



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Resource Stewardship

Ministry of Indigenous Relations
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 16, 2022
9 a.m.

Transcript No. 30-3-6

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session**

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC), Chair
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP), Deputy Chair

Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)

Also in Attendance

Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, QC	Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Melanie Niemi-Bohun	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Janet Laurie	Supervisor of Corporate Communications
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Michael Nguyen	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Participant

Ministry of Indigenous Relations
Hon. Rick D. Wilson, Minister

9 a.m.

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

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

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, when we get to you, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table. My name is David Hanson. I'm the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul and chair of the committee. We will begin, starting with my right.

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

Mr. Guthrie: Peter Guthrie, Airdrie-Cochrane.

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

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

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

Ms Lovely: Good morning, everyone. Jackie Lovely from the beautiful Camrose constituency.

Mr. Rehn: Good morning. Pat Rehn, Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Wilson: Good morning. Rick Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations. With me I've got Kristina Midbo, Donavon Young, Sonya Johnston, and Don Kwas.

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

Mr. Huffman: Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to have your camera on while speaking and your microphone muted when not speaking.

Remote participants who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or send a message in the group chat to the committee clerk, and members in the room are asked to please signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of two hours have been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations. Standing Order 59.01(7) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times.

In brief, the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the minister's comments a 50-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but time may be combined between the member and the minister. After this, rotation of speaking time will then follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and then the government caucus. The member and the minister may speak once for a maximum of five minutes, or these times may be combined, making it a 10-minute block. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send an e-mail or message to the committee clerk about the process.

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

Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to two hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn.

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

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

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 21, 2022. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk with 20 hard copies. An electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to committee members.

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

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

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a beautiful morning out there. I just wish everybody a good morning, and thank you all for coming this morning. I'm joined, like we said earlier, by my deputy minister, Donavon Young; assistant deputy minister of finance and senior financial officer, Sonya Johnston; and assistant deputy minister, First Nations and Métis relations, Don Kwas.

Thank you again, Mr. Chair and committee members, for calling this meeting. It's an absolute pleasure to be here to speak with you about Indigenous Relations' budget estimates for fiscal year 2022-23. I get to see all your smiling faces, finally, again in person this year, so that makes me extremely happy as we gather on Treaty 6 territory, and I acknowledge the Métis people, too, who have a deep connection with this land.

I'd like to introduce you to some other members of my team who are with me here today: assistant deputy minister of consultation, lands, and policy, Michael Lundquist; director of Indigenous women's initiatives, the amazing Kristina Midbo; my chief of staff, Ted Bauer; policy adviser Melissa Crane; and my press secretary, Adrienne South. Also in the gallery are finance director Howard Wong and communications director Olga Michailides.

I see that we only have two hours this year, which is a little disappointing, of course, but we have lots of good things to discuss

and to see what are the most important. One of our most important ministries is only requested for two hours by the opposition. It's a bit sad but understandable, but let's get to it.

This year's estimates maintain core program funding for the coming year as we move forward in Alberta. This level of certainty and consistency couldn't be more important after an especially difficult year for Indigenous people in Alberta and across Canada. From the reclamation of more than 1,000 children who did not make their way home from residential schools to ongoing experiences of racism in everyday life and to the trauma and violence too many Indigenous people, especially women and girls, our two-spirited LGBTQIA-plus are experiencing, there's been a lot of heartache.

There's a saying that in action there's hope, and we need an abundance of both hope and action so that we can get to a better place. That's why I'm especially proud of this year's budget, which shows that good things can happen through fiscal responsibility. I want to be sure that First Nations and Métis communities can thrive for generations to come, not burden their children and grandchildren with debts that we failed to manage.

Anyone who's done the calculation is going to see that the Indigenous Relations budget is down by 15.5 per cent compared with Budget 2021. We have very strong rationale for that. The investing in Canada infrastructure program capital grant funding sees an \$18 million reduction, but that's due to the schedule of progress payments and the completed projects. There's a \$10 million reduction in the First Nations development fund. That's due to the updated forecasts in casino revenues, and there's a \$3.6 million reduction in land and legal settlement funding due to scheduled progress made to implement the treaty entitlement claim for the Bigstone Cree Nation, and the funding for the claim is being carried forward into fiscal year 2022-23. There is also a \$3 million reduction due to the natural conclusion of the Indigenous litigation fund.

These decreases are off-set by new spending amounting to nearly \$2 million for initiatives to move toward reconciliation and to review and implement recommendations from the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report.

I'll just take a chance to explain this here. The Indigenous litigation fund, which has given three Indigenous communities grants to fight for their livelihoods against unfair federal legislation, was only intended to be available for one year. We extended it to be sure that those communities that had viable, ready-to-go litigation programs could get the funds that they needed.

Another reason for the budget decrease is from the expected variability of the First Nations development fund. This grant program is funded through revenue from government-owned slot machines at the five First Nation casinos in Alberta. Following COVID-19 protocol requirements, it put a major dent in casino revenues, and that has affected the projected amount available to share between the 46 First Nations that benefit from the First Nations development fund program, so Budget '22 includes \$113 million in '22-23. But forecasts are looking really good for this program, with a bright recovery ahead, increasing the budget to \$120 million by '23-24, and that is much-needed good news because the First Nations development fund puts dollars back into First Nations to invest in their social programs, economic development programs for their members.

Budget 2022 includes \$11.6 million in funding for the investing in Canada infrastructure plan to support continuing projects. Some of these projects are multiyear, and that, of course, is going to affect the budget. We've also carried forward \$1.5 million in funding for two projects that were originally scheduled to be completed in '21-22 but are now expected to be completed in '22-23.

9:10

I'm also pleased to confirm that Budget 2022 includes \$5 million in capital grant funding for the Aboriginal business investment fund program. Now, this important program provides capital funding for Indigenous community-owned businesses and development opportunities. We've also moved unspent funding for other multiyear projects, like our land reclamation at Bigstone Cree Nation, to Budget 2022 to align with projected activities.

My commitment as the Minister of Indigenous Relations is to build prosperity while helping to create opportunities for people to support themselves and their families. Like the rest of Alberta's government, we are doing our part to secure a healthy and prosperous future for more people. Now, that future, a future of hope and promise, depends on the actions that we take today. We must take action on two priority fronts.

The first is toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The Premier and my cabinet and caucus colleagues stand beside me when I speak to this urgent need to close the outcome gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. But reconciliation goes further than this. The first thing it does: we have to start from a place of acknowledging the truth about harms perpetrated on Indigenous cultures, languages, ways of life, and lives themselves. It continues as we lift each other up. As my good friend Dr. Willie Littlechild says, Alberta's government has been working toward reconciliation through large and small actions, and he likes to call it reconcili-action.

Here's a small sample of what the government has done, items that have been requested for years by First Nations, items that now have been taken care of like eliminating the Alberta Indian tax exemption card to simplify how First Nations people and bands purchase tobacco and fuel and creating a financial instrument that levels the playing field, the AIOC, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, so communities can get secure lower rate loans to fund investments in projects that are going to generate long-term returns. This organization has rolled out three projects, secured grant funding for another. This work needs to continue, and with nearly \$1 million in Budget 2022 we will be working with Indigenous communities and across government to say yes to more initiatives that fill needs and bring us closer to reconciliation.

We also have nearly \$1 million to review and implement recommendations from the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. They did extraordinary work engaging Indigenous families, communities, and organizations to help our government set a path toward hope and healing. Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited LGBTQIA-plus people should have the freedom to dream about safe and successful lives in Alberta, not worry about their safety and their well-being. On both these fronts I've heard calls to rush the work as though the changes needed are superficial and easy, but I've put together the teams and put in time toward reconciliation and towards safety.

I can summarize this budget in a few simple statements: maintaining core funding for operations, including time-bound programs and completed projects; moving funding into future years to match projected milestones as required; and reflecting the natural variability in casino revenues. Most importantly, this budget invests new funding to priority initiatives. We have a plan, Mr. Chair, and we continue to work with Indigenous leaders to refine and revise. Budget 2022 supports this plan while caring for the real needs facing Indigenous peoples, families, and communities today, and we're moving forward in a way that respects Indigenous leadership toward their own destiny.

In many ways our work is to take down barriers and provide supports where too few exist. Alberta's government takes seriously our role as partners in prosperity, as partners in reconciliation, and

this is our chance to create real change for a bright, strong, and healthy future.

I thank you for this time, and I'm looking forward to your questions today and your comments. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

I'd just like to point out to the members of the committee that times will be shown on the two clocks up on the wall so you can kind of keep track of what your speaking blocks are.

Minister, are you willing to go back and forth today, or are you looking for block times?

Mr. Wilson: We're going to try block times this year.

The Chair: Block times. Okay.

Then, Mr. Feehan, you have 10 minutes, starting now, for a total of a 50-minute block.

Mr. Feehan: Help me just to understand. I have 10 minutes; then that goes back to the minister for 10 minutes?

The Chair: Yes. For 10 minutes, yes.

Mr. Feehan: Until our 50 minutes are up?

The Chair: Yep.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Well, I'm a little disappointed that we're going to go block this time, but I guess that's where we're at these days in terms of ministerial accountability.

First of all, I'd like to take an opportunity to acknowledge the land we're on, Treaty 6, and, of course, the treaty areas of 7 and 8, which we are responsible for here in this Legislature, and of course the land is significant to the Métis people of the province of Alberta.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank the many people that work for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations because, having been there, I know the incredible level of dedication that they bring to the work that they do and their continual striving toward excellence. I just want to say how much I appreciate that because it sounds like I'm so critical ever after this, but I know that's not on the people who do the work.

Okay. Well, I guess my only choice, then, is to read questions into the record and hope that some of them get answered over the next little while, and I'll just do that. Let's begin with some overarching questions, and then we'll kind of proceed to some individual line items.

The first thing I notice is that the budget for 2022-23 is approximately \$33 million less than the budget set out in '21-22. It's the third year in a row that there's been a decrease in the overall budget for this ministry at the same time that we know that the Indigenous population in the province of Alberta is growing at a faster rate than the rest of the province and we know that Indigenous people are overrepresented in most indicators of social distress, including measures of poverty, mental illness, and school dropout. The needs in the community are surely growing, so I would love a bit further explanation from this government or this minister for why, in a year with record oil prices, the government has failed to address the significant needs of the growing Indigenous population in this province.

Now, I know that the minister has indicated that they are participating in the larger governmental initiative of government restraint, but the size of this budget is very small compared to any other ministry. I can't imagine that cutbacks in this ministry have much to do with ultimately balancing the budget, so it's discouraging to see the constant attack on the budget of this ministry. The drop in the budget is approximately 16 per cent – 15.5 I think the minister

said – while the budget for the province overall has risen slightly. I just wonder why Indigenous people in this province have been singled out for cutbacks when that's not necessarily true of the overall budget of the province of Alberta.

When the minister does get a chance to answer some questions, I notice that there is no change to the capital investment budget year over year, and I wonder if we can have an explanation as to what the money in the capital budget will be used for and why there is no change in that either reflective of the overall decrease in the Indigenous Relations budget or investment for the purposes of the minister's priorities of reconciliation.

When we look at the budget, it's important to remember that there are two significant line items that are not monies provided by the province of Alberta. I've done this before, so the minister knows that I like to separate out what the province is actually putting into this ministry versus money that happens to just flow through the ministry. In our budget, line item 4 on page 126 indicates money taken in from the First Nations development fund, which is money raised through the five First Nations casinos and distributed by the department. It is not actual government money. Line 8, again on page 126, the investing in Canada infrastructure fund, is money provided by the federal government.

So if we take these two lines out of the budget, because they're only essentially flow-through dollars, the government only contributes about \$57 million for Indigenous Relations in this province on a yearly basis, a pittance, really, when you think about the billions of dollars spent by this government every year. Even accounting for significant losses in these two programs, which the minister identified in his opening remarks, the reduction of the department budget this year in terms of specific money provided by the provincial government directly is approximately 9 per cent.

9:20

Given that this budget in Indigenous Relations is only about one one-thousandth of the overall provincial budget, why was this department singled out for dramatic cuts? Clearly, these kinds of savings are not going to be effective in helping to balance an overall budget. The fact that there's been a continual decrease in the IR budget over the years, that every single year Indigenous Relations is singled out for a higher level of cuts than almost any other ministry in the government is significant. I think we need to point that out. I'd love to hear the minister's comments on why Indigenous people are being treated in this way.

I did notice, however, that on line 1, while cuts to programs have been significant, there have been no cuts to the operating budget of the minister's office. Just this last week the government has initiated salary negotiations with health care workers such as respiratory therapists, social workers, and pharmacy assistants and has begun with the position that these workers, who were so essential during the time of a global pandemic, should have a salary rollback of between 6 and 11 per cent. So while these heroes of the pandemic have been asked to reduce their salaries, no one in the minister's office has been. Can the minister explain why he's not asked the political staff in his office to surrender an equal amount of pay as these essential workers or perhaps even the 9 per cent lost to the overall budget?

Moving on, I'd like the minister to tell us if there has been any change to full-time equivalents across any parts of his department, in which division of the department those FTEs have been reduced or eliminated, and in which areas of the budget the reductions will be felt the most. What programs will be eliminated or reduced as a result of changes in FTEs? Thank you.

Moving to line 2 in the budget, I see that there is a small decrease in the budget for First Nations and Métis relations. Can you tell us

if this reflects a change in actual services being provided by the department to Indigenous Albertans? It's not a significant change but clearly not keeping up with population growth and inflation by any means, so there certainly is going to be a reduction in services one way or the other or a significant increase of burden on the people who are performing these services on behalf of Indigenous Albertans.

The forecast for line 2 indicates that this area significantly overspent the budget in the last year by approximately 42 per cent, a dramatic change from what was actually budgeted. It was budgeted for \$15 million approximately, and in fact the forecast looks like they will have spent \$22 million. Clearly, there has been some demand, there has been some need over the last year. Can you explain why there was a significant overexpenditure in this budget line, and if there was a legitimate overexpenditure, why is it not acknowledged in setting the new budget? If we needed that money last year, will we not need it next year? Perhaps the minister can help us understand a little bit more about that.

I have a number of questions about two different aspects of that budget, the First Nations and then the Métis relations. I know they're separate divisions within the department. But I've run out of time, so perhaps I'll wait for my next section.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Member. I was very interested in seeing how you tied in negotiations with AHS, but you did bring it back to the ministry. I was about to ask you to get back on topic, but it was coming from experience, I guess.

Go ahead, Minister. You have 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm glad you brought out the budget right away because for Indigenous Relations this is a good-news budget, a very good-news budget. We've got increases around reconciliation. We've got increases for all the good work that Kristina is doing with her missing and murdered Indigenous women panel there. I was really excited when we were able to keep our budget intact and keep our core funding intact, especially for the Aboriginal business investment fund – that's a \$5 million fund, as you know, for small businesses out there – so I was really happy with our budget this year.

You're saying that it's not that big a budget, but we're a small but mighty ministry. We do a lot of good stuff, and I'm so happy with our staff, with all the good work they do in there. We work with other ministries, all of the ministries. Like, even the Premier asked all the ministries to work through us on reconciliation projects, and they're constantly coming to me with ideas and things that they can do around reconciliation, so that's really exciting.

Everything from Transportation: we've got an amazing minister there; she's working so hard, a great heart for the Indigenous people, and coming up with ways to help them out. Roads, of course, on First Nations are not that great, and access to them: especially when the fires were going up north, we really saw that the need for better access to the communities is really important.

There are a lot of projects. Like, Alberta is back, let me tell you. Buckle up. This is going to be a great year. There's a lot of activity especially going on up in the Treaty 8 area. We have to really be cognizant of that, that on some of these roads there's going to be a lot of activity, truck activity and pipeline activity, so we have to make sure these communities are safe. We just met with a couple of groups yesterday up in the Wood Buffalo area that were concerned about the road situation up there and how we could help them out, so we're working on that as we speak.

We talk about our staff. First year in, the first thing I did was start reductions in staffing. We took a 20 per cent reduction in staff in

the first year. We're stable now, but we did all the cuts the first year. I thought: let's just rip the Band-Aid off, get it over with, take the cuts, and get it done. So we did that in the first year. You know, speaking with Donavon, like, we're actually getting more done than ever before. Like, the staff is so dedicated. They're working hard. Like, when you say that we've got a great staff there, we do have a great, dedicated staff, and you're right to thank them because they do some amazing work for us there.

Then my office staff in the Leg. there, unfortunately, took a 7 per cent rollback right off the start. There was no increase; it was a rollback. I really have to thank them. They work as hard as I do. Like, if I'm here 16 hours a day, they're here 16 hours a day. They don't get any extra for putting in all that overtime. So I thank you for all the work you put in, and I really do appreciate it. Without them I couldn't get anything done. They're my right hand, my left hand, and just an amazing group of people out there working for me.

Some of our increases. You said that our budget increased. That was a good thing. The big increase was that community research grant. That's \$8 million, and that was for reconciliation. You know, it was a sad year when the graves were discovered. Past grand chief Willie Littlechild says: we don't need symbolic stuff now; we need action; Minister, take action. I was so happy that we were able to come up with the grant, and it's a very flexible grant. Like Donavon likes to say, we're passengers on the bus; they're the driver. We've put that \$8 million out there. It's about \$150,000 per community. We left it open to them, how they want to use it. If they want to use it for the ground-penetrating radar that's going on out there, if they want to use it for the elder circles, you know, to speak with the elders to see what they should do, if they want to create memorials, we let them do that. We left it totally flexible.

We also left it so that if they want to go together – the graves that were found just up in Grouard here in the last week: there was actually the Lesser Slave Lake group up there. They all went together. There are five First Nations up there. Instead of doing the single grants, they took it as one block. It was \$750,000. Like I say, that's up to them. If they want to use it as a memorial, whatever project they want to use it on, we're letting them drive the bus there and decide how they want to spend it.

9:30

Of the \$8 million, all the communities that put an application in have gotten notice that they're going to be receiving their grant. A lot of the money has already gone out the door to these communities, and the rest will be going out shortly. They've all gotten notice that they will be receiving these grants. We're really excited to do that project to help the communities out.

AHS stepped up as well and came up with a mental health grant around that, so that worked out to about \$50,000 to communities that they could use, again flexible. Like, when all this starts coming forward, there's all this past trauma that starts coming up, so there are a lot of issues around mental health issues and that type of thing. We wanted to make sure that communities had access to that, and then Alberta Health put an additional – how much was it they put in? – several million dollars for mental health that they would use internally for Indigenous people, \$8 million in total, altogether. So two \$8 million grants going right off the start: that was really good, and the communities really have gotten onboard with that and accepted that.

Also, we were approached by several engineering companies that wanted to help out as well. There's a lot of pro bono work going on right now with the ground-penetrating radar, so I encourage the First Nations always, if they want to use the companies that have offered to do that service for free, to do that. Then they've still got

the money left to do other projects. Also, I believe the University of Alberta is working pro bono on a lot of projects as well. It's great that we can stretch that dollar by companies just stepping up. We didn't ask them to do that. They just stepped up. They said: we want to help; how can we help? It was really encouraging to see that happen.

One of the areas where we were talking about a decrease was on the FNDF. That's the First Nations development fund. From the First Nations casinos, from the gaming proceeds, part of the money goes into this First Nations development fund on the profit side of it. Now, because of COVID, of course, they were shut down quite a bit. It's a scientific guess as to how much money is actually going to come in on that. We're guessing, very conservatively, that the funds are going to be down, but I was at the River Cree casino just the other morning meeting with the staff over there, and actually, after talking with them, I'm quite encouraged that it'll be the opposite, that we're going to have actually more funding than ever.

The River Cree casino, for example, has gone to being open 24 hours now. They said that by doing that, that's like increasing 90 days of operation. I didn't realize it was going to be this big, and they didn't either. They thought there might just be a spillover. Some people don't always work the same hours, you know, 9 to 5. They get off work at 2 in the morning, and they want to go relax, so they go to the casino or whatever. That's going to create a lot of extra income for them. We may actually be on the other side of this one on that, which is really great, because that money is used for social programs on First Nations, housing, economic development. It could be building a playground. They can use it however the communities – maybe a van for taking people to hospital, that type of thing. I was really encouraged when they said that they're looking at – knock on wood – having a banner year this year and actually creating more money than they had before.

You talked about some of the money we get from federal grants. That's always welcome. We use that for the investing in Canada infrastructure program. These are great projects, and we try to use them wherever we can. We've been lucky enough in working with some of the First Nations, for example down in southern Alberta, Kainai country, doing the Red Crow college program there. The Premier has a real love for culture and languages, so when they lost their college down there due to a fire, the province stepped up and we helped them to build a new college there, which they're really excited about. I was down there when they were doing the groundbreaking and then when it was being built. The whole community was so excited to see this new structure going up there and to have the ability for their kids not to have to – as you know, it's a long ways from Calgary down in Kainai country, so for them to be able to have a college right in their backyard was really amazing. And it's for the whole community. They welcome all people into the college.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Go ahead, Mr. Feehan, if you're going to take the next 10-minute block.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will go back to just one of my questions first before I proceed with the other ones, and that is that I asked about the fact that in the First Nations and Métis relations budget there was a bump-up of 42 per cent in the last year from the budget to the actual forecast spending. It didn't indicate why there was such a dramatic uptick this year as compared to last and why, if there was a legitimate need to bump it up this year, that is not continuing into the future. Is it just that you're engaged in one-offs, or are you just, again, planning to overrun that budget line item as we move forward?

I also noted that the minister talked about the \$8 million for reconciliation with regard to the residential schools, which, of course, is something that we all support. I'm glad the money is in for that. I'm glad to see that at least a few of the recommendations for response to the residential schools – of the six that were there, at least the ministry is doing a couple of them. I see that that's what the \$8 million is about. However, I have concerns, and I did ask the House about this, that with the recent discovery of 169 graves or potential graves – I'm not sure how we need to refer to them – at the St. Bernard residential school in Grouard, Alberta, Chief Sydney Halcrow indicated that they had spent their own money on that because they were no longer prepared to wait for the government to provide dollars. Now, you indicated in the House, as you have indicated here, that they are part of a project where they will receive monies for this. I'm wondering: what has been the delay, and why has the nation felt that it was necessary to proceed on their own before the actual dollars arrive? I'm glad they're coming in finally now, but I don't understand why they've had to wait this long for the monies.

Staying with line 2 in the budget, First Nations and Métis relations, I have a number of other questions that perhaps you can talk to me about so that I can understand how this money is being spent and what decisions have been made about why the money has decreased from the actual spent money of this year. I'm wondering: what programs are going to be lost and what services are going to be diminished as a result of this budget? I'm a bit surprised that the minister talks about this loss of at least 9 per cent of your budget as a good-news budget, but I will leave that as it is.

I wonder if you can tell me a little bit about the nature of the protocol agreements with treaty organizations. I know that there were some plans to move ahead with new protocol agreements. My understanding is that there are currently two protocol agreements, one with the Blackfoot Confederacy and one with the G4. The attempt to establish one with Treaty Six apparently failed and is no longer in existence, and apparently the previously existing one for Treaty 8 is no longer going. Perhaps you could tell me if you have been able, within the monies allotted to First Nations and Métis relations, to negotiate any more protocol agreements and if we expect any progress on that in the coming year.

Can you also tell me whether or not there are currently any councils of elders working with First Nations or Métis relations that are helping to set the priorities, the directions of the work in these areas? There have over the years been a number of at least ad hoc councils of elders brought together for various projects. I'm just wondering if there are any currently existing anywhere in the ministry or if there are any plans to involve elders.

9:40

I'm also concerned at the circumstance of elders reporting to me that subsequent to receiving some recognition of their work on these elders councils that had a financial piece attached to them, they were then told that that money would be deducted from other monies that they received from the province of Alberta in terms of personal support. So, as a result, the elders actually lost money over the last year if they participated in some of these councils and received money, which they believed to be money that was done with respect to protocol and not payment. Perhaps that could be explained to me so that I can pass it on to the elders who have been calling me saying that now they are in trouble with taxes as a result of these decisions.

Can you tell me as well whether or not this division – perhaps either of the First Nations or the Métis relations divisions – are involved in any work on antiracism initiatives as there have been in the past? As you know, there was an antiracism committee that is

now, it is my understanding, not working or is not producing any results or is perhaps completely defunct. That's the piece I want to know about. Is there anything in line 2 that I should understand about specific antiracism initiatives?

Can you tell me as well whether or not in either of these divisions, First Nations or Métis relations, there are any educational initiatives that are going on, you know, in completion of some of the calls for justice from the murdered and missing Indigenous women's inquiry asking for educational initiatives both within the Indigenous community and outside of the Indigenous community? I'll have a lot more to say about that inquiry a bit later, but I just want to know if there are any educational initiatives that are going on right now. Are there any new plans, moving forward, that would be reflected in this budget for any educational initiatives?

Can the minister also report to this committee about the work that the ministry is doing or that members of the First Nations and Métis relations staff are doing across government ministries to provide services to Indigenous Albertans? Are they involved in programs in other ministries that will enhance the well-being of Indigenous people in the province? If so, can you tell me which crossgovernment initiatives are supported by funds in line 2? And that is the work of the people who work in First Nations and Métis relations, what their role is in enhancing the work in other departments and whether or not there's any increase or decrease in that.

This division is also responsible for urban programming, and we know that over the last number of budgets we've seen these repeatedly severe cuts to the budget. We have seen a significant, dramatic cut to urban programming. A number of programs are completely eliminated in the first year or two, and others experience severe cuts. We're just wondering whether there have been any changes to the urban programming that is financed through this section of the budget. Have the severe previous cuts been reduced in any way? Are there any programs that are receiving funding now who were previously subject to the axe?

Can you tell me about some of the specific programming that has typically been funded through this ministry in the past? For example, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women has been receiving \$100,000 in core funding for the last five years, I think it is now. Maybe it's more. Perhaps you can give the exact number. I believe it's five years with no apparent change, no increase in spite of the fact that inflation has gone up. Can you tell me if that \$100,000 continues to be paid to the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women for their core funding? And, of course, the I believe it is \$15,000 for the Esquao awards: has there been any change in that, or is that continuing?

I have the same question on line 2, about the new in town program for the Bent Arrow association. Are they continuing to receive the amount of monies that they previously have received? Is there a reduction in that at this time? Is there any acknowledgement that with the increased costs of the significantly rising number of Indigenous people in the province of Alberta who are moving to the cities and therefore the significant demand on the program – has there been any decision to increase the financial support to the Bent Arrow program?

I'll continue with my questions in my next block. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much, Member.

Minister, you have 10 minutes to reply.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I captured everything that you said there. There were a lot of questions in there, but I'll go through it, and if I've missed something, we can catch up with you later there.

Let's talk about that bump in the grants there. Of course, the \$8 million is the community research grant. That was a one-time grant that we got out to communities, and that's what they're accessing right now. Basically, where you're saying that there's an increase: it wasn't an increase for staff or anything else; it was an increase to go to the communities to help them with that community research grant.

In that St. Bernard area, say, the Lesser Slave Lake group – there are five of them there – they received it as a one-lump sum, and that was \$750,000. That was their choice. That's what they asked for, so that's what they got. Unfortunately, they didn't put the application in until just I think six or seven weeks ago, so that's the reason that they – it takes a while to process that, of course, but it has been approved. As soon as we got their application, we went to work on it right away because I knew they were working on it. I was actually, literally, up there last summer, when they had started the ground-penetrating radar, and we looked at the site with them. The University of Alberta was on-site at the time doing that work for them. So, you know, the money was there. As soon as they asked for it, we got it out to them. There may have been some confusion, because maybe they didn't realize that they'd asked for it as group funding, but that money is available to them in that area for that.

I'm really happy about the protocol funding element. I want to talk to you about that. New grand chief of Treaty Six, Chief Arcand: great leader, several good meetings with him already. I just met with him the other night with the Premier. He's so excited to work with this government. He tells me that all the time. In the last two events I was with him, he mentioned that he wants to move forward with the protocol agreement, so we are setting up a meeting with them right now to move forward with that protocol agreement with them. We've already got funding provided for them to kick-start the process, plus they will get the funding for the protocol agreement as it moves along.

I was literally just with him the other day. We were out at the Edmonton International Airport there. A young girl had just started a new business up. She calls it the Indigenous Box. Pretty amazing. Young entrepreneur. She starts this business in her basement a year ago, putting these boxes together with products from local artisans. It could be a scarf. It could be some handmade soaps and chocolates. She puts them all in these nice little boxes, and then corporations can use these for corporate gifts. She started out in her basement a year ago, built 50 boxes, thought: if I can sell those, that'll pay the bills and I'll be good for the year. Her first 50 boxes she sold in the first hour.

She has now moved to a 3,500-square-foot warehouse at the airport. They've got an incubator program there. She's like their little rising star there. They're just gushing over her. They love her so much there. She's doing such a great job. In the last year: over a million dollars. Her first year of operations, her and her husband. It's pretty amazing. I was tickled to be out there and just be part of that and see her great success story. That's where Chief Arcand mentioned the first time, in his speech, that he wanted to carry on with the protocol agreement and start working.

We've already started working on the tables with their staff, and I'm pretty excited to be getting that protocol agreement going with Treaty Six. It's basically a memorandum of understanding how we work with the Treaty Six groups. There could be a table on education. This gives them direct access to the Education minister and the ministry staff that'll work with them on building the programs. There will be one around transportation. Minister Sawhney's group would be working with them on road issues, sewer, water, those types of things. Health table: that's really important.

9:50

Over the last year with COVID we've seen how important it is to protect vulnerable people, and that's one thing we really pushed hard with the First Nation, the COVID protocol. We knew they were a very vulnerable group. There's still a lot of poverty out there on some of the First Nations. We knew they were a vulnerable group, so we worked with them to make sure that they were one of the first groups to get vaccinated. We made sure that they had personal protective equipment. I put out still a weekly newsletter just with everything that's available to them to make sure that they have access to all these different programs, and Alberta Health has been working closely with them. All of these things add up to show you how much this government really cares about our First Nation people, to make sure that they do have the programs in place when they need them.

Like I say, the protocol agreement: the money is out there. We're going to be doing one with Treaty Six. We're already doing the Treaty 7 group. I just met with them on a couple of tables two weeks ago, so that's moving forward. We've got some great programming there. In there one of the things is that they get a one-on-one with the Premier, so they're really excited to be doing these types of programs with us, these protocol agreements. I'm happy that that Treaty Six protocol agreement is back on track.

We talked about elders. Indigenous community elders are so important, like to get that knowledge from them. We work with a good friend of ours Gilman Cardinal. He works with the government. I just saw him the other day. He was doing a class here. It's our Indigenous learning council. He does great work with that.

When we started the AIOC board, right off the get-go we could see we needed an elder there, so we brought in an elder to work with that group. Before anything ever gets started, we always make sure that we consider the cultural needs and that we're addressing those issues properly. So we have an elder there with Kristina's group, with the missing and murdered Indigenous women panel. We have two elders there. We always start with the ceremony and prayer and smudging and about a half hour of crying. Thank you for your work on that.

Yeah. Then you talked about the IAAW funding this year. There's close to a million dollars, about \$900,000 in that program. I believe we're still good with the Esquao. Because of COVID we haven't been able to do it for the last couple of years, which is kind of sad, but that will be moving forward. That's moving forward this year. That's a great thing, Esquao – in Cree that's women – to recognize the Cree women and all the great work they do out there. Thanks for your help on that, Kristina. Great job on that.

What else are we talking about? Antiracism. Yeah. That's huge. This government doesn't accept racism of any kind. We've got the associate minister of health and multiculturalism, labour, working on that. We have input into all of these. Like, see, we do a lot of crossministry work. Before they start these programs, they'll come to our department and ask for help. We've got some great people in there that can help them put these programs together to make sure that we are addressing these very serious problems around racism. It's sad that that still happens, but we have to acknowledge it and work from that acknowledgement and try to do what we can to stop it.

I think we talked about the employment partnership programs.

The urban initiatives. I know this is always a huge issue for you, Member, around urban initiatives. We've made it a priority as well. We do a lot of work especially with the Bent Arrow group in the city of Edmonton here to make sure that they have funding, and that funding is available to them this year. Donavon is like Scotty on *Star Trek* here. Every time I need some money, he seems to come

up with it. He found me some more money this year. The extra money we find this year is going to urban initiatives and for women's initiatives. We focused on that. That extra funding is going into those programs, so I'm really happy about that.

Then around our friendship centres. We have some great groups out there working in the friendship centres, especially the Calgary group down there. They do some amazing stuff. We've made sure that they've got their funding in place. I was just down there three or four weeks ago. They were working on a seniors' lodge. The friendship centre helped put this program together. I believe it was 12 units down there for a seniors' lodge. Surprise visit there. I walk in the room, they sit me down at the table, and Susan Aglukark is sitting beside me. I'm like: is this Susan? It really was. So that was really exciting. She gave us about an hour performance. Like, I was literally this far away from her. She's singing some of her new songs. That was kind of a highlight of the year for me.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, for that.

We'll move back over to the Official Opposition for the final 10 minutes of their block.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I know that you just recently mentioned the friendship centres, and I'm wondering whether or not the amount of monies previously allocated to them, which I understand was approximately \$720,000 a year, continues to be the amount of money. I know that's a significant cut from what it was at one time. I just wanted to know whether or not you maintain that cut in this budget. You also indicated that there was a million dollars going to the IAAW. Is that core funding that you're now doing, or are you mixing a bunch of things there together? I just want to have some understanding of that kind of thing.

Minister, over a year ago the government unceremoniously booted the Nechi Institute out of the building they had occupied for decades without consulting the program. At the time this minister made a public declaration to assist the institute in finding a new permanent location. Does this division in this budget line item 2 have any resources to assist in fulfilling the promise made over a year ago to actually find a permanent location for the Nechi Institute?

Now a bit more about Métis relations. In March 2020 the minister acknowledged to this committee that he was aware that the long-term agreement with the MSGC, the Metis Settlements General Council, had only three years left till expiry, which would mean that it would be only one year left now. The minister stated at the time that there'd be discussions to consider what would happen after the end of the LTA. Can the minister tell us if there's been any progress over the last two years on coming to a new agreement and if there are any monies set aside in this budget to either establish the agreement or to actually fund a new or replacement program to the LTA over the next little while?

The minister has also previously acknowledged in this committee that the future fund of the Metis Settlements General Council is close to being completely dissolved. Given the end of the LTA and the potential loss of the future fund the financial prospects for all eight Métis settlements are quite dire. Can the minister indicate whether the staff of the Métis relations division are charged with any responsibility in terms of addressing this looming crisis and whether there is any money set aside in this budget to address what is going to be a catastrophic change in the eight Métis settlements over the next little while?

Over the last year the government made a number of changes to the Metis Settlements Act that were roundly condemned by the leaders of the eight Métis settlements. They indicated there were no true consultations, only directive phone calls, and they asked the

changes be stopped, which they were not. Can you tell this committee if there's any money in line 2 to reassess the one-sided alteration of the Metis Settlements Act and to institute consultations with leaders prior to any further changes going on?

Moving on to line 3. It's been three years since the release of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, yet this government has not yet implemented any of the 231 calls for justice. A committee, of course, was formed. It took a year to form the committee. Then the committee was given a year to act, but it took 18 months. That may have been reasonable; I don't know. On that committee were two members of the government caucus, who could have been in constant communication with this minister, yet with both these members available to the minister about the contents of the report and the extended time given to the finalization of the report the government said that they would still need to consider the report after it was provided to the government. Having, you know, two members of caucus on that committee apparently was not fruitful in terms of communication with the government. Why has the government failed to release the report? How much of the funding in line 3 is dedicated to fulfilling these recommendations?

I know the minister has mentioned that there is \$2 million instead of \$1 million, approximately, in line 3, Indigenous women's initiatives, which means that there is potentially a million dollars of money that could have been spent for fulfillment of the report on the MMIW.

10:00

Because the minister has failed to release this report publicly, it's hard for us to know whether or not that money is in any way adequate. I wonder if the minister could confirm that this report contains approximately 117 recommendations to the ministry. How many of those recommendations do you intend to fulfill? And if you have a million dollars for 117 recommendations, it would indicate that you intend to spend approximately \$8,000 per recommendation. So it seems that the minister is not overly intent on achieving anything substantive with the use of \$8,000 for each of these recommendations.

Because the minister has failed to share with the public the report that the public paid for, we have to ask the questions in a general way. We don't know what the recommendations are and whether or not there is any intention for this department to actually fulfill any of those recommendations. All we know is that there is a million dollars put into this division. We'd certainly like to know a little bit more about that. When will the government stop the secrecy and tell us how much funding is available for what kinds of actual initiatives?

I know that line 3 also previously included funds for the Indigenous internship program, which was cancelled by this minister early in his term, and I'm just wondering if the program has been reinstated at all or if there's any intention of bringing the program back.

I don't have much time, so I'm going to skip a few items.

Now, the minister has talked a little bit about the EPP programs, the employment partnership programs. I have serious concerns about the fact that a decision was made to reduce the amount of funding going to Trade Winds to Success, an Indigenous program that helped Indigenous people become involved in the trades. It was a very successful program, but apparently the money has been redirected to a Calgary-based program that is not specifically Indigenously focused. I wonder if the minister could tell us why the decision was made to defund Trade Winds to Success to the degree that it was. I know it wasn't completely, but to the degree that it was defunded, and why moving away from a program that is Indigenously focused to a program that is not substantially.

On line 9 we can see there's a substantial drop in funding for land and legal settlements. Can the minister explain why there is a drop? Is there no expectation of further outstanding TLEs in the coming year? Can the minister inform the committee about the status of the TLEs for Beaver First Nations and Fort McMurray First Nations? I understand that some money was available for Bigstone, but I don't know if that is going forward or not. It appears that there's very little progress in terms of TLEs, as evidenced by the money being set aside or not set aside.

Line 10 also shows the closure of the Indigenous litigation fund. I ask the minister to tell the committee: how many grants were funded in this program when it did exist, and is the closure of this program indicative of the failure of the program to have any value?

Line 11 with regard to the AIOC. The minister, of course, is quite proud of that program, and overall I'm supportive of the existence of the program. I certainly voted for it in the House. I notice that it is only 50 per cent utilized in the budget, and I'm just wondering why there was such an underutilization of this funding and why, if there was an underutilization, the amount in the budget has remained the same. Why doesn't this year's budget reflect anything to do with the actual usage in the previous years? Can the minister tell the committee how many of the 48 First Nations were able to benefit from programs under the AIOC?

In reviewing the list of the nations, it is evident that most of them are already the highly successful financial nations that have been participating, in my discussions with members of the Indigenous community. The high cost of participating in the program has been cited by a number of nations as a barrier, and as such many less financially strong nations have been unable to move forward in this program. In fact, a number of communities have told me that they have made multiple applications and been refused in this program. Can the minister tell us how many applications to this program have been refused by this ministry?

I'm out of time again.

The Chair: That concludes the first portion of questions for the Official Opposition.

We'll now move on to the independent member for 20 minutes of questions. Minister, do you still want to maintain the block time, or do you wish to go back and forth?

Mr. Wilson: Block time.

The Chair: Block time. Okay.

Mr. Loewen, go ahead. You have 10 minutes, sir.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much, and thank you, Minister and your department, for being here today to answer questions and talk about the important work you do. I appreciate what you do and your care and concern for the Indigenous people in Alberta.

I just have a few quick questions, but they are important questions I believe, and I think you'll agree. I just wanted to start out with asking how the process is going on identifying the residential school graves. Obviously, that's near and dear to my heart, too. There was a residential school in Sturgeon Lake, which is in my constituency and very close to my hometown, so just a bit of an update on that if you could, please.

I also would like to get a bit of a report on what's happening with the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. You know, I understand the process has been under way and there has been time for input and now it's time to see how these suggestions are going to be implemented. So just maybe a bit of an update on that process there and the direction that you'll be taking.

I just wanted to mention quickly about the rural broadband strategy. I know that's with Service Alberta, but I just want to make sure that we are considering our First Nations people and their reserves. I know that in my local area the Sturgeon Lake reserve is one of the dead spots in cell service when travelling between Valleyview and Grande Prairie, so some of these reserves don't even have cell service, never mind the rural broadband. I just wanted some comments on that.

Then the last question would be on clean water. I did talk to the Transportation minister about that in estimates, but I just want to know how many reserves in Alberta don't have clean water. I understand that some of this is a federal issue and there's federal money involved with working through that, so I just want to see what your department is doing, working on this issue of clean water for our First Nations people.

I'll leave those comments there and let you respond. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister, you have 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you for the great questions. I know we spent some time up in your community there before, and it's a great community and some great First Nations up there. I know you've got a big heart for the Indigenous people up there.

Starting off on the residential schools, this is a tough area, and I'll try not to choke up here. You know, when you start – like I talked to before, when the graves were first starting to be discovered, we said: let's try to get some action going on this right away. We started with the community research grants, and in your area they are receiving those grants as well. These are up to \$150,000 per community or, like I say, they could group them up. Like I said, we left that as flexible as possible so the communities could use it however they see fit, because every community is going to look at this differently.

These are sacred sites to them, so to even start digging them up like that: I don't know that too many are really, actually going to do that. It goes against the culture to do that in a lot of places, but you will see a lot of the ground-penetrating radar going on. If your community is interested, if they haven't started that work, we have a list of companies that will do it pro bono as well, so they don't even have to use their money to do that type of work. We can get that done for them at no charge, which is really good because that leaves the money, then, available for other things.

Like I say, it's really important. Like, we talked about elders with the other member there. Elders in the community are very important, so to work with them to make sure that we're moving forward in a good way. It gives the community a chance to heal, doing a memorial maybe. Even last summer the member was out when we did our memorial garden at the Legislature here. The Premier gave us one of the gardens to use as a reconciliation garden, so we planted a tree there. Chief Billy told me that was the most appropriate thing that we could have done, a sign of healing and hope, and that's what it's all about.

We have to heal. It's happened. We have to acknowledge it. We have to move on, though. We can't just dwell with all the trauma. That's where we start getting into all kinds of trouble. We've acknowledged it. We're trying to move on the best we can on our little reconciliation garden we've started there. We're going to have a program going this year to name it, so we're going to reach out to the communities to see if they'd like to put a name on it.

10:10

We work with all treaties – treaties 6, 7, and 8, of course – because this happened all across the province. This didn't just happen in Treaty 8 or Treaty 7. So we want to work with them and

we want to do – as you probably noticed in the throne speech, there was a lot of content in there around Indigenous people. Very encouraging. I just met with the Lieutenant Governor the other night, and she is such an elegant woman. She told me: Minister, any time you're doing something around reconciliation, missing and murdered, I want to be there with you. I thought that was really encouraging, to get that response from her. She wants to help us out as well.

We want to work, and we're going to go out to the communities again, get their input so it's not government telling them what to do. They can come up with kind of a competition to see what type of memorial we want to do there, and we'll work with the Ministry of Culture, again crossministry work, to get a memorial built there. That's really encouraging to get that done, and we'll be working with your communities up there to make sure that they're able to move forward. Any time they need help, you know, just contact our office, and we'll work with you if they need something extra to move forward on that.

You talked about broadband. This is going to be a huge initiative for this government. Our Minister of Service Alberta: this has been his passion. When we were sitting up at night, 2 in the morning, in the Leg. there, we started working on this program to increase broadband. I've been up in your country, and I know. People don't understand; you get an hour north of Edmonton, Mr. Google doesn't work anymore. Google Maps: thrown out the window. You'd better know where you're going. I spent a lot of time stopping at people's houses asking: which way to the Métis settlement here? So I understand your issue, especially in the more remote communities, around the broadband issue.

We knew that this is important enough, and this is going to be coming forward. We actually increased our mandate in the AIOC. It started out with natural resources: oil, gas, forestry, mining, and renewables. Now we've increased it to include agriculture, transportation, and broadband. This is going to be a huge initiative as we start rolling out the program. Our government has committed \$390 million towards the broadband initiative. We've got that full commitment from the federal government now as well, so it's \$780 million. The minister is confident, in working with the providers out there, that he can pump it up close to a billion dollars that will be working on a broadband solution for all of Alberta.

Where I really found this was important with COVID happening this year and the kids out of school – if you're in Edmonton or Calgary, it's no problem; you just sit in the basement, and you can do your school work. But when you get up in Todd's area there, they might have to drive an hour to get to the closest McDonald's or Tim Hortons so they can sit in the parking lot to get broadband and do their school work. We saw this is going to be a huge issue, and we're going to try to address it. We're working with Service Alberta on this program.

We're really hopeful that we can get good – I'm not sure of all the technical stuff, but that the upload, the download speeds are going to be consistent so that we've got good broadband coverage all across Alberta. This is going to be so important, especially in those rural, remote, and Indigenous communities where they don't have that good access to broadband.

We're really going to be rolling that one out, and I'm happy that we got it approved in our AIOC now, to include broadband in that. They can make applications to become partners, and they might be putting fibre optic – there's going to be a real combination because it's different all across Alberta. Some areas have the fibre optic, and you might tie that in with a tower. Some areas are going to be just strictly off towers or through the new Elon Musk one there, the star – what's it called? Star something? [interjection] Starlink. Yeah. Some of the really remote communities are going to have to go to

something like that because, otherwise, you know, fibre optic to one house could cost you a million dollars. You do a combination of what's available. Working with industry, we'll be able to link up these communities, so I'm really excited to start rolling that one out.

And just while I'm talking about AIOC: our mandate increase. I heard from a lot of First Nations. Not everybody is blessed, like you say, to have the oil and gas in their backyard. Down south they say that they don't have oil and gas, but they've got wind and water. We have to work with what we've got. Some areas don't have anything. What they've come to me with is that culturally they want to be involved in agriculture in some areas, so that's why we included agriculture. You're going to be seeing up in your area, Todd, that there are going to be some groups coming forward with some new programs around some big agricultural projects around ranching and that type of thing. I can't let the cat out of the bag yet, but there are some really good projects going to be coming forward that I'm excited about, where through the expanded mandate we'll be able to work with some of the First Nations and Métis groups up there.

For a lot of the Métis groups, of course, agriculture and ranching are a big part of what they do. Like the member said, you know, some of the sophisticated First Nations: they have economic development staff, they have lawyers on staff, and they can get into these projects and write the grants. What we really try to do is work with the ones that aren't as sophisticated, and we've actually built a capacity program into the AIOC so that some of the not-so-sophisticated nations that don't have the staff on hand – we'll help them out. We'll help them build that business plan. We'll bring projects to them and help them to see if it fits in with what they want to do. We're really excited about that, moving forward on the AIOC, on the expanded mandate, and getting into the broadband and the agriculture. We're really excited on that one.

Okay. I've only got a minute left. To start on the missing and murdered Indigenous women – I'll probably cry for the first 30 seconds – I'll just say that we've got a great group out there. They've been working. Kristina has done an amazing job, and I just can't thank her enough for moving that program forward. It's been a work of love for them. Like, I know they said that that's some of the most important work they've done in their careers. I can't thank Martin Long enough. He stuck with it right through the whole thing. The guy has got a heart of gold and has done an amazing job with us on putting that program together. The department has received the report. When we started that journey, we started it with ceremony, so when I get the final report, we want to do it in ceremony.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The member now has about seven minutes and 50 seconds.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister. I appreciate your responses so far. I do have to run to another meeting, so I'm just going to give you a chance to finish your comments on the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls work that you're doing and then maybe cover the clean water. Since I have to run off, I'll be looking for your answers in *Hansard*. Again, no disrespect that I can't stick around for your responses, but I will be looking for them in *Hansard*. I appreciate your concern and your deep love for the Indigenous people in Alberta.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister, you have about seven minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thanks for giving us the opportunity to talk about that a little more. I'll maybe start with the water projects. It

was a \$100 million program. We've kept that intact. We have a fairly large project going on for the Ermineskin First Nation right now. They're part of the Maskwacis group down there. We were short of funding on that, so the government actually came up with an additional \$13 million for that project. It's now a \$39 million project. It took a while to put all the pieces together because we are working with a water commission out of the Ponoka-Lacombe area on an existing system to run the line up there. All of those details have come in place now. The water commission is working with Ermineskin First Nation to supply that waterline down there.

We'll be putting the line down to Ermineskin, and we've sized the line so that if – there are four First Nations in Maskwacis. You've got Ermineskin, Louis Bull, Samson, and Montana. What we'll be doing is running the waterline up to Ermineskin, but the line is sized so that we can expand it from there. Once it gets onto the First Nation, then that becomes a federal program to do any internal lines they want to do. If they just want to do a water station, that'll be up to them, how they want to move forward from that.

They are working with the water commission now. The money is in place, and they will be starting to do the line this year. That line should be in place up to Ermineskin. It's coming. It's quite a long line. They have to come from the Lacombe area with the line to Ermineskin. It's going to be a fairly major project, which is good. That's going to employ a lot of people. There are going to be a lot of people working on that project. It's going to probably take, by the time we get it all done, close to a year. It's a fairly big project, a \$39 million project. That's nothing to sneeze at. We're really happy that that program is going forward. The chief out there and the staff are really excited that they're finally seeing that come to fruition. It's fun to be part of these bigger projects and finally get them moving forward.

10:20

Going back to missing and murdered, like I say, we want to do right by the families, make sure that we've taken our time, because this is a very sensitive issue to work with. We will be receiving the final report in ceremony fairly soon, next week, so we'll do a ceremony around that. It's a tough issue. As you heard in the news just in the last week or so, another two women – horrible situation. So we have to really make sure we get this right. All the women involved pretty much have lost somebody in their family.

We've already started on a few things. I wanted to get out of the gate even before we got the report, so when I first went down to the national inquiry there and we got the original report, there were some things that we could get right off the start. You know, under what all Canadians can do, there are some action items that we could get going there. I see the member is wearing his leather patch. A moosehide patch, they call it. It's a symbol just to remind people that we have to, as men, stand up and defend Indigenous women out there and girls. It's really a good starting point for talking. Last night I was at a function, and I had a fellow come up to me, the mayor of Morinville actually, and he says: what is this patch you're wearing? So I was telling him about the Moose Hide campaign and what it's all about. He was so excited because they're doing a ladies' shelter up there right now, so he's going to be contacting us because they're wondering how they could participate in this and get more involved.

To see that everybody is all of a sudden taking this really seriously – what we're doing in our ministry: we're constantly talking about it. A lot of times you'll see me wear the red dress pin, also a symbol for murdered and missing Indigenous women. We accepted a full-size regalia red dress from the Awo Taan society down in Calgary. It's downstairs here in the Federal Building. It's in a glass case. Normally things get put on display

here for a month or two. The Speaker has had it on display for just about two years now. It's got its own prominent place in a glass case, so I'm really happy. Once a year we've been doing ceremony there. This year they brought up some little moccasins that we put in there. That was tough, a tough day.

We're keeping it going. As the report comes out, you'll see a lot of initiatives that we'll be taking forward, and we did put an additional million dollars in this year to help with the programs that are going on. Some of the things we've already done: as you know, in the Legislature we brought forward Clare's law to protect against domestic violence. We funded projects related to employment systems. We've been doing a lot of work around human trafficking. Like, who'd have thought Alberta had human trafficking issues? Like, it's just hard to even believe that happens here. We've declared October 4 the Sisters in Spirit Day. You'll see marches going on around that time.

It's such a heartbreaking thing to see these families. You'll see the ladies wear their red dresses, and then there'll be another little red dress sewn on it: that's somebody that they know. It's really personal to me because I know a lot of these families and people that have gone missing in my own area. That's why we've put so much effort into it. One of the first things we did: we went down to Awo Taan and met the ladies there, and they gave me my first red dress, that I wear on my jacket. A lot of times you'll see me wear it. It's been quite a journey, and I'm glad that the department supports me so much on it. I can't thank you enough for your work on this, Kristina, and I know we're going to make a difference. We're going to make a difference.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. We all do recognize your passion for your portfolio and definitely respect the hard work that you put in.

We'll now move on to 20 minutes with the government caucus. Would you like to remain with the block portion?

Mr. Wilson: Please.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

You have 10 minutes, gentlemen and ladies.

Mr. Getson: Thanks, Minister. Thanks, Chair. Again, Minister, obviously, out in my area we have Michel band, Alexander, Alexis, and Paul. When the events broke out in Kamloops, it was such a wound that was opened up again for everybody, and dealing with the leaders out in those areas was very telling about the efforts that have been taking place in trying to get things recognized and to do the right things going forward. I acknowledge, you know, fully your comments earlier.

The feedback I had from some of the elders and leaders out there as well was that allowing them the best place, best space, and best time to heal and go forward – as well, what I did find was that the community really got behind it, not just in the First Nations communities themselves but our local communities, businesses stepping up, wanting to try to help out. You know, some of the folks that had the ground-penetrating radar and some of the drone technology and everything else: like, everybody just – it was a full-court press. Everybody wanted to jump in and fix it right away. It was probably more to the point of trying to hold them back from causing more harm than good on stirring the pot. Everybody really wanted to get in behind this. It's something we need to acknowledge, recognize, and move forward together on, for sure.

The other thing, too, Minister. You know, coming back to the plan here, on page 23 of the fiscal plan there's one of the biggest initiatives of the budget. It is the Alberta at work plan. The initiative

intends to create pathways and success for Albertans, Indigenous communities, Alberta and our own young, highly skilled, motivated workforce and a wide variety of transferable skills.

Prior life, I couldn't tell you more than that. When we were pipelining and you get together these communities to see what's around the table – you're a great storyteller. Maybe I'm not as good as you, but I'm going to share one with you as well. I can remember that, first, we were up in the Fort McKay group and sitting there with – I'm not going to name the company, but it's one of those that rhymes with TC. We're sitting up looking at this project, and as a construction manager they couldn't imagine why I was heading out with the Indigenous relations groups. Quite frankly, I told everybody around the table and the chiefs and the folks over there: well, so these guys don't make promises I can't keep. Nothing worse than when you go to execute a project and somebody else makes commitments.

Then the other thing, too, is a noticeable paradigm shift of the advancements. You know, God bless the folks internally from the company, their group, and they're talking about outreach programs and maybe how we can teach people how to become welders and everything else. I'm looking around the room, and here's the trap that people set into. They go through a standard protocol rather than getting to know folks off the front end. The lady was talking about all that, and I paused her, and I said, "Let's stop for a second." I turned to this young fellow that was sitting beside me. He's wearing a ball cap, and he's kind of got trendy clothes on. I said, "Do you feel like being a welder?" "Not really." I said, "What's your business?" "Well, actually, I do drone technology; we do heat sensors, we're doing all this geospatial mapping." I said, "Yeah." So I turned to the lady and said: "Maybe let's start with that. Let's start with: who do we have around the table, what skill sets do they have, and how do we apply it to the project?" With that, I was very excited to see that on page 23 of the fiscal plan.

Talking about that and, moreover, Minister, the AIOC, I know that we just finished working through the corridors task force, and some of the reports that you're going to see – and I appreciate the efforts your group gave us as well – were simply that, that we can't be a one-trick pony in one industry. The First Nations are advancing so much and want to participate in so many different items and elements and expanding the AIOC. If you can in your block, when you get a chance to talk about it, can you please talk about the new updated mandates from AIOC, how that applies, how we can leverage that?

Then on page 58 of the ministry business plan it talks about the Aboriginal business investment fund, how it supports projects, a number of Indigenous community-owned businesses. I know you told us a little bit about that one upstart business that's now turning out a million dollars a year in the first year, which is phenomenal. If you can tell us some more about that program, how we can receive the funding on it, which people can access it – how do you, you know, spread the good work, quite frankly? – how it covers all the capital costs of the Indigenous community-owned economic development programs, or does it only handle the partial funding? Then how does it improve the economic outcomes for Indigenous communities? I really want you to try to explain more on that.

10:30

Then, a different item, too, is the Indigenous housing capital program. It intends to increase the supply of affordable housing units for Indigenous peoples in need. Page 162, I believe, of the capital plan adds about \$20.7 million, back of the napkin here, of additional funding towards the Indigenous housing program over the next three years. If you could talk about the overview of that program. What type of housing does it include? Is it construction,

repurposed, you know, build up from brand new, or leveraging other properties? Who's eligible for that program as well?

Then, Minister, one of the other things that came up through COVID was the interface. You know, it's a very fine point as well. Councillor Myrna Rabbit out in my area in Paul: we've had a bit of a working relationship for the last few years. Really, it comes down to the drug issues. I know that there are overlaps between federal and provincial, and it always seems like we're falling through the cracks there in these areas. Again, it comes back to the young folks in those communities. How do we break that cycle? How does that tie in? I'm not sure how it weaves in between the feds, yourself, and then some of the other ministries when it comes to mental health and addictions. Maybe you can talk about that, the work that we've done over the last while and then how we take those steps to go forward, because that's really a big issue.

The other thing, too, is that I'd like to give credit where credit is due. Again, when we worked on the corridor task force, your group was helping us in behind to do some really good work. You know, the folks that were on the task force from a First Nations community were Chief Fox, Chief Whitney, Chief Standingontheroad, Chief Morin, and also President Quintal. Then, who wasn't on the task force was Chief Isaac up in that Treaty 8 area. They came up with a new business model, as well, of dealing with economic relations. Maybe you can talk a little bit about some of those interfaces and some of the work that your department does as it relates to the budget for those programs going forward, when we are doing these works and we're expanding the economy and looking at these pathways, how we're making sure that we're respecting how each one of those communities functions and their treaties respectively. Then, how do we build on the next steps? Is there something in your department, your purview, if you're forecasting more projects of such going forward?

Then, obviously, a shout-out to my area. I've got a new grand chief in my area, Grand Chief Arcand. He's phenomenal. I mean, he's just excellent. First time that he came in, we were meeting on a biweekly basis just to catch up. Chief Alexis, again another all-star, Chief Rain, and Chief Goerz, too, from Michel band: at the Alberta International Airshow these gentlemen were all there. Actually, it was Chief Goerz and Grand Chief Arcand that led us off in starting that.

If you can talk, as well, Minister, of some of the new opportunities that are coming forward by having these reconcili-action type relationships, as you would, to help take those next steps to those communities. If you could expand on that and how that relates.

I'll cede the time back to you if you want to take that and respond back to me now.

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you so much for you for your comments. I know you always say that you come from God's country up there.

Mr. Getson: Well, it is. Lac La Biche is God's lake.

Mr. Wilson: It is beautiful country. I've been lucky enough to travel through it quite a bit over the last couple of years and really get an appreciation of why you've got such a heart for the land up there. I know you worked in the industry for a lot of years. Your approach to working with Indigenous people I find very refreshing. You understand them probably better, the culture. Because you've worked up there, you've lived up there, you understand how important the land is to the Indigenous people.

Your work around the energy corridor was just second to none. I really applaud you for what you've done up there. That's our key to the future, working with Indigenous people.

ESG, now, I think we have to expand that. I think the world is finally realizing how important our energy is with what's going on in Ukraine right now. Why would we want to bring in energy from Russia when we've got the best ethically produced oil and gas right here in Alberta? We really have to start celebrating our industry more and more, the people that work out there, the young people.

This is the part that really frustrates me. My niece is an environmental engineer. These are the most highly trained people in the world and young people working in this field, yet the world is saying that we don't know what we're doing. It bothers me because these people are so proud of the work that they do, these young folks. You get up there, where they've been doing these reclamation projects: amazing work. If we can work with the First Nations, Indigenous people, and Métis people of these energy quarters, that's the key to our success right there.

There's an energy. When you talk to some of our ministers from India, where they still use cow dung to cook on, it's ridiculous when we've got all this energy right here. I'm so encouraged with some of the projects going forward, our LNG projects and blue hydrogen, and being able to take our energy to the world to help these developing countries, to get people out of that energy poverty. Yeah, energy poverty, that's basically what it is.

I'm really encouraged with what you're doing on your programs there. You talk about the litigation fund. That's why it's important to get these First Nations involved in that litigation fund, to fight back against Trudeau's tanker ban, a tanker ban on the west coast to ship our energy around the world, that needs our energy so bad, so they're not using cow dung to cook. Like, it's just incredible. Thank you for your work on that. That's great work.

We talked a little bit about the AIOC again and our extended mandate. We wanted to really highlight our natural resources. Like, anywhere else in the world they'd die to have our natural resources. I mean, we've got the most ethically produced oil and gas that there is. We started out with the oil and gas, forestry, mining, and renewables.

We do have a project we're working on. I think it was with the Ermineskin band. We helped fund them. They're working on a renewable project as well. That's part of it. That's diversifying the economy. That's all part of it. It can't be just one part; it all has to tie together. If we can work with the hydrogen projects, some renewable projects, our good oil and gas, you know, we can make a difference and help people all around the world.

Like I said before, we wanted to expand the mandate. We'd heard from the Indigenous communities that they needed – not everybody is blessed to have oil and gas in their backyard. But they do have a lot of really great land out there, so agriculture becomes really important. COVID really showed that food security is so important. I hear that from pretty much every Indigenous community out there: food security.

We expanded into agriculture as well as the broadband initiatives and transportation. Those are the three areas where we've got expansion. So if your community has a project that you think would work with them, encourage them to bring it forward. We're reviewing projects all the time. The three big ones out there, of course, are the Cascade project up by Edson – that little community: right now you cannot get a hotel room. You can't get a bed and breakfast. People are renting out their basements because the town is full. The town is booming. They want to have at least 1,500 people. They probably could use another 500 right now. So if somebody is looking for a job, send them out there. They said that even a chubby old guy like me can get a job pushing broom. There's lots of availability for work up there.

We were talking about training and that type of thing. When we were up there – I knew it was a big project, but I didn't realize how

big it was. This is a megaproject, when you see the size of what's going on out there. Alexis First Nation, Backwoods Energy: they did all the groundwork. Indigenous people did all the groundwork to start off there. It was all Indigenous people.

One young girl came up to me. She was apprenticing to become an electrician. She was so proud to be part of Alberta's recovery. That was just, I'll tell you, touching to see how proud she was in getting this training. She's going to be able to support her family. Like, that's why I do this. To be able to help young people is just the best thing you can possibly do.

That project is going forward. That was six First Nations on that one. Yeah, we had Alexis, of course. Enoch, Kehewin, O'Chiese, Paul, and Whitefish were all partners in that, I mean real partners. Like, we backstopped them \$93 million to be part of a \$1.5 billion project. That's going to provide 8 per cent of Alberta's power with good clean Alberta natural gas. They're using the newest technology for carbon capture. It checks off all the boxes. It checks every box. Like I say, the community is booming. It's so great to see Alberta back again. Buckle up because this is happening. You can see it from our housing markets and everything else.

10:40

I was at a function last night, and there were a couple of builders there. Their biggest problem, again, is getting labour. That's why I really think we need to try to help Ukrainian people wherever we can and bring those good, hard-working people here. They can be part of our getting Alberta back to work program. Everywhere I go in the province, that's the biggest concern I hear. Everybody needs labour. Everybody needs help, skilled labour and training labour. You name it. Everybody is looking for people right now. So if we can bring some people in and help them immigrate and get them started, there's lots of work here in Alberta.

It's really great to see that we're back. I'm going to blow our horn a little bit. This is what our government has done. We've lowered the corporate tax rate and by doing so created more corporate tax than we had before with a higher rate because the businesses are coming in. The Premier is out there working hard. He's brought lots of different companies in. In the technology area there's so much stuff happening.

Anybody who wants to be a movie star, now is the time to do it. My little granddaughter was in two movies this summer, if you can imagine. There is one young fellow in my area – I'll give him a little plug. There's the new Predator movie coming out, and one of the stars in that movie is right in my area, a good-looking young fellow. Since he's done that, he's kind of become a little bit of a rock star. He's been doing modelling gigs down in Australia. He's down in California right now. His mom is so proud of him. She lives right beside my sister there, so I get to visit with him quite a bit.

To see the difference you can make when we're moving forward and the economy is coming back and people are getting pride from working: that's what it's all about. That's what our government has been working hard to do. We're focused. Everybody I know in this room is laser focused on jobs and the economy, on getting Alberta back to work. Thanks for bringing that up.

We should talk about ABIF. How much time do I have here? At least a minute. Aboriginal business investment fund is one of my best tools in the tool box. It's up to \$500,000. These are straight grants. It really helps, like we talked about, communities that maybe aren't as sophisticated. Out in my area, the Montana band, food security is a big issue. They got an ABIF grant this year to build a greenhouse, so they're going to be growing their own food on-site, training people, again young kids, teaching them how to manage a greenhouse operation, plus they're doing the construction . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Members, you have about just over two minutes left.

Mr. Getson: Sure. I can cede my time to MLA Guthrie.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Guthrie.

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah. Thanks for being here this morning, Minister. I just have a couple of questions. The first is on red tape reduction. In Budget 2022-2023 the government is committing once again to reducing red tape. On page 60 of the ministry plan it discusses the ministry's commitment to support that red tape reduction effort. Could you just explain what your department has been doing to contribute to that commitment? I guess also maybe just elaborate on what the benefit is for Indigenous people in Alberta to that red tape reduction.

The next portion here, I guess, would be in relation to natural resources. At page 21 the strategic plan objective 4 says "standing up for Alberta's natural resources." You know, as a plan of action for this objective the government of Alberta has committed to "working with First Nations, Metis Settlements, other Métis communities . . . to support Indigenous participation in the natural resource and energy sector." I guess the first question would be: what are the initiatives that are in the budget that support this objective? Then, two, if you can elaborate on the importance of that participation. Then, lastly, what are the main concerns that you hear from Indigenous peoples in relation to this participation in the natural resource and energy sectors?

I'll leave it at that and let you respond.

The Chair: Well, thank you.

Minister, you have about 10 seconds, so you may try, but we'll be moving on.

Mr. Wilson: I'm proud to say that we're the first ones to get our red tape reduced to 34 per cent. We're at about 32 per cent. We had to have a little bit more . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move back over to the Official Opposition for a 10-minute block.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can see why the minister has chosen to go to the block segment, because then you don't really have to answer any questions, just exchange bar stories with . . .

The Chair: Member, I would just remind you that it's up to the Official Opposition to pick which ministry gets a two-hour block, so if you have issues with the amount of time, then you need to go back to your party leadership.

Mr. Feehan: It's nothing to do with that. Block answers: that was the minister's choice.

Minister, I asked a number of questions before my break, so I will assume that if I give you some time, you'll answer many of those, but let me throw in a few more before the break. I'm interested that you said that you kept \$100 million in the water to reserve program, but you indicated that there was a shortage for Ermineskin, so you added some more to bring it up to \$39 million for that one project. Can you tell me: does that mean you've actually spent more than \$100 million? Can you also detail for us how many other nations are in line for the project and where they're at in the three-step process there?

Sorry. I've only got a few minutes, and I want to give you some time to answer a few of these things. I would like to know the status

of the training for the civil servants in terms of Indigenous history, traditions, and knowledge. Can you tell me if this program is still in existence? Is that reflected anywhere in terms of your budget here today? Was there a decision not to proceed with phase 2 of the project, and why was it discontinued?

Can you tell me if the Treaty 8 Trappers Association agreement was in fact honoured and whether or not funds are flowing through to them? I understand that they're not.

Minister, I really want to give you time. I've asked a lot of questions, and I haven't had answers for any of them. The last thing I want to talk about is the release of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate report on children in care. The news is deeply unsettling. In the past 11 months there have been 45 deaths of children in care. The record in previous years was only 34. In 11 months, because they had to do the report early, it's gone up from 34 to 45, so I'm assuming it'll be somewhere around 50 by the end. To date 36 of those are Indigenous children. This is a significant increase over previous years. Currently 64 per cent of all children in care are Indigenous. Can the minister tell this committee if Indigenous Relations is participating in any way in actions to address these terrible numbers and which division is assisting in the crossgovernmental initiative? Where in the budget do we find anything with regard to attempts to reduce the number of children coming into care and attempts to stop the death of Indigenous children in these extremely high numbers?

I will give you some time to answer those questions. I have more, but we're running out of time.

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister. You have five minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start with the water question you asked there. Like I said, that is in progress right now. Beyond that, we put an additional \$13 million in because we were a little shy for the Ermineskin project that is going forward.

Mr. Feehan: So \$113 million altogether?

Mr. Wilson: I'd have to check on the exact numbers, but I believe so. That's a \$39 million project. It's in progress. The engineering is done, and they're getting ready to start putting the actual line in the ground. It'll be a good project. Like I say, it's going to create a lot of employment. We're trying to work with the First Nations to get them to do a lot of the work themselves. They're excited to be partners within that. Like I always say, we call it partners in prosperity. I've noticed that you've started using that line on your side of the House, but we started it. We're proud of that one.

10:50

The Mikisew Cree First Nation: that project is in progress. That's \$20.1 million. Whitefish (Goodfish) First Nation: that's in progress as well. The Cold Lake First Nation, Bonnyville one, \$3.2 million: that one is substantially completed. The Dene Tha' Bushe River one: that one is also substantially completed. The money is all basically going out the door. Those projects are either in progress or are about to be started. So that's where we're at on that one. In Budget 2022 there's \$14.3 million allocated for a First Nations drinking water tie-in, and that's part of Alberta Transportation's budget, so it's beyond what the Indigenous Relations budget would be.

The Indigenous learning initiative: I'm really proud of that one. Like I say, I just met Gilman the other day. He was putting on a course out here. He calls me his adopted grandson, so I'm really proud of that. That's still going. It's ongoing. To date more than 14,000 Alberta public service employees have completed their

introductory training since its launch, so that's pretty good. Indigenous training creates a desire for further learning, respectful dialogue, improved relations, and ultimately reconciliation. The training addresses a lot of myths and misconceptions and stereotypes and serves to change behaviours. The participants gain a greater understanding of the long-term impact of colonialism, assimilation policies, how residential schools have led to the long-standing systemic racism.

Member Ceci: We started that one.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you. And we're carrying on bigger and better than ever.

On the Treaty 8 Trappers Association, I'm proud to say that the president is actually one of my best friends. He sits on my constituency board, actually, so I hear all about it all the time. He's a great guy. And talk about an entrepreneur. He's just started another new business himself. He's into the building of all those – what are they called? – rig platforms.

Mr. Rehn: Rig mats.

Mr. Wilson: Rig mats, yeah. He's into that business, rig matting. Also, as a sideline, he's started a business for cleaning algae up in lakes. He says that he's got the answer to it, so I hope he does, because it's a huge issue. If we can clean that algae up in the summertime, that would be awesome. He's a great guy. I work with him really closely, and he lives, actually, just around the corner from me.

Children in care: that's Children's Services, so I can't really address too much on that.

Going back to some of your original questions around the friendship centres, that annual funding has been maintained. It's \$720,000 for the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association. As well, we do a lot of crossministry work, and like I said, with the Minister of Seniors and Housing we just did a project with the friendship centre down in Calgary on a seniors' lodge down there. That was really exciting. The best part of working with the friendship centres on something like that is that it's all culturally sensitive and done so that the elders can have areas where they can do smudging and the types of things that you wouldn't typically be able to do in a regular seniors' lodge. It's great that we can work with them on that.

The Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women: we've been really good on that one. There's just about \$300,000 for the job readiness navigator program.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll now move over to the government caucus for five and five. Who's on your speakers list? Go ahead, Mr. Rehn.

Mr. Rehn: Minister, on page 144 of the fiscal plan it states that this ministry is in charge of working "with Indigenous communities, the federal government, industry . . . stakeholders to support strong, vibrant Indigenous communities and people who [can] fully participate in a prosperous, competitive and diverse Alberta."

I also see budget line 2 of the government estimates. It explains that the budget item First Nations and Métis relations is "responsible for establishing effective relationships, legislation, policies and initiatives for Indigenous governments and organizations, and administers the Metis Settlements legislation." I'm also aware that Budget 2022 maintains the funding for protocol agreements between Indigenous communities and Alberta's government. Can the minister tell us about your relationship with Treaty 6, the Blackfoot Confederacy, and G4 and how it impacts protocol agreements?

Now, concerning Métis relations specifically, the capital plan shows \$2.1 million towards the long-term governance and funding arrangements agreement, LTA, for the 2022-2023 budget. With one year remaining of the LTA, how does the government of Alberta intend to address the long-term sustainability of the Métis settlements? That's 10(a). Less than half of the Métis people in Alberta are represented by the Métis Nation of Alberta, MNA. How is this government ensuring that all Métis people in Alberta are having their voices heard and concerns addressed?

Residential schools are part of one of the darkest times in our history, and two weeks ago researchers from the University of Alberta found 169 potential unmarked graves at St. Bernard's Indian residential school. This is a hard and profoundly troubling reminder of the commitment that we all have towards working for reconciliation. The residential schools community research grant is a program with the objective to fund engagement, research, and support healing for those affected by Indian residential schools. The fiscal plan, page 144, shows that \$8 million in operating expenses will provide funding to this program. This grant works towards these activities for either documented or undocumented deaths and burials. Can you further explain the importance of this program as part of our commitment to reconciliation? Can the minister also explain how people in my community access such funding? What other supports are there available for residential school survivors and the families of those who never returned home?

I cede my time, Mr. Chair, to MLA Lovely.

The Chair: Go ahead, Member Lovely.

Ms Lovely: Thank you so much, Minister. A few questions for you. The ministry business plan indicates that this ministry works to make life safer for Indigenous women and girls. Now that the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls submitted their final report in January, what is the government of Alberta doing to address the recommendations provided by the final report from the Alberta Joint Working Group

on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls? That's 9(a). How much funding is being provided to address such recommendations? How has the Indigenous women's council on economic security influenced government programs or policies? How is their role important to the government? That's 9(b).

What kind of support does your ministry offer to Indigenous women through funding the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women? 9(c).

Can you provide more information regarding the victims' services family information liaison unit and their work to support families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls?

I have one more question here. Budget line 3 shows an increase of \$0.89 million towards Indigenous women's initiatives. Can you explain why your ministry is significantly increasing such funding? Can you elaborate on the different programs that this budget line supports?

Minister, that wraps up my prepared questions, but I wanted to sincerely thank you for all the good work that you do in the province, and it touches my community as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Unfortunately, Minister, you only have about 15 seconds.

Mr. Wilson: Well, let me just say thank you, everyone, for all your great questions. Like I said at the start of this, this is a good-news budget for Indigenous Relations. We're increasing funding for the missing and murdered Indigenous women . . .

The Chair: Thank you very much. I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet this afternoon, March 16, 2022, at 3:30 p.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Energy.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 11 a.m.]

