



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Safety and Services

Department of Aboriginal Relations
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, February 10, 2010
6:30 p.m.

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Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

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Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL), Deputy Chair

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Olson, Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC)
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Department of Aboriginal Relations Participant

Hon. Alison Redford Acting Minister

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Wednesday, February 10, 2010

[Mr. Drysdale in the chair]

**Department of Aboriginal Relations
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services to order. Welcome, everyone, to the meeting. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Department of Aboriginal Relations for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011. I'd like to start out by going around and everybody introducing themselves, and I'll ask the minister to introduce the staff at the table. We'll start with Neil.

Dr. Brown: I'm Neil Brown, MLA for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Mr. Rogers: George Rogers, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Griffiths: Doug Griffiths, Battle River-Wainwright.

Dr. Taft: Kevin Taft, Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Redford: Hello. I'm Alison Redford, Acting Minister of Aboriginal Relations this evening. With me is Deputy Minister Maria David-Evans, Assistant Deputy Minister Donavon Young, and Howard Wong, acting senior financial officer and acting assistant deputy minister of corporate services.

Mr. Olson: Verlyn Olson, MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Sandhu: Peter Sandhu, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Xiao: David Xiao, Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Cao: Wayne Cao, MLA, Calgary-Fort.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: Wayne Drysdale, MLA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

We had a couple other members join us. Ms Notley, if you could introduce yourself.

Ms Notley: Rachel Notley, Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Kang: Darshan Kang, MLA, Calgary-McCall. Sorry for being a little late.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, everyone. Just so everybody is aware, I will call a five-minute break after the Official Opposition has had their hour so that it's not quite a three-hour stretch all at once for the minister.

I'll just go through the process real quickly here for the first meeting so that everybody is clear on the procedures. Standing Order 59.01(4) prescribes the sequence as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party [the Wildrose Alliance], if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
- (d) any Member may speak thereafter.

With the concurrence of the committee the chair will recognize the members of the fourth party, the NDs, if any. Following the members of the third party and for the next 20 minutes, the members of the fourth party and the minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on behalf of the minister may speak.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate. Department officials and members of staff may be present but may not address the committee. Members may speak more than once; however, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they plan to combine their time with the minister's time.

Three hours are scheduled to consider the estimates of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the department's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted on the schedule, and we will adjourn. Otherwise, we will adjourn at 9:30 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

The vote on estimates is deferred until Committee of Supply on March 18, 2010. Any amendments to the estimates cannot seek to increase the amount of the estimates being considered, change the destination of a grant, or change the destination or purpose of a subsidy. An amendment may be proposed to reduce an estimate, but the amendment cannot propose to reduce the estimate by its full amount.

The vote on amendments is also deferred until Committee of Supply on March 18, 2010. Written amendments must be reviewed by Parliamentary Counsel no later than 6 p.m. on the day they are to be moved. Seventeen copies of the amendments must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

With that, I will now invite Madam Minister to begin her remarks.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good evening. I'm pleased to be here on behalf of Minister Len Webber tonight, Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Just before I start, I would like to say that because of the circumstances where I am acting today, and in an effort to provide as many answers as I possibly can, I would beg your indulgence if I do not have the answer particularly at my fingertips and take a moment to consult with officials so that we can keep the information flowing and don't have to take a lot under advisement.

Thank you for this opportunity to present Aboriginal Relations 2010-2011 spending estimates as well as the ministry's 2010-13 business plan. Before I do that, I'd like to take a moment to introduce you to some of the people from the department who aren't sitting at the table tonight who are attending: Tim Morrison, executive assistant to Minister Webber; the assistant deputy minister of consultation and land claims, Stan Rutwind; communications director Marie Iwanow; and executive director of policy and planning Cameron Henry.

The role of Aboriginal Relations is to oversee development and alignment of government of Alberta legislation, policies, and initiatives that affect aboriginal people and their rights. The ministry strives to accomplish this by building effective relationships with aboriginal communities, industry, and governments as well as other stakeholders.

Alberta has one of Canada's largest and fastest growing aboriginal populations. Nearly a quarter of a million people in this province claim aboriginal ancestry. Aboriginal social and economic issues are interrelated with education, employment, resource development, health care, and economic development, among others. The ministry

is working to address these and other priority concerns with its colleagues across the government of Alberta. Its federal counterparts, who generally have responsibility for First Nations people living on reserves, are an important partner in our relationship with aboriginal groups. As well, the ministry interacts with various resource and other industries and a diverse range of aboriginal and nonaboriginal stakeholders. With the current economic outlook all government departments and partners must contribute to corrective fiscal actions, and Aboriginal Relations is prepared to do its part.

I want to make clear from the outset that only \$35 million, or less than a quarter of Aboriginal Relations' \$152 million proposed budget for the coming year, is slated for ministry programs and services. The remaining \$118 million flows through the ministry to the First Nations development fund, which supports social, economic, and community development projects in First Nations communities.

At first view, it would appear that the ministry budget has grown by 1.7 per cent year over year. However, this is due to the projected \$8 million increase in the First Nations development fund funds that flow through the ministry. As most of you know, the First Nations development fund is not funded out of general government revenues. It represents 40 per cent of the net proceeds from government-owned slot machines at the five First Nations casinos across the province. Another 30 per cent of the aboriginal casino revenues fund traditional Alberta lottery initiatives across Alberta. The ministry budget for the coming year includes a fiscal correction amounting to a \$5 million reduction in operational spending. The department has sought a balanced approach to meet provincial objectives for restraint while maintaining its capacity to respond to issues and pressures.

Aboriginal Relations is focusing its resources and efforts on what it does best: building relationships between Alberta and aboriginal communities and leaders to support the economic and social development so vital to their well-being. The ministry has already begun to decrease spending by reducing its workforce by approximately 8 per cent, for a savings of \$957,000. There are not going to be layoffs. These are currently vacant FTE positions that are not being filled at this time. Aboriginal Relations' mission is largely accomplished through hands-on, face-to-face services provided by ministry staff. Reducing their numbers means an adjustment in this approach, reassessing the types of initiatives that can be supported, and reducing the level of support previously available for some projects. I think it's important here to reassure you and all Albertans, particularly the aboriginal communities, that the ministry's most important core initiatives will endure.

One of the ministry's business plan goals is to support economic and social development of aboriginal communities and people. Fostering strategic economic partnerships through the First Nations economic partnerships initiative is central to accomplishing this goal. Nevertheless, the ministry has had to make reductions where it made the most economic and strategic sense. While First Nations economic partnerships initiative grant funding is being reduced by \$1.53 million in 2010-11, more than \$2.25 million is still being allocated to aboriginal economic development. Coincidentally, an evaluation of FNEPI's three original components led the department to roll one of the programs into the other two because of minimal results. This increased the program's overall efficiency while ultimately saving taxpayers money.

Of course, the \$118 million flowing through the FNDF is also available to First Nations for economic development. The FNEPI's program managers will attempt to leverage funding support with other partners such as Alberta Employment and Immigration, the federal government, industry, and other organizations. The ministry

also cohosted an international symposium last summer that served as a unique catalyst to help aboriginal people exchange best practices on successful economic development activities. Aboriginal Relations has provided tools to continue this momentum on its website.

6:40

The second business plan goal is that Alberta meets its constitutional and legal obligations regarding aboriginal consultation and land claims. The budget for aboriginal consultation on natural resource and land management decisions has been reduced by \$1.4 million. However, Alberta will continue to provide capacity support to First Nations to ensure that they have the ability to participate in the consultation process. All First Nations will continue to receive their core funding allocations of \$80,000 each this year. This funding is critical to maintaining our province's competitiveness domestically and further afield. It also ensures that our government meets its legal duty to consult with First Nations.

As I said earlier, the aboriginal population in Alberta is rapidly increasing. Nowhere is that more evident than in our towns and cities, where 63 per cent of the aboriginal population currently resides. Aboriginal Relations is providing \$757,000 in operating funds to the 20 Alberta friendship centres and the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association to support health, employment, housing, and cultural programs for aboriginal people in urban centres. This figure maintains the 7 per cent increase provided to the association in last year's budget.

The ministry has also maintained consistent year-over-year funding for the Métis settlements ombudsman and the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. These are two essential accountability agencies connected to the ministry that investigate settlement members' complaints regarding management of the settlement by councils and administrations.

The ministry has reduced grants and contracts by approximately 59 per cent, or \$431,000, which means less support for the cultural events and one-time projects which are not funded on an ongoing basis. Aboriginal Relations has also cut land claim and consultation contracts funding by \$315,000.

While helping Alberta address its new fiscal realities, the ministry will remain vigilant to ensure that there is no reversal of the progress made since our Premier created Alberta's first stand-alone Ministry of Aboriginal Relations in 2008. Aboriginal Relations cannot afford to diminish its reputation as a trusted government partner. The ministry will do everything it can to maintain the level of support its stakeholders expect. Trust-based relationships are essential to the orderly development of our natural resources. Ministries such as Environment, Energy, SRD, Health and Wellness along with the federal government, industry, and other stakeholders will have a continuing role to play in maintaining those relationships.

Those are the ministry's submissions. I welcome your questions and your comments. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

We'll move into the second part, and the next hour will be with the Official Opposition. Do you wish to go back and forth or have your half-hour?

Dr. Taft: Well, I think I should talk to the minister. I appreciate that this isn't her portfolio. It's always a little bit more natural to just go back and forth if you're okay with that.

Ms Redford: We'll try.

Dr. Taft: I'll do my best to be patient and understanding, which is often a challenge for me, but I'll try extra hard tonight.

Okay. Just to be clear, Mr. Chairman, my hour is starting about now?

The Chair: Yes.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Great. I want to begin with what is a fundamental concern for me – it was last year, and it continues this year with this proposed budget – and that is that as a member of the Legislature when I read through the business plan and related documents, I don't have any way of knowing whether anything real is being achieved here. There are words like “review” and “improved co-ordination.” I noticed that in your opening comments, Madam Minister, you said that what this department does best is building relationships with aboriginal people. And part of me says: well, so what? You know, it's \$152 million. If the best the department does is build relationships, then it doesn't feel like it's worth \$152 million.

I would like to back up. The business plan does acknowledge the tragically obvious, which is, you know, the serious social problems of this population, the need – and I'm quoting here from page 8 of the business plan – “to improve educational, social and health outcomes” for aboriginal people. We did a little bit of research just to illustrate. In Edmonton 38 per cent of the homeless people are aboriginal; in Calgary it's 36 per cent. These are mostly provincial government figures. Annual dropout rates for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are more than twice the average rate; much, much higher health issues across the board; shorter life expectancies. And I could on and on through that. So what I would have liked to have seen would be something that connects to those problems because “building relationships” leaves me feeling: so what? I want to help the people in my constituency and the constituencies around this province with their real daily issues and challenges. So as they are, I'm really going to have a hard time supporting these objectives.

I don't know if you want to comment on why they aren't more specific. What can you say to convince the taxpayer that \$152 million to a department – the best thing that it does is build relationships – is a good investment?

Ms Redford: Okay. Thank you. I think that if we look at the department's business plan, one of the things that it has always been straightforward about is the situation that we as Canadians find ourselves in with respect to very difficult circumstances that many people in the aboriginal community face. The history of this, of course, we are all very aware of just as citizens of this country and members of this Legislature.

It seems to me that when we talk about the work that this department does – and as I noted in my opening comments, it is a new stand-alone ministry in the government, being only two years old. But if we – first of all, I want to make a distinction – talk about how much we spend on building those relationships, even though the budget of the department is \$152 million, a piece of that is the development fund, and I'll come back to that in a minute. When we are actually talking about the piece of work that the department does, my math would tell me that I'm at \$35 million.

It seems to me that if we first take a look at the First Nations development fund, that's been a pretty important piece of work that government and, I think, the community in consultation with the aboriginal community has decided matters because it's about coming to a consensus with aboriginal groups around how they as citizens in this country and as First Nation citizens want to build their capacity in order to deal with some of their issues that they identify and that we're aware of. The first thing I would say is that there is

a fundamental belief in the approach that this department takes that we need to be working as partners with aboriginal groups to try to find ways, that we can mutually define, that will provide aboriginal communities with the opportunity to build sustainable success stories in a way that matters to them.

Now, as a department I think that it's interesting to have the department sitting within government in the way that it does because although we have relationships with the communities and then have individual relationships with government departments, we need to find ways to separate out what those functions are. So part of the function of the department is to build relationships between aboriginal communities and line ministries, I would say, and that is something that I think requires a great deal of effort and a great deal of resources. As we have said, if you look at the actual money that is spent in this department, which is approximately \$35 million, most of it is focused on personnel who are able to work face to face with community partners.

Now, those relationships may result in better public policy around education, health, and, I believe, also safe communities issues, but it is also work that believes fundamentally in finding ways for communities to build an economically sustainable future. Therefore, we have programs that are funded through the department out of that \$35 million that provide capacity building with respect to consultation because of the work that communities are involved in with industry, with respect to natural resources. We see work that is provided for social development grants. We see pieces of work that develop partnerships between our provincial government and First Nations communities, perhaps with respect to education so that we are able in common cause to represent one view with respect to aboriginal education to the federal government.

6:50

So while I would say that you are right in that what we are trying to address is a very large issue, if we look to what our outcomes need to be at this point in time, if we can focus on empowering Albertans who happen to be First Nation citizens in economic development, putting together policy planning that allows for better discussions with the federal government, who have the fiduciary duty with respect to First Nations, those are pieces of work that are important for public policy right now, at this point in time, in the province.

Thank you.

Dr. Taft: Okay. We're not going to close this gap here. I just have a really hard time supporting a budget that has such unclear objectives. There's no way, there's no conceivable way for any MLA here to measure, to assess, or to know whether this money is being effectively spent or not, quite honestly. That's how I feel. I don't know how the other MLAs feel. We'll find out.

You know, the minister spoke about creating sustainable economic development or terms like that. The language is lovely. In that spirit if there was something that said that through the efforts of this department to create X number of profitable aboriginal companies or to reduce aboriginal unemployment by 1 per cent or to create a certain number of jobs, those kinds of things would make it much easier to decide whether this is working or not. To improve high school completion rate, even if it was just a tiny bit. Anything in that spirit would be helpful.

As it is now, I feel a real – I don't just feel; I have, as do all MLAs, a real responsibility for this money, and I don't know that I can ever feel like I've fulfilled that responsibility through the way these documents are presented.

Maybe you're getting some information from your staff.

Ms Redford: Well, I think that if we acknowledge the situation that we're in and we look to what the department is trying to do, we can see in terms of reporting back to the Legislature on activity that has taken place that there have been some success stories. We know from our reporting that the department itself works with 31 different First Nations, that through the FNEPI program they have been able to support 109 economic development partnerships, which are, I think, fairly tangible in terms of where we are in the life of this piece of policy and the life of this department. We know that the objectives that we need to meet have to be around economic sustainability, defined by the communities that we partner with, that we have as a goal economic sustainability, jobs, and more than that, I think, ensuring that First Nations communities that want to pursue economic goals have a stake in their future.

I have been a part of a number of discussions around the table with respect to First Nations consultations, which we may talk about later. It is a very important piece of the relationship that we are able to support the aims and objectives of First Nations leaders without always defining for them what their goals should be. I don't know how you would reflect that in a business plan differently than we have without it appearing as if we were being prescriptive in what we were doing. I think the nature of the partnership is key to this, and it's not always possible for us to do that.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Life is largely intangible. The important things are difficult to measure.

When I look at the strategic priorities on page 9 of the business plan, there are six of them there, and they all are exactly or almost exactly the same as the ones in last year's business plan. The number 1 strategic priority, "Review Alberta's First Nations Consultation Policy on Land Management and Resource Development," was in last year's business plan. Number 2 is "Review the Aboriginal Policy Framework," which was in last year's business plan. Number 3 is, "Continue to establish and maintain effective relationships between the Government . . . and First Nations." On it goes: "Co-ordinate discussions and initiatives."

It just feels like this would be a very easy place for huge amounts of money to be spent without any clear outcome. I feel like turning this around to the minister and asking you to help us as MLAs. What's going to be different that I could see or that would make a difference to the people on Stony Plain Road in Edmonton, where a significant aboriginal population struggles with daily life? What's going to be different in their lives because of this \$152 million? Where does the rubber hit the road?

Ms Redford: Uh-huh. Well, I am going to come back and say – you keep referring to \$152 million.

Dr. Taft: Well, we can split that. We can talk about that, sure.

Ms Redford: Nonetheless, if we're talking about whatever that amount of money might be – and I would maintain that what we're really here to talk about is primarily the \$35 million. The creation of this department, I think, is no small feat because without the existence of this department, there wouldn't be a clear place for First Nations groups to be able to feel that they have a defined partner in the work that they want to do with respect to the social issues that First Nations communities face.

As I learn more about this department, I'm struck by the fact that we are very often considered by First Nations communities to be an ally in the work that they are defining for themselves, whether that might be work under the urban aboriginal initiatives that are funded by the federal government, whether it is partnering with particular

chiefs who want to work on education policies that they want to negotiate with the federal government, whether we're talking about particular resource sharing, capacity building to negotiate resource sharing agreements with industry, that we are able to act as honest partners with First Nations groups.

I will tell you that apart from the work that I have done – and I'm sure you've had the same experience – we are dealing in this province with a community that, quite honestly, we are still in many ways getting to know. There are relationships. I think for people who were involved in politics and involved in community development, it's very clear that as we work on what those partnerships could be, we do need to build relationships, build trust, find ways where we can support each other, where we can work in common cause and detail exactly how we want to proceed. It seems to me that a \$35 million investment in that is important in terms of the particular grant programs that we support, in terms of the capacity-building work that we are able to do, the funding we are able to give to First Nations so that they are able to participate in a meaningful way in consultations with the industry around resource sharing: all success stories and pieces of work that will allow us to build into the future. But I think you are right that there are many intangibles. I think that is partly the nature of the work that we have to do as a government that is working on a government-to-government basis with First Nations in Alberta.

7:00

Dr. Taft: Okay. I would really appreciate it next year if there were some more tangibles, if there were some way for us as MLAs to get a little bit of a grip on these activities and whether there are just a lot of, as it appeared in last year's discussion, meetings and discussions and a symposium and so on. Again, I always return to the people in my constituency who are struggling with their daily life, and I'm wondering: what difference does it make there? So if next year the plan could somehow relate to those people through some specific accountability, specific measures, that would be great.

Ms Redford: Am I allowed to ask you a question?

Dr. Taft: Sure.

Ms Redford: Well, I think this is an interesting conversation, and I think it's worth exploring this because some of these strategic priorities – and I will speak for a moment to safe communities although I won't sidetrack the entire discussion there – are around using this department as a resource in government to build better front-line programming that relates to people of aboriginal descent. I find it quite interesting to have people come to government, to different parts of government, and talk about issues and not be quite sure exactly where their home is. For example, I have had discussions with aboriginal women who are leaders in their communities who want to talk about domestic violence.

It is, I think, a great frustration when we look to these sorts of issues that are common right across our province, unfortunately – and there are a number of these issues, whether we're talking about people with drug addiction, domestic violence, homelessness, these sorts of things – where we have government ministries that provide front-line programming and policy to try to deal with these issues. What I would not want to see – and I don't think you're suggesting it, but I think it's part of this conversation. That programming must respond to the needs of all Albertans, you would agree, not only to Albertans that are nonaboriginal.

The Chair: That's the first 20 minutes. Do you wish to continue with this back and forth?

Dr. Taft: Sure. That's okay with me. Hugh, you're okay with this?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I'm listening with interest.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Continue.

Ms Redford: We wouldn't want to see a system where we had a Department of Aboriginal Relations that was charged with dealing with all programming related to aboriginal people that happen to live in Alberta, so in that sense I think that by definition the function of this department is a little intangible. I would not want to see in the business plan for this department an objective of, you know, reducing homelessness in the aboriginal community by X number of people because from my perspective that is the responsibility of the Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, to build an integrated program that deals with all Albertans regardless of what their descent or what their history may be. Now, that means that the work that this department does can be quite unique but unfortunately does become a little less solid, and I don't know how to reconcile those two pieces.

Dr. Taft: I'm thinking out loud here. Discussions like this maybe should happen more often. If there was something like: to work with the children's services department or challenge the children's services department to reduce the percentage of children in care who are of aboriginal descent by 3 per cent or something. I understand we're not creating a huge service delivery department here.

You mention homelessness. Work with whatever department it is, the department of housing, to challenge them to reduce the homelessness among urban aboriginals by something, just something more specific than building relationships and yet again another year of reviewing policy frameworks.

That's what I would hope the department would get to next year. It would be wonderful. If you're working with these various departments, as you are, and if you're working with the various bands and Métis settlements, as you are, what's the point of that work? What do you want that work to achieve? Then put that in here, and that would give not only us an opportunity for accountability but maybe, more importantly, a clearer focus for the department.

Ms Redford: Thank you.

Dr. Taft: I think in your opening comments you had mentioned that 63 per cent of Alberta's aboriginal population lives in cities or something like that.

Ms Redford: That's right.

Dr. Taft: I think that clearly, given jurisdictional issues and so on, that's a very crucial focus for the provincial government and its services. On page 8 of the business plan it refers to goal 9 near the top of the page: "The Aboriginal Relations business plan links to the Government of Alberta Strategic Business Plan through Goal 9: Alberta will have strong and effective municipalities and self-reliant Aboriginal communities." My question is: what is a community in the eyes of the department? I do not ask this facetiously. This is not a trick question here. When I think, again, of the strip along Stony Plain Road in my constituency where so many aboriginal people live out very broken lives, is there even a community there? How are we getting to those individuals? In some way those lives are broken because those people are outside of a community. They don't have

a community. When I see a goal that talks about self-reliant aboriginal communities, I worry that so many of our biggest challenges don't have a community. This is a serious question. How is that term defined or thought about in the department?

Ms Redford: Well, the use of the phrase in the business plan is very much around trying to encompass, as I think you've sort of inherently acknowledged in your question, the existing communities, whether we're talking about First Nations reserves or Métis settlements or Métis zones. It's to speak, I guess what I would say in this context, around the physical location of aboriginal communities. Now, that to me is a piece of the answer. It's a geographic definition for this purpose, but I wouldn't say that fully answers the question. I think it does come to the wider piece, which is the continual challenge that provincial governments have.

I've been also in conversations with, you know, governments in British Columbia and Saskatchewan who have the same issue, where as a provincial government, although we do not have a fiduciary duty with respect to First Nations or aboriginal citizens living in our province, a constitutional, legal, fiduciary duty, we as the province of Alberta want to ensure that all people that live in Alberta are part of the community of Alberta. I think that as a philosophy of this government we need to find ways to build programming that does support people that are falling through the cracks. I think that some of the people that you were talking about are very much, in a very pointed way, people that are falling through the cracks. We, in the safe communities context, do see that that is a piece of work that needs to be done, whether we're talking about vulnerable people who may be in the justice system or people that may not be receiving the sort of social support and resources that they need to have.

7:10

The challenge of providing that programming, again, is to try to find ways to work with aboriginal groups that are in urban settings that are trying to provide support to aboriginal people living in urban settings with some cultural integrity to the process. The work that we do is partly funding organizations such as the friendship centres. We fund 20 native friendship centres around the province. I think you're probably familiar with that work. We also provide funding to municipalities and the \$100,000 a year to Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge. So we are able to try to find ways to transition some of these pieces, but it is a challenge for a provincial government to do that.

Dr. Taft: I'll move on in a moment here, but it would be interesting to consider changing the wording there of goal 9: Alberta will have strong and effective municipalities and self-reliant aboriginal people or aboriginal persons or something like that.

Ms Redford: Yes. Thank you.

Dr. Taft: I actually didn't expect you to narrow it to the physical location of communities, so that leaves me ambivalent, but I'll move on.

You have referred a number of times to the First Nations development fund and the \$118 million there. I have tried to find some information about this fund and went back to last year's annual report for the department. I've looked through the business plan and poked around. I might be missing it, but I can't even seem to find a list of however many projects it is that are supported by the First Nations development fund. Maybe I just missed something really obvious here.

Ms Redford: The first thing I'll do – and I'll table it although it's a public document – is provide just a background piece, which is last year's annual report on the First Nations development fund grant program, which I don't think lists every project, but it does highlight some of the key projects. It does set out how the funds are paid out to treaties, to First Nations that are hosting casinos as well as to nonhost First Nations.

Through the government of Alberta website, if you click on the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations, I'm advised you can go to a list of every project that's been funded, the total value of each grant, and each community that it went to back into history. It's quite detailed.

Dr. Taft: Okay. We'll track that down.

There are special challenges with accountability when we're talking \$118 million. That's a lot of money in one year. There would be lots of room for mismanagement or waste or worse, frankly, in those projects. Can you speak to accountability here? What special provisions are in place to make sure that that money is properly spent?

Ms Redford: I will.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Good.

Ms Redford: But before I do that, I want to do a very quick summary as to how the funds are distributed. Would that be helpful?

Dr. Taft: Sure.

Ms Redford: Okay. The revenue from the First Nation casino slot machine is notionally divided into two separate pots of funds. Thirty per cent of it is allocated to the operator and the host charity, which is the casino where the slot machine is residing, and 70 per cent of it is then kept aside. Forty per cent of the revenue goes to the First Nations development fund. Thirty per cent of the revenue goes to overall provincial lottery initiatives.

Of the 40 per cent, which is now what we'll call the First Nations development fund, 75 per cent of that is available to host First Nations. Those are the First Nations that have casinos. One-quarter of it is available to the 40 First Nations that do not have casinos, called nonhost First Nations. The process for receiving that money is that there needs to be a board resolution with respect to decisions as to what the projects could be.

Dr. Taft: Whose board?

Ms Redford: The band council. Sorry. Yeah, it's a band resolution.

They then make an application to this department. The department will review the application to ensure that there is compliance with the terms that are set out as the objectives for the First Nations development fund.

Once the project has been granted, the First Nation must sign a First Nation development fund grant agreement. They will then provide detailed project descriptions and budget information and will then receive their funding. Every First Nation in Alberta has signed a grant agreement, so they've agreed to the terms of how this will be managed. Under that agreement First Nations must provide a financial report on the use of the funds both annually and at the completion of each project.

The agreement also includes an audit clause. We have three auditors who work exclusively on FNDF projects. The department will audit every First Nation's use of FNDF funds approximately every two years, ensuring that the use of FNDF funds is consistent

with the FNDF grant agreement and the projects that are approved by the government. We have the ability to suspend the agreement and discontinue funding for noncompliance.

Dr. Taft: Okay. That was helpful.

Of the \$118 million 25 per cent goes to the nonhost bands, correct? What about the 63 per cent of aboriginals who are living in urban areas?

Ms Redford: This fund is for First Nations communities that are reserves.

Dr. Taft: In other words, the 63 per cent of aboriginal people in urban areas don't qualify for any of this.

Ms Redford: They don't qualify for any of the funds out of the First Nations development fund, but 30 per cent of the revenue from slots does go into lottery initiatives and then gets distributed into the rest of government programs.

Dr. Taft: Do you know how much of that goes to nonband resident aboriginals?

Ms Redford: We can't track that.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Again, my concern is largely for those 63 per cent who aren't on the reserves. This probably will grow into a wonderful system for people who are still on reserves or in settlements, but there are a lot who aren't.

Sorry. Do you want to add something else?

7:20

Ms Redford: I just want to clarify something for myself first. Thank you. I don't want to add anything yet.

Dr. Taft: All right. The world-wide symposium: the minister last year spoke at some length about the one in Banff or Kananaskis. What did that result in?

Ms Redford: I'll speak to some general information first, which is that the primary goal of the symposium was to promote and share best practices in aboriginal economic development throughout the world. It was, I think, considered to be a success by all accounts. There were 600 people who attended, including 100 young entrepreneurs. An international study tour also participated. It will lead to enhanced relationships between First Nations, Métis, and aboriginal leaders and increase labour market participation and economic opportunity.

Dr. Taft: I guess my question is: how do we know that?

Ms Redford: I think what we know from the work that was done at that session – and I think it does speak to your first question – is that we are at a point in time as we are developing initiatives and opportunities in partnership with our First Nations partners to try to explore new ways of doing business, new ways of working together, new ways of exploring how to develop strengths in particular areas. The outcome of the symposium will, I believe from conversations that I know have taken place between aboriginal leaders and the department – and some of them which I participated in were to develop very strong and detailed plans for the development of a stream of aboriginal youth entrepreneurs across the province.

There was much work done on skills development for people who were on reserve looking to develop economically sustainable programs. Whether or not we are able today to identify a particular set of business stories from that, I think it's still to soon to say. But I do maintain that if we look at what the role of this department is to do – and I do think it is a fair objective – it is to try to explore ways to build on our strengths as partners and develop ways to promote economic development in First Nations communities.

Dr. Taft: Okay.

The Chair: It's the final 20 minutes. If you're comfortable with that, we'll just keep going.

Dr. Taft: Thanks.

Ms Redford: Apparently, one of the other results of the symposium was a tool kit that is available online through the Department of Aboriginal Relations that explores economic development resources.

Dr. Taft: All right. The annual report from last year on page 10 says, "The First Nations Development Fund Grant Program allocated over \$101 million to support more than 200 economic, social and community development projects for First Nations communities." I think that's one of the few references in the document to the First Nations development program. Maybe it exists more than on the web as a list of programs. Is there any move to, say, a comprehensive annual report or an annual report looking at a comprehensive performance audit of that program? A hundred million dollars a year: that's going to add up over the years. That's a lot of money. Is there a move afoot to sit back after three years and say, "Okay. That's \$300 million. What have we got for this?" It's not turning up in here.

Ms Redford: We are now into three years of the First Nations development fund, and as part of that work we have begun by preparing these annual reports. The intention over time is to be able to, as you said, sit back and take a look at whether or not the objectives of the fund are what we as a government would like to achieve. However, that discussion can't be done in isolation because we need to be able to sit down with our partners and ensure that their needs are also being met. You'll recall that the initiating action for an application to the fund is a band resolution. So we see this as an initiative that is driven very much by how aboriginal communities would like to make use of these funds.

We believe that over time through this process of reporting on the fund, providing the details that we do on the website around dollar values and projects, we will begin to build a solid piece of data that will allow us to sit down with First Nations and ensure that the original intention of the fund is continuing to meet their needs and our needs. That has not been set. There is not a date set for that. But that is the long-term goal, to revisit this in a way that we are able to have those discussions.

We have to remember that these are not funds that are fully under the purview of the government of Alberta. This is revenue that is available to First Nations because of their unique position in the province. Because of the arrangement that we have set up and the fact that there are audits of these particular programs, it is the way that we are able to hold people who have made decisions to develop these projects to account and to ensure that there is transparency in the work that they have defined that they want to do. But ultimately it is the community through the band resolutions that will define what the work is that they want to do.

Dr. Taft: Does the minister, the ministry, the department have a role in the decision over how funds are allocated? If you have \$150 million worth of applications, who decides who's in and who's out?

Ms Redford: The formula that has been developed has been developed amongst the First Nations. They have agreed themselves as to how these funds will be distributed, and our role in this is to administer the funds according to the formula that has been agreed to.

Dr. Taft: So, clearly, there's no place for, say, urban aboriginals to access this funding. If in my constituency there was an effort or a desire to develop programs for kids who were struggling in one of the schools in my constituency, largely of aboriginal descent, that all has to flow through the standard channels: Education or Children's Services or whatever. Your department doesn't have a role in that.

7:30

Ms Redford: The role that we have would be in facilitating the discussion around whether or not a program could be developed. But the program would be developed and delivered through the line department.

Dr. Taft: Okay. We have just a few more minutes. The second goal, goal 2: "Alberta meets its constitutional and legal obligations regarding Aboriginal consultation and land claims." What is the relationship between the Department of Aboriginal Relations and, I'm guessing, the Department of Justice in terms of a land claims strategy and approach for the province?

Ms Redford: Can you ask that question again? I'm not sure I understand what you're asking.

Dr. Taft: Well, goal 2 here says: "Alberta meets its constitutional and legal obligations regarding Aboriginal consultation and land claims." Now, I'm assuming – and maybe I'm wrong – that when a land claims issue comes up, the Department of Justice gets heavily involved. Is that a correct assumption?

Ms Redford: Well, unfortunately, it's not a correct assumption. It depends very much on what the nature of the claim may be. If an aboriginal group decides that they would like to make a land claim and goes through the legal process of filing a statement of claim claiming a right to something, whether that be land or water or perhaps natural resources, the actual claim is made against, in the first course, the federal government. This is a piece of work that is administered under federal legislation and is considered to be primarily the work of the federal Department of Justice. There is a particular department within the federal Department of Justice that deals with land claims and also with what are referred to as treaty rights, which are usually resource issues or water issues. In some cases there may be times when the government of Alberta is added as a party to that land claim, and in that case the government of Alberta would be a respondent in the land claim.

The premise of the first piece of your question in the context of this ministry is that there is a significant amount of case law that defines what aboriginal consultation needs to be with respect to certain circumstances, and it is the obligation of the provincial government to ensure that they are facilitating that consultation. So that is a separate piece of work from the land claims side. The aboriginal consultation piece is delivered primarily through this ministry and, first and foremost, is represented by a financial contribution to each aboriginal group in the province that allows

them to engage resources and build capacity so that they are able to consult with organizations or companies that may wish to negotiate with them around economic development.

Dr. Taft: So if there is a challenge from a band like Fort Chip, for example, around failure to live up to legal obligations to consult on development issues, I'm thinking that must somehow cross a desk somewhere in this department. No?

Ms Redford: No, not really. I just had to clarify there. As a community that may decide that they have a claim, they make that claim in the courts. It doesn't connect to the government of Alberta or this department in any way. They would go out and consult lawyers and decide whether or not they wanted to make a claim, and if so, they'd file a statement of claim. Sometimes the first the government of Alberta may hear of it would be when we are served if we are a respondent.

Dr. Taft: Okay. When you're served, though, would your response – I say your response, the government of Alberta's response – in a case like that likely involve this department?

Ms Redford: It would not. The Department of Justice would represent the government of Alberta as a respondent in the land claim.

Dr. Taft: One of I think only two goals of the department is that Alberta meets its constitutional and legal obligations regarding aboriginal consultation and land claims. How does that work? What are we talking about here?

Ms Redford: The obligation that the government of Alberta would have in a land claim would be that if a land claim was made – really, this is a detailed answer – and the court was to decide that the land claim was a legitimate right and the group making the application were awarded a particular land, then the government of Alberta would be under an obligation to assemble the land that is required to be presented to the successful claimant as part of their award. That is done by this department.

Dr. Taft: Okay. All right. If it wasn't a land claim but another legal issue? There are several sentences here on this department's strategies and so on. It says, "The ministry has an important role to support the province's constitutional and legal obligations regarding Aboriginal people," and it goes on for a few sentences there.

Ms Redford: The other piece of work that is done through the department, and I think it's one of the six strategic priorities as well, is to facilitate – I just want to get the wording exactly right. It's to actually develop in consultation with our aboriginal partners a First Nations consultation policy that satisfies aboriginal communities in developing a dialogue between various government departments and aboriginal communities in Alberta and also to facilitate a consultation process between industry, when we're dealing with natural resources and land, and First Nations. So the department plays a role in convening meetings between industry and First Nations and developing a long-term First Nations consultation policy that is satisfactory to both industry and First Nations with respect to natural resource agreements.

Dr. Taft: Okay. I think we're pretty much near the end.

The Chair: Four minutes left.

Dr. Taft: Four minutes. I will return to what for me as an MLA is my most important point. I'm not looking for an answer, but this is urging your department to make the priorities, the goals, the objectives something that's more concrete, to become better at something than just building relationships. Show me the purpose. Give me a sense of how this is going to make a difference to the aboriginal people in Alberta in their daily lives. How is it going to help their health status? How is it going to help their unemployment status? How is it going to prevent suicide? And on and on. Some direction like this because as it is, I just feel like it's millions and millions of dollars going into what really is, for all I know, a black hole just tied up with fancy ribbons.

I will end my comments with that. I do appreciate you stepping in for the minister.

7:40

Ms Redford: Thank you. I would make just one last comment, and that is that after many years of doing different kinds of work in this province and some of it in relation to legal issues relating to aboriginal communities, I would never want us to describe relationships as just relationships because I think that we are at a point in this country, not only in this province, where we still have an awful lot of work to do in building those relationships of trust so that we can get to some of those pieces that you and I are both concerned about.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Seeing as we don't have a representative of the third party here, I'll call a five-minute break. When we return, the member of the fourth-party NDs will have 20 minutes. So a five-minute break.

[The committee adjourned from 7:42 p.m. to 7:47 p.m.]

The Chair: Okay. We'll call the meeting back to order, please.

Seeing that there's no one here representing the Wildrose Alliance Party, I'll turn the next 20 minutes over to the NDs. Ms Notley, I'll give you the floor. Do you wish to go back and forth with the minister?

Ms Notley: Yes. I'd much prefer to just go back and forth, for sure, and see how we do with that.

Just as an aside, for the record we are actually now the NDP. We officially changed our name about – I don't know – seven or eight years ago.

The Chair: Sorry.

Ms Notley: That's okay. I just thought I'd throw that in there. I was very pleased when that happened, so I like to correct people every now and then.

I guess I'd like to start where much of the last discussion ended or just about ended in relation to the issue of consultation and the role that this ministry plays in consultation. For the moment, anyway, I'm going to just focus on that \$35 million, understanding that the context of this discussion is roughly a 12 per cent cut in the ministry's budget over last year.

One of the things that the previous minister talked to us about last year was the revision of the consultation policy and guidelines. In particular, in the last set of estimates, in the last discussion, there was a commitment made that this review that had been ongoing for a couple of years would be finished in the spring of 2010. I'm just wondering where we are on that issue in terms of the revision

process as well as whether we can get a sense of what that was costing us on an annual basis and whether or not that's going to be continuing to cost us or what the plan is there.

Ms Redford: Sorry. Just to clarify: how much the development of the consultation policy cost us?

Ms Notley: Well, the review, because the consultation policy has been sort of under extensive review for two or three years now. That's how it was described last year by the minister, I believe.

Ms Redford: I would say that when the minister would have been here last year, he would have been telling you that we were starting the review of that policy, that there was significant discussion with First Nations leaders as to what the process would be for consulting on the review of the consultation policy. That has led to, I think, two or three meetings between the consultation ministers and chiefs, and engagement has really been the key to that work. We have just recently, I think within the last month, been advised by First Nations leaders as to how they wish to be consulted on the review of the consultation policy. We will now be beginning that process. As part of that they have requested \$400,000, that will be provided to them to build their capacity to consult on the review of the consultation policy. We expect that that will be finished in the fall of 2010.

Ms Notley: Just to be clear, because I am looking at the *Hansard* from last year, and what it did actually say is that the review process itself along with the revisions that would arise from it would be completed by now. Now we're talking about having a consensus established by the fall of how to review the policies?

Ms Redford: No. We now have consensus on what the process will be. We got that in December. We now are hopeful that the review will be completed by fall 2010.

Ms Notley: Okay. That \$400,000, then, is in which line item right now?

Ms Redford: It's in this year's budget. I'll come back to you in a couple of minutes with the line item. Maybe we could move on, and I'll just let you know as we go unless you wanted to carry on your conversation from that line item.

Ms Notley: No. I have other questions on the issue but not that line item.

Ms Redford: It's line item 2.4.3.

Ms Notley: Right. That was the one I was sort of concerned about. That line item has actually been reduced globally if I'm not incorrect, the consultation resources overall, line 2.4.

Ms Redford: Sorry. The \$400,000 was paid out of last year's budget, and that is being paid to the First Nations for the review. That's \$400,000. That is not in this year's budget. Line item 2.4.3 will be provided to First Nations leaders for ongoing consultation.

Ms Notley: Ongoing consultation. Not the policy consultation but actual consultation.

Ms Redford: Yes. Once the consultation policy has been revised and finalized, then that will be for capacity building and consultation according to the new policy.

Ms Notley: Okay. On the issue of consultation, then, this line item is one that is a bit of a concern to me because it would seem to me that, as you'd mentioned, there are a number of different forums within which the courts have directed that we need to enhance and build our consultation strategies with First Nations groups.

Then, of course, since the last budget was brought down, we had the passage, I believe, of Bill 19, which was the land-use framework, which contemplates buckets of consultation with people. I believe that at the time the Minister of SRD, for instance, committed that there would be a place for aboriginal and First Nations representatives to be specifically included in that consultation. That, combined, of course, with the growing economic, shall we say, potential for conflict between certain economic players and certain First Nations.

I'm concerned, ultimately, about the reduction in funding for capacity for these First Nations. We can consult them, but if they can't afford to do the very first study that they need, if they can't afford to talk to their own members, let alone get expert advice – so many of these consultations require expert advice. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't believe there's anywhere else from which they would be getting assistance to get the expert advice they need to be truly equal partners in these consultation processes.

7:55

Ms Redford: The core funding of \$80,000 to groups has not changed. That funding is still available, is still provided. There is additional funding available to groups who are involved in extensive consultations. It's referred to as tier 1 funding and tier 2 funding. That funding is allocated based on the number of consultations that they are involved in. That is tracked primarily through the permitting process that is managed by Sustainable Resource Development, and it is our expectation based on the experiences to date that we will have sufficient funds to deal with those consultations. There is still funding available through this department for the traditional use studies, and that funding has not changed.

Ms Notley: Right. Okay. Well, I guess I find it interesting that the thought would be that with a reduced amount of money in the overall pot, there would be enough money there for all the consultation, given the potential for there to be more opportunities for consultation as a result of the land-use framework legislation.

Ms Redford: Well, I think the operative word is "potential." We are certainly in a difficult fiscal climate, and we'll have to observe that as we go.

Ms Notley: Okay. The final thing, then, just on consultation issues, because I had a couple of other points I wanted to get to before I run out of time, was that last year the minister did say that he believed or he perceived his ministry to be taking a leadership role. "Lead minister," I think, was the phrase he used with respect to issues relating to Fort Chip.

If I recall correctly, in February or March we had a report that was ultimately completed by the Cancer Board which made some preliminary observations about the health effects of industrial development on the people of Fort Chip. Of course, they quickly responded by saying that the parameters of the report were not something that they agreed to and that the extent of the report was not adequate. Indeed, at the time, not in estimates but subsequent to that, I believe, the former minister suggested that there probably was going to be a need for more extensive studies about health effects within that community. My question is: have there been decisions with respect to that? If so, will that be funded out of this ministry?

If not, will it be funded out of Health? And if not, does this minister have the ability to tell us about further studies that meet the requests of the community members?

Ms Redford: There has been some very good progress on that issue. That progress is that there was just yesterday a conference call between the provincial government, our department, the federal government, doctors in the community, and community leaders identifying or beginning to identify what the terms for that community-based health study will be. That study will be paid for by the Department of Health and Wellness.

Ms Notley: Can you advise: is there now consensus in terms of the parameters, or have you just had a preliminary discussion?

Ms Redford: My sense is that we are in early days and that it will probably take some time.

Ms Notley: Okay. That's good news, although given that I believe there was discussion about that conversation commencing back last May-ish, June-ish, it would have been nice to hear that some of that might have happened then. Nonetheless, it's a move forward.

Ms Redford: I understand that there have been ongoing discussions to get to the point that there could actually be a conference call yesterday. I think there are many stakeholders that needed to all agree to come to the table at the same time.

Ms Notley: Okay. Great.

I wanted to ask about the core service review that the minister spoke about at much length last year, where this ministry was sort of engaging in a core service review of what other ministries were doing with respect to issues impacting aboriginal people in Alberta. I'm just curious as to whether there is a completion to that and whether there is a report of that or whether we can get access to the report and the outcomes that would have flowed from that. There was a lot of discussion about it. The minister went back to it quite often last year.

Ms Redford: I'll give you some of the background that I have on that, which is that the service review is an internal process that is aimed at determining whether the government of Alberta is doing the right things with respect to aboriginal-specific programs and services; that the results of the review are currently being considered; that a minister's report on the review is anticipated to be completed in the fall of 2010; that it will align with the review of the aboriginal policy framework, which is scheduled for later in the summer of 2010; and at this time other than staff time there haven't been any costs associated with the review. As to whether or not that might be available, I don't want to speak to that. I'd want the minister to speak to that.

Ms Notley: Could the minister get back to me on whether we can get some information about what's been established thus far?

Ms Redford: Well, I don't know what you mean by "what's been established thus far."

Ms Notley: Sorry. Whether they're prepared to share with us where they are, whatever information they've gathered at this point.

Ms Redford: Well, the report is being reviewed and will be completed at some point this year. What I won't speak to is to what the minister intends to do with that report.

Ms Notley: Right. So you're suggesting that we can't get a copy of the draft report until it's been reviewed by the minister in the fall of 2010. That was my question, their willingness to share the draft report.

Ms Redford: I don't even think we're talking about a draft. I don't know about a draft report. My information – and I can't make a commitment on behalf of the minister – is that there will be a report in fall 2010, and I will certainly take your request back to him and expect that he'll respond to you.

Ms Notley: Okay. Good enough.

Flowing from that – and, of course, there are so many core services. We could talk about that for many, many hours, but I'm going to try to limit it as much as I can. Up until last year there was a suicide prevention strategy that was funded through this ministry, and that line item was eliminated last year, and it was transferred to Health and renamed the Alberta youth community empowerment strategy, something like that. Unfortunately, in April of 2009 Alberta Health Services completely cut it. My question is: in terms of reviews of core services and the role that this ministry plays, has there been any consideration? You know, clearly there was a need identified within this ministry, and I'm just interested in any comments that can be provided for how that very important program got lost from this ministry and immediately was eliminated about, I think, two or three weeks after we had our estimates debate.

You might not be able to provide comment about that, but given the fact that aboriginal youth experience the highest rate of suicide of any group out there, it's obviously quite distressing to have seen it disappear. Since the previous minister characterized himself as the person that speaks for aboriginal people vis-à-vis other ministers, I'm just curious as to whether there can be any comment provided about that.

Ms Redford: I don't know whether or not that'll be reflected in the core service review. What I would say is that since that's a program that's now sitting under Health and Wellness, I might suggest that it would be a more fruitful conversation to have with the new Minister of Health and Wellness, who is the old Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

8:05

Ms Notley: Indeed. Nonetheless, again speaking to this ministry and its consultation and, again, the linking up with other ministries, I know that during the rollout of the flu vaccine last year the Minister of Aboriginal Relations took a lead in terms of answering to that. We certainly at the time discovered that it appeared as though there was a particular failure to interact as timely as possible with particularly the Métis settlements around the rollout of the H1N1. In fact, I've heard most recently that they continue to feel as though they've not been adequately consulted or advised of what they can expect in terms of any subsequent vaccination programs. I'm just wondering, again, since it's this ministry's role to co-ordinate and communicate and because they took a lead, what efforts have been taken and where we would see that in the budget to ensure that that kind of communication or co-ordination is addressed more appropriately in the future.

Ms Redford: Well, there is a committee called the aboriginal communities pandemic influenza planning liaison committee, which really should have an acronym, but I don't know what that would possibly look like. I know that that is one of the reasons that the previous minister did take a lead role, partly because of the work that

he needed to do interfacing with the federal government in providing vaccine to First Nations reserves.

I do recall the discussion from last fall with respect to H1N1 vaccinations in Métis communities, and I recall that at that time there was some confusion as to whether or not everyone understood when the vaccine was delivered. I believe there was quite a vigorous debate in the House between the previous minister and yourself with respect to whether or not it was or wasn't delivered in a timely fashion.

My recollection was that the minister at that time – and we could probably go back and look at that in *Hansard* – did provide details as to when that vaccine was delivered. My recollection is that it was delivered in a very forthright manner and quite quickly after it was available, but we could provide that detail through *Hansard*. I know that the last minister played – and I don't have any reason to think that the current minister wouldn't also play – a leading role in that committee.

If you are aware of a particular concern, I think that the department would probably want to know about that, and if you could provide that information, it would be a very good thing for the department to follow up on that if there are concerns with respect to information on vaccinations.

The Chair: Thank you. That's the end of that time allotment, so now we'll move to questions from the speakers list. We'll start with government members and alternate with opposition members.

The first question I have is from Ms Calahasen, followed by Mr. MacDonald.

Ms Calahasen: Is it one question, Mr. Chair, or can I have a few minutes?

The Chair: You have 10 minutes, and if you want, going back and forth with the minister.

Ms Calahasen: Okay. Actually, what I would like to do is lob some questions at you, and then you can determine which ones you want to answer and which ones you want to send me the answers to. Okay?

Ms Redford: All right.

Ms Calahasen: I'll start off. First of all, I want to thank the ministry for the fact that the core will endure. That's great to hear.

Another comment I wanted to make is that the function of Aboriginal Relations in the past has always been to be the greatest resource to other departments, whether it's in Alberta or across Canada, and in fact even internationally was the goal, to be able to see how that can be done. I want to know where it is in terms of that, because I think that you have some great people and great resources in that department.

Soft performance measures, though, have always been something that have been our Achilles heel in Aboriginal Relations. I know that there have been some challenges for all the ministers that have been ministers in this department to be able to find some really good performance measures that we can begin to use baseline studies for in order for us to be able to measure whether or not the quality of life of the aboriginal community has increased or whatever the case may be. I'd like to suggest that you look at not only quantitative measures but also the qualitative measures that could identify that as identifiers in performance measures. I think that would really make a difference in terms of identifying to the aboriginal community how far as aboriginal people we've come. I think that's something that your department can certainly work on and do some great things.

Now, a few other questions. On the native friendship centres, I've always felt that I have a soft spot for native friendship centres, mostly because when the aboriginal community come to the city – and the identification of aboriginal people coming into the city has been 63 per cent – most of these people end up at the native friendship centres. Those friendship centres are what I call transitional centres, for them to transition from where they have been to be able to transition into a city kind of mode. I think that sometimes we miss out on the fact that they don't get enough money to be able to carry that function out. I would like to suggest maybe something like that, to be able to see how we can increase that component. I know that last year the minister increased it, and it was really good. I want to see how we can continue that, and I certainly would support that.

On the traditional land-use studies, I know you identified that as a priority. I've been hearing some things about that. Traditional land-use studies are basically what I call indigenous information. That's knowledge information. That's their information, but I'm hearing that the government is wanting to take that information and use it as they wish. I think that's really something where I'd like to hear from the department which direction you're going in that respect.

The other question is on consultation. Consultation, of course, is part of the aboriginal policy framework. The aboriginal policy framework had all of the principles. One of the actions to be done was actually consultation as well as TLU. On the consultation component there were five planks that were to be implemented. The fifth plank, which we never had an opportunity to implement, had to do with what I would call long-term benefit plans. I don't know where you're at relative to that. I'd like to know what kind of discussion is occurring with First Nations relative to that.

The urban aboriginal strategy. As I indicated and as you identified, 63 per cent of the aboriginal community lives in the city. The urban aboriginal strategy was one tool for the department to be able to utilize for what I think my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was talking about, which is: how do we work with the aboriginal community that lives in a city? The aboriginal strategy, which had the city to be involved as a partner and the province and the federal government, I thought was really a good tool for the department to utilize. I don't know where we're at in terms of the time, when it's going to be finished. If at all possible that's something I think we should look at extending.

I think Aboriginal Relations, though, has had the most vibrant land claims process ever. We've been known across Canada and internationally for how well the land claims process occurs in this province. I've been hearing that we might have lost ground in that respect. I want to know where we're at with the numbers of land claims that are out there, what is left relative to the finishing off of those land claims, and how we can get even better at that, because I think we have been known to be the best.

Métis Nation, which is on page 4. We have an agreement with the Métis Nation, and I know that that has been working very well, but I'd just like to know: have we got any kind of notion or idea as to how well they are relative from the start of the agreement to now and how many agreements they have with the various departments? I think that the Métis Nation agreement has always been a really good agreement that was signed by previous ministers. I think that's one area where we can certainly see. Of the 63 per cent of aboriginal people living in the city, part of those are Métis people as well. I think that that kind of a vision that was done with the Métis Nation can certainly be seen through to see how we can help them even more. I'd really like to see that happen. I don't know if there's an increase or if there's no increase in that respect.

On the issue of Métis settlements, I think that on the Métis relations you received \$3.5 million. Not only on the Métis settlements but Métis generally, where are you relative to the Métis consultation policy that the minister had described last year, as to starting it and trying to see where we're going to go with it? Can I please have a sense as to where we are with that?

8:15

The Métis settlements. We had an agreement with them; 1991, I believe, was the time that we signed that agreement, 1990-91, if you remember, Member for Edmonton-Riverview. It was a really good agreement because I think what it did was set the stage for a relationship to be built, and I think that there was a really good relationship with the Métis and the province of Alberta. I know that agreement has been discussed. I don't know what stage it's at, but I certainly would like to see the finalization of that agreement so that they can also have a life. The people in those settlements all across Alberta – and I have three in my constituency – they also should get the same kind of funding, I believe, as – what would you call them? – other communities, you know, like municipalities, et cetera. There has always been a gap, and I'd like to know how we can fill that gap to be able to see how they can also receive the funding there.

We have a legal duty to consult whenever it impacts treaty rights on Crown land by proposed development, and I know that part of the mandate is to review the First Nations consultation policy on land management and resource development. What are you reviewing relative to that specific policy? I'm not sure what part is being reviewed and what needs to be done relative to that.

Mr. Chair, I think I'll leave it at that. If there's time for them to answer, great. If not, they can certainly write to me.

The Chair: Yes. You pretty well used your 10 minutes anyway, so you're done. So I'll let the minister answer. She has 10 minutes to answer now.

Ms Redford: I'm tired just listening.

Ms Calahasen: You can just answer a few, and then you can write to me.

Ms Redford: Okay. Well, I'm going to start with some, and maybe you can remind me as I go. You asked about the MNAA and the number of agreements that had been signed with provincial departments. There is approximately \$150,000 received annually from three provincial ministries – Education, Children and Youth Services, and Employment and Immigration – and that has not changed.

With respect to the status of the TLE claims, which is the assembly of the land, we have 12 settled claims involving Mikisew Cree, Sturgeon, Whitefish, Woodland Cree, Chipewyan Prairie, Tallcree, Kapawe'no, Alexis, Alexander, Loon River, Smith's Landing, and Fort McKay. We have four claims in negotiation with Bigstone, Fort McMurray, Lubicon Lake, and Beaver Boyer River.

With respect to the urban aboriginal strategy Aboriginal Relations currently provides \$757,000 in operating funds to the 20 Alberta friendship centres and the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. As you said, that funding supports health, employment, housing, recreation, and cultural programs. This figure has not changed despite operational reductions, and we support the urban aboriginal strategy with aboriginal groups, Ottawa, and municipalities, which I referred to in a previous answer, with \$100,000 per community.

With respect to the long-term arrangements we have not been able to complete that mandate due to some recent developments with the Métis settlements. You may know that in September of 2009 the

Métis settlements made a decision to sue the government of Alberta with respect to the accord, which arose out of some discussion as to whether or not the evaluations were conducted in a way that they were satisfied with. As a result, in discussions with the settlements we have basically suspended the long-term discussion until they are able to come to terms with how they would like to settle the lawsuit. In the interim there has been that three-year interim agreement, which I think this year will provide \$5 million to Métis settlements. They are also able to continue to apply for municipal grants. Apparently, statistically, since their population has increased from 6,000 to 8,000, that allows them to receive higher amounts of funding through the municipal grants.

You asked a question about long-term benefit plans, which I think we'll get back to you on.

What was your very first question, please?

Ms Calahasen: It was on native friendship centres, TLU.

Ms Redford: Traditional land use, yes. There is not any intention on behalf of the department to be obtaining that information for any other purpose. That is certainly not part of our intentions or plans. We recognize that that is the intellectual property of the people that develop the studies.

Did I miss anything?

Ms Calahasen: You can certainly get me some information.

Ms Redford: I think the only other piece was the long-term benefit plan. In the minister's mandate letter for this year the Premier has asked the minister to look at the long-term economic benefit plan, so I think that will now provide for an opportunity to honour that fifth plank.

Ms Calahasen: Performance measures.

Ms Redford: And performance measures. I agree with you with respect to the qualitative and the quantitative, and it does take us back to the very first conversation. This is tough stuff in social policy anyway, as we've alluded to a couple of times, as we work as partners in trying to determine exactly what the goals are for the community and the government. We aren't necessarily in a position yet to come together on those, but I do think that it's something that requires significant work. I think that there's a fair amount of work that can be done with respect to performance measures around economic development. I think that there is good work being done in the department with respect to that, and I think that needs to continue.

Premiers across the country have asked all of the ministers across the country to work with the five national organizations representing aboriginal peoples to develop performance measures around education, economic development, and health, which I think should provide for some pretty critical mass in terms of developing, first of all, some baseline data probably and then some standardized performance measures. So we may see more of that in the future.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you.

Ms Redford: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Next on the list is Mr. MacDonald, followed by Dr. Brown. Mr. MacDonald, would you like to go back and forth for 20 minutes or have 10 minutes straight?

Mr. MacDonald: Back and forth, please, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. MacDonald: I don't know whether we will use up the time or not. My first question would be from page 24 of the government estimates, and it would be element 1.0.5, the Cabinet Policy Committee on Public Safety and Services. In 2008-09 the budget was originally determined to be \$125,000. It was increased by \$78,000 to \$203,000, which is reflected in the 2008-09 actual, and it is basically the same now. In the estimates that we are debating tonight the request is for \$205,000. My first question is: why is this Cabinet Policy Committee on Public Safety and Services located in this department?

8:25

Ms Redford: The Cabinet Policy Committee on Public Safety and Services has a membership that includes this department. So part of this department's work is to report to that cabinet policy committee, and therefore part of the cost of operating that cabinet policy committee is in this department's budget.

Mr. MacDonald: So the \$205,000 requested is only part of the cost of operating the cabinet policy committee. What would be the total cost, then?

Ms Redford: This is allocated to us by Treasury Board. It might be a question to ask Treasury Board. I don't know the answer to that question.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I was going to ask you what the Cabinet Policy Committee on Public Safety and Services does. Could you elaborate on that, considering the fact that there's a request here in this department for \$205,000?

Ms Redford: The cabinet policy committee is one of the policy committees of the government that will integrate policy development from various government departments across this sector so that there is some government policy perspective on exactly how different departments that report to that committee are addressing public safety and services issues.

Mr. MacDonald: Could you tell me, please, how often you anticipate the Cabinet Policy Committee on Public Safety and Services to meet in this budget year that we are discussing tonight?

Ms Redford: It meets on a regular basis. I can't anticipate how often it meets. My recollection is that it meets – during session it meets on an as-needed basis, but at least every two weeks.

Mr. MacDonald: During session.

Now, the \$205,000 that's being requested here, is that for support staff for the cabinet policy committee? Is it for minutes?

Ms Redford: It's for support staff to the committee.

Mr. MacDonald: It's for support staff to the committee.

Now, the payments to government MLAs who serve on this committee, are those payments included anywhere in any of the line items we're discussing here this evening?

Ms Redford: I can't answer that question.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Perhaps the deputy minister can give us some advice.

Ms Redford: I don't think that the deputy minister can answer that question either. As I suggested, I think that this might be a question you might want to ask the President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, with all due respect, we are requesting through this department a considerable sum of money, and I would like an answer.

Now, the appointment process for the cabinet policy committee. I would like to ask you how the members of the Cabinet Policy Committee on Public Safety and Services are appointed.

Ms Redford: I can't speak to that. I do not know the answer to that question. I'm not sure how that's related to what we're here to discuss tonight, but I do not have an answer for you to that question.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, with all due respect, again, there is a request for over \$205,000 here. Surely, someone in the Department of Aboriginal Relations has an idea of where this money is going, why, and to whom.

Ms Redford: I've answered that question. It's going to the cabinet policy committee to discuss the development of public policy with respect to these issues, and it integrates the work of this department into government policy and planning.

Mr. MacDonald: Interesting. Okay.

Now, with the rest of this budget of \$152 million how much, if any, of this allocation is from federal funds?

Ms Redford: This is only our provincial money. There are no federal funds in this. Oh, hang on just a sec.

Mr. MacDonald: That can't be right.

Ms Redford: Sorry. I apologize. Just a minute. The community development trust amount, which is \$1.5 million, is federal money.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you.

Now, I'm reading your published annual report from 2008-09. I understand that there's a funding gap existing between First Nations or band-operated schools in the province and provincial schools. Could you explain to us how wide that gap is in funding?

Ms Redford: It's zero to \$4,000 per student, depending on the size of the school, the student population, the First Nation, and how it gets paid by the federal government.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I was surprised to learn that just a year ago the former Minister of Aboriginal Relations and the current Education minister together with Alberta's aboriginal leaders attended the first national aboriginal education summit in Saskatoon, which was sponsored by the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada. The aim of this summit was to eliminate the educational achievement gap between aboriginal and nonaboriginal students. I find it an extraordinary event that a year later the Minister of Education takes the radical act that he did in firing an elected school board. Will there be any money in this budget here tonight that possibly could be used to narrow that funding gap?

Ms Redford: The responsibility for funding education for First Nations children is a federal responsibility. There is very good co-

operation between the ministers of Education in this province and the First Nations leaders through the First Nations consultation policy in developing strategies to try to negotiate with the federal government to close that gap. However, the funding that does need to be required has not been provided yet by the federal government, and we will continue to work with First Nations to try to get that gap closed.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you. I hope you can work with the Minister of Education on that, too.

Ms Redford: I know the Minister of Education is working very hard on this issue in partnership with the leaders and has made the case a number of times and at that conference in Saskatoon that the federal government does need to meet its obligations with respect to funding First Nations students.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

Now, I can understand what Dr. Taft and Ms Calahasen were talking about, where they're coming from with their questions and their suggestions regarding the urban population of First Nations people. I had a tour before session started of the Hope Mission, and I was surprised to learn during my tour that AADAC provides one half day per week of counselling services to the clients of the Hope Mission. I know there has been some work in this department regarding fetal alcohol disorder, suicide prevention strategies, and healthy kids Alberta, to name a few. The children's mental health plan would be another one. In my visit to the Hope Mission it was made clear to me that there needs to be more support provided. Are there any monies in this budget that we are discussing tonight that could be used to supplement the rather modest budgets that the Hope Mission and many other organizations throughout the city have?

8:35

Ms Redford: As we discussed a little bit earlier, the function of this department is to really provide co-ordination and policy advice to line departments. While there may be funds in other departments that are used for these purposes, the funding of those front-line programs doesn't take place through this department.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, again for the record, before we conclude, Mr. Chairman, I would like to certainly state that it surprises me that this is a playbook department and not a department where there are actions initiated. I think you have to do more than co-ordinate policy. I think this department could really make a difference in the lives of many people, not only in urban centres but throughout this province.

Thank you.

Ms Redford: I'll just respond to that if I could. I don't think that at any point tonight in my responses I have suggested that the only thing that this department does is co-ordinate policy. This department is a key partner for First Nations in this province to build sustainable economic development plans, to provide support with respect to consultation, to facilitate the assembly of land with respect to land claims, to provide meaningful discussion and support to our partners in their negotiations with the federal government.

I wanted to come back to an issue which we have talked about a couple of times tonight, particularly with respect to relationships, and I have given that some thought over the course of this evening. I would not presume to know how much time all members of this committee may spend directly working with aboriginal communities around this province. I would suggest that there is some way to go

in the relationships that we need to develop, not as a provincial government but as a community of people who are nonaboriginal, in understanding the unique history and perspective and understanding of trust relationships that aboriginal people have because of their historic experience in this country. The fact that this government created a department to build on those relationships and to develop a feeling of trust in order to begin to address some of these very difficult situations should not be minimized, and I wanted to put that on the record.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we'll go to Dr. Brown, followed by Dr. Taft. Would you like to go 10 minutes straight or 20 minutes back and forth?

Dr. Brown: I don't expect that I'll be taking the full 10 minutes, but I do have a couple of questions, Mr. Chairman. I would like to follow up on the line of questioning that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was delving into, and that has to do with the condition of some of the aboriginal communities. I was interested to hear that 63 per cent of the aboriginals in the province live in cities. I'm curious to know what ballpark percentage of the budget was specifically directed to serving and ameliorating the conditions of urban aboriginals. Could you point out some of the specific programs that are directed towards the economic and social conditions of urban aboriginals? If you wish, I'd be happy to get the response in writing.

Ms Redford: Thank you. Besides the native friendship centres, which I have discussed, and some of the funding to municipalities, we will provide you with a full list in writing of what pieces of work done in this department do support those individuals that are currently living in urban areas.

Dr. Brown: Right. And some sort of a ballpark number if that would be possible. That would be great.

Ms Redford: Yes, we will.

The Chair: And that information will be provided through the committee?

Ms Redford: Yes. That's right.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Dr. Brown: The second question that I have for the ministry would be relating to one of our strategies in goal 2 of the business plan, which includes investing in consultation capacity and working with First Nations to affect resource development costs and enhance competitiveness and, specifically, to develop traditional use data and protocols that are used for land management and for resource development consultations. There is a line item in the budget, page 24, line 2.4.3. My understanding is that the product of the land-use studies, as my colleague from Lesser Slave Lake had alluded to, remains out of the knowledge of the province.

My question would be regarding the funding for traditional use studies. How do we know that we're getting value for money in the land-use study investment that we're making? How do we know that we're getting solid data, empirical data which is of use? How do we know that it's being expended in a way that's a fair and equal opportunity for qualified people? Why are those data not accessible both to the government and to resource industries who wish to do seismic exploration, forestry cutting, perhaps drill a well or a

pipeline or something like that? It would seem to me logical that if we are trying to increase our competitiveness and trying to enhance the ability to harmonize the desires of industry to exploit those resources with the rights of the native peoples to be fairly compensated, we would want to have everything on the table. Those are my questions.

Ms Redford: I guess that just from our perspective in terms of how the department and First Nations view the studies, we're talking about using these traditional use studies to identify where First Nations people hunt, fish, or trap on public land, significant sites such as gravesites, cabins, trails, spiritual or sacred places. Although that is a perspective and in some ways ideally the GOA and industry could have or should have access to that, the nature of the agreement and the value of that property is that First Nations have maintained their need to maintain intellectual property ownership over this information since they are in control of the study. Although we are funding them to build their capacity to develop the study, we are not simply contracting them to develop the study.

First Nations consider some of this information to be very sensitive in nature, and while ownership of the data remains with First Nations, the priority of the initiative that this government has is to enable First Nations to have the knowledge to respond and to consult with industry and Crown consultation requests in a timely and meaningful way. I'm advised that that does in fact happen and that that information as part of the consultation process is shared with industry, and it's one of the pieces of information that is used as industry moves forward in deciding how they will develop resources on Crown land. The success of the initiative can be measured by the pipelines, the oil and gas development, the mining and the forestry projects that have been approved in the last seven years that have required First Nations consultation.

On your question with respect to accountability I can give you some detail. The \$1.7 million that is intended to provide the First Nations with the ability to develop those studies does staff positions and interim consultants. It provides support for community workshops, meetings, final reports, and capital purchases such as computers and GPS systems. As part of the application process First Nations must submit a band council resolution and sign an information sharing agreement before we will enter into a contribution agreement with them. The band council resolution, therefore, demonstrates that there will be community support, which makes First Nations leadership accountable to both the government of Alberta and community members so that the funds are used for the intended purpose.

8:45

The information sharing agreement specifies that First Nations will share information gathered from the studies with the government of Alberta to inform future discussions related to land management and resource development activities. The contribution agreement is restructured so that TUS funds are paid only after specific deliverables are reported to Aboriginal Relations, and these often include work plans, sample data and maps, screen shots of TUS databases, lists of interviewed elders, final project reports, and financial statements.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Those are my questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Dr. Taft, followed by Mr. Griffiths. I'm sure you want to go back and forth?

Dr. Taft: Sure. That would be great.

Two different issues. I might as well start with the ones just around the land-use framework. I'm on page 11 of the business plan, strategy 2.6, which reads: "work with other ministries, industry and Aboriginal communities and organizations to implement the Land-use Framework and explore mechanisms to increase certainty for all entities in the oil sands regions." Now, the priorities under the land-use framework are, I think, the South Saskatchewan basin and the lower Athabasca River region. I'm wondering what role the ministry has played in engaging in that process or in encouraging First Nations to engage in that process. What exactly will be supported through this budget in terms of real activities?

Ms Redford: Under the land-use framework part of the initial policy discussion that needs to take place in terms of terms of reference, which are then provided to the regional advisory committees, the RACs, is exactly what the parameters will be for the descriptions of land use. The work that this department has done with respect to that, in developing those terms of reference, is to provide information to Sustainable Resource Development and to the team that is building those terms of reference on the sort of detail that needs to be included so that it is possible to engage with First Nations and ensure that they can be part of those conversations to make sure that the sorts of detail that First Nations want to see included in that in terms of what has some cultural relevance is part of that conversation. So it has been used to frame the terms of reference for the land-use framework and for the RACs.

Dr. Taft: Getting them in place at the table, so to speak.

Ms Redford: That's right.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Can I assume, whether it's in this coming budget year or in future ones, that as the other areas under the land-use framework move up their list of priorities as the lower Athabasca is done and the South Saskatchewan, the same process will . . .

Ms Redford: That's right. It'll be part of the continuing process.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. Okay. A different kind of issue comes from page 7 of the business plan. There's an opening paragraph there. One of the sentences says:

The ministry supports two important institutions that are accountable to the minister: the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal, a quasi-judicial body established by the Métis Settlements Act, which works to resolve disputes pertaining to land, membership and surface rights.

My question is around membership, which is an ongoing challenge. Essentially, under the activities of this department in the coming year what's the state of the membership issue in terms of defining membership and numbers and resolution of issues pertaining to it?

Ms Redford: What do you mean when you say membership? Membership of the tribunal?

Dr. Taft: No. I'm assuming – maybe I'm misunderstanding – membership of Métis settlements. Or who qualifies as a member? That's what I'm trying to get at.

Ms Redford: The Métis settlements themselves set out their criteria for membership. Because the membership is attached to a settlement and land is involved, there are sometimes disputes with respect to that.

Dr. Taft: Correct.

Ms Redford: The way to resolve those disputes, the procedure for resolving those disputes, first of all, is the appeal tribunal and then the Court of Appeal. But to your original question the description or the definition as to who is or is not a member is defined by the settlement itself according to the Metis Settlements Act.

Dr. Taft: Okay. I understand that there are the disputes; these issues come up for dispute. Let me come at this a little differently. Do you see the number of disputes diminishing and coming to an end, or are disputes rising? How are we doing on the dispute business?

Ms Redford: Okay. The tribunal was involved in 12 decisions in 2009. Just one minute, please. I only have that one piece of data available, which doesn't give you a reference point, so we will provide that information to the committee as best we can in terms of a context in terms of . . .

Dr. Taft: Trends. It would be even more enlightening if there was some description of what the disputes entail. What is being disputed exactly?

Ms Redford: We do have that, so we can provide that.

Dr. Taft: All right.

Then my last question, if I still have a couple of minutes, is around education. I'm starting to lose track of the pages and references and so on, but somewhere in here there's reference to improving the education levels of aboriginal people in the province. I noticed it actually changed from last year to this year. Certainly, it would fit in with the general concern of the province to address the social and economic development of these First Nations communities or aboriginal communities. With that in mind, then, on the contentious issue that has come up before about the disbanding or the suspension or whatever the correct term is of the Northland school division board, was there consultation with the Department of Aboriginal Relations around that decision? It's an issue that had been building for a long time.

8:55

Ms Redford: I just want to speak to the overall education piece for a moment. I guess the first thing I'd speak to is that as part of the First Nations consultation policy – and I referred to this earlier – there has been a very strong partnership between First Nations and Alberta Education and the ministry with respect to developing a tripartite memorandum of understanding that aims to improve the educational outcomes of First Nations. We actually think that will be one of our first successes out of the First Nations consultation policy.

I think that from discussions that I've been part of in those consultations, the First Nations leaders who are part of that process feel that that has been a fairly tangible success story and are very pleased with the discussion that is going on between the people that are leading aboriginal schools in Alberta and the Department of Education with respect to evaluation and curriculum development and that sort of thing. It's a very good demonstration, I think, of how it is possible to collaborate on these issues.

I can't speak to your second question. I think that is probably a discussion that ministers could have had, and I will advise the minister to respond in some way to that. I don't know. If it was me, I would be able to personally speak to that. I can't do that, but I will advise the minister that this question was asked.

Dr. Taft: Fair enough. Then in looking at the year ahead and the mandate and interest of this department and the issue around the Northland school division, whatever the future holds there, does this department, Aboriginal Relations, have a role to play or foresee itself playing a role in the re-establishment of a school district there, the resolution of those issues?

Ms Redford: Well, I expect that that would fundamentally fall within the Department of Education. However, I do know that with respect to what I was speaking to earlier, around the First Nations consultation policy, there is an awful lot of work that is done on a regular basis between the Ministry of Education and First Nations and Métis communities. So speaking to the spirit of what this department does, I believe that this department will have a role as we go forward. That is my expectation. I guess that if the minister was sitting here, he would be able to articulate exactly what he would see his role being. I can't do that for him.

Dr. Taft: Right. Well, I would urge the department to help those communities work this through and come to a constructive resolution.

Ms Redford: Thank you.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Griffiths, the last person on the list so far.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much. First, I really appreciate the job you have done, Minister. It's fantastic that you have come in to substitute for the minister, who has some personal issues to take care of. I think you have done an exceptional job in handling a complex ministry.

I have four questions for you. The first is that we've had a challenge in the province for the last eight or 10 years with overemployment. We've had employment rates below 5 per cent, which has caused some challenges with rising costs. We have managed to successfully attract youth from across Canada, across North America, and across the world to come here, but with a fast-growing aboriginal population that is very young, we have an incredible resource right here in the province to help fill some of those labour gaps, from doctors and dentists and nurses and teachers to welders and engineers and labourers.

I believe that the statistic I remember from three years ago had only 2 or 3 per cent higher unemployment amongst aboriginals off reserve as compared to the regular population on reserve. It's incredibly atrocious. What is the department doing, if you know, to help engage some of those young aboriginals, that are, quite frankly, the key to our successful economy for the province in years to come?

Ms Redford: Well, I'll start with some work that the department is doing with Employment and Immigration on the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit workforce participation initiative, which was designed to address exactly that point, to try to increase aboriginal participation in the workforce, and seems to be meeting with some success. As of December 2009 the aboriginal workforce in Alberta was 73,400 people, which was up from 70,000 a year earlier. In 2008 the Minister of Aboriginal Relations at that time and the Minister of Employment and Immigration appointed an MLA committee led by Verlyn Olson to engage with First Nations and Métis leaders and other stakeholders with respect to this issue. I know from conversations with Verlyn that the committee has visited numerous communities over the course of a year to discuss challenges and identify strategies that would really get to the heart of the

matter so that we weren't simply exploring the issues. I think that their report is due at the end of March.

I would also add something else. As a ministry we also sit on the board of Careers: the Next Generation. We provide \$80,000 to them to engage aboriginal youth. I understand that they have had some success focusing on the trades and also on health careers.

Mr. Griffiths: Good. I believe, actually, that representatives from Careers: the Next Generation are coming around right now and in the next few weeks informing MLAs of some of the successes they've had.

Ms Redford: Very good. Very good.

Mr. Griffiths: My next two questions are about performance measures, the business plan, page 11. [interjections] No, they're not quite soft.

Right at the top of the page, economic projects based on the first performance measure to support economic and social development, the goal. The performance measure is the number of strategic economic initiatives and economic capacity building projects undertaken by First Nations. I didn't see any explanation. I see some numbers there, but what qualifies? How is it defined? Where are the parameters around it? How do you know if it's actually had success? As we did discuss before, you can have the project, but did it really create more employment? How many more people did it employ? What are the long-term consequences or benefits of the projects?

Ms Redford: I understand that this is a new performance measure for 2010-13 and that the previous performance measure was economic partnerships, which counted the number of First Nations negotiating economic partnerships through the First Nations economic partnerships initiative and the strategic economic initiatives programs. This new performance measure is to try to get to the heart of what you're talking about. It will include projects under both the economic capacity building and the strategic economic initiatives programs. The department believes that this will be more reflective of the ministry's activities under FNEPI. So it counts the number of projects rather than the number of First Nations. It has developed also a performance measurement framework to identify and collect outcome measures such as the number of businesses that are created on reserve.

I want to supplement that. In a publication called Aboriginal Economic Partnerships Annual Results 2008-09, which I expect would be available through the website or on the website, on page 9 the report sets out a number of specific results that probably speak to the sorts of projects that would be covered under this. I'll just read some of them:

- ten new economic capacity building projects;
- New Regional Economic Partnership Coordinators placed with 12 First Nations . . .
- 14 new strategic economic initiatives projects involving 18 First Nations;
- over 190 detailed engagements for Aboriginal entrepreneurs;
- four 15-week Entrepreneurial Training programs delivered to over 40 Aboriginal participants . . .
- three business proposal writing workshops piloted with two Tribal Councils . . .
- five procurement workshops, developed with industry and facilitating Aboriginal participation in economic opportunities.

I think that what has happened is that as some of these projects have had some success, the department has seen that by changing the performance measure to this, they are better able to capture these sorts of activities in a detailed way.

Mr. Griffiths: Right. Thank you. I do hope that performance measures are developed that eventually show how many businesses are launched, how many last longer than five years, how many people are employed by them, and what sort of economic return so that there are some concrete measurements.

9:05

Ms Redford: I understand that that is one of the reasons this has been shifted, so that they will be able to begin to identify along those lines.

Mr. Griffiths: Yeah. Well, I know it takes time to evolve the performance measures. That's good.

At the bottom of the page, the land claims and related agreements performance measure, number of final agreements and number of implemented agreements. Perhaps I don't fully understand the way land agreements are arrived at and implemented, but it seems to me that there has got to be some point when we've settled all of the land agreements. A better performance measure or something that would be more telling would be whether or not we've settled 30 per cent of them or 35 per cent of them or made progress. I would think that at some point we will have hopefully settled them all.

Ms Redford: Yeah. I had to sort of double-check this myself because I wasn't sure that I was thinking of an answer that was long enough.

It isn't really possible to come up with a finite number of land claims. I mean, if we get out of the minutia of this detail of the performance measurements, it's very possible that many First Nations groups in this province could continue to bring land claims for a very long period of time on similar land, on different aspects of the land, perhaps in relation to resources, perhaps in relation to other aspects of their rights. It is not a definable piece. You could have one piece of land that five different aboriginal groups could all lay claim to, so it's not even defined by the physical geography of the province. We don't have this case in Alberta, but I do remember when I was practising law that at one point, you know, 120 per cent of the land in British Columbia was subject to a land claim, which is a statistical impossibility, but in terms of the way that the land claims were structured, you weren't able to have a finite number. You can probably only best measure where you are on the ones that are currently active.

Mr. Griffiths: Which is what this does.

Ms Redford: Yes.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. I do understand that now. Thank you.

One last question. I just want to clarify. Did you say that \$400,000 from last year's budget was used this year to pay for capacity to build on consultation in order to aid in the development of the consultation policy?

Ms Redford: Yes, that is what I said.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Just checking.
That's good. Thank you.

The Chair: You've got 10 more minutes if you want.

Mr. Griffiths: I'm done.

The Chair: You're done? Okay.

Next we have Mr. Xiao, followed by Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Xiao: Yeah. I just have two small questions I'd like to have some information about. Last year I had some opportunity to visit the Alexander reserve. I really saw some very positive things happening there. Although on the reserve education is a federal jurisdiction, as the provincial government we're actually working with the feds and with the reserve to try to develop some training programs for the youth on the reserve. That's very good. You know, going through the budget you presented, I don't see any visible funding to that. I want the minister to deliberate on some of this. How are you going to work with other departments and with the First Nations organizations to help to equip the youth? You know, the youth population of First Nations is huge. I think the success of our policies or programs or plan very much depends on whether we can bring the full potential of those young people, the young population, into our economy in the future. That's my first question.

Another question. Some of my colleagues have already asked. Given the fact that there are more than 60 per cent of the First Nations, the native population, living in urban areas – and in my riding I run into quite a few, actually, of First Nation descent and also of Métis descent and so on – they feel that because they are off the reserve, basically in the middle of nowhere, and it's very difficult for them to receive sufficient counselling, adequate services, it's most important to have access to our government programs that would be available to other citizens. I just want to know what kind of efforts we have put into this in order to reach out to the descendants of First Nations or Métis who are living in the urban areas to help them to integrate into our mainstream society and, at the same time, to help them to develop the skills they need to succeed in mainstream society; in other words, to help them to bring their potential, their full potential, if you will, into our economy.

Those are my two questions. Thank you.

Ms Redford: Thank you. I'll go in order. You talked about the good work that is happening at on-reserve schools with education, and that is very true. The work that is done by this department is really the co-ordination of programming that can then be provided by line departments, and that is how education is funded for aboriginal students that are not on reserve.

Your last question sort of inferred that if a person was aboriginal and not on reserve, they would not have access to provincial programs. That is not the case. Any provincial program that is available to any Albertan is available to a person of aboriginal descent as well. Now, that doesn't mean that there are not sometimes challenges in terms of structure and availability and access. As we've spoken about before, the urban aboriginal initiative and the native friendship centres are both investments that we make in this department to try to facilitate some of that. Besides that there is also funding provided by Alberta Education to school boards, Catholic and public school boards, in communities to allow for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students to receive not only education but in some cases particularly tailored programs that are able to provide extra supports that may be necessary for them in different learning environments.

With respect to youth, it is a very important part of the strategy of this department to ensure that aboriginal children and youth are included in the future of this province, and this ministry supports Children and Youth Services, which has primary responsibility for that mandate. The ministry has supported a program in Hobbema, which the MLA from there, Mr. Olson, is very familiar with, the cadet corps program, which is led by the RCMP, with a grant of \$15,000. There are more than 1,000 cadet recruits who are part of that program from the four First Nations in Hobbema.

As part of its support for aboriginal economic development the ministry is working with partners to develop a young aboriginal entrepreneur partnership, mentorship, and network to engage Alberta business organizations. The ministry also supports the aboriginal youth initiatives of partnering ministries, including Alberta future leaders and the Alberta mentoring partnership programs.

I think those were all of your questions. Did I miss anything?

9:15

Mr. Xiao: No. That's it. Thank you.

Ms Redford: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Rogers, followed by Mr. Cao.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, I want to thank you for your presentation tonight and your answers. I just want to focus on one area. In the budget, under 2.1.2, aboriginal economic partnerships, you're showing a very significant reduction. I think you might have answered that partially when you answered Mr. Griffith's question. When we look at the situation on many First Nations reserves in this province, the growth of the population, the economic conditions, as much as we're trying to build capacity in those populations to encourage them to take advantage of all the opportunities across this province, I think it's safe to say that if they are able to grow their own economic engines, their opportunities for employment would be much better. I'm just wondering why we would have such a significant scale back in this program and the performance measures related to that. That's my only question.

Thank you.

Ms Redford: Thank you. Unfortunately, in this climate we had to really scrutinize our budget as part of this fiscal review. We tried to make reductions where it made the most sense economically and strategically. The First Nations economic partnership initiative is grant funding. It is being reduced this year by \$1.53 million; \$2.25 million will still be allocated through the program for aboriginal economic development. In fact, I'm advised that at the time well before as a government we were involved in beginning this fiscal review, there had been an internal programming audit of FNEPI. It was found that while there had been three components to the program, they had decided as a department that they were able to accomplish the same thing by rolling two of the components into one, so it was going to ultimately become a two-component program in any event, which the department believed would increase their efficiency in delivering these programs but still achieve the same results.

FNEPI program managers will still be able to leverage funding support with other partners such as Employment and Immigration and the federal government. The First Nations development fund, of course, is also available for that. But there had been a program review of FNEPI ahead of a fiscal decision, and it had been decided that it needed to have some changes made to it anyway, so this is partly a result of that and complemented the fiscal review.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you for that answer, Madam Minister. I'm encouraged. I guess I'm hearing you say that you're getting the same or as good a bang for a lot less buck.

Ms Redford: True.

Mr. Rogers: If that's the case, I'm really looking forward to seeing a lot more of this as we discuss more of this budget, so thank you for that.

Ms Redford: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The next question is from Mr. Cao, the last one on the list.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Madam Minister. I have a question regarding a line item. In fact, Minister, as you are aware, there has been ongoing and seemingly increasing conflict between First Nations people and business companies in developing their natural resources and forestry and so on. In the estimates for the coming year, line 2.4.3, I see that there is an allocation of \$8.766 million which is allocated toward the resource consultation and traditional use. My question is: when we are expending this money – it's over \$8 million for capacity building and traditional use studies – how do we know when we are getting the value for the money in terms of the measurable outcome?

Ms Redford: Thank you for that question. We've discussed it a bit earlier tonight with respect to the traditional land-use studies. You might recall that we did go into some detail with respect to the process that must be followed, including band resolutions and then applications to the department for that funding. Once the process has started in developing those land-use studies, there is a fairly rigorous process, including enabling data sharing, providing reports from consultants, and not paying the money out until the projects have been finished. That principle, as I understand it, is one that applies across the ministry so that each time we see situations where there is funding being provided, we do have a similar process where the application must be initiated by a band council resolution, which does provide some transparency.

In addition to that, the consultation funding is provided at a core level of \$80,000 per group. Any money that is provided after that is only provided to groups based on the amount of consultation activity that they are involved in. As I mentioned earlier, that is determined by the number of permits that are granted through SRD. So there are a number of places in the process where the department does have the opportunity and does take the opportunity to ensure that the terms of the grants are being met.

Mr. Cao: Thank you. I have a supplemental question, in fact, a question based on the book called Ministry Business Plan. On page 12 there's an item called Contacts for Consultation, the number of First Nations with a single point of contact for consultation. The target was 39 last time and is 40 and 40 and 40 in coming years. But then in the footnote it says that there are 47 First Nations in Alberta, so the target probably has to be 47 First Nations. Why is it only 40? You left an impression that there are seven that will not be consulted.

Ms Redford: I understand that the reason that we have these numbers is that it is up to First Nations to determine whether or not they choose to engage with the department. There are some First Nations that are not prepared to do that. So even though there are 47, we do know, based on historic relationships, that there are some First Nations that are not prepared to enter into a dialogue with respect to this sort of programming and the work of the department. Therefore, they are not included in the targets because it would be an unreasonable target in that they have the choice as to whether or not to engage, but we do want to make note of the fact that there is that difference, as you pointed out.

Mr. Cao: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Acting Minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Are there any other members wishing to speak, not on the list?

Seeing none, the estimates of the Department of Aboriginal Relations are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in this schedule. I would like to remind the committee members that we are scheduled to meet next Wednesday, February 17, to consider the estimates of the Department of Service Alberta. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(2)(a) this meeting is adjourned.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 9:24 p.m.]

