr. Chair. Can you provide an update to our committee on the Alberta government's relationships with Indigenous organizations and how we are working to improve these relationships through budget 2025 and '26? And then also if you could provide and explain how protocol agreements impact both parties and give our committee an idea on the benefits we can expect through these agreements through the 2025-26 budget.

I also have a question, Minister, in regard to page 93 of the '25-28 Indigenous Relations business plan. You focus on enabling access to capital for Alberta-based Indigenous groups, investing in medium- to large-scale projects through the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. The AIOC enabled Indigenous groups to participate in commercially viable, major natural resource, telecommunications, agriculture, transportation, tourism, and related infrastructure projects that play an integral role in Alberta's economic growth. I was interested, Minister, to hear your story about where they were building greenhouses and if there is an appetite or whether you're doing any training to help other Indigenous communities be able to have that as an option for them so that they could be able to have that good, quality food. I mean, I know that wherever you are, if you can get quality food coming right close, that really helps.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Minister, you have five minutes to answer questions posed to you relative to your budget. Carry on.

**Mr. Wilson:** Red tape reduction – I actually still do have your plaque on my trophy wall there. I was the first one to get it on there, and you gave me the award for that. The way we were able to do that was through our consultation department. A simple consultation used to take hours if not days, if not weeks to get out the door. So our department – can I let Thomas talk to this? Thomas is in charge of our consultation, and he was the one that put this all together, so I'm going to let him take the credit for it. Like, he did an amazing job on that.

**The Chair:** You'll have to say your name, and if you can relate it to the budget and the business plan somehow, that'd be great.

**Mr. Djurfors:** My name is Thomas Djurfors, and I'm assistant deputy minister with consultation, land, and policy in Indigenous Relations. Happy to answer that question. What we did in the ACO, the Aboriginal consultation office, was digitize the system. Before, we used to send e-mails and all those kinds of things and that would just take all sorts of time, of course, in dealing with proponents and with Indigenous communities, so we put it online. Basically, now the communities and the proponents can just apply through an online system that we call the digital services. That's how we kind of responded to the whole red tape reduction. It actually just cut back enormous amounts of steps in how we go about consultation. That's it.

5:50

**Mr. Wilson:** Thanks, Thomas.

Yeah. That was probably one of the biggest areas that we cut down red tape, and for the First Nations it meant – as you know, it's a lot of work doing the consultation on jobs. Some of the First Nations we'll do upwards of 10,000 to 15,000 consultations a year, if you can imagine. Like, nothing moves forward in Alberta without the Indigenous people being part of the whole consultation process. That's a tremendous amount of work that's involved there, so to be able to digitize that and get the information out to the First Nations quickly so that they can have their people – because some First Nations will have 10, 15 consultations going on at the same time. It's a lot of work. We get that information out to them as quickly as we can so that they can go to work with their people and start looking at how it's going to impact their communities. That's been a huge help for us.

And then, even with industry – because now all of a sudden they know there's going to be movement. They're not going to be sitting for years before they can get a project started, especially if it's a simple project where you're just doing a seismic or something like that. We can have those done in a matter of minutes out the door, to be honest. So those ones are working really well, and this has sped it all up, and that helps everybody. That helps the First Nations, the Indigenous people, the Métis people, everybody that lives in Edmonton or Calgary. Without these consultations going on, nothing happens in the oil patch or forestry or mining or anything like that. It's a big part of what we do, consultation, to make sure that both the First Nations and Métis people and industry are able to move forward with projects. Otherwise, the delays were ridiculous. Cutting that red tape made a huge difference for the whole province.

The white card: I forgot all about that. I think it was actually Chief Isaac that came to me with that. Was it? I think it was. We got two cards. He said: Why do I have to have two cards? We

worked with the red tape reduction, and we got it down to one card. I thought it was pretty cool to get that done.

The Indigenous reconciliation initiative. I've talked about that a bit. That's one of our big keys for economic reconciliation. What we'll do there is we'll start it, and they can apply for a grant to do capacity funding because to put together a business plan, especially if you're a small First Nation, that's a big job when you put together a business plan, when you're applying for a \$750,000 grant. We are very thorough because, like I say, in the end, I have to answer to the Auditor General. He's saying: "Where is this money going? How is it being spent? Are there jobs being created?" I have to be very thorough on that. We make sure that before any money goes out the door, that we've had a good, thorough discussion with the First Nation people, Indigenous people, Métis people to make sure that their grant is in line with what we need to make sure that it's a successful project. We don't want to set people up for failure. We want to set them up for success. So that's the first part of it, helping them get this capacity money together so that they can put together a good business plan.

Like I say, not everybody has the capacity to be able to do that. Some of the bigger First Nations, of course, they've got the people on staff, lawyers, whatever. . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll go to our next question for the opposition. Go ahead.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to now ask a few questions about the crossministry work that Indigenous Relations may have connections to under this budget. Every single time I talk . . .

**The Chair:** It's the camera moving.

**Member Arcand-Paul:** Oh, that's the noise. Like, Creator, is that you?

On page 91 of the ministry business plan, again, it mentioned crossministry work. Mr. Chair, I'd like to focus this question on two programs that I have not talked about but which are referenced in the budget documents before us today.

My initial question is that the Premier did not include any reference to Indigenous peoples in her strategic plan at all and, through you, Mr. Chair, I ask why that is?

On page 72 of the fiscal plan it states that \$15 million will be allocated three times over the next three years for Indigenous health initiatives, for a total of \$45 million, while "work continues . . . to address health inequities, promote health and wellness, and give patients choice when receiving care," specifically for Indigenous peoples. This is apparently an \$80 million decrease from what I assume was the Indigenous primary health care innovation fund. My question, through you, Mr. Chair, is why did the minister not advocate further for the continued spending of this program under this budget for this very vital work that would have assisted not just Indigenous nations but also many other rural Albertans? And, to you through the chair, can the minister elaborate on what these initiatives will entail if it is not the innovation fund? I would like clarity on that, as I am assuming that the ministry has strong connections with Indigenous nations.

From my review of the very thorough website on this fund, the '24-26, there are only two grant recipients and, at a max of \$5 million per project, there's some change left on the table on this year's budget. Through you, Mr. Chair, can the ministry either look into this or speak to why this is?

I also note that in another envelope of funding there is a First Nations college grant, which goes to five colleges across the province of similar relationships that IR would have. That envelope

I believe comes out of perhaps Advanced Education, although the relevant colleges were not alongside the other polytechnics, universities, or colleges in the capital plan section of the fiscal plan, which begins at page 93. Through you, Mr. Chair, a two-pronged question. Can the minister elaborate on which Indigenous colleges receive this funding, and will they be expected to receive this funding on an ongoing basis? Further, can the minister elaborate on whether the ministry connects this other ministry with these colleges and whether work may be furthered with other organizations which may be looking for funding? For example, I can think of an institution in Treaty 8 territory that would welcome college funding applications and opportunities.

Finally, on page 87 of the fiscal plan, there's a good overview of the work that the ministry has intended to do with the ultimate goal of Indigenous nations and peoples "fully participating in Alberta's prosperity." While I appreciate that the intention of this inclusion is to provide some strength for the government relying heavily on economic reconciliation, my question, through you: does the minister or the ministry officials present here also have a contingency plan in a crossministry strategy for when the U.S. tariffs begin trickling down their effects to the Indigenous nations? This is specific for any programming that Indigenous Relations covers.

Something that was not touched on earlier today by either side is – and I have to ask it again – how has this government further expanded its leadership in Jordan's principle, particularly if there's been no budget for said leadership in this budget or last year's budget? I bring this up because we all heard the news of multiple projects, partly because of a failure on the federal government, but also the province has a responsibility under Jordan's principle to fund projects. The purpose of Jordan's principle is to ensure no Indigenous child goes without, and where the gaps are that exist from the federal government, the province is intended and supposed to step up to support.

But we've heard that there are school districts in this province that applied for Jordan's principle funding but did not receive any support. They are looking to the provincial government, and I know I've directed them to this government to seek that funding. I'll continue asking the question on their behalf because Jordan's principle requires any government that exists, that supports people in this country: they're supposed to be the first pair. So if the province isn't stepping up, I ask: why? Jordan's principle requires it. I would urge that we stop letting our children down in this province and continue to support them under this very necessary principle.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Minister, if you could address the questions answered, that would be great.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thanks for the questions. A lot of them actually would go back to other ministries but I can tell you what I know about them.

We do advocate, of course, for Indigenous health, and one of the health pillars now is just around Indigenous health. The woman that's in charge of it, I actually brought her onto our team originally. She was in charge of the Friendship Centre out at Edson, if I believe right, Lisa Higgerty, and she worked in our department, but she was so good that she got stolen into Education and she was so good they stole her into Health. So if you've got any issues or questions around Indigenous health, you can contact Lisa. She's very open, a great help for our ministry. Because she has worked in several ministries, that gives me a nice in to Education and to Health because of her work that she's done in there. There is a lot of work being done there.

There's an Indigenous advocate now. I hear this a lot, even from my area, that Indigenous people go to the hospital or whatever and they feel that they're not being cared for properly. They really didn't have any other avenue to come to me or something like that. So there is an advocate that's been put in place now to hear their concerns and help them through the system.

On Advanced Ed, when we're talking about colleges and that type of thing: what we did there, that's part of my whole protocol table thing again. We set up the protocol tables. Health is at that table. Education is at that table. So any issues that a First Nation or Métis community would have if they were doing a protocol table with us, they bring it to that table. The Minister of Health is there with her people. She can direct them to get to work on a project, and they actually get things done that way. Like I said before, you've got the technicians that actually do the work, the grunt work, not just talk like me but actually get the work done. You got their technicians and our technicians. They can work together on a program and then bring it forward, and we bring it back to the table, and we all sign off on it, and away we go.

6:00

That's been my most successful way of dealing with other ministries rather than just trying to have my little department do everything. We were kind of like the jack of all trades, but now we've got the specialists. We can go to either Health or Education. The Health minister has been very open and helping us with developing a pillar just for Indigenous, so I can see that we're going to start making a difference. As you know, the results for Indigenous health haven't been very good for the last couple of years, and that's quite troubling. We know we have to do better there and start working with these communities to find out what their problems are and how we can do better there. Those protocol tables are how we do that, so that's been very good.

You talked about the tariffs again. Not specifically in my budget, but overall, you'll see a line item for tariff contingency fund. And we have no idea – who knows by the hour where Trump is at? One time they're on, then they're off, then they're on, then they're off. Who knows? So we budgeted \$4 billion for a tariff contingency. That would help, whether it's First Nations, Métis, or any company that's doing business, if we start running into trouble with all these tariffs, there is money set aside, that we can put that assistance in. Hopefully, somebody wakes him up and this all ends, but I don't think it's going to. It seems like we keep ramping up.

Our Premier has been working really hard on this. She's actually down in the States right now meeting with different groups down there, and we've had some members here that have gone down and made good relationships with various people and departments down there, so we've kind of opened the door. The people that are actually in the know are working with us to try to avoid this whole tariff situation because they know that the tariffs hurt everybody. It doesn't just hurt us. It hurts the Americans; it hurts us. Like, what's the point? There's really no point to this.

We're working hard. We're not going to get into the whole battle of we're going to put a huge tariff on oil. I see now today that Ford has backed off his position. He's not putting a tariff on electricity. Trump's going to double aluminum, then he's going 25 per cent. It's all over the board, so we didn't even know what to budget for it. We threw a number in there at \$4 billion, and that's in the budget right now to help the communities in case something goes awry.

Jordan's principle. I did write a letter of support with the Minister of Education to the federal government to make sure that it doesn't get forgotten that there are issues around Jordan's principle, but the way our Premier has directed me and other ministries is that

Jordan's principle is in effect. If somebody needs help, we're going to do it, and we'll fight the federal government for it later.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

Our next question goes to the government side. Member Armstrong-Homeniuk, go ahead. Five minutes.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you, Chair. Through you to the minister: first of all, Minister, I just want to acknowledge you and all the good work that you do with your file. You are passionate and caring. You wear your heart on your sleeve, which shows me how genuine you really are. You also have excellent staff that support you, and you're very lucky. I'm honoured to be a colleague of yours.

I would like to ask you a few questions on the services provided by the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. I see on line 5, page 129 of the Indigenous Relations estimates for '25-26 that the budget for the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal has been increased by about \$18,000 this year, bringing the funding for '25-26 in total to around \$1.2 million. Can you speak on how this funding will assist the operations of the tribunal and where it will be spent? Also, through the chair, could the minister please speak on how this funding will assist in the operations of the tribunal and where it will be spent going forward and explain to our committee what the process is for appeals to the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal? Is this process expected to change in the '25-26 reporting period?

My next question, Chair, through you to the minister: as the fastest growing segment of Alberta's population, urban Indigenous people remain vital contributors to our current and future workforce and economy. Creating opportunities and supporting urban Indigenous people is vital to moving the province forward and ensuring prosperity is attained. I see on page 96 of the ministry business plan that the ministry supports the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association with an annual funding agreement. How long have you worked with the ANFCA, and how much funding will you provide to this incredible association going forward next year?

Next question, Chair, through you to the minister: the crisis in missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2S-plus people remains a priority for this government. I understand that your ministry has been collaborating with various organizations and partners to address this issue. On page 96 of the business plan I see key objective 4.3, which focuses on building and enhancing partnerships with organizations that support Indigenous women and 2S-plus individuals facing significant challenges. To you, Minister: how is the Ministry of Indigenous Relations working to strengthen partnerships with these supportive organizations going forward?

Chair, through you to the minister again: our Alberta government has consistently recognized the urgency of addressing the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people. Given the ongoing concerns about the high rates of violence and the complex factors contributing to this issue, can you please outline the concrete action your ministry is taking in the '25-26 reporting period to respond to this crisis? Chair, again, through you to the minister – you're taking notes, Minister, right? Sorry if I'm talking too fast; you can stop me if I am. On page 95 of the business plan key objective 3.2 focuses on implementing and supporting government actions guided by the Alberta Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Roadmap to prevent violence and increase the safety and economic security of Indigenous women, girls, and 2S-plus people.

I see that on page 97 of the business plan \$7.7 million has been allocated for Indigenous women's initiatives in '25-26, which will provide secretariat support to the First Nations and Métis Women's

Councils on Economic Security and contribute to Alberta's response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Minister, can you outline the steps your ministry is taking to advance the key objective and the government's broader efforts going forward to prevent violence against Indigenous peoples, particularly Indigenous women, girls, and 2S-plus people? How will the \$7.7 million in funding support these initiatives? Can you provide details on specific programs or actions this investment will contribute in the '25-26 reporting period?

With 30 seconds left I will leave you with that.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond.

**Mr. Wilson:** Thank you so much. I'll just go back to where we started. I think we talked about the Métis tribunal. With the Métis settlements I'm kind of like every ministry; I'm like Municipal Affairs there. The Métis settlements are really unique. We're the only province that has Métis settlements, so it's kind of a unique situation we've got here. They have combined over 1.25 million acres of land that's in their title. It's not like a First Nation; it's in their title. But each individual person doesn't have a provincial title. They have what they call a Métis title.

It gets kind of complex. You've got one person that has a quarter section – and to get this quarter section, they have to fence it, they have to look after it and everything else – but they don't pay property tax to the province. They keep it internal. So if there's an argument between two people as to whose land it is or how it should be worked out, we've set up this Métis tribunal. They have a board, they set up a hearing, and it's very formal. It's like a quasi-judicial court where they would go in and both sides would present their case and then it would be decided as to how the transfer of land would be completed or not completed. This is how we resolve the disputes. It's not me being Big Brother telling them how to run their operation. They do it internally.

6:10

We fund that part of the operation for them. We have a chair that has to apply to become a chair, and the other members apply to be members. They've been doing a really great job for us. I'm kind of like the Maytag repairman there. It just chugs along, and I don't really hear too many problems with it. It's been working really well for us. We want to make sure that they have enough funding to carry on and do their work and that if there are any disputes they're able to handle it internally. That's why you never really hear too much about it. It's just doing a really good job for us over there. So that's one of the areas I work on.

The friendship centres: I wish I had one in every community. Those are critical for me, especially in the urban centres. I think it was Brooks who talked earlier about the urban Indigenous people. There are literally thousands of Indigenous people that don't live on-reserve and live in the cities. Especially if you're coming from a small community into Edmonton, where do you go? Where do you go for help? Within the Indigenous community, then, they know where these friendships are; they realize that if they go there, that's where they can get their support. They know if they're looking for housing where they can get housing. If they're looking for some help with some kids or what have you, you go to these friendship centres. They're just a safe place to drop into, so you can drop in there. You know you're not going to be judged. If you need some help, people are going to help you out.

They're their own entity, basically. I thought I could just put a friendship centre wherever I wanted, but it's not that easy. They

actually have to be up and running for two years and be – is it black good or red good? – in the black. Basically, a municipality kind of has to take it on and help them out to get started, and then we can help them with some funding to keep operating. I'd really love to have one in my community, but I'm having a little issue with the community there to get it going. But it really gives a safe place for Indigenous people to come to and get that hand up that they might need. So I'm really happy with the friendship centres, with what they've done. We do fund them, and I think we increased their funding last year.

**Mr. Young:** No. I think they're flat.

**Mr. Wilson:** Flat this year?

**Mr. Young:** Yeah, flat.

**Mr. Kwas:** One point three.

**Mr. Wilson:** One point three.

I was hoping that we could get some more friendship centres going. I'm working on a couple of communities to get them involved, but I can't just start one up and fund them. They have their own – I know, it would be so easy if I could just do that, but I don't have that much power. They do a great job for us, and it helps me out in communities to know that they're there and people aren't going to fall through the cracks. Like I said, especially with the young moms coming into a city with a kid: that just scares me. There are so many bad guys out there that take advantage of these people. If they can get into a friendship centre, they know where they can go for help, they know where they can go for housing, and it just gives me that extra tool to work with to help the people.

Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll go to the opposition for the next set of questions. You have five minutes. Go ahead.

**Member Calahoo Stonehouse:** Thank you, Chairperson. Thank you to the minister and staff for answering our questions so far.

In 2010 I was a radio show host where I mentored youth at risk in partnership with Kendall Wallace and iHuman Youth Society. One of the youth that I mentored had started to use drugs more often. I noticed because this individual showed up regularly at 9 a.m. on the dot to do radio with me every day. I noticed this person started using more drugs and started engaging in sex work. I asked this individual what was going on and why they were cycling out of control, and in a frantic mess she explained to me that her biological mother had been murdered, her biological aunt had been murdered, and her grandmother, who was an Indian residential school survivor, had overdosed and died. This young person was raised in foster care and was soon going to age out of care and was afraid she would have no one. I said, "Well, I'll be your mom; I'll adopt you," and she moved in with my children and I. This daughter of mine is now 33 years old.

Two summers ago we opened up her child welfare file. In this file it was disclosed that she was sexually abused from multiple foster parents, faced food insecurity, abuse, and a tremendous amount of torture both in group homes and in foster homes. Since then in her university I noticed she started cycling after opening her child welfare file. Less and less FaceTime, less and less visits home, and all of a sudden she vanished. I was unable to find my daughter. So I went to East Hastings over the Christmas break where I pulled my daughter out of a sex trafficking ring. I have brought her home,



and we have begun methadone treatment. There are no voluntary beds available for Indigenous women coming out of addiction.

Mr. Chairperson, my question through you, to the minister, 4.3 on page 96 of the business plan '25-28, this ministry commits to engaging with organizations led by Indigenous women and strengthening relationships but does not allocate the spending amount.

Mr. Chairperson, to the minister, I want to know why we have heard reports of funding cuts to organizations like the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton when we know 1 in 3 Indigenous women are sexually assaulted. We also have seen a reduction in instructed to leave out allocations, and I'm curious: are these to hide the budget cuts from the public?

Further, I am curious, as the minister mentioned earlier about [aboriginalalert.com](http://aboriginalalert.com). I am curious, Chairperson, through you to the ministry: what are the interprovincial agreements so that we are having province-to-province conversations? Mr. Chairperson, through you, I want to know: what are the policing agreements that have been negotiated so that these systems are connecting and speaking to one another?

Mr. Chairperson, through you, I want to know how this system is not only tracking missing and murdered Indigenous women but how it is collecting evidence and data to persecute perpetrators of violence against missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Lastly, Mr. Chairperson, I would like to know how [aboriginalalert.com](http://aboriginalalert.com) is supporting families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit. Those are my questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

You have up to five minutes to answer the questions. Go ahead, Minister.

**Mr. Wilson:** I'm so sorry for your loss. We had a good talk about this before. I can't even talk about this, so I'm going to turn it over to Kristina and let her take it on. She's my expert, and she does an amazing job for me.

You're okay to do that?

**Ms Midbo:** Yeah.

**Mr. Wilson:** Okay. I'll let you do it.

**Ms Midbo:** I too want to thank you for sharing your story. I'll probably cry, too, but that just is the nature of the work that me and my team do, so I just want to hold space for that.

I guess, first, I'll speak to Aboriginal Alert. We first heard about the Aboriginal Alert initiative through Dan Martel and his wife, Sandra, who had been on their own journey of loss and grief. As they were talking about the impacts of residential school and the trauma that our communities, our families, and our loved ones continue to experience, they talked about: how can we make a difference? So they started Aboriginal Alert with no funding at all, and it was really to try to raise awareness in communities, in cities across the province and across the country. We wanted to support Sandra and Dan Martel, and we were the first province to fund them.

Their website is not just specific to Alberta, but they really are trying to support families across the country. They put out alerts. It goes through social media. You can sign in to be part of the compassion circle where you can help distribute these alerts. It's on Facebook. It's on Twitter. It's everywhere. Through our support with Aboriginal Alert they've also established relationships with police forces in Alberta but also in other provinces; for example,

Thunder Bay Police. They engage with the police. The police are using this tool. They will send a message to Aboriginal Alert and say: can you please bump up this person? They've now added a historical person's page or tab to their work. They track data, and they're doing really good work.

**6:20**

At the national round-table into missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people in Ottawa earlier this year there was an update from Manitoba on the work they're doing to engage communities, families, loved ones, and survivors on the creation of a Red Dress Alert in their province. They're doing excellent work in Manitoba. Our Premier's council chair was also present. She spoke to Red Dress Alerts. She noted that a Red Dress Alert, a national system may not work everywhere across the country because of the unique needs and circumstances.

She referenced Aboriginal Alert as a tool and a mechanism right now that we're using in Alberta. We are hoping other provinces and territories support Aboriginal Alert. There's a lot of talk about racism across the country and if there are a lot of alerts, people may become – the word is escaping me, but they just won't care – desensitized to it. Through Aboriginal Alert, people can volunteer, people can share and get the word out because it's our communities and our families who are desperate to find our loved ones and bring them home. That's the tool we have right now.

We are hoping to work with the Premier's council to continue to explore what a Red Dress Alert might look like in the province. If they're just supporting Aboriginal Alert and want us to enhance that work, that's something we would consider. Absolutely. We also have at the Premier's council table an ex officio member from Public Safety and Emergency Services. They will certainly be part of that conversation. That's what we're doing with Aboriginal Alert.

I can't remember the other question you asked us, but in terms of supporting families and survivors, my team is doing the best we can. The community support fund . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will go to the government side for their next set of questions. Go ahead, Armstrong-Homeniuk.

**Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk:** Thank you.

Chair, through you to the minister: page 94 of the 2025-28 business plan also mentions – I think it should be '26 business plan – that \$1.5 million will be allocated to support Métis organizations participating in the Métis credible assertion process and provide Indigenous consultation capacity program funding in the event of a successful assertion. This is obviously a deeply important process for many Métis organizations in our province. Minister: how many organizations went through the process last year, and how many of these had credible assertion established as a result? Is this trend expected to continue in 2024-2025 and in future years? Also, Chair, through you to the minister: how will the decreased funding impact communities that have or want to apply for credible assertion status going into the 2025-26 reporting period?

Chair, through you to the minister again: on page 95 of the '25-28 ministry business plan I wanted to highlight under outcome three that the Ministry of Indigenous Relations has offered "the Indigenous Learning Initiative to Alberta Public Service . . . employees to build internal capacity and understanding in working with Indigenous Peoples [here] in Alberta." This program allows Albertans who work in a public servant role to better understand and internalize Aboriginal perspectives in order to better serve all Albertans in the community. Chair, through you: could the minister

please expand on the necessity of the Indigenous learning initiative and give our committee some information regarding the contents and delivery of this initiative going into 2025-2026?

Also, Chair, through you again to the minister: could you please explain to this committee some of the feedback that they've received from this initiative and touch on how many groups are expected to engage with the Indigenous learning initiative going forward based on previous results?

Again, Chair, through you to the minister: on page 96 of the 2025-28 ministry business plan, I wanted to bring attention to the Métis settlements enhanced community policing initiative for policing services on settlements. I see the ministry will be allocating \$2 million in Budget 2025-26 in order to continue this initiative. Also again, Chair, through you to the minister: please explain to our committee some of the concerns shared by the Métis settlements across Alberta which have led to the Ministry of Indigenous Relations to continue funding this policing initiative going into 2025-26. Also, Minister, through the Chair, could you please explain to the committee how the Métis settlement enhanced community policing initiative is working to ensure Métis people across our province feel safer and more secure in their communities going forward?

Again, Chair, through you to the minister: on page 96 of the 2025-28 ministry business plan I wanted to highlight the \$1.6 million dedicated to the Métis Nation of Alberta framework agreement. This agreement promotes and facilitates the advancement of Alberta's Métis people by addressing agreed upon needs and preserving the Métis identity and cultural heritage throughout Alberta. Also, Chair, through you to the minister: please explain to this committee how this \$1.6 million investment to the Métis Nation Alberta framework agreement will help address the concerns of Métis people across Alberta for the 2025-2026 reporting period. Also, Chair, through you to the minister: Minister, could you please explain to this committee how the Métis Nation of Alberta framework agreement is helping to preserve and uplift cultural heritage here in Alberta, going into the 2025-26 reporting period?

Chair, I think I'll pass on the rest of my time.

**The Chair:** Very good. You have a little over two minutes and 30 seconds to respond.

**Mr. Wilson:** That was a lot. I'll do my best.

Under the credible assertion process with the Métis groups, it's a very complex process. We have to meet a lot of guidelines, because we're it's laid out by the courts very clearly what we have to do. We have a whole team that works on this. We've only got two, I think, that have been asserted so far. They have to meet all the guidelines to prove that they were one of the first Métis communities. That means everything from going through birth certificates, marriage certificates, to prove that they have been in the area long enough to be asserted. We're working with, I don't know, quite a few right now as to . . .

**Mr. Young:** Fifteen.

**Mr. Wilson:** Fifteen groups right now that want to be asserted. That's why there isn't a big budget for it, because it actually literally could take years to go through the process. We are working with several different groups right now. Some up in Tany's area have been pushing hard for it. We'll see how many we can get through this year, but I don't expect it to be a whole bunch. I know we are working with about 15 different groups right now.

I was going to talk about the Indigenous learning initiative before we run out of time here. That's been a really good program for us. I was looking at the numbers here. Since 2018 20,000 Alberta public service, including staff for agencies and boards, have gone through our Indigenous learning initiative. That's a lot of staff that have gone through the process.

One thing that I wanted to mention was my good friend Gilman Cardinal, who worked with us for many years. He passed this last year. He had adopted me. I was his grandson. He was so proud. Any time we went to a function, he'd always introduce me as his grandson. He meant a lot to me, and he did so much work in this area. He was one of our leaders. So, I just wanted to mention his name while I still had time, before I ran out here.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded. I would like to remind the committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow, March 12, 2025, at 7 p.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 6:30 p.m.]



