



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Resource Stewardship

Ministry of Indigenous Relations
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 7, 2023
3:30 p.m.

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Ministry of Indigenous Relations

Hon. Rick D. Wilson, Minister

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

Kristina Midbo, Director, Indigenous Women's Initiatives

Donavon Young, Deputy Minister

3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

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

The Chair: Welcome. 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, 2024.

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

Mr. Shepherd: David Shepherd, MLA for Edmonton-City Centre.

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

Mr. Orr: Good afternoon, everybody. Ron Orr, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Sigurdson: Good afternoon. R.J. Sigurdson, MLA for Highwood.

Ms Rosin: Good afternoon. Miranda Rosin, MLA for beautiful Banff-Kananaskis.

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

Ms Issik: Good afternoon. Whitney Issik, Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm Rick Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations. I have with me my deputy minister, Donavon Young, and my director of Indigenous women's initiatives, Kristina Midbo. On this side I've got my new deputy minister of finance and senior financial officer, Chad Schulz, and the amazing assistant deputy minister, Don Kwas.

Mr. Feehan: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Richard Feehan. I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Nielsen: Good afternoon, everyone. Chris Nielsen, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Huffman: Good afternoon. Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: Now we'll go to the members participating remotely. When I call your name, please introduce yourself for the record. I see Member Aheer.

Mrs. Aheer: Good afternoon, everyone. Leela Aheer, Chestermere-Strathmore.

The Chair: Very good.

I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: Mr. Shepherd for hon. Mr. Feehan as acting deputy chair and Ms Rosin for Mr. Turton.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to turn your camera on while speaking and to mute your

microphone when not speaking. Remote participants who wish to be placed on a speakers list are asked to e-mail or message the committee clerk, and members in the room should 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 three hours has been scheduled for the consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations. Standing Order 59.01(6) 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 60-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 speaking times may be combined between the member and the minister.

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

With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone have any objection to taking a break? Seeing none, we will announce that shortly.

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 three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the speaking block time and the overall three-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 16, 2023. 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 the 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. [Remarks in Cree] Sir, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Wilson: [Remarks in Cree] Thank you again, Mr. Chair and committee members, for calling this meeting. It's my sincere pleasure to speak with you about Indigenous Relations today, our budget estimates for fiscal year 2023-24. First, I'd like to acknowledge, of course, that we're on Treaty 6 territory today, and I also want to recognize the Métis people, who have a deep connection with this land.

I'd like to introduce to you other members of my team who are here with me today in the gallery. We've got the assistant deputy minister of consultation, land and policy, Thomas Djurfors; my chief of staff, Hadyn Place; policy adviser Maya Echtay; press secretary Callum Reid. Also in the gallery are our finance director, Howard Wong, and our communications director, Iris Dias.

Mr. Chair, it really fills me with pride to speak about Indigenous Relations' new budget, which is seeing a 10 per cent increase this year. That's \$20 million more to support reconciliation efforts, economic stimulus programs, safety initiatives, and so much more, although what might excite me most about this budget is our focus on Indigenous-led solutions. Throughout my time as minister we've achieved incredible outcomes when we looked to Indigenous leadership to guide us. In many ways this budget says to Indigenous communities and leaders: "Show us the way, and we will support you. We will work together as partners under your guidance." This kind of partnership is essential for our journey towards reconciliation, and it's been a key focus for our ministry.

Budget 2023 takes this community-led approach even farther on our mission to secure a healthy, safe, and prosperous future for more Indigenous people living in Alberta. Take, for example, the important work we do to pursue reconciliation. We know we can't change history, but we can work together with Indigenous partners to face the truth and take concrete steps towards reconciliation together.

In Budget 2023 I'm happy to say that there is \$3 million in new funding to support community-led reconciliation initiatives so that the Indigenous people can continue to lead us. Let me explain how this funding will work. We are creating a new program called the Indigenous reconciliation initiative. It will be a new way for our ministry to partner with Indigenous communities and help enhance cultural or economic conditions. Indigenous communities and organizations can apply for funding amounts between \$10,000 to \$100,000 to support activities that seek to improve the cultural or economic aspects of their communities. The cultural stream of funding is for projects that enhance, protect, or revitalize Indigenous language, arts, or culture. Think of educational programs on Indigenous cultural practices and languages, youth leadership camps that reveal new opportunities for wide-eyed children, or mentorship programs with elders.

Meanwhile the economic stream will fund projects that are going to help increase local economic capacity and develop opportunities for growth. These projects could include the creation of business plans, economic studies, opportunity assessments, or asset inventories. Eligible projects could also help build capacity through strategic economic development plans or by finding new approaches to community or corporate structuring. The common thread here is that all of these projects will be led by Indigenous community members. By taking this approach, money will flow to the areas it is needed most and where it's going to have the greatest impact as decided by the community.

We've heard from Indigenous leaders that this is the kind of collaboration that they want. They can lead the change, but they're looking to us for support. We are listening, and we are acting, and our partnership will not end with dollars. As always, our ministry staff will be available for assistance, whether that's finding solutions to

barriers or helping navigate government programs and services that may enhance these initiatives even further.

Another important focus of our new Indigenous Relations budget is our continued commitment to finding solutions to the ongoing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people. MMIWG2S-plus I'll refer to it as.

3:40

Again, we are looking to Indigenous people to help lead us to the best solutions to these pressing issues. I'm very pleased that Budget 2023 includes \$5 million in new funding to support Alberta's continued response to the ongoing MMIWG2S-plus crisis. This includes \$1.5 million to support the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and related initiatives like community engagement, research, and evaluation. It also includes 3 and a half million dollars to create a community support fund that will support activities that seek to reduce violence and to increase the safety and economic security of women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people.

The Premier's council has brought together diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives from urban and rural communities across the province to help shape long-term strategies. I expect many positive outcomes from this funding. I'll have more details about the community support fund soon, but it's another part of our commitment to Indigenous-led solutions.

Now, this approach is consistent with the guiding principles of the Alberta road map on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Of course, an Indigenous-led approach does not exclude non-Indigenous communities or organizations from taking that initiative. It simply means that Indigenous people must be involved in the development and delivery of these projects. That is the key, and I'm eager to see the healing and supportive activities that come from this funding.

You know, another way to improve safety and security is to increase economic growth and inclusion for Indigenous communities, and our ministry remains deeply focused on that goal. Many people are talking about economic reconciliation and what it means to them. I can tell you that, for us, economic reconciliation is about removing the barriers to investment and ensuring that Indigenous people have access to the support and the tools that they need to grow thriving local economies. They're an essential part of the provincial economy.

Economic reconciliation is about supporting sustainable and self-reliant Indigenous communities. These are goals that leaders have told me are of the utmost importance to them, and they are a top priority for our government. We've been working towards these goals through initiatives like, of course, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, AIOC. Since its launch in 2019 the AIOC has provided \$410 million in loan guarantees to nearly 30 communities, and this is just the tip of the iceberg, in my opinion, because we've seen significant investment interest since we expanded the AIOC's mandate to include agriculture now, telecommunications, and transportation projects.

Another great success story is the Aboriginal business investment fund, or ABIF, which helps Indigenous community-owned businesses create jobs in their local areas. Since 2020 ABIF has supported 35 projects, and that's created 378 full-time positions as well as 254 full-time construction jobs. Now, interest in the ABIF program has grown steadily, and so has the quality of the projects. We've consistently received more ABIF applications than we were able to fund with the \$5 million budget we've been working with, and that's why I'm so pleased we're able to increase that funding by 50 per cent – 50 per cent – this year and beyond, from \$5 million to \$7.5 million per year. That's \$23 million that will be invested in

community-owned Indigenous business initiatives over the next three years. And I'm pleased that the \$2 million each year will be targeted to the Métis settlements to help community-owned business initiatives thrive. I'm looking forward to seeing all the good that comes out of this in the years ahead.

I'm also pleased that despite the end of the long-term funding agreement with the Metis Settlements General Council Budget 2023 includes more funding for Métis settlements, communities, and organizations. Indigenous Relations will provide \$2 million to the eight settlements to maintain enhanced policing services, and we're also providing \$1 million for consultation capacity funding. That's in addition to the \$2 million in ABIF funding I just mentioned that will be targeted to the settlements each year. That's \$6 million going directly to the settlements.

Budget 2023 also includes \$1 million for the Metis Settlements General Council to support its operational costs, because we want that council to succeed. There's also \$2 million to assist Métis organizations with the credible assertion process, and we're increasing the Métis Nation of Alberta's funding to \$1.8 million. All of this shows our continued commitment to Métis people in Alberta.

Indigenous Relations is dedicated to building prosperity and creating opportunities for Indigenous communities. Like the rest of Alberta's government, we're doing our part to secure a healthy, safe, and prosperous future for more Indigenous people living in the province. Budget 2023 represents an exciting step forward for this ministry, and we're building on past success and finding new ways forward under the steady guidance of Indigenous leadership.

As the Minister of Indigenous Relations I'm proud to say yes to more actions that fulfill the need of Indigenous communities, and I'm committed to working together in partnership with Indigenous people in pursuit of reconciliation and a better future for us all.

Thank you for the time, and it's my pleasure to discuss this in depth with you as we move along.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For the hour that follows, the members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block both in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams.

Members, would you like to combine your time with the minister and go back and forth? Is that your desire?

Mr. Wilson: I'll go with block time.

The Chair: Block time. Okay.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. I appreciate this opportunity to address the committee with regard to the estimates for Indigenous Relations. I want to take a moment first to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 territory, but of course we're broadcasting and responsible for all treaties 6, 7, and 8, so I wish to acknowledge that and, of course, the Métis history, which is very significant in the province of Alberta.

I also want to take a moment, as it's my last chance to do so before I end my career as a politician, to thank all the members of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations, who I have known for some eight years, I think. The work in Indigenous Relations has often just reached a level of excellence, and I appreciate that. I appreciate all the staff who have, you know, really committed themselves and been dedicated to trying to move this government along, whether it be under our party or this present party, to try to actually achieve, I think, some historic growth and change in terms of the relationship between the government of Alberta and the Indigenous people in

this province. So while I have an official microphone, I'd like to say thank you for that.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank the minister. You know, it's been, as is the nature of parliamentary democracy, a bit of a combative four years from time to time, and I want to assure the minister that I've never doubted your commitment to the work. I know how deeply engaging this work is. So many other ministries you can take or leave and switch along to the next ministry and probably don't look back too much, just move on into the next ministry, but I don't think anybody ever does that from Indigenous Relations, so I want to thank you for that.

Now moving on to my questions. Thank you for indulging my personal need to say goodbye in many ways. I want to start my questions by commenting on the fact that I was indeed quite pleased to see that there were increases in the budget for Indigenous Relations in this estimate. I was very discouraged over the last four years. The first three times we found ourselves in estimates, it was each time talking about decreases in Indigenous Relations, which I found very stressful. Now, finally, we are seeing, some might say slightly cynically just before an election – but you know, honestly, having gotten out my little shot, I actually am pleased that there is an increase to Indigenous Relations and in some of the areas that I'm just learning about now, because, of course, some of this was not available to me up until this moment. I'm pleased to see the growth, and I'll certainly speak to that as we go along.

Some of my questions will be, really, more about just trying to gather an understanding and information of where things are going and what will happen. I certainly think that if government happens to change in the next couple of months, we would like to maintain and continue the good progress that has been made, so the greater understanding I have, the better.

I noticed that the minister began his speech by talking about the fact that it's essentially a 10 per cent increase in the budget. You know, there's a bit of a quibble around that, I think, partly because the budget in the last year was \$181 million, but the actual forecast spend is \$204 million. So there's already been a significant overspend, and I'm wondering how much of this new increase is just simply a catching up on the fact that there was this dramatic overspend, a 10 per cent overspend, in fact, and that the amount of increase beyond what is actually forecast to having been spent in this budget year into the estimate is actually only – I did the numbers; I could really bore you with them, but it's actually only .46 per cent over what was actually spent in the 2022-2023 forecast within this budget. So the actual increase in terms of what was actually spent in 2022-23 to what is expected to be spent in '23-24 is actually only .46 per cent.

3:50

So just sort of noting that while there is some good news here – and I certainly will support that – it isn't quite as dramatic as it might sound. Maybe if I just understand some aspects of the budget, I'll certainly have some more understanding. Part of the reason is that you have to take out from this budget, as people know, money that isn't really the government of Alberta's money; it's just money that is flow-through money. For example, line 4, which is the First Nations development fund, is money that does not come from government at all; it comes from casinos. I see that of the increase, the \$44,000 from last year's budget to this year's budget – I see that the increase in the First Nations development fund takes up \$21 million of that. So, you know, more than half of that is just flow-through money; it's not actual money decided on by this government to flow through to the Indigenous communities.

So I just want to say that I am pleased that there are some increases. I'm hoping to understand them a bit more as we move

along. I'm hoping that maybe what we'll see is a bit of a shuffling from one area to the next and some good areas. Having just kind of set that out, after three years of cuts I wanted to take a chance to say thank you to the minister for successfully getting some increases, and we'll move on.

The first one I think is of any significance to us is line 1.3 in the budget, which is the strategic and corporate services. There is quite a significant increase in that, which is simply money the government pays itself to do its own work. There is an 11.65 per cent increase there, so quite a significant increase over the last year. I'd certainly appreciate if the minister could take some time to explain why there was a such a significant increase in this particular division. What is it that suddenly is happening now in the department that wasn't happening before that requires one of the largest increases in the budget?

I'm sorry that the minister has chosen not to go back and forth because it really decreases the opportunity to ask questions and get answers, but I'll certainly try my best to listen to see if the answers come and then refer to them again when it is my opportunity to do that. This way everybody just has to listen to me talk for an hour, which I know is very difficult.

I guess when I look at strategic and corporate services, I just want to have an understanding. Is this money that is being charged from other divisions within the government for services provided such as accounting and other legal services and so on? Perhaps, you know, either the minister or one of the supporting personnel could answer that question.

Not being able to get an answer to that kind of question, I then want to move on to talk about line 2, First Nations and Métis relations, and just ask a little bit about the increase in First Nations and Métis relations. You have talked about a number of programs which you say are an increase. You haven't necessarily identified which of those programs may be part of any particular increases in each of these individual lines, so I don't know if, for example, the \$3 million community reconciliation from the Indigenous reconciliation initiative, the IRI, would be included in this or – it's very hard to ask questions that you know you're not going to get an answer to. It would be helpful in terms of the further questions that I would then have.

I guess I want to know with each of these budget lines: you know, what is it that is actually happening in this individual budget line? Is it one of these programs that have just been spoken to, or is it a shuffling of money?

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, you now have 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, and thank you for the nice comments off the start, Member Feehan, and thank you for your time. I've got to say, you know, like you say, we've been a little bit head-butting back and forth a little bit, but the hearts are always in the right place. I appreciate you coming to some of our events that we've held over the years. We'll miss you on the other side, for sure. We'll still be on our side. Thank you for the nice words to our staff, though. I know it was very heartfelt, and I appreciate that.

On the strategic and corporate services line we'll have to get back to you on that, if you don't mind, because I'm not up to speed on that. We're doing some research. Somewhere along the line we'll get to you on that one.

What I want to really talk to you about are some of the increases, because I'm really happy with what we've done here. Actually, around the friendship centres we've increased that from \$1 million to \$1.3 million, and on that we actually worked a little bit with Member Janis Irwin there around the friendship centres. She was

telling me about some of the shortfalls some of their programs had. It's always been an issue around getting extra funding to the urban centres, so we're happy to increase that from \$1 million to \$1.3 million.

The MNA is a pretty big hike from \$1.2 million to \$1.8 million . . .

Mr. Feehan: I hate to interrupt, but can you just tell me where in the budget these things are? Otherwise I can't tell which set and line we're on.

Mr. Wilson: If you go into line 2, First Nations and Métis relations, it's mostly in there.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Wilson: Sorry.

The Chair: I'll allow that interruption, but please, the Minister has the 10-minute block.

Mr. Feehan: Sorry. My apologies. It's just really hard to . . .

The Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. Around reconciliation from \$1 million to \$3 million; missing, murdered Indigenous women and girls, \$1 million to \$5 million; and on our urban initiatives \$500,000 to \$1 million; and the Métis settlements, \$5 million to \$6 million. So that's where some of the big increases come.

We're doing a lot of work around reconciliation. A lot of people, you hear the term "reconciliation, reconciliation." What's it really mean? A lot of my ministry work, you know, is keeping those relationships open. Whenever I'm going to do something, I usually get a call from past Grand Chief Willie Littlechild, and he says: "Minister, reconciliation is nice. What's your action? What's your action?"

So we always try to take action on things. You were with us when we opened up the reconciliation garden there and we planted a tree. It was symbolic, but you know it was very meaningful to the Indigenous communities to have a spot on the Leg. Grounds that's a reconciliation garden. We're going to be putting a big push around that this year. It's going to be a monument as you come in as well as a medicine wheel, so very meaningful to the Indigenous people.

I had a group of elders that again steered us as to how we should move forward with the whole garden. The medicine wheel, of course, will have sage and sweetgrass, tobacco, willow. I've actually had a tobacco patch here. You may not know it. I've kept it kind of hidden for the last four years, and we have an Indigenous lady that comes and harvests it for me, and we make our own tobacco. So it's very meaningful to the elders when we give it from the heart, actual tobacco that's been grown on the Legislature Grounds.

There's going to be a huge monument. We went to RFPs to decide how we want to move forward on doing this monument. I really wanted a Steinhauer, those granite carvings you see at the university and Grant MacEwan around, even at I believe – yeah. He wasn't putting out an RFP, and I thought: I'm just going to give him a call. So I called him up and said, "Aren't you going to put in a bid for this monument?" He said, "Well, I was waiting for you to call me." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You came to me in a vision a year ago and asked me to do this carving." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, so I already built it."

This is a very expensive carving, a granite carving. We were up at Fort McMurray, so coming back we stopped in at Saddle Lake,

and I asked a young fellow where we could find Stewart Steinbauer's house. He said: just keep going till you find all the rocks, and there it'll be. So we went to his house, and sure enough, right in the front of his yard – and this is no small monument that you're going to see. This thing is 12 feet tall, 22 tonnes, solid granite. *Mother Earth Circling*, he calls it; Mother Earth holding a child. I can't even explain to you. It was just amazing.

4:00

We spent the day with him out there. His wife says: "Oh, good. Stay for dinner. One of the neighbours hit a moose last night and left a hind quarter on the driveway." So you know what we had for lunch; we had moose stew. It was just a great time to sit with him.

Then his son Ben came along. Ben is actually the spiritual one of the family, and he was the one that came up with the different petroglyphs that should be on the carving, so you're going to see a lot of meaningful stuff around there, everything from bears' claws to eagles to the Métis symbols on it.

So we went back, and he put his bid in, and then the elders, the group that we had deciding who was going to get it, picked his monument, thank goodness, because he'd already built it. So that's going to be the leadoff when you come into this reconciliation garden. You'll go and start your journey of reconciliation. You'll see the monument and the meaning of it. Then there's a pathway with children's footprints on it leading up to the medicine wheel.

We basically wanted to make a place that Indigenous people can call their own and start their journey of healing. As you know, there's a lot of pain out there, and there are a lot of issues that go with that, everything from addictions to mental health to abuse. I've just seen it grow so much over the last few years that I really wanted to make a difference, and I think this is going to be a great step forward for all of us. I, of course, invite you to come back on the day that we open the garden. It'll take us a while. This spring they're going to be working on it. We have to bring in dirt and everything to create a nice spot where the plants will grow, but it'll be – what have you got there for me?

Oh. Donavan has done a little bit of research while we're sitting here, and he's going to answer some of those corporate questions that were asked. So I'll let him jump in.

Mr. Young: Yes. Thank you, Minister.

Member Feehan, you were asking about line 1.3, the change in the strategic and corporate services?

Mr. Feehan: Yes.

Mr. Young: It's a \$500,000 increase. That is due entirely to bargaining unit increases that we settled with the union and out-of-scope increases as well. So those are bargaining unit increases.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Getting back to some of the other questions you asked around the increases, the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, 2S people: that's a huge one that we've put a lot of money and effort into. That's going to \$5 million this year. I really want to make an impactful difference, and the only way we can do that is to put some real money towards it. So I'm really pleased that Kristina and her crew have been working hard on this. I took it to budget, and we had a great discussion at budget, and of course it was passed through there. So we do have that money to start these projects, and we just have to figure out where it's all going to go to, but we do have a road map.

We put together – we call it a Premier's council. We've already met with the Premier, a group of individuals. We've got some Indigenous women on there, Métis, First Nations, two-spirited

people, so we did a nice cross-section there. They're working hard on our 113 pathways to justice, we call it, and they'll be bringing forward ideas on how we can move forward and where we can make a real difference. Like, this is probably the one that's most difficult for me. We usually start the meetings crying for about half an hour. Kristina has been leading us on that path of reconciliation there.

You'll see that we're still in the building, down on the main floor. You'll still see our red dress on display there. Typically something like that stays on display for a couple of months; the Speaker has had it on display the full time, and it's become, like, a permanent fixture of the building here. A couple of times a year we'll come up, and we'll do a ceremony, and we'll add something to it. Last year we added some baby moccasins. Tough days. Unfortunately, all of the people that participate in that have lost somebody, so it's quite a journey that we've been on there.

Whitney helped us out on that as well. We've had a lot of different MLAs along the line. Martin stayed with us the whole time. It's just been a journey of growing and walking the walk with the people that have lost somebody. And I thank Kristina for guiding us on that walk. It's been an amazing journey, and I think we're actually in a position where we're going to make a difference in the coming years with the funding that we've got available to do projects. I like to say that I'm not driving the bus; I'm just putting the tires on it.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you for mentioning Mr. Steinbauer. He's one of my constituents. I'm very proud to have him there. We have a very vibrant arts community there. I actually have a picture of that monument on my phone that I can show folks after the meeting.

Mr. Feehan, if you're back online, we can give you a 10-minute block.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much. I appreciate your stories and general commentary. I guess the thing that – I can't really ask questions and get answers to them, and I can see what's going to happen. I'm going to get stories, so I'm not going to get answers. I accept that. I can't do anything about it.

I guess I want to take us to the question of: why the sudden change of heart in government? For three years we saw decreases in all of these budgets. You know, we saw the urban initiatives ultimately destroyed in the first budget and then some minor increases subsequently, and now you're saying that, for example, the friendship centre has gone from \$1 million to \$1.3 million. You know, there are certainly other things. I count just in the things you've talked about so far 10 different programs, services, or whatever else that may be increasing, and I guess I just want to know what happened.

Why is it that for almost four years – we are literally two months away from an election. For almost four years we saw a decrease in funding for Indigenous Relations. We saw specific programs lose their funding, we saw some completely eliminated, and we certainly have seen other programs that were very successful prior to your taking over government that received no extra funding. They essentially got played out and were allowed to wither on the vine after the fact. And now, suddenly, as we head into this next election, I have 10 programs, and I'm wondering how it is we get through three years and 10 months with little action and suddenly two months now before the end, we get all of these kinds of things.

I know, for example, the reconciliation garden is a lovely thing, and I appreciate going to the original sod-turning, but that was over a year ago, and nothing has happened with it since. Again, these things are promised, and then there's no motion forward on this. There was no increase to the MNA until suddenly this year. Now

there's an increase to the MNA. There was no increase to ABIF, and now suddenly there's this big jump in funding.

I'd also like to just ask the question about where in the budget ABIF funding is, because I've forgotten now. Too long I've been on the wrong side of the conversation.

So I guess, you know, I'm just discouraged about this. I really want to spend some time talking about the murdered and missing Indigenous women because it is something I wanted to be positive about and be congratulatory about. I am thrilled that there is \$5 million. I certainly wish it was more. I mean, you have 113 recommendations and \$5 million. That comes down to only a few thousand dollars per recommendation – I know they don't all take money – but I am thrilled that at least it's going in that direction. I'm a bit discouraged that of the \$5 million, \$1.5 million of it is just going to the council itself, the Premier's council, and not to initiatives; only \$3.5 million is actually going into the community fund focused on violence.

My point here is that, you know, the calls for justice from the national inquiry came out four years ago, and there's been plenty of time to take action, and there's just – action hasn't been taken. And now we're in a place where there's promise of action. I want to be supportive and congratulatory on it, because I think this is one of our biggest issues in our society today, and I'm just so discouraged that we're seeing these small bits of action just at the last minute.

You know, I could go through this catalog and just sort of say: recommendation 22 – you can see it; just open it anywhere – “partner with Indigenous women and organizations to develop and implement an evaluation framework to inform enhancements of tracking and reporting on the progress of all government actions to support MMIWG2S-plus survivors and families.” Has anything happened on that, or is that a promise? I literally could go through – my temptation was to bore you to death and to go through 113 recommendations and say: has anything actually happened on that? The answer to the vast majority of them, I mean, well over 90 per cent, is: no, there's no action that's actually been taken on these things. The promise is there.

4:10

I am so caught because I can't ask back and forth. I can't even – you know, I have to give you some general questions, and I'm sure that was the intent – express my concern that we're seeing action now that could easily have taken place over four years, and it's taking place at three years and 10 months, and it's just discouraging. So congratulations on finally, after three years and 10 months, getting to the place that you are now.

I guess I just go on with my questions, and you can answer them as much as you want. Thank you for the answer on the strategic and corporate services.

Then, of course, I move on to the next one, which is the First Nations and Métis relations. I'd like to know specifically which of these program initiatives are in that particular section of the budget. Can you tell me how much of the money in that increase? I see it's a little over \$2 million increase, almost a \$3 million increase. How much of that is going to staff as opposed to going to initiatives? Can you tell me – I'd like to know in each one of these divisions of First Nations and Métis relations, Indigenous women's initiatives, and the other sections there, because some are different: are there changes in the FTEs in the department? Is there an increase in the number of people who are working on these initiatives?

You know, I can see that there is a significant amount of increase in Indigenous women's initiatives, which is the one I'm celebrating here with you the most, but I'd really like to know: how much is put into resources for Kristina and her team to actually be able to follow through with these what I think are excellent pathways to

justice, in some ways a repeat of the national calls for justice? I'd just like to know: are there actual things put in place to move these things forward? Are the people in place to do that? Are the programs in place to actually implement these kinds of things?

I'm worried it's going to be like the reconciliation garden. You know, we were at the sod-turning a year ago, and I went out there today, and that tree is still there. That's the only thing that's there, though. It just makes me nervous. While I'm trying to be supportive and congratulatory because these are all things that I would certainly like to see us doing, it's been really inconsistent with the history of this department over the last four years.

Perhaps you can go through the First Nations and Métis relations – and I will ask similar questions on all of them – and tell me which of these programs are in there, how much of that affects FTEs in that program, and when you anticipate some of these programs will actually result in people being able to receive funding. Will, indeed, people be able to get a cheque from the economic reconciliation program, for example? You know, when will people be able to get money from ABIF? When will the MNA receive their increase in funding? When will the friendship centres receive their increase in funding? Those kinds of things would be really important to me at this time.

I would like to know with regard to First Nations and Métis relations whether there's actually been a change in any of the promises of protocol agreements with the different treaty organizations. I know that there was sort of a failure of the Treaty 6 protocol agreement at one time, and I wonder if you can tell me if that's back on track. Do we actually have a protocol agreement with Treaty 8? I do understand we have one with the Blackfoot, and we do have one with the G4 as well. I know that last year – I went back and looked at my notes – you had said that you had hoped to get a new one this year. I just want to know: indeed, did you get a new protocol agreement or not?

I guess I'm mostly interested in results, Minister. I certainly am seeing that you have some promises here, and I certainly hope that many of these things come to fruition. I'm discouraged that this seems to be a last-minute change of heart.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Feehan. I do I feel your frustration, but the minister, as you had as a minister, has an option of going back and forth or going to block. You can spend 10 minutes giving him a list of questions, and hopefully the minister will be able to answer those for you as long as they stick to the business plan and the budget documents.

Minister, you have 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you so much, and thank you for the questions. Those are all good questions. I appreciate it, and I'll do my best to answer what I was writing feverishly here.

Around our reconciliation garden, this is going to be a highlight of the Leg. Grounds. It's going to be amazing. The monument is already built, and it's wintertime, so it's kind of hard to do groundwork in the winter. As soon as the ground thaws out, they're going to be out there. We've already contracted a landscape company to do the landscaping. We've got people working on logistics around moving the monument. This is no small task. Steinhauer is doing it himself. He's got it all figured out, how he's going to do this, and I'm not sure how, but he's got a plan. We were down there with him one day, and he was figuring out where the crane is going to sit and how they're going to put everything in place. So don't worry; it'll all come together in due course.

A lot of these programs – of course, the budget is passed by the Lieutenant Governor. When she gives the blessing, then the money is available. So it's a matter of the MNA and the friendship centres

putting in applications, and the funding can start rolling out as soon as that happens.

Around staffing, there's only been one FTE that's come in, and that's in Kristina's department to help her out there.

Am I right?

Mr. Young: Actually, Chad's position.

Mr. Wilson: Chad's? Okay. Chad's.

Other than that, it's been frozen, so all the money is going into programs, and that's what we're trying to do. We're really focusing on putting the money where it can do the most good. I know Kristina is a little scared that she's got this much money to spend, but I know she'll do an amazing job at it. That's part of what we do there. Like, I don't try to tell the department heads how to spend it, like I said, in working with our women's initiatives and the missing and murdered panel that we have, the Premier's council. That's their, really, work to go forward with and tell me what they want, and it's my job to get it done once they tell me exactly what they want. We've been working on some good programs.

The Premier is incredibly supportive of all this. She wants to meet with an Indigenous – what's Rachele's group called? Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. It's quite a nice story around that, how that became. That one, and we've got the Métis women and economic security, and now we've got our Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We're trying to line these up. She wants to meet with them all as quick as she can – she's already met with her Premier's council on missing and murdered once – so we're lining these meetings up. She's very supportive, and that's one of the reasons why a lot of this funding is coming forward, because the Premier is very supportive. She put me on Treasury Board this year. I think that's probably the first time you had an Indigenous Relations minister on Treasury Board. I was able to have direct input to the Treasury Board.

It's not just this ministry. As well, you'll see coming forward from other ministries – from housing, there's Indigenous housing coming up through Culture, around our tourism initiative. Like, there's an employment benefit program, Advanced Education. That was one of the things we took on over the last couple of years under Premier Kenney. He said that he wanted all ministries to work with our department on reconciliation, which was really good, but it made us really busy. But the team pulled it off, and I was really proud of what they'd done. So it's not just reconciliation around what you're seeing in Indigenous Relations. You're going to see reconciliation projects and just the whole reconciliation theme throughout our entire government, and I'm really proud of all of the ministers and members that have put so much time and dedication into doing this.

4:20

We've got our economic corridor – that's huge – like, for Treaty 8. When you're talking Treaty 8 initiatives, this is a huge initiative that's going forward that's going to benefit all Albertans and all First Nations. Member Getson has done yeoman's work on this in helping us put that together, and I'm so proud of the work that we're doing around that to help move Alberta's products and help Indigenous communities be true partners in prosperity. We're walking the walk here. Like, this is some amazing work that's being done. I'm so proud of everything that's going on around that.

You know, you talked about: what did we do right off the start? The AIOC: I have to talk about this all the time, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. This is phenomenal, never been done before anywhere. I even get federal ministers coming to

me and saying: how did you guys do this? I've been to other provinces and talked to other ministries, and they're just looking at their staff: "How are they doing this? Where did this come from?" This is making a difference in people's lives.

Some of the projects that we put together: I think, over \$400 million worth of backstopping so far. This has changed people's lives. When I look at the big project we did with Enbridge, project rocket, up there, a little Métis community that had nothing before – one of the reasons COVID went so rampant in some of these Indigenous communities: they had four families living in one house. Not even affordable to build more houses or other houses. We've been able to put together, I think – how many? Twenty-three Indigenous communities were brought together: First Nations, Métis communities, Métis Nation, Métis settlements. We put everybody together on this, and they're all working together wonderfully. It was a \$1.12 billion project. The government backstopped that through AIOC, \$250 million.

I know the one little Métis community up there literally had nothing. They now have bought land, they've bought a bison herd, and they've got so much pride in what they're doing. No money down, no risk: they're making a million dollars a year for the next 30 years. I call that a win, and that's what we did right out of the chute. I mean, right out of the chute that was going. Yeah. We're lucky this year. We've got some increase in budgets, but we've been working at it right from the start. Like, these are life-changing initiatives that we've been working on, and everyone has been backing us up on this. That was just one project.

We did the Frog Lake, the cogen with a SAGD project up there, where they put the steam into the ground to take the heavy oil out, and by capturing the heat that's being wasted, they've been able to create electricity. We backstopped them, I think, \$27 million on that one.

Of course, our Cascade power project out by Edson there: we backstopped a \$1.5 billion project. That's still going. It was a two-year project to build this thing. I don't know if you ever get a chance to take a drive out there and take a look, but it's pretty impressive, what's going on out there, using good, clean Alberta natural gas, the best carbon capture technology there is in the world. Nobody does it better than Alberta. This has provided, I think, somewhere around 1,200 jobs just constructing this thing. We've got training programs for Indigenous kids out there, young girls becoming electricians. We've got people that are running big equipment, learning how to operate the plant when it gets going. This is going to help bring the cost of electricity down for all Albertans once we get this online. This is no small project.

And then the project rocket with the Enbridge group, everybody joining partnership on the pipeline – how many communities are involved in that one?

Mr. Young: Twenty-three.

Mr. Wilson: Twenty-three on that one? Yeah. That was amazing. I think it was the biggest energy project . . .

What's that?

Mr. Young: In North America.

Mr. Wilson: In North America? I think in the world.

. . . that Indigenous communities ever participated in. It's huge.

I'm proud to say that there's a lot more coming. Like, buckle up because it's really starting to heat up. We've opened an office in Edmonton now for the AIOC on First Nation lands out of Enoch there. We've got a full First Nations CEO that's taking over the reins and doing an amazing job. There are a lot of projects in the

chute. You're going to see a lot of stuff coming out this year where so many communities are going to be involved. I can't tease you a little bit here, but there's a lot of good stuff coming out of that one, so I'm probably really happy about that. It's probably one of the biggest things that Indigenous Relations has ever done, and I get asked to speak across the country on that project. It's never been done before.

And now we've got – Saskatchewan is trying to copy us, B.C. is wanting to copy us, and even the federal government is wanting to copy Alberta. I actually had the minister in my office, federal Minister Marc Miller, about two weeks ago, and he was trying to give me the gears about our energy. And I said: you know, instead of giving me the gears, you should be out there touting all the good stuff Alberta is doing. You want to talk carbon capture? Down in Member Orr's area, there's a project down there. It's called origins. If you can believe this, they're capturing the carbon up at Fort Saskatchewan, they pressurize it, and – guess what? – when you get CO₂ under pressure, it's like propane. It turns into liquid. They run it in a pipeline down to the Joffre plant. They've got seven wells that have been dry that they're now dropping the CO₂ down, and when it gets down there into the formation . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now the Official Opposition will have a 10-minute block. Carry on, Mr. Feehan.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I think, I guess, I will just ask a number of questions, hopefully maybe get some kind of an answer from them. In the last year have you indeed signed any new protocol agreements, as you indicated you were going to try to do at our last estimates? I don't see any evidence of that in your plan, so I want to know why you have failed to do that.

Can you tell me if you currently have any councils of elders working in any of the programs that you currently have? If so, why have all the councils of elders – a number of them have been disbanded.

Can you tell me if this division is working on any antiracism initiatives or educational initiatives? I'm particularly interested in the program for the education of the civil service. I know that in previous estimates you've indicated that while you were basically continuing the program as it was set up by the previous government, you were not putting any new monies in and were not making it compulsory for civil servants to take the program, so I'm wondering if that program exists now. Has the number of people receiving the training gone up or down? Do you have any intention of going to what was originally designed as phase 2 of the program to train civil servants? Are there any other antiracism initiatives that you are particularly involved in? I'm interested in all of these things in that: do they actually exist now? I know that you have lots of plans, after three years and 10 months, of doing some things in the future. I want to know if these things actually occur right now.

Can you tell me whether or not there are crossgovernment initiatives that are supported by your staff in your ministry that have required any particular increase in costs and how that might be reflected in the budget in terms of working with other programs?

I'm interested in the urban Indigenous programming. As you know, for three estimates we saw significant cuts in this area, and I'd like to know if there have been some improvements. I see that there are some promised ones. But, in fact, have there indeed been any increases in the urban Indigenous programming of the ones, the many programs, that you cut along the way? For example, the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women received a significant cut to their core funding earlier on in your term, and I'm just wondering whether or not that has been fully restored. Or is

there an increase? Are they also continuing to get the money that they require to run the Esquao awards?

I also want to know if there's been any change to the funding for the new-in-town program at Bent Arrow. Of course, any of the other front-line programs that you had previously cut: are they all getting their money back, are some of them getting their money back, or are you just heading off in new directions and sort of leaving behind the previously funded programs?

4:30

About two years ago now the government, somewhat unceremoniously, booted the Nechi Institute out of the building that they occupied for decades without any consultation with the program. We did send a letter, and thank you for your response to that request. But at the time that the Nechi Institute was told that they were to be leaving their decades-long facility, there was an indication from this minister and other ministers that there would be help in finding a new, permanent location. However, as you know from the fall and the appearance of the director of the Nechi Institute in the House, they are indicating that they have not received that kind of assistance, and I'm wondering whether this budget reflects anything that may give some hope to the Nechi Institute to find a long-term, permanent residence subsequent to them being booted out by this government.

Moving on to Métis relations division, in March 2020, at our last estimates, the minister acknowledged to this committee that he was aware that the long-term agreement for the Metis Settlements General Council had only a few years – three years, I think, at that time, so two years left before the expiry. Perhaps you can correct me on the date of the final expiry of the long-term agreement. And can you tell me about some changes that we might anticipate in that agreement? I see from your comments earlier that you've indicated that there is \$1 million going to the Metis Settlements General Council. Is that just for the running of the Metis Settlements General Council, or is there actually going to be some increased funding into the long-term agreement that would actually help them to do things in their community?

I see that you have indicated that you're providing \$1 million for consultation and \$2 million for policing. Can you tell me how much of an increase or decrease that is for consultation? How much was it that the Métis settlements had for consultation prior to this \$1 million? How much of a change is that now? And the policing: is this money that will be made available to them to establish their own policing, or is this money that will be made available for them to hire the RCMP to continue their policing?

I'm interested in whether or not this department is designing any particular structure, moving forward, to deal with the fact that the Métis Nation of Alberta has now established their own constitution and has signed an agreement with the federal government. Will you be acknowledging that constitution? Will you be dealing with the Métis nation moving forward as an independent government in much the same way we do with First Nations? If so, is there money put in this budget to do that, and where might I find changes in terms of the relationship with the Métis nation moving forward? I know that you've indicated just this morning that there is an increase of the Métis nations budget up to \$1.8 million. Can you tell me how much of an increase that is? It's not a \$1.8 million increase; it's just an increase of the existing budget up to \$1.8 million.

So I want to know how that will play out. Is this government preparing to treat them differently moving forward, given the signing with the federal government, and how is that reflected in terms of the budget here in staffing and other programs that might move forward in the next little while?

I also am interested in the Metis Settlements General Council future fund and the fact that the future fund is at a significant decline over the last number of years, and the prospects of that funding essentially dwindling to zero apparently remain the same. I'm wondering if you can tell me if you are putting any money into the future fund with the Métis nations or if there's anything else that will help to increase that fund, or are we essentially looking at that fund coming to its conclusion over the next couple of years? And can you tell me: is the government taking any particular responsibility or leaving it up to the Metis Settlements General Council to deal with the future fund in the future?

I guess, with regard to the Métis settlement group as well, two years ago the government made some overarching changes to the Métis settlement governance, and it was widely condemned by the Métis leaders. I'm wondering if there are any changes there, if this budget reflects any attempt to move back, to rectify or change the assaults that were committed against the MSGC last year.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, you have just about nine minutes to go.

Mr. Wilson: All right. I'll do my best. There were a lot of questions in there. Around the protocol agreements, we did do a protocol agreement with Treaty 6. It was a very meaningful ceremony. We signed that with several ministries there as well. As you know, with the protocol agreements we have various tables that lay out how we'll work with, say, Transportation and Health. The big one, of course, right now is Children's Services. Each of those ministries signs off on their table as well as the general signing for the protocol agreement.

They're moving along with a lot of different initiatives. Don runs a lot of those, and we have a team that works with them to make sure that we keep moving forward. There are things in there like how many times a year they'll meet with the Premier, various ministries, and that type of thing. So the one with Treaty 6 has been signed and is moving forward.

With Treaty 8, we work with various groups up there. The big one we're working with right now, that involves all of them, is around the economic corridor. We've got an amazing working group going on that, and you'll be excited, as it moves forward, to see how the groups are going to benefit from this huge initiative that's going on up there right now.

Council of elders. We, of course, use the council of elders all the time. I used them quite a bit extensively around our reconciliation garden as to how we'd move forward. I had another one set up as to who's going to pick the monument, that type of thing. Of course, we always listen to the elders, and that's how we get our advice to move forward on a lot of projects.

The IAAW actually never had a cut – never had a cut; nope – and we've actually moved it from \$115 K to \$165 K, so they got an increase. Bent Arrow: just wrote them a cheque for around, I think, \$215 K. A great group over there. A couple of the ladies are from where I live out there, so I get a chance to stop in and visit with them once in a while. They're doing amazing work for us over at . . .

Mr. Kwasi: Since 2021.

Mr. Wilson: Since 2021? Excellent. Yeah. A lot of work going on with Bent Arrow. They do a lot of great stuff for us, so we make sure that they have funding to carry that on.

The MSGC long-term agreement actually expires March 31 of this year. Under the long-term agreement they're getting around \$5 million. I've actually increased that to \$6 million, so they're actually making \$1 million more than they were under the long-term agreement. Around the policing, we did give them an

additional \$2 million to the settlements directly to pay for the RCMP, so we'll be signing some agreements with them very shortly as well. The MNA, Métis Nation of Alberta, were at \$1.2 million, and they've moved to \$1.8 million, so a significant increase there.

As well as all of these grants, they're capable of applying for other things as well. The MNA applied for an ABIF grant for the Métis Crossing. Dave, you're probably familiar with that as well. We helped them build a hotel up there, and it's doing very well. I was surprised. I was going to do a function up there, but it was booked solid. I didn't think it would ever really take off because it's kind of – well, it's out in God's country, but it's doing quite well. I was surprised. Really happy that they're doing a good job on that and a lot of people helping out to make sure that that's successful.

4:40

The Metis Settlements General Council: actually, I believe that you approved most of the withdrawals from the future fund. They were using a lot of it just for administration fees, so I didn't think that was the best use of those future funds. It was supposed to be for saving up for projects. So they are in control of it as to how they want to spend it. They just have to agree on it, so I don't get involved in their internal workings on that.

Around the Indigenous learning initiative that you asked about, that's to do with civil servants' training. We'd still do that, of course. Renewing and improving relationships between government, Indigenous people: we feel that's essential. The Indigenous learning initiative offers two programs, the Indigenous introductory training and the Indigenous cultural protocol training. The programs provide an overview on Indigenous histories, residential schools, treaties, contemporary issues, and the course has helped the Alberta public service and the agencies, boards, and commissions staff better understand the unique strengths and the challenges faced by Indigenous people in Canada. Since 2018 15,896 Alberta public service agency and board commission employees have completed these courses. That's significant. The Indigenous learning initiative is core training and considered essential for employees working with Indigenous peoples, and some ministries have made the Indigenous introductory training course mandatory for employees. The evaluations of the Indigenous learning initiative consistently receive positive feedback.

There is an increasing demand to learn more about the residential schools and the diverse histories and cultures of Indigenous peoples who enrich our vibrant province, and this demand is the key driver to expanding the Indigenous learning initiative to help build those positive relations and cultural competencies across the public service.

The two programs that are offered – so the Indigenous introductory training was developed in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report and call to action 57. It provides Alberta public servants and agency, board, and commission employees with an overview of Indigenous history, the treaties, residential schools, and contemporary realities that are experienced by the Indigenous communities today. That training addresses myths, misconceptions, stereotypes, and that serves to change behaviours and create a desire for further learning and respectful dialogue. The course is six and a half hours long, and it's delivered by Alberta public servant facilitators, and that is supported by Indigenous elders as well.

Our Indigenous cultural protocol training is the other one. Now, that's a half-day session, and that expands Alberta public servants' and ABC employees' understanding of diverse Indigenous cultures and protocols, the role of elders, and how to work with and engage in a culturally appropriate way with First Nations and Métis groups in Alberta. There's an increasing demand and a request for the ICP sessions, generally by employees and specific divisions directly

engaging with Indigenous communities. These two programs and sessions are offered in person in Edmonton and virtually across the province for greater accessibility, so everyone has access to do this.

The ministries of Indigenous Relations and Children's Services and Education as well as Yellowhead family services and InnoTech Alberta and Alberta Innovates have made it mandatory for their staff. The ministries of Forestry, Parks, and Tourism; Environment and Protected Areas; Culture; and Infrastructure support all employees to attend both training programs. In 2021 Indigenous Relations became the lead ministry of the IL. Previously it was the Public Service Commission. So we take it very seriously, and we have all employees taking it.

There's also another free program through the University of Alberta that you can take online, and I think most of my staff in the office have taken that if I'm not mistaken. It's a really good course, and it's free; that's the best part. You can just go under University of Alberta and look it up and take that one. I haven't quite completed it myself, but I'm in the middle of it, so it's my spare-time project, working on that to get through that.

So there are a lot of projects that are going on throughout our department to make sure that they're all taken care of.

You asked me about one other one. MSGC, Bent Arrow – oh, Nechi. The Poundmaker's Lodge there: we've expanded the beds there, like, twice as many as there were before. Our government decided early on that we were going to make addictions and mental health a big part of our mandate, and we were going to go to 4,000 treatment beds additional than what existed when we started. Well, we're past the 8,000 mark now, if you can imagine. Unbelievable. We needed the bed space . . .

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Minister, but I'm going to take this opportunity to give a shameless plug for the Métis Crossing because it is a beautiful location for a wedding or a family reunion. They have hotel facilities, catering, and a campground with full power. It's huge, and it's right on the beautiful North Saskatchewan River. That's your commercial break for the day.

We'll now move on to 20 minutes for the government caucus.

Mr. Feehan: Are we taking a break?

The Chair: It's coming. It's coming.
Member Issik.

Ms Issik: Thank you.

The Chair: Do you wish to go back and forth? Are we going to do block time again, Minister?

Mr. Wilson: I can go back and forth with the members if they like.
Is that all right, members?

An Hon. Member: Yup.

Mr. Wilson: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

The Chair: That's your prerogative, sir.

Ms Issik: Well, Minister, you know, just having a look at estimates here, I'm seeing an increase of half a million dollars: First Nations and Métis relations up \$3 million; Indigenous women's initiatives up \$5.2 million; First Nations development fund up \$21 million; program support and land claims, \$700,000; strategic engagement and policy innovation up \$6 million; and the list goes on. That shows me and many others, I think, the commitment that this government has to Indigenous people in Alberta, and I commend you on that.

I want to talk a little bit about the health and safety of Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA. I'm going to say that out the long way one time so that everybody knows what it is, and then I'm not going to have to say the very, very long name: 2S is two spirited, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual-plus, so 2SLGBTQIA. I'm going to ask you a couple of questions about that as well as we go through.

You know, we know that the health and safety for Indigenous women and girls is a complex issue. We know that it has had tragic, tragic consequences for so many women. Certainly, working with the Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: it's heartbreaking and it's hard to look at, but we need to look at it, and we need to understand what we need to be able to do. So on this very important issue I just would like you to generally discuss the multitude of factors that are involved here and what the priorities of your ministry are with regard to this issue going forward for the upcoming year.

Certainly, we've worked on this now for three-plus years, and beyond that I'd like to know how your ministry is working with other ministries and partners to address this ongoing crisis. We discovered that in the joint working group, that much of this is crossministry. The national inquiry also spoke about the crossministry piece and the across-government piece, that this requires not only dealing with root causes but also dealing with the actualities of tragic consequences happening today. So maybe you can talk about the upcoming year and also the crossministry work.

Mr. Wilson: Thanks for that great question. It's the hardest thing I have to speak about, so you'll just have to give me a minute to collect my thoughts. Sorry. I shouldn't talk about this, but I will. My daughter and her wife – her wife is Indigenous. They call themselves two spirited. They don't use all the other acronyms; they go by two spirited. So that's why it's so near to my heart. You're going to meet my little grandson next week; I'm bringing him to the Leg.

4:50

Indigenous women and girls do experience some of the highest rates of poverty, unemployment, violence, and other challenges and barriers that impact their health, social, and economic circumstances. Indigenous Relations does not deliver the programs and services directly to Indigenous people in Alberta. We work, like you said, with other – across government to guide ministries and to improve or enhance policies, programs, and services to Indigenous women and girls and 2S-plus people. It's critical that the voices of Indigenous women are heard and understood across government. That's why we created the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and why we continue to support the First Nations and Métis women's councils on economic security. Meaningful consideration of these three councils' advice is key to ensuring provincial policies and programs and services meet the needs of Indigenous women and girls and the 2S community.

As a lead in co-ordinating the government of Alberta's response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, my ministry has done extensive work examining the complexity of the issue and working with Indigenous women and the 2S people to identify their needs, gaps in service, and potential solutions to address those issues. The national inquiry and the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls both identified the need to support families, the loved ones, and the survivors. Therefore, this year we're going to be focusing on developing and implementing a grant program to fund projects and initiatives that support families and

survivors. The program will also support initiatives that aim to prevent violence and increase safety and economic security of Indigenous women, girls, and 2S-plus people.

We have established the crossministry committee of MMIWG2S-plus. It's a forum for collaboration and co-ordination across government, and it's going to support the implementation of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls work, the road map that we developed. This includes the development, implementation, and funding of actions to reduce violence and increase safety and economic security of Indigenous women, girls, and 2S-plus people. It will also provide support and information to the Premier's Council on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Recognizing that we have a role to play in addressing the MMIWG2S-plus crisis, the committee has representatives from all of government and ministries at the table. This is one of very few crossministry committees that has representation from all departments as we review our work on these issues as a total government of Alberta and its commitment to finding solutions. Ministry officials also sit at various crossministry tables that address violence such as the interdepartmental committee on family violence and human trafficking, a crossministry committee where they provide advice and share information. Ministry officials have also been building relationships with other councils such as the Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society and municipalities across Alberta to understand how they're going to work together to address the factors that contribute to this violence. We also have strong relationships with Indigenous organizations that are working hard to combat violence against Indigenous women and girls and 2S-plus people.

My ministry has partnered with Alberta Culture to support community-based initiatives, and that includes engaging men and boys in addressing and ending this violence.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Minister.

I appreciate you describing the crossministry committee. I think that's incredibly important information. Coming out of the MMIWG road map, one of the most important pieces was that further work be Indigenous led, which is why the Premier's council, I believe, was put in place in the first place. But I'm happy to hear how the crossministry committee and the Premier's council have a feedback loop amongst themselves to be able to lead and respond, et cetera.

Just keeping this sort of broad strokes, I think that, for the benefit of the Alberta public, so that everybody really understands, the Premier's council has come into place. You talk a bit about it on page 68 of the business plan. It's there to provide, obviously, advice and to monitor things, but perhaps you can expand on why the council is so important in terms of Indigenous women and 2S people's health and safety going forward.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Whitney, for that. Including the agency and the expertise of Indigenous women and girls and the 2S-plus people – in the context of violence and the missing and murdered women, it's critical to address issues that contribute to the high rates of that violence. When we've got the stature of a Premier's council, that demonstrates the government of Alberta's commitment to addressing the crisis of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and reflects our understanding that a government-wide approach is needed. We can't do it just out of one little ministry; we have to work together on this.

The Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls provided recommendations on actions government can take to improve laws, policies, programs,

and services towards preventing violence and increasing safety and economic security of Indigenous women and girls and 2S-plus people. The focus is on collaboration between the Premier's council and government ministries to inform how those recommendations or the outcomes that were intended by those recommendations can be achieved. The Premier's council will provide an annual report, which will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly. Having an arm's-length agency monitor and report on government actions ensures accountability and transparency. Having Indigenous women and 2S-plus people lead and identify solutions at the table with government is another step forward in advancing reconciliation. This is going to give us the opportunity to work with the other ministries, like Justice, which is going to be so important in putting this all together. Instead of just one little ministry pushing it, now we've got the power of all of government pushing this forward.

Ms Issik: That's excellent, Minister.

One of the largest increases that I see on here is on line 3 on page 123 of the estimates. That indicates an increase from \$2.1 million to \$7.4 million, and this is for Indigenous women's initiatives. If we look on page 122, we can understand that it describes what some of these initiatives are: "Provides secretariat support to the First Nations and Métis Women's Councils on Economic Security and leads Alberta's response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls." So we see that description, and we've discussed some of the priorities already, but I'd like you to perhaps speak more about the two councils, Métis women's and First Nations women's economic councils, and the work that they're doing and why it's so important for economic security for women, and maybe you can describe also any targets that you have in place for those.

Mr. Wilson: Around the economic security, we have to remember that's always important but especially so for Indigenous women because, as you know, they face higher rates of poverty, violence, unemployment, and other socioeconomic factors. We have to recognize the central role Indigenous women play in their families and their communities. They are the mothers, the grandmothers, the caregivers, the teachers, community builders, and the leaders. This is why First Nations and Métis women's councils on economic security – they see economic security as having the resources to maintain their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being and thus to provide for themselves and their families in safe and secure communities while fully participating in the economy. Increasing women's economic security is one of the most important preventative measures of violence. Financial stability provides agency so Indigenous women can leave violent situations or relationships and they have means to support their children.

When you talked about other targets – so our ministry's role as a lead ministry is to provide advice and support co-ordination across ministries, like we've talked before, but for the large part our partnering ministries such as Education and Health would be responsible to identify the targets that they would like to achieve. The women's councils provide valuable insight to how the government programs, services, and initiatives can help improve the lives of Indigenous women and their families and their communities. We share the women's councils' advice and recommendations with the other ministries for their consideration. The economic councils recognize the need for more government progress on their recommendations. It's a topic we've been discussing with councils as to how to better monitor the progress of government action in response to their recommendations but also how we can support the councils so their recommendations are meaningful, measurable, and achievable.

My ministry will be working with our crossministry partners to better inform the council's examination of the issues facing Indigenous women, including the current data regarding Indigenous women's socioeconomic outcomes.

5:00

Ms Issik: Thank you, Minister.

On page 71 one of the initiatives that's listed involves engaging with organizations led by Indigenous women and 2S-plus people, and this is going to be done in the pursuit of key objective 3.4 on the same page. This seeks to establish and strengthen relationships with these folks. There's no doubt that members of the 2S-plus community already face significant challenges in their daily lives, made more difficult many times because of the Indigeneity piece. I think there are challenges that are amplified, and I'd like to know the important work that's being done on that front to support them. Also, how is the government already engaging with organizations that will help with the engagement process with the 2S-plus people?

Mr. Wilson: Thanks, Whitney. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls recognized that violence that the 2S-plus people experience is in some ways similar to the violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls, but it's also amplified for that 2S community as the violence they experience is also based in homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of gender discrimination.

For example, access to culturally safe and appropriate health care for gender-diverse people is very challenging, and we recognize there are gaps in supports for services for the 2S-plus people. The Alberta joint working group also acknowledged this and recommended that government engage this community to identify specific actions to address violence and increase their safety and economic security, and we did have input from the 2S community into the report. We had people that sat in and gave their recommendations on how we could do things better.

Ms Issik: Thank you.

Can we turn now to the protocol relationship agreements? I was really pleased. I think you'll remember when we attended the signing for G4 at Tsuut'ina Nation right across the street from my riding, and the protocol was written by laser on a buffalo robe. It was really quite something. It was very, very, very special.

Now, I'm aware that Budget 2023 maintains the funding for protocol relationship agreements with Indigenous communities and between Indigenous communities and Alberta's government. These are government-to-government agreements. I'm not sure – for those watching on television, so that everybody understands, maybe you can talk a little bit about how these work. On page 71 of the business plan there are some details there, but maybe you can talk about the relationship you have with the existing protocol agreements with Treaty 6, Blackfoot Confederacy, as well as G4 and how the relationship and the agreements are working so far and how they work so that everybody sort of understands that process as well.

Mr. Wilson: Thanks, Whitney. It was pretty special when we did the one when signing the buffalo hide. It's going to be a tough one to top.

Signing these protocol and relationship agreements is part of our government's commitment to, like you said, government-to-government relationships with First Nations. These agreements provide – that's our formal way to have meaningful discussions between senior officials, chiefs, ministers, and annually with the Premier as well. The protocol and relationship agreements establish a productive working relationship, and that's based on areas of

mutual interest. They support collaboration, commitment, and co-operation.

Since taking office in 2019, Alberta's government has signed two protocol agreements and one relationship agreement, reflecting new government-to-government partnerships with First Nations. I'm proud to have signed a new agreement with the Blackfoot Confederacy in 2019 and to have entered into a historic protocol agreement with the Stoney Nakoda-Tsuut'ina Tribal Council in 2020. Additionally, we have a relationship agreement with the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, signed in 2022.

Indigenous Relations' budget is \$1 million annually to support the protocol relationship agreements, and funding covers things like capacity funding for administrative costs and related to First Nations achieving their priorities through these tables. Like I said, other ministries are involved on different tables, and they have their own budgets to look after things.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Minister. I think that these are fantastic relationship agreements that are providing important work in, I'd say, very unique ways. I think that might be unique to Alberta overall in this country. I think that it's quite leading edge, and I think it's going to really yield some fantastic results.

I know that if you look on page 71, under performance measures, at the very bottom, you'll see some targets there. It's for four agreements to be made. Right now we've got, as you've pointed out . . .

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt.

We'll now move to a 10-minute block with the Official Opposition, followed by a five-minute break. Are we going back and forth or just a block?

Mr. Wilson: We'll go with block.

The Chair: Block time? Five minutes each.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Minister. I just received a question from the community, and before I forget to say it, I just want to ask you. It is from Bradley Pierson, and he's just – I'll try to read it as directly as I can – asking about the calls to action for the truth and reconciliation report and has a specific concern. He's been thankful that the Provincial Archives of Alberta has been working to release some of the records regarding residential schools, but here's the question:

I have discovered that they have not yet publicly released the Indigenous Death Records, which includes death records of many residential school victims. This means that one must pay to access these records. As someone who has been going through the TRC website, I have found many children who died in Alberta who are listed with an "unknown" death date on the TRC website but have been able to find their records at the Archives.

I would just like to ask – you may not be able to answer right away, but I wanted you to know that that concern is out there in the community, and I said that I would pass it on. Perhaps if you could find out if indeed the death records are being shared and, if so, if there is a fee for them, and if there is a fee, is there something that the ministry can do about it? Thanks for indulging that. I just wanted to make sure that that question got through.

Thank you, Minister. I appreciate the answers to the questions that you have so far. Just with regard to the budget I wanted to ask a few more specifics. The strategic engagement and policy innovation section, 6.3 in the budget, has been the most dramatic increase that we've seen. I know that some of the programs that we've talked about already are the reason for some of these

increases, and I wonder if you could just sort of iterate for me, you know, what specific new programs are coming out of this particular budget so that I can follow along. Why is it that strategic engagement policy initiatives have jumped up by, well, approximately 50 per cent? If you could detail that for me.

I also am interested in what's been happening with the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. You certainly have indicated that there have been a number of programs funded through that. You said that there are \$410 million in loan guarantees to some 30 communities. I know that in the past there have been concerns from many of the nations that they've been unable to access it and that the initial cost to get in and then the types of programs that were funded were too restrictive. Now, you've indicated today that you've expanded some of that, and now you're allowing more in the area of agricultural and IT, a few other increases over the last little while.

5:10

But I'm finding here that in the budget in '22-23 you had put aside \$6 million for that, but then the forecast spending is less than 50 per cent of that. I just want to have some understanding. Is this reflecting that the program is not as successful as you had intended it to be? What's going on? And I see even in terms of your estimate that you're certainly not returning back up to the \$6 million; you're only going to \$4 million. So are you not anticipating any significant growth moving forward here? I just want to understand why this budget was not used. Does it demonstrate a failure of any of the planning or the strategy moving forward? If you can help me understand that.

Again, with regard to the capital grants, which is line 2 under the capital grants, there was kind of the opposite. There was quite a dramatic increase in capital grants under First Nations and Métis relations. I just want to have an understanding of why last year there was such a significant overage in that department. If you could explain what happened in that budget in that last year, why it wasn't contained and why now that you have gone over, you apparently don't feel like it's going to continue to go over, because you're putting the budget back down to basically where it was before. I just want to have an understanding of what the exceptionality was here in terms of this budget and why it's . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, you have five minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you. Yeah. I'll start with your first question, on the increases. So \$3 million is for reconciliation, and I've talked a little bit about that. There's going to be a grant program around that, so you can apply for various projects you want to do. We're leaving it wide open. Like I said, I don't drive the bus on this; I let the communities do that, and if they get a flat tire, I'll help them fix it. It's their program and their projects that they feel are important to their communities.

When the school stuff first started coming out, I was able to go to other ministries, and we actually – I've got to give Donavon credit. He went hat in hand, and we collected \$8 million for community research grants that they could – you'll see in the projects starting to roll out that different communities are doing different things. Some are using it for the ground-penetrating radar; some use it for building monuments and this type of thing. We were able quite successfully to, between our ministry and other ministries, come up with a nice grant program to show that this government cares and we do want help wherever we can.

Two million dollars went for Métis credible assertion. As more and more of the communities – so credible assertion. They have to

reach credible assertion for consultation purposes because there was a court decision that for certain things you have to do consultation. Let's say that we're drilling a bunch of oil wells or doing some forestry or mining, that type of thing. You have to consult with the communities, and you have a legal duty to consult with them on these bigger projects to make sure that we're not disturbing, you know, hunting areas or burial grounds or this type of thing.

We give out money to the communities, and they use that maybe for whatever, their office capacity or people that go out in the field and look and this type of thing. It is a fairly substantial line item for us, making sure that they do have money to do these consultation processes. And as more and more reach the – it's kind of complicated, but on the Métis side there is a credible assertion that they have to reach under what the courts laid out to have that ability to have the consultation process. We have a whole team behind me that works on this type of making sure that they meet that credible assertion, and then we have money set aside that as they reach that ability, we're able to help them out with the process.

Métis, \$1 million for – what was that? Oh, maybe you'll have to talk to that one, Donavon. Sorry.

Mr. Young: Yeah. Member, you had asked for the increases in 6.3. The minister mentioned the first two – \$3 million for reconciliation, \$2 million for Métis credible assertion – and the final \$1 million is for Métis settlements consultation. So those three together constitute the significant increase in line item 6.3.

Mr. Wilson: There's also one big bump, and this is for a huge project but a very much-needed project. I've been hearing about this for quite a while, and we were able to get it through Treasury Board this year: a \$4.7 million increase to one-time funding projects. This is at the Bigstone Cree. It's a gasification project to run a gas line up into their community. This is going to really help out the community to have gas up there. As you know, they're quite far north and on propane. If your tank starts getting low, it'll actually freeze off on you, and then you have no heat. Even I remember as a kid my dad building a fire under the propane tank to warm it up so that you can get gas. That happens a lot in the communities up north. We're really happy to be able to provide them gas up there. It's going to be a great project moving forward.

The death records: I'm going have to check on that. Sorry. I'm not familiar with that at all, how that works. But we'll check on that.

The AIOC. The little decrease there in our capacity funding is because it's been too successful. We actually charge a small fee, and as more and more projects come online, it's going to be self-sufficient. It's one of our greatest success stories for helping communities. I call it our hand up, not a handout. And as more and more projects come online, they're able to become more self-sufficient. Eventually, once we get a couple billion dollars out the door, we'll be . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Members, we will take a quick five-minute break, but please be back in your seats. We'll move on to the government caucus after the break.

[The committee adjourned from 5:16 p.m. to 5:21 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. Thank you, committee members. We'll now move to a 10-minute rotation back and forth, Minister, with the government caucus.

Who's up for questions? Member Issik, go ahead.

Ms Issik: Thank you. I'd just like to finish up on the protocol issue. What I wanted to ask you about was on the bottom of page 71. Well, first of all, I'd like to understand how the pursuit of the Treaty 8 agreement is going and sort of how you feel about the future of that. Then I'd also like to ask you – you've chosen four as the sort of metric of what your target is, and I'm just wondering why it's four instead of three or instead of five.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. Thanks for the question again. Alberta's government: we're remaining open to discussion on consensus regarding the protocol relationship agreements. Treaty 8 right now is not currently pursuing an agreement with the government of Alberta, but why we don't have a formal agreement with them – there are a lot of conversations going around, matters of mutual interest. The big one I talked about before, which Member Getson has been working tirelessly on, is our economic corridors. I also speak regularly with Treaty 8 First Nations individually, which has led to, just like I talked about before, the successes like the Bigstone ATCO partnership for gasification and the MOU on mental health and support services. We just did an agreement with the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council. So there are ongoing agreements that are outside of the protocol agreements as well.

Three to five. We approved a mandate for Indigenous Relations to renew two existing protocol agreements, one with Treaty 8 and one with the Blackfoot Confederacy. The mandate also specified entering into two new protocol agreements, one with the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations and the Stoney Nakoda First Nations tribal council in your area. These organizations represent signatories of Treaty 6, 7, and 8 respectively and blanket the whole province.

As I stated previously, in the absence of a signed protocol relationship agreement I meet with each First Nation individually as needed or when requested, and we help First Nations navigate government processes and create opportunities for collaboration with our various cabinet colleagues.

Ms Issik: Thank you very much for that.

I'd like to cede my time now to Member Sigurdson.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, MLA Issik.

Once again, Minister, it's okay if we go back and forth?

Before we begin, I just wanted to say one thing, something that echoes to me, and you said it a lot, I know, over the last four years. You talk about reconciliation, but it's not enough; it's about reconciliation. Getting to know you over the last four years, the work that you've done, I just want to applaud you. I've seen the passion that you've put into this ministry and really followed it up with action through the AIOC and other issues. I just really want to applaud that. I don't think anybody can deny that you've really put your full heart into trying to build this back over the past few years.

Moving into the budget, I was pleased to see on line 2, page 123 of the estimates, that First Nations and Métis relations is now going to receive an additional \$3 million of an increase over the forecasted amount from last year. On page 122 we see that this program is "responsible for establishing effective relationships, legislation, policies and initiatives for Indigenous governments and organizations, and administers the Metis Settlements legislation." I've got two questions here, and I just kind of would hope that you'd be able to build out on this: just really about how you intend to utilize this funding and how this increase is going to be applied, what certain aspects of this program you feel were a priority that you need as a department to continue to work on. With that as well, if you could expand on what the Métis settlements legislation – what that entails as a part of this funding.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, and thanks for recognizing all the work we've done, but we couldn't have done it without every member of cabinet. Everybody has been so supportive, and I just can't thank all of you enough. It's been an honour to serve with you all, so thank you for supporting me with the initiatives that we brought forward.

As you know, the government Alberta: we've had a long-standing relationship with the eight Métis settlements in Alberta, and we're committed to that partnership with the Métis settlement sustainability. The \$3 million: that's being utilized to fund the Métis settlement consultation and enhance community policing on the eight Métis settlements. Both initiatives have previously been funded through what we talked about, the 10-year long-term governance and funding arrangements, or the LTA, and that's ending March 31. That was the reason I've been pushing them really hard. You know, that agreement comes to an end, and I wanted to make sure that they're prepared for success in the future, so we've been working hard to help them get to that position. Not everybody likes change, but it comes, and you do the best you can with it.

This funding is going to provide critical support where needed. That's going to include \$1 million for consultation capacity funding to help the Métis settlements have the capacity to meaningfully participate in the consultation process. Like I said, that's for any type of industrial work that's going forward so they can have the ability to participate in that. There's \$2 million for enhanced community policing on Métis settlements to support the settlements to maintain safe and comfortable communities for members and create an environment that welcomes economic development and investment. That's one thing I hear – and it's not just on Métis settlements; First Nations, across the province – is this whole thing with the drugs and addictions and mental health. We have to really get focused on this because this is taking too many lives out there. We really have to work at it, and we're dedicated to doing that.

Both initiatives are critical for the Métis settlements, and we're pleased that we've been able to commit to continue to fund these programs. We've heard from the Métis settlements that current enhanced community policing services could be improved upon, and we plan to work with all parties to address these concerns. Like I say, when I go out to anywhere in the province, the big concern is around policing. We have to do a better job; there's just no way around it.

Mr. Sigurdson: Excellent. Well, thank you for that answer. Sitting in Highwood, I kind of am right in the middle between Tsuut'ina, Eden Valley, and Siksika. I know that we've heard, when I was sitting on the rural crime task force, when I first got elected, that there were a lot of additional issues that needed to be dealt with, and it's great to see that your department is moving forward with a proper funding plan for them to be able to address those as they move forward.

I also noticed on line 5 of page 123 of the estimates that the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal received as well an increase of close to 5 per cent. This program is described on page 122 as "a quasi-judicial body established by the Metis Settlements Act that mediates and adjudicates disputes on Metis Settlements [regarding] membership, land and surface access." Once again I kind of have two questions related to this. How does the work of this program differ from the work of First Nations and Métis relations, as was detailed in the previous question, and why is it important to have a program dedicated entirely to mediating and adjudicating disputes on Métis settlements?

5:30

Mr. Wilson: That's a good question. A lot of people don't understand the whole Métis settlements. It's unique to Alberta. No other province has this. They have their own internal governance around land issues. The Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal – they call it the MSAT – is an independent, like I said, quasi-judicial tribunal, and this was established when the Metis Settlements Act was established.

The legislated overriding consideration is to exercise its powers and carry out its duties with a view to preserving and enhancing Métis culture and identity and further attaining self-governance by Métis settlements under the laws of Alberta. So unlike First Nations and Métis relations, which is responsible for establishing effective relationships, legislation, policies, and initiatives for Indigenous communities, the work of MSAT is to apply provincial legislation, Metis Settlements General Council policies, or Métis settlement bylaws to resolve disputes through conciliation, mediation, and adjudication.

So basically they have their own Métis land titles, unlike what you would – First Nations don't have that. They have their own land titling department, and we oversee that.

Mr. Sigurdson: Excellent. I see with about seven seconds left here I'm going to wait to ask my next question when we get to the next block.

Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, members.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Minister. I wonder if you could go back to the question I asked about the capital grant increase for capital grants, line 2, First Nations and Métis relations, and why last year there was such an overage there and just what happened different last year as opposed to what was predicted and what you predict in the future year, just so I can understand that.

You also mentioned that some of the money from strategic engagement and policy innovation in 6.3 is going to the credible assertion process. I'm wondering if you could tell me something about – you said that the purpose of that credible assertion was to allow people to exercise the right to consultation moving forward. I'm wondering how you determined what is the area for which a group that has achieved credible assertion – how will it be decided what area for which they will be consulted since they don't have an obvious land designation? If I can just understand that, I'd really appreciate it.

The next question that I have is about the water to reserve program. You haven't mentioned this at all. It was a pretty successful program at one time, and I know that the last time we had spoken, you had indicated that there was some money put in just to finish up a final nation, but I'm wondering if there's any money to continue that program in this budget. Are there more nations that are in line to getting water to their reserves, and if so, how much money is currently going to that? And can you tell me which nations are in line for that amount of money, whatever that happens to be? I would actually like to know the final comment on which nations did indeed complete their water to reserve program. I'll give you a chance to speak to all of those.

I'm interested as well in the Indigenous internship program. I've been asking about this every year for the last four years because I think it would be a good program, but you've indicated that that program was discontinued, and I'm just concerned about that. It

was a chance to have more Indigenous voices in IR itself, and I know it was essentially held in the Indigenous women's initiatives section. Just wondering if there's been any decision to return to that. Is there any money in this budget for that or any other program that will actually have more Indigenous people in Indigenous Relations itself?

I mean – and that leads to sort of the larger question. I know I've asked in the past about: do you keep track of the number of people who identify as Indigenous in Indigenous Relations? I've been told that no, you don't. So I'm just wondering, then, well, if that's still true, I guess. I'll start with that.

And then, secondly, I'm wondering about any programs that you have that actually look to bring on more Indigenous people into Indigenous Relations or perhaps across all of government, I guess. I certainly would like to see greater representation across the board, but I know you're only responsible for your own ministry, so I'll leave it defined narrowly. Are you doing anything to ensure that would happen, like the internship program or any other kind of program to bring Indigenous people on, and have you got any evidence that you've been successful if you've been doing that, that in fact there are more Indigenous people working in Indigenous Relations, or if in fact it's gone down, which I suspect may also be true?

One of the other things that we haven't talked about yet is outstanding TLEs, and I'm just wondering if you can tell me which treaty land entitlements are still outstanding and which ones are being worked on at the present time. Do we anticipate more to come forward? Is there money set aside for the final resolution of these TLEs?

And while we're talking about that, I'd like to specifically – I guess I'd better wait. But I'll tell you that I'm going to ask in the next section specifically about Lubicon. We'll ask a little bit more about that. I have some specific questions about it.

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Wilson: Should I jump in?

The Chair: All right. Minister, you've got five minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. Thank you. Around the capital grants the big one was a one-time initiative, and that's that \$4.7 million for the Bigstone gasification, so that's where most of it came from. And then the other is around the ICIP program; that's the federal program, and we don't control that one.

I should just talk to you on this a little bit. On the budget, you said that the budget increase is negligible, but actually if you remove both sources of the flow through, like the FNDF and investing in Canada, it's a true 20 per cent increase in our budget, so that's a good budget.

We talked about a couple of grants. Thomas back there: he's my guru on credible assertion, and it's all based on evidence, data around hunting, fishing, and trapping. I'll maybe let Donavon expand on that a little bit.

Mr. Young: Sure. Thank you, Minister. The question was: how do we determine the consultation area? And it really is, Member, around the existing data for hunting, trapping, and fishing for food, because that's the test, if you will. So if there's real evidence put forward historically and in a contemporary sense where these community members hunt, trap, fish for food, that is mapped out on what we call a geodata mapping system, which may be familiar to you. That's how we determine the consultation area. So it's very much evidence based.

Mr. Wilson: Thanks. And then maybe, Donavon, just follow along with the internship program. I believe that's coming back if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Young: Yeah. You asked about the internship program, and the minister is right. In this fiscal year coming up, '23-24, we'll be reinstating the internship program. It'll be coming back in '23-24.

And then you asked about the number of Indigenous employees and so on. Every two years the government does what's called a pulse survey, and just this last time the question was asked around Aboriginal identity, but I don't actually have the results. I mean, anecdotally I can tell you that we're fairly consistent around that 15 to 20 per cent range, but until the results of the pulse survey come out, which will be in the next month or so, I couldn't give you specifically. I know as the deputy for the past nine years that we run in that 15 to 20 per cent range.

Mr. Wilson: The one where I really tried to promote as much Indigenous participation as I can is on the AIOC. The CEO is a full Indigenous lady, and our board is prominently Indigenous people at this point; seven out of nine, actually. We really are promoting Indigenous participation there, and every time we open up for board members, we get a lot of participation, people wanting to be part of it, just because it has been so successful that people are really responsive to that.

5:40

Around the treaty land entitlements we did complete one this year, just a small portion. You know where Doig River is up there? A substantial amount of it was in British Columbia, and there was quite a bit of acreage there. We participated and did put forward Crown land on that one as well. Plus, there was a small payout. There was one trapper in there that had a trapline that I believe have to be paid out. It wasn't a big payout, but there's quite a bit of land involved, a lot of it on the B.C. side. That one is complete. And once they're complete and signed off, then we are done with them.

Right at this moment there are eight TLE claims validated by Canada and accepted for negotiation. Included in those are Fort McMurray First Nation; Beaver or Boyer River First Nation; Sunchild First Nation; the Stoney Nakoda nation; my favourite, Horse Lake First Nation. Sorry. Not my favourite; one of my favourites. They're all my favourites. They just do such amazing work up there, I'm just impressed with them. Kehewin First Nation, Montana First Nation, and a recent validation for the Piikani First Nation.

The government of Canada and the band are looking to Alberta to possibly share in a cash-in-lieu settlement to address the long outstanding TLE claim with the Fort McMurray First Nation. The actual federal minister was just down two or three weeks ago, and we had a discussion around that. The technicians are working on that to find – because it has to be unencumbered land, which is getting difficult to put together. There will probably be some cash payouts involved in some of these, but they are moving forward, and some of these have been going on for 30 years or more. So, I mean, it's frustrating on both sides.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move on to the government caucus for 10 minutes, back and forth if it's acceptable to the minister.

Mr. Wilson: It is. Yeah.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Chair. Once again back and forth. And thank you to Member Feehan. He actually asked one of my questions on the credible assertion process, and that was a great clarification from the department. I appreciate that.

I'm going to stay a little bit focused on this topic of assisting the Métis peoples of Alberta. One of the things that I actually thought was quite clever and I think it applied, and I never really had thought about this, but I'm really extremely pleased to see that there are a lot of initiatives set out in this business plan that look to support these communities and peoples in unique ways. One such initiative, actually, on page 71 involves assisting Métis settlement's administrations with building governance capacity and access to existing government of Alberta programs to support Métis settlement sustainability.

I wanted you to be able to build on this, because I know as an MLA I've worked with business and a lot of organizations, and just the awareness about what is out there to be able to aid and assist and connecting with them to be able to show them that it's there and that awareness piece is huge. There are a lot of changes that happen on a constant basis with that connection. So could you expand on what these existing programs are and why there might be a lack in capacity, that you felt you wanted to address, on page 71, to be able to connect Métis with these programs and remedy the situation of that awareness piece?

Mr. Wilson: That's a really good question. One of the things I do is a weekly newsletter now because there are so many grants from different departments and our own department going out all the time that it's hard for some of those, especially the smaller First Nations that don't have the capacity in-house to constantly be researching as to what is available. Most of the grants that are available to any community in Alberta are available to the First Nations and Métis. I mean, for culvert repairs and this type of thing, they can apply for all those grants as well. We put out our weekly newsletter, and if we've got a new grant program that we're coming up with, we'll have that all explained in there so that they can catch up with and keep on top of making sure that they apply for the appropriate grants.

The other way we can do it is that our staff is always available to assist the Métis settlement administrations by path finding existing grant programs that meet the settlement's – their needs and their priorities.

This year with the Métis settlements, having set aside \$2 million for the ABIF program – we've got a staff member that's going to work with them to help create these business plans. We don't want to set them up for failure; we want to set them up for success. You have to make sure that you have a good business plan moving forward and little things like: is your land zoned to even do this? And if you've never really been in business before – like, as a past land developer myself it took years to figure out how to navigate a system. If it's your first time up to bat and you're trying to put a business in place, you have to have a lot of knowledge behind you to put that together. So we've got staff in the department, as Mr. Feehan knows, great working people that can help them navigate through these processes to get these grants started.

The grant program could be internal, external to Indigenous Relations. Some of the grants but not limited to – so we'd have the Aboriginal business investment fund; that's our ABIF program. Those are up to \$500,000, so a pretty substantial grant to kick-start – oh, we've got everything from little service stations. We've helped out with some campgrounds, buying some equipment to get into a logging business, fixing up an existing store. A couple of them have golf clubs that we've helped them do programs to get fixed up. Even around some of these, you know, you need some of

that business acumen to make sure you're on the right track. Not all of these are on First Nation property. They're out in the community, so we have to make sure that they know the rules that are involved to make sure that they can get their business off the ground. We've got our Indigenous housing capital program, our municipal sustainability initiative – that's transitioning to local government fiscal framework – our community facility enhancement program, fire services training programs. Navigating through these government programs can be challenging, and we don't want the settlements to miss out on funding that could help them be sustainable.

Accessing these programs: you asked about that. Like many rural communities, settlement capacity may decline when members move to larger urban areas with more amenities and services. We've got skilled and trained settlement members who are attracted to higher wages and more stable positions outside of their home communities, so access to grant programs may lead to better paying jobs on the Métis settlements.

Indigenous Relations staff are also able to investigate and highlight eligible training programs to increase settlement capacity. We count on the expertise of the Métis settlements' administrators to make connections in government. They're going to help the settlements obtain more support and program capacity. Our staff, along with working with the Métis settlement administrators, are working on those path-finding solutions.

Mr. Sigurdson: Excellent. I just want to applaud that. I think a lot of great ideas have the opportunity to fail if you can't navigate the process and especially depending on the size of the Métis settlement. This has a huge benefit, so I applaud that.

One thing I do want to rotate or just come back to before I pass off my time to my colleague. When you were talking, on page 71, about the additional initiatives that relate to supporting Métis communities and comments you made before, the allocation of \$2 million to support the Métis settlements' enhanced policing initiative for community policing services on settlements – it's something you have commented already about. But I just want to say that I'm a big fan of this initiative. It really does dedicate a solid commitment to addressing the issues that are being seen within those communities. Just two clarifying questions. Why do you think it's important to have policing services that are dedicated entirely to Métis settlements? As well, maybe you can clarify what criteria is being put in place that officers have to meet before they can serve in these unique communities.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you. I'm going to go off script a little bit here. I'll give you an example. I was up at one settlement, and there was one older fellow there. He came up to me. He had been out – when COVID first started, he was the hunter for the community, so he'd been out hunting for moose, him and his wife, in their car. An RCMP who was outside of their community stops him. Not only does he take his gun; he takes his car and throws the old fellow in jail. Like, he was no kid. He was in his 80s. I thought: what the heck is going on here? I was furious. But that's what happens when you get outside people that come into these communities that don't understand the culture. Like, yeah, they drive with a gun in their car because if they see a moose, they shoot it. That's what happens. I mean, we're so far out in the bush, Mr. Google doesn't even work out there.

5:50

So that's an example of where if you've got a policeman that's part of the community and understands the culture, you know, he might come to the old guy and say, "Well, make sure you've got

your safety on" and whatever, but don't confiscate his car. He's got nothing to start with. Like, he's just trying to survive out there.

That's why our ministry of public safety is – we actually met with the community when we were out on our retreat there, and he came with me to a meeting – policing is a huge concern – and talked to them about a grant program that we also have so that they can assess the service that they need in their communities. They're all going to be applying for grants through another ministry as well, so there's other monies out there that they can apply for and work on their policing needs. That's a constant theme I hear about, policing and working on addictions and controlling the – I'll leave it at that before I start bawling again.

Community policing supports crime prevention, intervention, and enforcement. The Métis settlements: they've developed relationships with their dedicated RCMP officers to explore culturally appropriate enhanced community policing practices to serve the needs of their settlements and of their members. I think that's critical, that we have to work with these communities.

Like, it's a different world up there. Like, Dave and you guys that live up north, you know what it's like. It's not downtown Edmonton or outside Leduc. It's a way of life out there for the people to survive. They do survive off the land, and we have to be able to work with them and understand what their needs are so that we don't get caught into a trap of doing something that's really culturally inappropriate.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move on to the Official Opposition for a 10-minute block, five and five.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Minister, for the answers to the questions so far. I just want to go back briefly over the water to reserve program because I did ask about them and you weren't able to provide me the answer to that particular one. I'll just reiterate a little bit about what I'm hoping to learn from that. I'm wondering whether there is any money in this budget to actually continue that program. Is the program now completely wrapped up? If so, can you tell me – you know, can you list the nations that were able to take access to the program? Maybe you can even explain to me the decision-making around whether or not that program is continuing or not and just sort of what your thinking is around that. It was a very successful program for quite some time, and of course, obviously, a very important issue, bringing clean water to nations. I'm very happy that the nations that were able to take advantage of it were able to do so. I just hope that perhaps some other ones can do so in the future.

And then the next one I was about to just ask about and I wanted to know a little bit more about is about the status of the Lubicon First Nations. Now, I was just up there recently speaking with them, and I'm very concerned that even though this was signed off now at least four years ago, we seem to be in this funny hiatus place where it doesn't seem to be resolved completely; that is, the nation is not actually acting as a nation at this point.

I'm particularly concerned about the circumstances around the lands around Little Buffalo, and I understand that any time that the nation tries to make a decision about development, you know, with all the money that has been supplied by both the provincial government and the federal government for housing for hospitals and so on, they're still having to go through the local municipality to get all of their decisions. I spoke to the local municipality about this once last year, and they're also irritated by having to do this all the time.

So I guess I'm just wondering, honestly, if you can help fill me in about the process about what needs to happen to actually move

this to a place where it's actually fully resolved, where the nation can actually be a nation, where the lands that we promised when we signed that will actually be transferred to them and they'll not have to go back to the local municipality to make really basic decisions about housing and so on. Is there a block there? Is there a role for the provincial government in terms of jumping in on that and resolving something? You know, I think we're really both on the same side on this one. For me, I would just like to have a greater sense of what the blockage is, and if there's something we can do to move forward, I'd appreciate that.

You were just speaking a little bit earlier with the members opposite about tribal policing, and I'm very interested in the request from Siksika to move towards tribal policing. I know that it's not necessarily within this ministry to actually introduce that – I assume that's with the Ministry of Justice or similar – but I'm just wondering if there is a role of this ministry to negotiate that through one of the protocol agreements, because I know that we do have a protocol agreement with the Blackfoot Confederacy that would include Siksika.

I wonder whether or not establishing a police force on Siksika is part of the work that's being done by the protocol committee, and of course given that Blood Tribe already has an internal police force, which – again, you know, we have always fully supported Indigenous-run and -conducted police forces on-reserve; we certainly would be a hundred per cent supportive of that happening on Siksika. Then, of course, it begs the question of: if you have one on Blood and you have one on Siksika, does that mean Piikani is likely to be the next?

Is there a role for this ministry, through the protocol agreements, to establish those things going forward, and if so, what will it take? Of course, the question is always: have you accounted for that in terms of your budgeting? Is there some designation of funds to make sure that happens?

The Chair: Minister, you have five minutes.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you. I'll start with the water first. This is one area that's a big concern both provincially and federally, of course. So far we've had five projects that have been completed: Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Cold Lake First Nation, Dene Tha', Paul First Nation, and the Whitefish (Goodfish) First Nation. Right now we have a \$39 million project under way at Maskwacis. That's through the Ermineskin Cree Nation to connect a waterline that's being built from Lacombe-Ponoka. That one I'm very familiar with because it's part of my constituency as well. We're very close on getting it together. They have a water commission set up, and they're adding the Ermineskin to the water commission, so they're getting down to the final pen strokes as to how the agreement will work.

Some of the concerns coming off First Nations: well, they're not used to actually paying a water bill. Like, what if somebody leaves a tap on and they get a big water bill? How are we going to deal with that? You know, little nuances like that. But the actual waterline project is fully funded. We're just ready to get started as soon as they finish off the final agreements with the water commission. Some good people working on that, so I'm confident they'll have that wrapped up really quick here.

We also committed over \$20 million to a project that's going to connect Mikisew Cree First Nation to a regional waterline as well. We're committed to seeing these projects through.

You know, like yourself, you said that we have a deep concern that so many people lack access to the fundamental right to clean and reliable drinking water. Like I said, three weeks ago I had the federal minister down in my office, and I have a friend up north at

one of their First Nations – I won't say which one – who just was having a water problem. They weren't aware of it, so we flagged it for them. We got both of us on the phone right away with our department heads, and within a few minutes we were able to start figuring out a plan forward. I was happy to be able to work with the federal government on that, on a concern that we both shared, so I'm confident that we'll be moving forward with something to help them out as well.

There are some other issues. I know that one of the Métis settlements has some water issues, but we work closely with other ministries, and transportation has money in their ministry as well. I won't speak for them, but I know there is some funding there to help out some with other projects as well. We are working on making sure that everybody does have access to clean water, so thank you for flagging that. That is a very important issue.

6:00

Who do I start with? The Lubicon. I'm very aware of what's going on up there. They do, like you say, have issues with what they want to do. They've got the money to build schools and all kinds of stuff, but then you have to go through the municipality, and the municipality doesn't want to do it because: how are they involved? It's kind of a jumble right now. But I had it similar in my own riding. We're working with the Louis Bull band right now to do that – you've probably seen it when you're driving along highway 2 – rest area there. They've got a big remediation program. You'll see a mountain of dirt piled up. They used to have a service station there, and they're literally baking the soil, cleaning it all up because they want to do a new service centre there with a small casino and a little hotel.

I was actually working on that project with them. Oh, my God, this started 30 years ago, when I was on county council. They wanted to start it, and we approved it on county council back then, and then it just sat and sat. One of my first things when I got elected – the chief came and saw me and said, "So are we going to do this now?" I said: "Well, it's in your court. What do you want to do?" So I've been pushing it forward. We've actually gotten it approved to do the small casino project there. Because I still had the connections with the county, we had that same problem because it's on county land, not on reserve land: "What are we doing?" Back and forth. The county finally just said: "Lookit, do what you want. It's going to be your land eventually anyways."

So the county does have the ability, as this municipality would have the ability, to just say: it's going to be your land; do what you want. I don't know why they're not. I may speak to them about that. Like, they have the ability to just wash their hands of it because it's going to be out of their control shortly anyways. Some of that stuff is very frustrating. I feel your pain on that one.

Tribal policing: this is an exciting one. Our Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services has been doing an amazing job around getting the First Nations . . .

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to the government caucus. I see Mr. Getson getting my attention. Go ahead for a back and forth with the minister if that's okay.

Mr. Wilson: Yes.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, again. The theme I kind of want to concentrate on, if I can, is on the reconciliation, or reconciliaction, as you put it, and, once again, on the economic corridors. I appreciate your acknowledgement on that, and I appreciate all the chiefs that participated: Chief Leonard

Standing on the road – he was one of our members that was on that – Chief Whitney, Chief Isaac down south. We had 6, 7, and 8.

Treaty 8 was a little bit different, where we worked with Chief Isaac. They stood up an economic council, and I was very honoured. It was an honour and a privilege to be the first person that they met with when they stood up that council to talk about the validity and the longevity of those economic corridors and how we can work with them. If there was anyone out there listening to this, I would suggest that there is a lot of credence to working within the treaty territories themselves because they span interprovincial boundaries. When we're talking about nation-building projects, which these corridors are, there is a lot to be gained by working with the First Nations folks. Chief Leonard, now that he's grand chief of Treaty 6, boy, he's guns blazing, going after these things in Treaty 6. I'm really, really happy to see that. So I appreciate the feedback on that, Minister.

There were a couple of items I had. I think the member opposite has already asked a couple of them, but I'd like to jump to page 70 if I can. That was "advancing reconciliation through policies and programs [that are] guided by Jordan's principle, [and that] ensures First Nations children in Canada have access to services and supports when they need them." I have two parts of a question, sir. Can you further expand on Jordan's principle and its importance, and then why is it so important to advance reconciliation for the First Nations and children in particular?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. Under my mandate letter the main heading that the Premier gave me was: make sure that you apply Jordan's principle wherever you can. She was adamant that we have to really make sure that no child slips through the cracks here. Jordan's principle helps ensure that all First Nations children living in Canada can access the social, education, or health services and supports they need when they need them, with payments being worked out later. So we're not caring about who's – if a kid needs help, we just help him. We'll figure out who's going to pay the bill later.

This is critical to addressing socioeconomic issues rooted in inequality. Some people have less access to opportunities or are born into circumstances where it's harder to thrive, so it's important to give extra help when it's needed. And certain barriers exist for First Nations people and their families that make it harder to access opportunities. Appropriate support provides First Nations children with that same opportunity to access services as other children in Canada, as it should.

Was there something else on that one?

Mr. Getson: Yeah. The second part was: why is it so important to advance reconciliation for the First Nations children in particular?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. That's a good question. In Alberta the federal government, the provincial government, and the First Nations all deliver programs and services with a variety of eligibility criteria, so everyone involved in delivering that service needs to work together to eliminate those gaps. Alberta was the first province in Canada to demonstrate its commitment to Jordan's principle by signing a memorandum of understanding with the government of Canada and the First Nations. Indigenous Services Canada determines the eligibility for Jordan's principle on a case-by-case basis. Regional services co-ordinate and support individuals and families as they navigate all available services in Alberta. The First Nations Health Consortium provides service navigation and support to those families.

Mr. Getson: I appreciate that.

I guess that since our chair took the liberty of giving a little bit of a promotional plug, I'm going to do the same thing for our area. I keep, you know, saying nonstop that it's God's country, but when you look at the history out there, it's God's lake, and that was from the Alexis group. I have Alexis, Paul, and Alexander in my area, and we had the truth and reconciliation, obviously, that took place, and we even had the papal visit this summer, so I think we can say, after he blessed the lake, that it's definitely God's country out there.

But back with the efforts towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, it's the utmost concern for this government, obviously, and, Minister, you wear that on your shirtsleeve, so I appreciate that.

I'd also like to turn your attention to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 82.

We call upon provincial and territorial governments, in collaboration with Survivors and their organizations... [to install a publicly visible] Residential Schools Monument in each capital city to honour Survivors and all the children who were lost to their families and communities.

Again, you know, with the events that took place last summer, I think that brought it to the forefront for a lot of folks to understand that we want to move forward and that we have to acknowledge what took place out there. So could you provide an update, if at all possible, on what the government is doing to respond to that call to action 82?

Mr. Wilson: Yeah. We started off, as I think I told you before, and did our reconciliation grants, where my deputy minister really did yeoman's work on finding money to help all of the communities. We set up a grant, and every community that applied got money, and you'll be seeing monuments and various things going up in communities across the province under that program. The big one – and I talked a little bit about it – was that we worked with the elders and our Indigenous representatives, and that was to develop our reconciliation garden. You might say that there's not too much showing there right now, but there's a lot of work going on behind the scenes to get this thing going. That's going to create that sacred space that people need to reflect and share and to start that healing process. There's a lot of pain out there. It's causing a lot of the addiction problems and what have you. I think that anywhere we can help is good.

In 2022 in Indigenous Relations we posted two separate requests for artists to do the permanent monument, and I talked about Stewart Steinhauer from up in the chairman's area there, who came forward with the winning design for the garden. It's just amazing. *Mother Earth Circling*. What could be better? I was thinking at first he might do a mother bear with three cubs or something, because that happened on my farm. We were doing some haying, me and my wife. If you're working with your wife, you know, you don't ever say anything that's going to make her mad because she'll quit in a hurry. All of a sudden the cows all came running through my yard, and she came driving up with the tractor. I said: what did you break now? Wrong thing to say. But she'd gotten off the tractor because she saw the cows running, too. She walked out and she got up about 20 feet away, and a mother bear with three cubs stood up in front of her. She said, "We just looked at each other, and I moonwalked back to my little tractor without a cab and putted back up to the house." You don't mess with the mother bear. That's part of the sculpture. You'll see the bear claws on the sculpture that he's done. When you hear about the mother bear, it's a real thing. She will protect her cubs, so that's why we went with that design.

6:10

Then we've got I believe it's called Land Tec Landscape Contractors. They've done a lot of work around the Leg. You'll see

them here. We actually worked with them to make sure that they're going to be very culturally aware of the work that they're doing, because this is very sensitive work to a lot of people. There are going to be a lot of eyes on us when we do this, so we want to make sure that it's done in a culturally correct manner, everything from removing the dirt that's there – it used to be a parking lot down there at one time. We're going to create this healing place. We want to make sure there's good, clean soil so that the plants grow good. I think that this is a pretty big budget item for us. The total cost is going to be approximately \$660,000. Yeah, \$660,000. So \$450,000 just for the monument and another \$210,000 for the design and construction of the garden.

It's a lot of work that's going to be going on. It's not going to happen overnight, but as soon as the frost comes out of the ground, they'll be down there working. They've already got it planned how they're going to, you know, excavate, take out the dirt and gravel and stuff that was there to create this reconciliation garden. I don't know if you guys know this, but it's kind of a secret around there: if you go to the centre of where this garden is, it's called the clapping circle. If you clap there, you get an echo. Like, it's pretty cool. This is still going to be part of the whole plan there. You're going to have a centre where you can still experience the sound effects that happen in there.

Like I say, we're pretty excited about moving forward with the reconciliation garden. A lot of people are looking forward to it. Once we get it done, we'll invite everyone up to see it. I don't know if I'll still be around, but I'm going to come to it anyways. We'll make sure that the community is involved. There are a lot of good people out there that want to see this happen and are working towards it. To have Stewart, one of the premier artists in Alberta, doing the monument is just – I don't know how it could have been any better. I don't think anybody else could have done a better job. We're very excited about that.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Minister. Since this is my last chance to say anything, I just want to thank you for your work over the last four years. I certainly think that many of the initiatives that have been started by your department are worth supporting and continuing, and we'll try to make sure that that does happen in the future.

Before I go on to my main focus here, I'm just noticing that with the water to reserve program pretty much all of the ones that you mentioned – Alexis, Cold Lake, Dene Tha', Whitefish, Ermineskin, Paul, and Mikisew Cree – were all in process when you first took over. I'm not seeing that there are any new additions to this. You can correct me if I'm wrong on that, but they were certainly all on the list when I left that ministry, at different stages. In fact, Alexis and Paul and Dene Tha' were, I think, essentially finished by the time I left, and others were in process. I guess the real question for me, though, is: in this budget is there money for more nations to continue on? Are you adding any new nations, or are you just finishing out the list that was originally established prior to your entry?

I guess I just want to spend the last few minutes that I have talking about the work of the committee, the Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I want to take the time to say how important I think this work is, and I really appreciate that your ministry has been pursuing it, that you have competent leadership involved in doing it, and I congratulate the success in going forward. I guess my overarching anxiety is that,

you know, four years later we have a great plan, but nothing has actually happened yet after four years.

I just want to give you a chance to sort of – I mean, other than the establishment of the plan moving forward. But the actual concrete things moving forward I'm very concerned haven't happened yet. I anticipate they will and hopefully will, but it's been a long time that it's all about: talking about it, talking about it. I guess I just wonder. With any of these things, if I were to select them, could you actually say that they've been done, any of the 113? Can you say, "Yeah, we tackled that one and accomplished that," or is it all hope for the future?

I guess the one I will ask about particularly is about the policy and legislation development because I think that's really important as you move forward. Number 19 I'll read out specifically, and that is to "develop a made-in-Alberta Indigenous intersectional policy analysis framework in partnership with Indigenous women, girls, 2S+ people, and organizations." You know, that's a fundamental piece that will then dictate much of the work that's going forward. And I'm just wondering: can you say that 19 is accomplished? Is it under way? Is there something I can read on that at this point? Is there an actual policy that's moved forward, or is that just something in the works? I certainly could go through the rest of them and say: well, have you actually done anything on this? Also, I recognize that many of them are not in your ministry, but the policy, I suspect, must be – you can correct me if I'm wrong – so I thought I'd identify that one particularly. I'd really like to know where that's at.

Does this committee have the resources to get that piece done? Will that be done in such a manner that we're not sitting here four years from now again saying, "Look, our intentions have been great; we've been working great; we've developed good relationships, but we're still planning for things to actually be accomplished"? You're the one who's talked about the difference between reconciliation and reconciliation, and so far when it comes to murdered and missing women, I can only tell you that it's been reconciliation but not reconciliation.

I certainly love what you've done here. I mean, the work of this committee to put this together is fabulous, but it is about the plan to move forward as opposed to what's actually been accomplished in the time that you've had in the four years that you've had. So I guess I'm really – you know, use it as a chance to brag if you want; I don't care. I really want to hear that there are specific things today, not in the future but today, that are better for the Indigenous women who have suffered so long with so much tragedy and truly deserve to have us commit ourselves in a way that we've never done before to move this forward and to extinguish this tragedy.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

Minister, you now have five minutes.

Mr. Wilson: Thanks for giving us the opportunity to talk on this one last time here. When we started out our budget cycle this year, I said that I want my number one priority to be missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Like, what can we do to really make a difference? Of course, it takes money to do everything, so we put it as a major budget item; \$5 million in the budget for that. We've talked to other ministries to make sure that Justice is on top of this, public safety is on top of this.

The number one thing – if you look at number one on the list there, it's to set up a Premier's council, and that was very important for the committee. They wanted that council. They wanted that access to the Premier, so that was the very first thing we did. They wanted it; we did it. Job done.

I'm going to put Kristina on the spot. I'll cry for you. It's okay. She's done such an amazing job on this. I want her just to brag a little bit. She's done an amazing job. I just can't thank you enough for taking me on this journey with you. Thank you.

Ms Midbo: Thank you, and thank you for the question and the interest in the work we're doing to address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQI-plus people here in Alberta. I would first start with that this work is not easy, and it takes a lot of time. I think the work of the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is a good example of the importance of building those relationships of trust because they are sensitive matters we're talking about, and we're talking about it with people whose lives are directly impacted by this. That takes time, first of all, to begin that trust building among these experts, among government folks who are learning and trying to understand the true impact of colonial violence on Indigenous women and their families and 2S-plus people.

6:20

I would also say that one of the important learnings we have from all of this work is the need that it is Indigenous led. Again, we do have 113 Pathways to Justice, and it is great work and it is certainly foundational work to continue moving the province forward. While I can't sit here and say all 113 pathways have been implemented, I can point out to some of them such as the recommendation around the family death review committee – they've added many more Indigenous members to that – where they're examining instances of death in family violence circumstances.

I'd also point out that the Premier's council has a number of mandate items, and that includes the development of culturally safe and appropriate tools for government to improve and enhance the development and implementation of provincial laws, policies, programs, and services. That is a mandate we will be examining as a Premier's council, so that work will begin. The council is still developing their strategic plan and identifying their priorities over the next several years.

The road map is also guiding the work of the government of Alberta. We do have our crossministry committee. We're engaging with our crossministry partners to talk about some of the gaps in services and where we can support and where we can enhance. As the minister mentioned, we've partnered with Alberta Culture to provide funding to support engaging men and boys in addressing the violence that women, girls, and two spirit and men and boys are experiencing as well as addressing sexual violence in rural communities.

We've also been working to provide grant funding to a number of initiatives that align with the 113 pathways and the road map. For example, we have continued funding Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society, which is the only Indigenous urban shelter in the province, in their important work partnering with the Calgary Police Service to better support the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2S-plus people. Again, that work required a lot of relationship building or relationship mending. We're happy to support them for another year to continue that work around policies and protocols when engaging the community, because when an Indigenous woman or girl or two-spirit-plus person goes missing, it doesn't just impact that immediate family; it's a community problem or crisis or trauma that is revisited. So that work is ongoing with Awo Taan and the Calgary police.

We've also supported IAAW for the third year to support their systems navigator program, which is helping advocate and provide referrals and navigation services to Indigenous women in the

province so that they can access housing, income supports, even access the justice system to ensure there are emergency protection orders in place for them when they're fleeing violence.

We've supported the ANFCA, who are providing supports to families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, which again aligns with the national inquiry and the Alberta joint working group recommendations.

We're funding Creating Hope Society so that they can do some intensive outreach to vulnerable people who are, you know, engaged in sex work, for example, and who need access to supports to make them as safe as they can be.

With IAAW, as was previously stated, we entered into a multiyear funding agreement with them several years ago. We maintained their funding, including the costs of the Esquao awards, but we also will be increasing it. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the IAAW, who is really an important partner. We call on them for a lot of advice as we work. We also have funded the IAAW in another division to support job readiness and retention for Indigenous women in terms of developing customized work plans so that they can achieve success in the areas they wish to.

We've worked with the YWCA Edmonton, who are strong allies in this work. Last year they hosted some healing camps for children and youth whose parents have gone missing or have been murdered. We're supporting the Y as fiscal agents and allies again this year, where two projects – one will support weekly gatherings, ceremony based, to support those who are participating in their programs as well as another project to, again, support the youth in land-based teachings and gatherings, and then there will be some aftercare supports.

So there's a lot of work that we've been doing. It's not that there's been no action, and certainly there's work going across government. The family information liaison units out of Alberta Justice: they're continuing to do their good work, and they were funded again by the federal government, which we're happy about. I just want to make sure that, you know, it's clear that we are doing work.

Mr. Feehan: Let me say thank you, and really I celebrate all of this, and I would like to thank the timer for not . . .

Ms Midbo: Oh, I'm sorry. I apologize.

Mr. Feehan: I noticed they stopped the timer. I think it was very appropriate that they did. I'm very thrilled to hear what you're doing. Thank you.

Ms Midbo: Thank you.

The Chair: Yes. Sometimes, in my opinion as chair, the standing orders are made to be broken, and that was one of those cases. Thank you very much, Kristina, for that and those statements and all your hard work.

We have about three minutes remaining for the government caucus. If there are any further questions, Mr. Orr, you have the floor.

Mr. Orr: I remember a story about the sun standing still, but anyway. That was worth stopping the clock and the sun. I'll focus on just one thought; the time, yeah.

Performance metrics. I was going to ask a series of questions about some of the supporting initiatives, which are all good, but performance metrics address, particularly the first one, the employment initiatives. I guess I'd just like to make a comment. I always struggle with the performance metrics that we receive because in too many cases they focus on means rather than ends. I see – talking about initiatives is great, but that's a focus on means,

not on ends. What I'd really like to see, Minister, are performance metrics that actually talk about, for instance, how many people actually become employed, and are they still employed in five years or 10 years? That would actually tell us that the means or the initiatives are actually achieving the end goal.

I'd like to push that one piece farther, that I'd like to even suggest to you. Across the world the measure of prosperity and success in nations is often reduced to GDP per capita. You can google it, and every country in the world will be listed in half a dozen different sites: what is the GDP per capita? For our Indigenous nations I think it would be extremely useful and an extreme measure of the success of many of the initiatives that we're talking about here if you could actually provide a long-term – and I realize going back is tough. But GDP per capita amongst our Indigenous peoples would be an incredible measure of how these initiatives are actually resulting in the ends that they're meant to produce. I said that in more than one committee: focus on ends rather than means. I know it's easy to focus on means; focus on ends.

Thank you.

Mr. Wilson: Those are great observations. We have been tracking it somewhat through our AIOC programs and our ABIF programs. I think we had – it's in the hundreds, but, you know, it would be nice to get it into the thousands. But that's a great idea, to track it with the GDP. I never thought of that. That's something that we could certainly look at doing in the future and seeing how we're

really helping some of these youth get involved. Through Advanced Education we've got our employment partnerships program that's been really successful. We use that for – it's like a trades type of training, so it might be the start of your apprenticeship. It's a one-year program to get you started in becoming an electrician or working in the heavy construction area or something like that.

Even on the First Nations, like, having a driver's licence: that's huge. I see that all the time, so we've got programs just helping folks get a driver's licence so they can get out and get the jobs. And, you know, I'm happy to say that we're going to have our first service where you get your driver's – what are they called? [interjection] Registration is going to be in Maskwacis. We're going to have one down there, so that's really exciting, to see that starting to move forward.

The Chair: Unfortunately, I will interrupt you, Minister. 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 the committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow morning, March 8, 2023, at 10:15 to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Transportation and Economic Corridors.

Thank you, everyone, for your participation. This meeting is adjourned

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

