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**Official Report
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Tuesday 27 September 2016

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 27 septembre 2016

**Standing Committee on
Estimates**

Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Affaires autochtones

Chair: Cheri DiNovo
Clerk: Eric Rennie

Présidente : Cheri DiNovo
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 27 September 2016

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The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Good morning, everyone. We are now going to resume consideration of vote 2001 of the estimates of the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. There is a total of nine hours and two minutes remaining.

Before we resume consideration of the estimates, if there are any inquiries from the previous meeting that the minister or ministry has responses to, perhaps the information can be distributed by the Clerk at the beginning in order to assist the members with any further questions. Are there any items, Minister?

Hon. David Zimmer: Just an observation: I would hope that the opposition members, in their questions this morning, are not in a caliginous mood.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): That's not an item, but duly noted.

When the committee adjourned last week, the government had five minutes left in their round of questions. Madam Kiwala, the floor is yours.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'm happy to have this last five minutes to wind up some of the conversation that we had the last time we met. I'm still thinking about the treaty-signing ceremony that I had the opportunity to be present for in Chapleau Cree. I think it's something that constituents in our ridings may not understand the significance of, so I wanted to just read into the record a few of the details related to the significance and the scope of that signing ceremony, just so that more people are aware, and then I'll ask you to comment at the end with your reflections on the significance of the event.

As we know, on November 26, 2010, the Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry withdrew approximately 21 square miles or 13,440 acres of land from mineral staking to support the Chapleau Cree First Nation claim negotiations. This was done to ensure that the lands would remain available to settle the claim.

The settlement agreement provides for the transfer from Ontario to Canada of approximately 4,000 hectares or 9,884.2 acres of unpatented crown land, to be set apart as reserve for Chapleau Cree First Nation. The payment by Ontario to the First Nation of \$352,688 has already been paid. The payment by Canada of \$21,468,028 has already been paid as well. Ontario and Canada are being

released from liability for the claim. In addition, Ontario will provide Tembec with up to \$500,000 to construct a new access road to divert existing forestry traffic away from what will become reserve lands.

I'm just wondering if you can expand on the significance of this treaty signing for that region. Do you have any reflections on how the money will be used or where things will go from here for that region?

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you for digging into the details of the Chapleau Cree First Nation treaty land entitlement negotiations. In your set-up to your question, you quite accurately set out what the settlement agreement provides for.

I want to emphasize that it is a settlement and I want to emphasize that it is an agreement. An agreement, of course, requires the consent and approval and indeed the support of all parties to the agreement.

I think the big takeaway here, aside from the details that you quite accurately put on the record, is that after a long period of time and a frank and fulsome and candid set of negotiations, the parties to the negotiation reached this agreement. That's a very good sign of things to come, when parties can sit down in a responsible fashion and a respectful fashion and put their concerns and their hopes and ambitions on the table and come to an agreement on how to realize those ends. That's a very good sign of what we can look forward to in our work on reconciliation with First Nations.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I agree that it certainly sets a very positive tone for the future. Having been on the ground on location during that signing ceremony, taking part in the pipe ceremony was pretty emotional. Having an opportunity to meet many of the partners who were there who had worked so hard on that agreement left an impact—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you, Ms. Kiwala, the time is up.

We now move to Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I guess the first issue I'd like to start with is First Nations housing. I note that it is mainly a federal jurisdiction, but I'm just wondering what role the province plays in it. There's a huge shortage of housing in First Nation communities.

I note that, "The federal government has promised to build just 300 new homes in First Nations communities across Canada this year even though the government

itself acknowledges an immediate need of at least 20,000 homes on reserves.”

I’m reading from an article from the National Post that says, “Crowded, unhealthy living conditions have been one of the main causes identified in youth suicide crises in remote, northern First Nations communities.”

It goes on to say, “An internal assessment this year by Bennett’s”—that would be the federal minister’s—“officials concluded that, by 2031, the housing shortage on reserves will rise to 115,000 units....”

“In order to bring the number of people living in each home on a reserve down to the Canadian average of 2.5 persons per home, an additional 80,000 First Nations homes are needed right now....”

“On top of that, between 41% and 51% of existing homes are in need of repair. That figure was provided over the summer to MPs....”

So it seems to me that it is a crisis. The federal government is just building 300 homes when there are huge, huge numbers that are actually needed. It seems to be the root of a lot of the other problems that are on First Nations. I’m wondering what role, if any, the province has in trying to support improving housing in our First Nation communities?

0910

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you very much for that question. I did read that article in the National Post the other day, and I was quite moved by it.

You are correct. Housing is an important issue in First Nation communities. When I visit First Nation communities—and I’ve visited 83 on-site first visits—a part of the day is set aside at which there is a formal agenda, and inevitably, one of the agenda items is housing. You’re correct that housing is principally a federal responsibility, but Ontario does provide support for off-reserve indigenous housing.

Since 2008, Ontario has committed, through various affordable housing programs, over \$150 million to off-reserve indigenous households in the province of Ontario. Through the 2016 Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy update, Ontario committed to developing a housing strategy in partnership with indigenous organizations to address the unique housing challenges posed by First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples. Ontario will continue this engagement with First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Housing on-reserve, as I have said, is a federal responsibility, and we hope that the federal government will provide stable and sustainable funding for housing both on-reserve and, of course, off-reserve. I am working closely with my federal counterparts on these issues.

We are pleased to learn that the federal government is going to make a significant investment in on-reserve housing. The 2016-17 federal budget recognizes the urgent need. I understand that the federal government is going to invest almost \$555 million over two years, and we expect that a significant portion of that investment to support First Nations will be spent on Ontario First Nations. I do look forward to learning more about the

federal investment and to working with my federal counterpart, Minister Bennett, and other federal ministers, as we work together to improve living conditions both on-reserve and off-reserve.

You might be interested in a couple of important facts. I’ll give you three just to start with. Approximately 17% of the indigenous population in Ontario lives in dwellings that require major repairs, and that’s compared to 6% of the non-indigenous population. That’s from the 2011 National Household Survey. Another interesting fact: Ontario’s northern region experiences the highest rate of dwelling disrepair, with 19% of indigenous dwellings requiring major repairs. That information is also from that National Household Survey that I referenced. The third interesting fact, among many other interesting facts: During the period from 2014 to 2019, Ontario will dedicate \$44.1 million to extend off-reserve indigenous housing. That’s the component of the Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario Program.

While on-reserve is principally a federal responsibility—and we help where we can there—our major responsibility and our major effort, our direct responsibility, is for off-reserve affordable housing across the board. My ministry in particular deals with affordable housing for off-reserve indigenous communities. Why are we doing that? Because it’s clear that access to safe, high-quality and affordable—and I want to emphasize “affordable”—housing is important to any community, family and individual for individual health and social outcomes. I would argue, given some aspects of the dark history here, that it’s doubly important for indigenous communities.

I think that covers my answer to your question.

Mr. Norm Miller: In that article I was referring to, it does mention that in the 2016 federal budget—they plan on \$206 million in 2016. You talked about \$500 million, so that would be—the next year must be roughly \$300 million. That’s only building 300 homes, so it seems to me that we’re losing. Based on this spending, the demand is going up far faster than the effort to build and repair homes on-reserve. I don’t know whether there’s some other approach. Unless a lot of money is somehow found—it seems like we’re not making headway, based on these numbers, anyway. I don’t know what other innovative approaches might be—somehow to find ways of building housing on-reserve. I’m not sure what the answer is there.

I’ll come back to the provincial part. You mentioned that you’re spending \$150 million to assist off-reserve First Nation, Inuit and Métis people. You said it’s in partnership. Can you tell me who it’s in partnership with and how that money is being spent and what kinds of outcomes you hope to accomplish with it?

Hon. David Zimmer: As I’ve said and as you’ve recognized, Ontario does provide support for off-reserve indigenous housing. We have committed over \$150 million to the off-reserve indigenous housing program, through various programs that really have been in the works since 2008.

In addition, as part of the new poverty reduction strategy, Realizing Our Potential, we’ve committed to

updating the 2010 Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy to reflect the particular lessons that we've learned and the new research on the best practices relating to housing and the homeless. We are working on updating that strategy, and in that process, what we've done is specifically sought the input of indigenous peoples and organizations throughout Ontario, to pose the question to them: Help us to identify ways to improve outcomes for indigenous people. We've heard from indigenous communities about the need for a very specific housing strategy to address these unique challenges and the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. There is an Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, which was established through this strategy. They've also made some very specific recommendations on homeless prevention.

Listening to this feedback, we've committed to develop a specific indigenous housing strategy. We are working collaboratively with indigenous partners. It's a dedicated strategy. It will reflect the unique housing and homeless needs of indigenous communities. It will better support their specific housing desires and desired outcomes. The idea is to do this with the best possible advice, and of course, the best possible advice comes from the people who are living in the circumstances that we're trying to address.

We are working closely with the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres. That's an organization that has something in the order of 30 or so friendship centres across Ontario, everywhere from Toronto to Sudbury and Thunder Bay, and smaller communities also. We're working with the OFIFC on indigenous housing—

Mr. Norm Miller: Sorry, OFIFC?

Hon. David Zimmer: Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres.

Mr. Norm Miller: Right.

Hon. David Zimmer: Since I've mentioned those centres, if you ever have a chance to visit one, you should. It's an inspiring visit to see the skill, the competence and the good work that they do. For instance, there's one in Toronto, Barrie, Sudbury, Hamilton—they're all over.

0920

It's particularly helpful and supportive of off-reserve indigenous persons who find themselves in Toronto or Barrie or wherever. They can go to the friendship centre and there's a wide range of supports there, everything that you can imagine: advice about employment, advice about health issues, and just the ability to sit down in a common room with your peers, enjoy a cup of coffee and dialogue and share your experiences about the challenges that you're facing if you're an indigenous person in those communities.

So we are working closely with our indigenous peoples to get the best possible advice. As I say, the best possible advice usually comes from people living the experience of homelessness.

Mr. Norm Miller: Just following up a little bit more: We do have a centre in Parry Sound where I have participated. I've been to their annual general meeting—

Hon. David Zimmer: Would you agree with me that it's an inspiring—

Mr. Norm Miller: —and to other events there as well.

The \$150 million that's being spent, can you help me understand—is it being used for subsidies? Let me understand how it's being spent to assist our indigenous people who are looking for accommodation. Do they just shop on the open market and get a subsidy? How does that money assist them?

Hon. David Zimmer: I'm going to ask the deputy minister to answer that, or refer that to one of the other people from the ministry here who have that technical background. Deputy?

Ms. Deborah Richardson: Good morning. Deborah Richardson, deputy at the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. The Ministry of Housing really houses this portfolio but I do know a little bit. For example, when I was student I actually lived in Gignul Housing out of Ottawa, which is an indigenous housing corporation, and it is through subsidy; it's based on income. There are a number of indigenous housing corporations across Ontario—

Mr. Norm Miller: So do they actually own specific sites?

Ms. Deborah Richardson: Yes, they do. They do own sites.

Mr. Norm Miller: I believe the Métis have some organization that is involved, as well.

Ms. Deborah Richardson: That's right. The OFIFC, the Métis Nation of Ontario—for instance, here in Toronto there's Wigwamen housing and there's Nishnawbe Homes, so there are a number of different indigenous owned and led housing corporations across the province. Essentially, they own the properties and then they are able to enter into lease arrangements that are geared to income. I know some young people who have just graduated, who are just starting, who are able to get a leg up, especially in a place like Toronto where rent is very high. So it is geared to income, and they have properties right across the city.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mr. Miller, you have just under five minutes left.

Mr. Norm Miller: Do they also have some type of program that's a subsidy where the individual could just find an apartment on the open market and get some sort of subsidy towards the cost?

Ms. Deborah Richardson: I'm not aware of that, but I know that there was one initiative at one point that provided support for individuals who wanted to purchase—for young professionals who maybe needed a loan at a discounted rate for a down payment, for example. There were programs like that. I'm sure there are, I'm just not aware of the specifics. You'd really have to follow up with the Ministry of Housing.

Mr. Norm Miller: Is this satisfying the demand that is out there, the money that is being spent?

Hon. David Zimmer: The homelessness housing issue is such that you probably never meet the demand,

whether it's homelessness facing indigenous communities or non-indigenous communities. It's a constant challenge to keep up, but we do our best. We work very closely with indigenous partners, we get the best possible advice, but it's something that we have to constantly keep our eye on and keep trying to develop innovative plans and programs.

Mr. Norm Miller: I assume the largest population is probably the GTA and Thunder Bay.

Hon. David Zimmer: Yes, you're right.

Mr. Norm Miller: Is that where the money is being spent?

Hon. David Zimmer: Well, you concentrate your efforts across the board, but of course it makes logical sense to concentrate the—you'll make more efforts where there's greater need.

One of the challenges, of course, in First Nation homelessness or indigenous homelessness in a city like Toronto is that in some ways it's a mobile population, so it's hard to get a number on. Just yesterday, I was in discussions on this issue, and there is a range of numbers of what the First Nation population in the GTA is. It ranges from a lower number to a much higher number.

Mr. Norm Miller: I know I'm pretty much out of time, so coming back to that bigger question, the huge challenge of the on-reserve population—the numbers just seem staggering when you read this article, assuming it's somewhat correct. Do you have any thoughts about what the solution is to this huge problem on-reserve with this projection of 80,000? Currently, it's at 20,000 homes needed with a projection of that increasing to 80,000 homes. What's the solution?

Hon. David Zimmer: One of the approaches is that the Ontario Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and the ministry itself and the Ontario government is and will continue to be an advocate for Ontario First Nations at the federal table. So I meet regularly with my federal counterparts. I meet informally with my federal counterparts, and I can tell you that everybody at my ministry, from the minister to the deputy minister to the assistant deputy ministers and down the line are pushing our federal colleagues, both politically and as public servants, to address this issue.

Mr. Norm Miller: It would seem to me that one of the solutions might be to try to generally raise income levels of indigenous people on-reserve. That's why I think projects like the Ring of Fire, which of course is in the northwest of Ontario, are so important, to see them get started, because that provides some hope and some possibilities of very good high-paying jobs for indigenous people. I know that in the mining—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm afraid, Mr. Miller, you are now out of time.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'll come back to that in my next—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. Madame Gélinas.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Good morning, Minister. Good morning, everyone.

Hon. David Zimmer: Good morning.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to start this morning with Mattagami First Nation in my riding. As you all know, on March 7, 2015, a CN train derailed and dumped over one million litres of crude oil into the Makami River, and the Mattagami First Nation has been directly affected by this. As you know, they have a big fishery operation—they raise little walleyes—as well as it being part of their traditional territories for hunting, fishing, gathering etc.

All through last summer, CN undertook to clean the mess and remove the one million litres of crude oil from the water. The cleanup was extensive. I was there on-site with members of Mattagami and Gogama numerous times. It was quite a process, and I would say thousands and thousands of litres of crude oil were removed. Then came winter, and everything froze over. As soon as the spring thaw came, it became obvious to everyone that there is still oil in the water.

0930

Since last spring, there have been exchanges between different parts of your government, mainly the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, to tell CN to continue to clean. So the situation is like that.

CN does not dispute the fact that there is still oil in the water. The most recent testing—it just came out yesterday, actually—shows that there is still oil in the river, as well as, now some of it has migrated into beautiful Minisinakwa Lake.

When the derailment happened, people in Mattagami First Nation were promised—as well as everybody else, and I was there—that the site would be cleaned up and brought back to what it was before. Now we're being told that the site will be cleaned up to whatever range is acceptable to the Ministry of the Environment.

CN does not deny that there is still oil in the water; it is clear for everybody to see. I know that you have been there, and members of your ministry had been there originally, but you can throw a rock in the water and oil will come up. You can sit there on a warm day and you see oil in the water. You see dead fish in that water.

So I'm pleading with you, Minister: Do you understand the difference it makes for the people of Mattagami? They were promised that things would be brought back to where they were before. There was no oil in the water before. Now they're being told, "Oh, no, we only had to clean to within the Ministry of the Environment maximum allowable oil in the water."

The mixed emotions within Mattagami First Nation have gone from despair to dismay to now you see more and more anger, and in some people it is turning to rage.

I will stop there and open it up to you as to: Is there anything at all your ministry can do, in light of your mandate letter, in light of the reconciliations that we so desperately need, to pressure the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to tell CN to continue cleaning? Is there anything at all your ministry can offer?

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you for that question. The Mattagami River and the Gogama area up there is one of the pristine places in the province, among many other pristine places.

Shortly after the derailment, I and ministry officials went up there. We had a meeting with Chief Walter Naveau and his council. He and his council walked us through the various issues arising from the derailment. We were then taken on a site tour, led by Chief Naveau and officials from CNR. We walked the site; we did an extensive helicopter tour of the site. We then sat down with Chief Walter Naveau and CN and got into what the next steps were.

I can tell you that the safety and well-being of this community and all other communities is a high priority for our ministry. I know it's a very high priority for Minister Murray over at the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change. Minister Murray is passionate about these environmental issues. When there is an occurrence and we're into remediation and cleanup, he follows these very closely and has made a very, very serious commitment to deal with these issues. As I say, MOECC has been overseeing the cleanup process and working with CN and Chief Walter Naveau.

Before the newly appointed assistant deputy minister Shawn Batise took on this recent role, he was up on the site, and he has some insight and information because he worked on some of these issues following the derailment and the spill. So I'm going to ask the assistant deputy minister—

M^{me} France Gélinas: I don't mean to be impolite, Minister, but I know the ins and outs. It is in my riding; I am there all the time. I know that CN worked really hard last summer. I see that I have 12.5 minutes left, and I don't want those 12.5 minutes to be used to tell me what has been done, because we all know what has been done and we are grateful for the work that CN did last year.

My question is very specific. There is still oil in the water. Everybody agrees that there is still oil in the water. We were told they were going to clean it up so that it's brought back to what it was before. Now, a year later, a new benchmark has been set, and the new benchmark is "as long as it does not exceed the safe level within the Ministry of the Environment." That's not acceptable to the people of Mattagami. That's not acceptable to the people of Gogama. What they were promised is that it was going to be cleaned to what it was before. We are at an impasse. CN is saying, "We don't need to clean anymore because we are within the highest threshold that the Ministry of the Environment will accept." The people of Gogama and Mattagami are saying, "You promised us that you were going to clean it to what it was before." So I'm thankful for what was done in the past, but I'm asking you: What kind of help can you give the people of Mattagami and Gogama so that cleanup continues till it is back to what they were promised, which is back to where it was before?

Hon. David Zimmer: Well, I was trying to be helpful by giving you background as we understand it at the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. But since you categorized your question as a very specific, detailed question about the details of the cleanup, then that question should be properly addressed to the Min-

istry of the Environment and Climate Change, which is, as I have said, working on the details of the cleanup.

If you want some background information that may be helpful to you, I can ask the assistant deputy minister to provide that background information. If you want specific, narrow, technical information, then address those questions to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. Which would you like?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm not interested in technical information. I'm—

Hon. David Zimmer: Well, then—we don't have that technical information. The Ministry of the Environment does that, so go and ask the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's not technical information I want. What I want from your ministry is, what can you offer to help Mattagami First Nation?

Hon. David Zimmer: I was about to offer that answer, and you cut me off and said you didn't want the answer; you wanted specific information. So I directed you to the specific ministry that's doing the specific cleanup. Tell me: Do you want that specific information? Go to the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change. Do you want some background on our approach that we're taking at the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation—because we play a supportive role, but we are not the line technical ministry. Which would you like?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to know the supporting role that you're playing.

Hon. David Zimmer: Okay. Assistant deputy minister Batise.

Mr. Shawn Batise: I'm Shawn Batise, assistant deputy minister for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, negotiations and reconciliation division.

As Minister Zimmer has said, in my previous job, I was present during this catastrophic event. There were actually two of them. Mattagami First Nation is one of the communities that is a member of the Wabun Tribal Council, of which I was the executive director and chairman.

0940

Just a bit of brief history: Minister Zimmer was in fact the first government official on site, which I think the chief very much appreciated; I know I did as the chairman of the tribal council. Deputy Minister Deborah Richardson was there as well. Their support, I think, was critical in bringing CN to bear on the problem and showed, from my perspective at the time, this government's seriousness in dealing with it and the minister's concern in dealing with the issue. It was on a weekend. I called the minister early that Saturday morning, and he was up there, I think, within 24 hours—certainly as soon as he could make the arrangements.

On a go-forward basis, CN, from my perspective, I agree: They said exactly what they were going to do. They put a bunch of money into cleaning up. Did they do a proper job? I'm not so sure. In my continued role at the

tribal council right up until July of this year, it continued to be an issue and continues to be an issue. From my perspective, as now an assistant deputy minister with indigenous relations and reconciliation along with our minister whom we have here, I think we will continue to support Mattagami in trying to move this forward.

It's a concern. I fully intend to continue to reach out to Chief Naveau, with whom I have a very good relationship, to figure out what we can do to make sure that this gets done.

M^{me} France G elinas: This gives me hope. Thank you for your answer, Deputy—much, much appreciated.

If you look at what your ministry can offer, is there any other hope you can give the local people that your ministry will continue to support them? What kind of support can they expect?

Hon. David Zimmer: I will endeavour to see what we can do for you on this issue. But just be assured—you've heard my answers and you've heard the answer from the assistant deputy minister—we are working very, very closely with Chief Naveau and his council. The assistant deputy is working very closely with him. The assistant deputy has previous relationships with the leadership there. Those relationships and that background is proving very helpful. I leave you with the thought that Minister Murray, the Premier and I are committed to working with Chief Walter Naveau to restore the pristine conditions that were there before this tragic event.

M^{me} France G elinas: That's very much appreciated. I can assure you that I will send that part of the transcript to everybody on the ground. They are desperate for help. Right now, they feel that they are in a battle of David and Goliath, and David very seldom wins.

The winter is coming again. The leaves have started to turn. We've had a couple of frosts. The lake will be frozen again and the river will be frozen again, and that's reason to do nothing. Can you give us any hope that action could be taken before the river freezes?

Hon. David Zimmer: That's again a very technical question—how you get it out of the river or what you do, and so on. I would have to invite you to address those questions to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

What I can do with respect to the CN part of the involvement—of course, CN is regulated by the federal government. I will raise this issue with Minister Bennett because she may have some insights into how the federal government might interact with CN on this issue.

All parties want to restore the pristine conditions. The Premier does. She has a strong interest in the environment. I do. Minister Murray does. Everybody in my office does. Indeed, the federal Prime Minister and the various federal ministers are passionately interested in the environment. So we will do everything we can, and we will continue to work with Chief Walter Naveau and his council.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Madame G elinas, four and a half minutes.

M^{me} France G elinas: Thank you.

This is the part that we don't understand. We know the commitment of the Minister of the Environment to clean water, we know the commitment of the government and this entire assembly toward clean water, and yet—a promise was made to clean the water, and now the promise has been downgraded to bring the water back to the highest level of oil you can have in it and still be safe. You see the breakdown between the two. The standards have been substantially lowered from what they were promised was going to take place.

I don't want to be alarmist, but the level of rage growing, all of those mixed feelings, from being scared to being desperate—all of those feelings are going toward anger and rage and talk of civil disobedience. Whenever I go, there's a lineup of people who talk about civil disobedience because they feel that this is the only way that they will be heard.

I don't want to get there, but I know that if there's no action on the ground this fall, it will be really hard to hold those feelings back. The drums are running right now. You can hear them beat. Nothing good will come of that.

You have an opportunity to be proactive. I thank you for what you said. If you can commit to pressuring the Minister of the Environment to tell CN to continue cleaning, they will continue cleaning. It's as easy as that. But this is not being done.

We need your support. Mattagami needs your support. Everybody who cares about clean water needs your support.

Hon. David Zimmer: I've only got four and a half minutes, but am I going to get a chance to answer you or are you going to run the clock out with your speech?

M^{me} France G elinas: Go ahead.

Hon. David Zimmer: The Ministry of the Environment is following this and they sent me the following email: "The derailment cleanup remains a priority for the Ministry of the Environment." We are devoting "significant resources and attention in overseeing CN's response to this incident."

We are working to support "CN's ... resampling of the sediment in the river between the derailment site and the lake to assess whether there remain areas of contamination requiring attention. Under the Environmental Protection Act, CN is obligated to take the necessary steps to remediate the site.

"CN will submit the resampling information to the ministry for review as soon as the analysis and" the technical "interpretation of that data is complete.

"The ministry is currently assessing additional information that was collected by the ministry in early August in response to citizen concerns as well as information ... submitted by CN detailing their remedial efforts.... The ministry will take all information into consideration to determine what further actions may be needed of CN to continue remedial efforts....

"The ministry will continue to oversee the cleanup work to make sure all impacts to the environment are assessed, mitigated and remediated."

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm afraid the time is up now.

We move to the government side. Mr. Potts.

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Sorry, we're moving to Mr. Potts at this time.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Chair. Maybe I could ask the minister if he could finish his thought on that matter.

Hon. David Zimmer: Yes. Just let me add that the assistant deputy minister, Shawn Batise, on my left, and I will be meeting with Mattagami Chief Naveau and his council next week further to this issue. Thank you.

Mr. Arthur Potts: My pleasure. Thank you, Minister, and thank you, staff, for being here.

Chair, I wanted to address my remarks to our government's response to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As we all know, in late December 2015, the final report was issued and there were some 84 recommendations, almost a third of which were directly responsible to the province of Ontario—and the important work that that commission did in identifying the abuses and the personal tragedies of so many families and identifying and looking for a way that all of Canada could come to better understand the history and make that part of our understanding of the history of indigenous people in Canada, and in Ontario particularly.

Then we all sat in the Legislature in late May as the Premier formally apologized. That was an extraordinarily moving ceremony, I think all members of the Legislature would agree, with representatives of First Nations and Métis and Inuit there—a very moving experience.

0950

We released at that time a document, *The Journey Together* document. What's interesting for me is the wording of that: *The Journey Together*. It reminds me of *Gulliver's Travels*. I don't want in any way to make light of this, but I know the minister is extraordinarily well-read and I'm sure he's familiar with the book. One of the central themes in the book *Gulliver's Travels* is how important it is to travel to other places so that you better understand where you are from yourselves.

I had the opportunity this summer to go to Greenland as part of a group with Adventure Canada. We took a boat with 120 guests up the west coast of Greenland and stopped in small communities along the west coast of Greenland, across the Davis Strait and up into Ellesmere Island and Baffin Island, way above the Arctic Circle, where I had the pleasure of meeting numerous Inuit leaders.

A gentleman from Greenland, Jens Olsen, who was raised in residential schools in Greenland under the Danes' control, spoke so glowingly of his experience in residential schools that it took me aback, having participated and seen the experience and better understood the experience of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in our residential school system. Because of the nature of how they did it, he had loving families who took them in and allowed them to keep their culture and to help them get

an education and go to university, all parts where their culture was protected. It was fascinating to talk to him about his experience there.

I also met with an Inuit leader out of Iqaluit, Auju Peter. Aju is an extraordinary woman: Order of Canada, lawyer—Order of Canada for the great work she's done in advancing Inuit cultural issues in the high Arctic. We were on board this boat eating raw seal brain, seal heart and blubber, and participating in cultural ceremonies with her, which helped foster a very deep understanding within me of the challenges that that community faces.

I know that the report we have, *The Journey Together*, is trying to identify what we need to do, and I was hoping the minister could talk a bit about the numbers, the amount of money within your estimates associated with trying to respond to the specific recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in order to try to bridge that gap, both in better understanding, but also in assisting in helping people better cope with the situations that they find. So I would like to put that broader question, but get some specific notions of what we are doing to respond to those recommendations.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Potts, and thank you for the reference to *Gulliver's Travels*. I urge everyone to read Jonathan Swift, the author.

This is the document that was issued last spring: *The Journey Together*. If anyone has not read it, you should read it. The document is Ontario's response to the Truth and Reconciliation report. As you know, there were 94 recommendations in the Truth and Reconciliation report. The Ontario government decided that we would take those 94 recommendations and break them out into themes—clusters of how we would respond. We came up with five themes that address Ontario's part of the Truth and Reconciliation report.

This report goes into detail. It identifies what those themes are, it goes into detail on what the thematic response is, and then puts a dollar figure to what we're going to spend on those themes.

The first theme is "Understanding the Legacy of Residential Schools." That covers some five pages in the report.

The second theme is "Closing Gaps and Removing Barriers." That goes into what we're going to do to lift up the economic well-being and opportunity of First Nations. That covers seven pages.

The third theme is "Creating a Culturally Relevant and Responsive Justice System." That deals with how we are going to work with changes within the justice system to address the Truth and Reconciliation aspects. That covers six pages.

The fourth theme is "Supporting Indigenous Culture." That deals with creating an awareness among non-indigenous peoples to recognize the value and the grandeur of indigenous culture and to help indigenous communities further develop and recover aspects of their lost culture.

The fifth theme is "Reconciling Relations with Indigenous Peoples." That's what we're going to do on an

ongoing basis: specifically address how we reconcile the differences, the tensions, some of the dark history on an ongoing basis. That covers some six pages.

Dealing with some of the amounts of money: On the first theme, we've got \$20 million over three years to address the legacy of residential schools. I can get further detail from the technical people here.

On the second theme, which is closing the gaps, we're committing \$150 million over three years to address these economic development challenges.

On the third theme, dealing with restorative justice, we are setting aside \$45 million over three years to address that. Of particular note, there is another \$200,000 for the expansion of what's known as the Gladue courts. For those of you who don't know what that is, I can speak to you after about that.

With respect to the fourth theme, which is "Supporting Indigenous Culture," we are committing \$30 million over the next three years to support indigenous culture.

On the last theme, "Reconciling Relations with Indigenous Peoples," we are committing about \$5 million over the next three years.

When you add up those totals, that's \$250 million in direct support to address the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. We've chosen to take, as I say, those 94 recommendations and group them into five themes, which I've outlined. I've told you what those themes are and I've told you the dollar amounts attached to them. If you would like some further detail about how those specific amounts are being allocated and spent, I can refer them to—if you will identify yourself for the record. Come up and sit up here. We want more detail. Esther is the numbers person. Introduce yourself for the record.

Ms. Esther Laquer: Good morning. My name is Esther Laquer. I'm the acting chief administrative officer for the ministry.

Hon. David Zimmer: If you have any questions about details of those global amounts that I've referred to, now is your chance.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Yes, actually, Minister, I would. I'd be very interested, particularly in the closing-the-gap portion of the investments and what particular kinds of steps we'll be able to do to assist indigenous people in helping them bring themselves up to standards that we'd all expect and would have thought they had but we now recognize that we need to do a lot more work with.

Ms. Esther Laquer: For the program-level details, I'm going to defer to Alison Pilla, the policy ADM for our ministry. She can absolutely speak to that better than I can.

Regarding the funding specifics, at this point in time the government is still confirming exactly how the funding that has been publicly committed is going to be allocated amongst the various programs in the ministry, so it wouldn't be appropriate to get into those specifics. As soon as they're available, I'm sure the minister and his staff would be happy to share those details.

Regarding progress on closing the gap, I'm going to turn it to Ms. Pilla.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Sure, and before we get there, it's the significant amount of money that has been allocated here that I think reflects the priority and the importance that the Premier and the minister and our government are putting on these issues. Just the fact of the change in your ministerial title is, again, symbolic. But it's important, and I think if we had more detail, that would be much appreciated.

1000

Hon. David Zimmer: Identify yourself for the record, and your responsibilities and so on.

Ms. Alison Pilla: Good morning. I'm Alison Pilla. I'm the assistant deputy minister for strategic policy and planning in the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. All of that fits on my business card.

I think you asked for a little bit more detail about closing the gaps. I think Esther explained that ministries are currently working in various stages on a number of these initiatives. The government has made a number of commitments, and ministries are working with indigenous partners on developing a number of these programs.

In relation to the section on closing the gaps and removing the barriers: This is one of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations' big concerns as we work with other ministries. We work pretty closely with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and others when they're doing their policy and program work to ensure that they include policy and programming for indigenous people specifically, and remove barriers for indigenous people in their programming and policy work.

In addition to that, the response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a great step forward in terms of adding programming for indigenous people in the province.

That particular initiative is looking at a number of different areas. The emphasis there is to improve social, economic and health outcomes for indigenous peoples. The allocation is up to \$150 million over three years. Some of the initiatives there include culturally based suicide prevention strategies for children and youth, and crisis intervention, as needed. This funding is under the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy by our sister ministry, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. It will really support holistic response and prevention teams that will focus on indigenous approaches to suicide prevention. I think we know that that's been an issue, particularly in some northern communities.

In addition, this element of the strategy is looking to work with remote high-needs indigenous communities to identify priorities for children, youth and families. There's a fair amount of youth and family focus in this section of the response. Since 2014, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services has been working with some community partners to develop programs that help indigenous children and youth. This will build on that.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Are we recognizing the importance of food security, the scarcity of nutritional food and

the expense associated with food as part of that? The health outcomes associated with poor eating and poor access to food are obviously very, very significant.

Ms. Alison Pilla: Yes. I think that food security, which is access to reliable, nutritious food at a reasonable cost, is a big issue for many people in the province, but particularly for indigenous people. It's a particular challenge in the north, as many would know. The cost of food in the north, in the northern stores, is an issue. The federal government has a number of programs. I think there is some view that those programs could work better than they do now. The cost of transportation, of course, in the north is a barrier sometimes to access to reasonable-cost nutritious food.

There's a recognition in this government that food security is something that we need to—working with our federal counterparts, at least in the on-reserve setting—think about. There have been a number of initiatives to start to address that. There's a Student Nutrition Program that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services runs. That is available on-reserve as well as off-reserve for kids who are in school. That was expanded a number of years ago.

Food security is important, but it also can be impacted by a number of different factors. I think that the government is also looking at ways of dealing with economic development, as was mentioned earlier as an opportunity, maybe, to ensure that people have the wherewithal to be able to purchase foods that are nutritious. So we have an economic development strategy in the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, including an Aboriginal Economic Development Fund, that helps support economic development.

We've been working with our colleagues in OMAFRA as well about some opportunities that there may be on the agriculture side. There is some support in various communities for local greenhouse initiatives and so on. I think it's a fair point.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I know that Mr. Miller was asking about housing issues. My good friend Adam Vaughan talks at length about the connection between housing and mental illness, housing and suicide, housing and instability, and the cost associated with getting structure materials into the north, and whether the housing we're building is appropriate for the north.

I know that my friend Bill Lishman—Father Goose, the man who trained geese to fly behind his ultralight—has developed a 150-person linear apartment building for the north, which is material made out of concrete. We have much aggregate up there, and all you're bringing in is cement. It becomes almost like a communal-living longhouse concept, living with sustainable energy—wind and solar opportunities.

Looking for new opportunities, is there a piece in the housing component that we could talk to on closing the gap?

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mr. Potts, you have just under three minutes left.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you, Mr. Potts, for that question. I think I largely addressed those in my answers

to Mr. Miller when we had the back-and-forth discussion on the importance of housing issues and the importance of housing on-reserve, which is a federal responsibility, but we as a provincial government work with and apply subtle forms of pressure to the feds to get on with it. But you're right: The living environment, the social context of a housing environment, is so important to the well-being of the family, the parents, and the children. If one doesn't have adequate housing, safe housing and reasonably comfortable housing—a room where you can sit quietly and read a book; where a family can enjoy life together in a comfortable circumstance—that creates pressures on the parents and it creates pressures on the children. That's not good.

I'd like to take a minute because I think we're probably getting to the end of our time. With respect to the document *The Journey Together*, you will recall that the Premier spoke and several indigenous leaders spoke, and there was a survivor of the residential school system who spoke. We were there. His name was Andrew Wesley. I think it fitting to close on what he said on the floor of the Legislature. He said, "Us survivors, we've been to the top of the mountain. On top of the mountain, we were given new fire to talk about our hurts, our pain, our struggle.... We were instructed to be strong. We were instructed not to be ashamed. We were instructed not to be afraid to talk about dehumanization. We were not afraid to talk about the traumatization of our spirits.

"We came down from that mountain, and we're telling you the truth of what happened. We're telling you the truth because we're tired of being hurt. We want to travel with the rest of you in a good way. From that mountain, we gained the strength we needed.

"Many of us went to the various TRC hearings to be able to tell our story, not to be afraid to cry the way we cried when we were abused like little kids, not to be afraid to cry as an adult and as a grandfather."

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Minister, your time is up now.

We now move to Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm going to follow up on the cost of food that was being discussed. I saw a recent article in the *Globe and Mail* with the headline, "Northern Ontario Aboriginal People Spend More than 50% of Income on Food, Report Finds." It goes on to say:

"First Nations families in northern Ontario are spending more than half their income on groceries to meet basic nutritional requirements, according to a new report....

"The average monthly cost for a family of four to purchase the list of items in the northern communities, according to the researchers, is just less than \$1,800. In Toronto, meanwhile, those same items would cost about \$850 a month."

It goes on to talk about what the federal government is doing. "The federal government's attempts to address the issue, through a subsidy program called Nutrition North Canada, have been widely criticized as ineffective—including a 2014 Auditor General's report that raised

doubts on whether subsidies given to retailers were being properly passed on to consumers.”

1010

Obviously, I was talking about housing before. Food is pretty basic to survival, to having any hope in life of being able to go on and be concerned about lots of other things. What role is the province playing in trying to bring about more food security for our indigenous communities?

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you for that question. That’s a particularly poignant issue that you’ve raised. Let me tell you via personal experience how this issue was driven home to me in a way that haunted me for some time thereafter. Even today, when I reflect back on the shock of that, it just makes my hair stand up.

After I was sworn in as the minister, shortly thereafter—within a matter of a week or so—I visited a remote First Nation. For those of you that haven’t been to a remote First Nation, there is something in the community called the government store or sometimes the Northern store. That’s a hardware store and grocery store and general store. That’s the only store.

To give me an idea, the chief who took me on the tour asked me for one of my favourite foods in the south. I said it was X. He said, “All right, now we’re going to walk through the store and we’re going to find that food, if it’s here.”

It was there. “What do you pay for it down in the south?” I said, “It’s around \$6 a unit.” You look at the price tag on this thing: It was three times as much. It was \$17 or \$18 a unit for the same amount of food.

Part two of it is that almost everyone, if not everyone, in that community was at or below the poverty line. Yet their cost of food was two and three times—more likely three times—what it costs in the south. I imagined to myself that people on the poverty line in southern Ontario are struggling to pay \$6 a unit. How on earth do they deal with it in the Far North, where people at that same poverty income level are paying double and triple for the same unit of food?

That question has been in my mind for the last three and a half—close to four—years now. I can tell you that when I visit remote and other northern communities, I try very often to take someone with me—Ms. Thompson from your party has been with me. Sarah Thompson?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Campbell.

Hon. David Zimmer: Sorry. Sarah Campbell has been with me. I’ve taken civil servants from other ministries who have never been to a northern community, and I’ve taken other people because, a picture is worth a thousand words, or seeing is believing. I now adopt that as a part of my tour. If I have someone with me on the plane who has never been, I go into the Northern store. “Pick out your favourite food. What does it cost in the south? We’ll see if we can find it in the store. Look at the cost of it.” In every case, when the person sees the price tag on the food, you can almost hear a pin drop. Then they start to connect the dots. How do people survive?

I just say that because it underscores the importance of the issue to me personally, to the Premier—I’ve been

with her on First Nation visits. She, of course, went many times herself when she was the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. I can tell you that everyone in the ministry, from the deputy minister right down the line, is aware of this difficult, difficult issue that needs to be addressed.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you, Minister. That concludes our time.

Madame Gélinas, you had a point that you wanted to raise?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like a couple of copies of those nifty little books.

Hon. David Zimmer: These?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes.

Interjection: En français?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Both.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Would the rest of the committee like one as well?

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I would ask the minister to provide—

Hon. David Zimmer: Okay. I’m going to ask Blair to make sure that everybody gets copies en français and in English. Would you like this one too? You might as well have this one, Walking Together.

M^{me} France Gélinas: You circulated this before.

Hon. David Zimmer: This one? I did? Okay.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you very much. This committee stands recessed until 3:45 this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1015 to 1555.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Good afternoon. We are now going to resume consideration of vote 2001 of the estimates of the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. There is a total of seven hours and 47 minutes remaining. When the committee recessed this morning, the official opposition had 14 minutes left in their round of questions.

Mr. Miller, the floor is yours.

Mr. Norm Miller: I guess I’ll keep going. This morning, when I asked a question with regard to the cost of food for northern First Nations and indigenous people, I was quoting a recent article noting that northern Ontario aboriginal people spend more than 50% of their income on food. And you, Minister, had talked at length that you recognized this as a problem and talked about your experience in remote communities of going into the Northern store and the sticker shock of looking at the price of things in the Northern store. I’ve done the same when I’ve visited places like Attawapiskat and, out of Ontario, Iqaluit. I as well noted that. In fact, I guess that big tour boat that was just up in Iqaluit—that seemed to be one of the things for folks in the tour boat, going into the food store to see the prices of various items. So you certainly have demonstrated that you recognize that it’s a challenge for these communities—that 50% of their income is being used to pay for food.

I guess the next follow-up is: What is the solution to this challenge? If you want to talk about what possible solutions—if there are solutions—that you see and what role the provincial government might play in trying to

come up with possible solutions, that would be appreciated.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you for that question. As you've said, you were hit with the sticker shock, to use your expression, as was I. When you go there and you go into the Northern store and check the price of things in the Northern store, knowing what you'd pay for them here in the GTA, sticker shock is putting it mildly. It's an enormous challenge for families to just put food on the table, especially when you consider their incomes.

Ontario does have a number of programs and initiatives that are focusing on healthy eating strategies in First Nations communities. What I'd like to do is just walk you through a few of them so you get the sense of what we're trying to do. We have something called the Student Nutrition Program, which provides healthy meals to children in schools across the province, but it includes over 120 educational settings in First Nation communities. That's a pretty good number when you keep in mind that we have 130 First Nation communities in Ontario—that is, 130 that have a land mass; there are three First Nations that don't have a land mass. So we do have the Student Nutrition Program in 120 educational settings in First Nation communities. That does give children access to a healthy diet, and more importantly, a part of the nutrition program is it supports learning, development and healthy attitudes towards healthy foods and everything that that entails.

We also have another program called the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program. I can tell you that it has provided over two millions servings of fresh fruit and vegetables to 36,000 students, including just under 7,000 indigenous students in 192 schools scattered throughout the north: Porcupine, Algoma, Sudbury regions.

Mr. Norm Miller: Do you mind talking a bit more about that, the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program, and how that works? Can you expand a bit on that Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program?

Hon. David Zimmer: The detail of how that actually—

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes, the detail of how it works. And does that affect the remote fly-in communities as well?

1600

Hon. David Zimmer: For the really close details on that program, I'd have to refer you to the Ministry of Health. We coordinate with them, but they in fact provide the delivery, if you will.

Mr. Norm Miller: So just in general then, is it in place for the fly-in communities as well as the northern communities, and is it a subsidy on the cost of it or how does it work?

Hon. David Zimmer: We've got something, in addition to that, called the First Nations Health Action Plan. That's operated by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. They are, I know, expanding access to the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program to a little over 13,000 more indigenous children in the northern com-

munities and—to your question—in the remote communities. By that, I take it to mean the fly-in communities.

In terms of the details of how the program is actually administered on a day-to-day basis, I'd have to get that information from the Ministry of Health, but it is available.

So those are three programs.

Mr. Norm Miller: So if I may, to the Chair, if I could get the information on how that works, I'd be interested to know just the nuts and bolts of how it does actually work, what sort of price, whether it's a subsidy or just how it works.

Hon. David Zimmer: I'll endeavour to do what I can on that with my colleagues at the Ministry of Health. I thought perhaps someone here might have the technical answers, but I have to go over to the Ministry of Health and I'll endeavour to do what I can there.

Mr. Norm Miller: Okay. Thanks.

Hon. David Zimmer: We have a fourth program—and when I say “we,” I mean the government.

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes.

Hon. David Zimmer: The healthy eating and active living program enables 10 aboriginal health access centres to provide culturally appropriate health promotion and—this is very important—chronic disease prevention initiatives to indigenous communities, both on-reserve and off-reserve. That's done in schools and community organizations. They work very closely in the areas of nutrition, healthy eating and physical activity.

The fifth program is the Healthy Kids Community Challenge. That supports 45 communities in Ontario. It specifically includes six indigenous communities. It provides resources to support programs, activities and policies that will promote children's health by focusing on healthy eating and active living.

As a government, we are aware of the connection between diet and health, and we're trying to get the right messages out there, the right skill sets to deal with diet and to see the connection with health. We have the challenge, then, of affordable food, if you will, which we talked about earlier this morning and this afternoon.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Mr. Miller, you have just four or five minutes.

Mr. Norm Miller: Okay. Are there any other things being considered, like for example—and I don't know whether these are even plausible, but like greenhouses in the north, for example. I'm sure, for the remote fly-in communities, just the weight and the fact that you have to fly everything in is a huge cost. That's why the food is so expensive. Or things, for example, like dehydrated food, which is much lighter, so I would think the transportation costs would be substantially reduced. Do you know whether any of those types of things are considered?

Hon. David Zimmer: Yes. Over the past couple of years, since I've been the minister, I've had a couple of initiatives presented to me at the office, which the deputy and I and the relevant assistant deputy ministers and other technical people attend. I recall one proposal that was very interesting, where someone has developed

portable greenhouses which you actually see in Toronto, I understand, on the balconies of condominium high-rises and condominium apartments. I saw the greenhouse; it's sort of the size of a small chesterfield, and it's operated with water and seeds and so forth. The point is, you can grow fresh tomatoes and carrots, vegetables and all that, and the idea was to pilot or test that in First Nation communities.

There were a number of similar ideas that have been presented to us. There are really some innovative ideas going on out there about how to grow and maintain First Nations' own sources of fresh vegetables, fruits and so on.

The dehydrated one—I see what you mean by that. I've not specifically heard of that—

Mr. Norm Miller: It's just coming from my camping trips, where I dehydrate my own food.

Hon. David Zimmer: And your pilot days. I know you're a pilot, so you know the factor of weight, flying to the north.

I said earlier a few times that I've been to 83 First Nations and I've been to most remote fly-ins. Whenever we go up—sometimes we'll charter directly from Toronto; sometimes we fly commercially to Thunder Bay or Sudbury and then charter, and the charters are these small six- or eight-seater planes. We always try to take a couple of the seats out of the back of the plane and fill it up with boxes of fresh fruit—oranges and apples. You have no idea—when the plane lands and we load those into the back of a truck, the word gets out just like that into the community among the kids that a plane has arrived with fresh fruit, there's just a rush and we pass it out.

Mr. Norm Miller: I note from this article that started me thinking about this line of questioning, which says, "Our primary recommendation when it comes to food insecurity is to increase income." I'll come back to that on the next round of questioning because I assume I'm pretty much out of time.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Two minutes.

Mr. Norm Miller: Oh, I have two minutes. Okay.

Again on the food topic, one of the real problems with not eating healthy food, or buying cheaper out of necessity because 50% of your income is going to food, is you're not buying fresh vegetables because they're too expensive. I think that probably contributes to the huge problem of diabetes, for example, in many of the communities. Solving the food problem will probably go a long way toward helping with some of the chronic diseases.

Can you talk a bit about what the government is doing with chronic diseases and specifically diabetes in indigenous communities?

Hon. David Zimmer: I can answer the first part of your question in a general way, but on the last part of your question, where you specifically asked about the diabetes piece, again, that's a Ministry of Health issue. I'm not ducking that, but Dr. Hoskins has got the technical details on how he's responding to the diabetes epidemic.

You're quite correct: Diabetes is an epidemic in the north. I will tell you another anecdote or story that will drive it home. On one of my visits in the remotes, we took someone along with us—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm afraid you're going to have to hold that thought and that story, Minister.

Hon. David Zimmer: It's a good story.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Well, maybe you'll have a chance when it gets to the government side.

We're now moving to the third party. Madame Gélinas.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you. I would like a little bit of clarification on the hydro share announcement specifically for First Nations.

There were two thresholds announced in the announcement. The first one was a threshold specified in the announcement of 15 million shares available to First Nations in Ontario, depending on First Nation participation. That participation is set at 80% of all Ontario First Nations by the end of 2017 in order for the agreement to close.

1610

My first question is, what happens if we have 72%, not 80%?

Hon. David Zimmer: On Hydro One, the financing of it, the mechanics, the percentages and who qualifies and all of that sort of stuff, I do have to direct it to the Minister of Energy, Mr. Thibeault, who's got the answers there. But just by way of a general background to the question, the question is, why did we agree to sell shares of Hydro One to First Nations and how will the shares be sold at a discounted price?

For the actual details of it, you'll have to speak to the Minister of Energy. But having said that, I can tell you that the signing of the political accord between Ontario and the Chiefs of Ontario was a demonstration of our shared commitment to work together to address common priorities and issues as we move down the path of reconciliation—closing the gaps and so on. I talked about that this morning.

I am pleased to say that the Chiefs of Ontario and the Ministry of Energy were able to arrive at an agreement in principle, and it was in response to the First Nations' request for an equity position in the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One. The agreement in principle reflects Ontario's very strong commitment to supporting indigenous communities to shape their own economic future. That's very important: to shape their own economic future.

If ratified—so the arrangements are out there and are out for ratification by the Chiefs of Ontario, by their First Nations. I think that ratification is—

M^{me} France Gélinas: End of 2017.

Hon. David Zimmer: Yes. So that ratification issue is out there by the First Nations. But if it is ratified, the new agreement will provide meaningful opportunities—really meaningful opportunities—for First Nation communities for economic development and wealth creation.

Then the other part of your question is, why were the shares sold at a discounted price? I understand from the Ministry of Energy and others that the province and the chiefs committee on energy—so there is a provincial committee and a chiefs committee on energy—are engaged in ongoing discussion towards agreement. But I think it's important to let the negotiating parties work out the best solution. For any more details, I'd have to refer to the Minister of Energy.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. Just at a very high level: So 80% of First Nations sign on, they get the 15 million shares at a discounted rate, and the revenue from those shares—it would then be up to them to generate economic opportunity? Where does the economic opportunity you talk about come in?

Hon. David Zimmer: Well, again, I'm going to direct that to the Minister of Energy. But having said that, having a significant equity position can only be beneficial to the First Nations. Shares throw off income. Income is revenue. Revenue is good.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay, I follow this. It's quite clear, concise and easy to understand. Has anybody quantified for them? The chiefs are trying to sell this to First Nations. Some First Nations are not that open to the idea, but if you can tell them, "Here's how much money"—has any quantification at all been done for them?

Hon. David Zimmer: Well, this is quite specific. The province and the chiefs committee on energy are working at that level of details. So the question would have to await the outcomes of their negotiations.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. So if 80% of the First Nations—that was one of your thresholds—sign on, do all of them get to benefit?

Hon. David Zimmer: Well, again, that's a matter for the chiefs committee on energy. They're going to decide what they are going to do with their revenues that are generated by that.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Is this a mutual decision between the government and the chiefs, or is this a decision solely for the chiefs to make?

Hon. David Zimmer: That one, you'll have to ask the Minister of Energy.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. So you made this announcement that this was going to be a significant lever. What was the role of your ministry in this announcement, if any?

Hon. David Zimmer: We are a coordinating ministry. We put the parties together and suggest how they might approach each other, sit down and get to a good result. But, at the end of the day, we leave it to the chiefs committee on energy, the Minister of Energy and the technical people to work out those arrangements.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Do you see this particular endeavour as a major effort from your ministry or is it one of many?

Hon. David Zimmer: From the government or from my ministry?

M^{me} France Gélinas: From your ministry.

Hon. David Zimmer: We have a number of ways in which we work with the various ministries, whether it's health, mines, forestry or energy. All of the things that we work on are important. This is an important initiative, this Hydro One arrangement with the First Nations, and we're very proud of our role in it.

M^{me} France Gélinas: All right. Are there any other revenue-sharing arrangements that your ministry is working on in the future, or was this just a one-off?

Hon. David Zimmer: Well, as I referred to this morning, one of the five themes in Ontario's response to the truth and reconciliation report—and that's at page 21 of the report—is titled "Closing Gaps and Removing Barriers." If you read through that, you will see that there are a number of initiatives there.

The title, "Closing Gaps ..."—there is a gap between the First Nations economic well-being and the economic well-being of people living in the south. The broad policy, as the title of the section says, is to close those gaps. In the process of closing the gaps, if we come across barriers to economic development by First Nations in Ontario, we work very hard with First Nations to remove those barriers—and work with the private sector, government and so on.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. So this Hydro One selling of shares is a revenue-sharing agreement between the government and the First Nations. I understand that it is within the broad context of closing the gap, but are there other revenue-sharing agreements?

Hon. David Zimmer: Let me tell you about another initiative, and that's the gaming revenue-sharing. You've heard of the gaming revenue; it's what we refer to as casinos. Your question might well be, "What's the status of the gaming revenue-sharing agreement between the province and the Ontario First Nation Ltd. Partnership?" That's the First Nations entity that we deal with on the gaming revenue. I can tell you that gaming revenue-sharing agreements have really helped to build some strong relationships with First Nations partners. It has provided stable and long-term funding to improve the quality of life for First Nations. Specifically, the Gaming Revenue Sharing and Financial Agreement—that's the formal title—will provide more than \$3 billion over the next 25 years to First Nations in Ontario. The proposed modernization of lottery and gaming is expected to increase those revenues. That modernization process is under way now.

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In accordance to the Gaming Revenue Sharing and Financial Agreement, First Nations receive 1.7% of OLG's aggregate gross revenues. As overall revenues increase, First Nation communities will receive increased financial benefit. We work closely with First Nations to get them in contact with OLG to discuss these issues and concerns related to the OLG modernization process.

Oh, and I can tell you something about our tobacco revenue-sharing. This is a really important issue that I want to address and that you've raised in your question.

First Nations have always asserted that they have a long-standing right to trade in tobacco. Over the years,

robust tobacco economies have developed on some reserves. First Nations need to be able to continue to support their communities in an economic, sustainable way.

A number of First Nation leaders have made it very clear that, in order for progress to be made on tobacco issues, Ontario must support the economic diversification of tobacco economies on reserves toward a more sustainable future for their community.

For example, there are two pilot projects on the tobacco issue. One is with the Mohawk of Akwesasne—that's near the Cornwall area—and the other is with the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, which is near London, Ontario. We are working with First Nation communities to identify strategies for using revenue-sharing agreements to expand economic opportunities beyond just tobacco. This will help to increase local business activity and employment in a variety of industries and will contribute to a more sustainable future for communities.

We are really committed to working with First Nation governments to support diversification—that's key—and sustainable First Nation economies. If we can help to diversify the economies and create stability in economies, that is going to contribute to closing the socio-economic gap, which is referred to in this report as one of our themes of reconciliation with indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Moreover, tobacco revenue-sharing would be linked to the implementation of a First Nation tobacco regulatory regime, pricing on- and off-reserve, and associated compliance and enforcement by those regimes by First Nation revenue-sharing, which would help to offset the assumed economic losses by First Nation communities who participate in these enforcement and compliance efforts.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Madame Gélinas, you have just about five minutes.

Hon. David Zimmer: Our government has made it a priority to engage First Nations in discussing changes that must be made to improve the quality of life on-reserve. First Nation communities are facing a number of socio-economic and structural challenges. I've referred to those, but those two examples—you have three now: You have the Hydro One; you have the gaming piece; and you have the—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Tobacco.

Hon. David Zimmer: The tobacco piece. We are really working with First Nations on these issues.

I just want to say something, while we're on this subject, about resource benefit and resource revenue-sharing opportunities. In Ontario, we are engaging with indigenous partners on approaches to close these gaps and to enhance First Nation participation in the resource sector.

How do we do that? Well, we improve the way that resource benefits are shared—I emphasize “shared”—with indigenous communities. This work will consider how to advance resource-benefit-sharing opportunities,

particularly resource benefit sharing in the forestry and the mining sectors. So there's another one.

Also, MIRR—the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation—is working very closely with the Ministries of Natural Resources and Forestry and Northern Development and Mines to begin exploratory discussions with First Nations. We are continuing those discussions with indigenous partners throughout the fall of 2016, as we sit here.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Okay. If we come back to the original revenue-sharing in my comments that have to do with Hydro One, those revenues will be for all of the others that you've talked about: for gaming, for tobacco. First Nations get those revenues, and they are in sole control as to how they use those revenues. Is the intention of the revenue-sharing agreement, that Hydro One shares the revenue—has it been decided that it will be the same way, that First Nations will get to decide how they spend it?

Hon. David Zimmer: That is being thought through as we speak, but one of the key players here is, as I said, the chiefs committee. That is in discussions with the province about how the benefits that flow from this hydro agreement are going to play out in the broader community.

M^{me} France Gélinas: First Nations are looking at tobacco revenue. There are also laws that are about to change regarding marijuana: Are there any tables that look at First Nations growing, packaging, distributing or selling marijuana through their existing tobacco channels?

Hon. David Zimmer: We have those two pilot projects I referred to—Akwesasne and Chippewas of the Thames—which are dealing with traditional tobacco, if I can use that expression. The issue of medical marijuana is elsewhere—down the road.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Does your ministry have any working tables, any knowledge, any involvement with First Nations who are interested in not only the medical marijuana but the recreational?

Hon. David Zimmer: No. There's a lot of chatter out there in the media about medical marijuana, whether it's in Toronto or in First Nations. People have different views of the medical marijuana issue, and it's premature to comment on the marijuana piece.

M^{me} France Gélinas: So your ministry has no involvement with any First Nations when it comes to those possible economic opportunities?

Hon. David Zimmer: I said that it's premature to talk about the medical marijuana issue.

M^{me} France Gélinas: What if a First Nation is interested in talking about it?

Hon. David Zimmer: It's premature to speculate on—

M^{me} France Gélinas: They're not going to talk to you, obviously. I think I got my answer.

We have the revenue-sharing that is going to be coming down. Your ministry has facilitated the Ministry of Environment and the First Nations to sit down, and

this is where you disappear. The rest of it is all through the Ministry of Energy to figure out who will be included; where the money will go; how it will be done; what if we don't reach 80%; what if some First Nations that are off the grid right now sign off—are they going to be able to sign in if the electrification ever happens and they come in? None of this your ministry is involved with and all of this I ask of the Ministry of Energy.

Hon. David Zimmer: Yes. I can tell you—I expect you know—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): I'm afraid you are out of—

Hon. David Zimmer: —that the Ministry of Energy is next up at the estimates committee.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): There we go. We're over to the government side. Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: A very interesting topic, Minister. I've been paying attention to the conversation going back and forth between you and the members of the committee.

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I want to talk about economic development. Minister, I understand that there is the need for economic development in indigenous communities and for indigenous people. It has been a very important issue and one of the priorities for our government. Indigenous people in Ontario continue to face significant economic disadvantages and are less likely to finish school or have a job. And that's in the context of our government's efforts in creating jobs and encouraging business development across the province.

Major barriers include lack of community-level capacity, limited access to financing and few skills training opportunities. The unemployment rate for First Nations people between the ages of 25 and 64 is approximately three times the Ontario average on-reserve and twice the Ontario average off-reserve, according to the StatsCan's 2011 National Household Survey.

In addition to having a higher unemployment rate than the non-aboriginal population, the aboriginal population in Ontario also has a lower labour force participation rate at 71% as compared to 80% for the non-aboriginal population.

At the same time, there are significant opportunities for economic development with a young and growing indigenous population. This is a sentiment shared by Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day, who, in an editorial published by the *Globe and Mail* in January, argued that indigenous businesses can thrive if they are provided with the right incentives. I'll read you a quote from the editorial:

“As the regional chief of Ontario, I realize that meeting basic human rights such as clean water, health and education is just the beginning of a long journey towards securing our rightful place in Canada. Quality of life investments are critical and long overdue. However, economic investments must also be a top priority. Once our peoples are able to overcome poverty and despair, we must focus on building healthy, prosperous communities.

First Nations must work with the business sector and all levels of government in order to fully participate in the Canadian economy....

“So when we talk about the aboriginal community and aboriginal-owned businesses, there are a lot of ways to support them. Provide the right incentives to take risks, leverage investments with tax credits or provide grants. However, providing the incentives for procurement contracts to promote aboriginal-owned businesses is good for the economy, good for jobs and good for all small businesses, particularly aboriginal-owned businesses.

“By working together—First Nations, governments, business and industry—we will build a strong, prosperous Canada for all.”

I agree with that and I think that's very well said. I understand that there are a number of ways that our government is ready to work with aboriginal partners to see meaningful employment and business development for indigenous people across sectors, especially in the natural resources sector.

Being the PA of advanced education and skills development, I actually had the pleasure of meeting representatives from Resolute Forest, for example. They came forward and talked about their model in providing training opportunities and really harnessing the talents that they see in the indigenous community. I think this is very, very important, and it's right up my alley as well.

Our government has committed substantial resources to mainstream services and programs that support economic development. Our government is moving forward on many fronts to creating initiatives to support business growth and economic development opportunities, and jobs and skills for Ontarians, including indigenous people.

I recall a few years ago our government introducing a new Aboriginal Economic Development Fund to address some of the key barriers to economic development for indigenous communities, including access to financing and skills training. This is a program that is still going on. I saw that you were in the Georgian Bay area earlier this summer to announce funding through the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund for some of the communities there.

My question to you, Minister, and I think it's a very important one, is: How has this Aboriginal Economic Development Fund and other initiatives helped to support economic development for indigenous people and their communities?

Hon. David Zimmer: That is a very good question, because the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund is an initiative that we are very, very proud of. I've spoken about the fund on many occasions, to many groups, both First Nations and non-First-Nations, and at economic development conferences and so on.

Let me tell you about the fund. We are moving forward on a number of these fronts to improve economic opportunities, and to promote economic sustainability for First Nation communities. We have a number of initiatives that aim to do the following: increase First Nations

and Métis communities' participation in mining, forestry, green energy and other areas.

Despite the government's efforts to support economic development through mainstream programs and services, indigenous people continue to face some very significant economic disadvantages. Those disadvantages, or the major barriers, include—and I come back to the reference in this report about removing the barriers.

One of the barriers is a lack of community-level capacity to actually take advantage of an economic opportunity; that is, there may be opportunity there, but the First Nation needs the capacity to deal with that opportunity.

Lack of access to capital is a huge issue—lack of access to capital and equity to participate in an economic opportunity. There may be an opportunity there, but if you haven't got the capital or the equity to be a player, it's hard, if not impossible, to get into the game.

The third barrier that we see is a lack of skills training opportunities, particularly on-reserve, and particularly in remote communities; that is, to get the technical skills to operate the machinery. So you need those technical skills, you need access to capital and equity, and you need the capacity to deal with some of these complex economic development opportunities.

So what do we do about that? To help address some of these key barriers to economic and skills development, the 2014 budget introduced a new—here it comes—Aboriginal Economic Development Fund. We refer to it as the AEDF. We put \$25 million into that over three years. The fund is continuing for another seven years, starting in 2017-18, with an additional investment of \$70 million. So that brings that AEDF, the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund, up to \$95 million.

Here's how it has played out—this is as of August 2016. As of August 2016, AEDF funding has been approved for some 36 projects through AEDF economic diversification grants. Those grants support communities in broadening—and that's a key word here, broadening—their economic base through planning and other activities. There are 11 projects through the AEDF regional partnership grants, which support regional or province-wide projects that improve access to skills training and financing.

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Interestingly enough, and importantly enough, these projects also tie into or contribute to Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. What's the link there? Well, increasing the success and competitiveness of aboriginal-owned businesses and the viability of community-owned projects by improving their access to funding—that's the capital and the equity access point that I made earlier.

By supporting economic diversification planning and implementation of economic development plans at the community level, allowing communities to identify new and emerging areas of economic and employment opportunity—that's a very important piece about the diversification. There are opportunities for First Nations that require them to move to another type or another

substance of economic development, so diversification is a big piece.

The third piece where it ties into the Poverty Reduction Strategy: Improving access to skills training for the First Nation member on the ground, so to speak, will lead to provincially recognized qualifications—and that's a huge issue—for First Nation people, especially those living on-reserve. It's very, very difficult to get those technical qualifications, whether it's plumbing or metalwork or what have you. That skills development is a way that those with skills can lift themselves out of poverty, assuming that there is an economy that they can contribute to, which goes back and ties this in with the access to capital and the skills training and the capacity. There's kind of a gestalt here. The sum of the parts is equal to any of the individual parts of this exercise.

As a part of the AEDF, Ontario is also providing \$15 million over three years to six, and this is the term, aboriginal financial institutions—we refer to those institutions as AFIs—through the AEDF Business and Community Fund stream. That will enhance business support services and provide grants and financing to promising, interesting and likely-to-be-successful First Nation projects, as well as providing start-up and early-stage help in expanding those indigenous businesses in their start-up or formative years.

I can tell you that, in June 2015, the Ontario government announced the launch of an indigenous procurement program—this is important. That builds on the lessons learned from a two-year pilot project. The program encourages ministries across the board to buy from indigenous vendors when procurement opportunities have a benefit or impact on indigenous peoples, involve an indigenous-specific program or policy, or are culturally specific to indigenous people. It also helps to support capacity building and partnership development for indigenous business. So do take note of the indigenous procurement program.

The 2015 budget also committed an additional \$250 million over two years to renew Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy and provide employment and skills development for up to 150,000 youth, a significant number of whom will be indigenous youth.

We're also investing an additional \$13 million over two years for pre-apprenticeship programs to help a potential entry to an apprenticeship program to develop their skill sets and readiness to take on the task and the responsibilities and the discipline and so on that you need to successfully complete an apprenticeship program. We do that through an in-class training session and work placements to give the potential apprentice a flavour, a sense, of what he or she may be getting themselves into, to give them a taste of what it's like to be a skilled apprentice and to complete that program. The additional funding also provides enrichment opportunities for all students from underrepresented groups across the board, with particular emphasis on indigenous young people.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Minister, you have just over four minutes.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you. I can just sum up nicely, then.

The aboriginal community grants program is designed to promote indigenous self-reliance by funding community capital projects that provide a delivery point for community services and business activity. I can tell you that from 2003-15, the aboriginal community grants program provided slightly more than \$34 million to indigenous communities. We've done that through 134 major and minor capital grants and related feasibility studies.

We also have something, the New Relationship Fund which was announced in May 2008, which fulfills a key recommendation of the Ipperwash Inquiry report which said to support indigenous communities and organizations in their participation, consultation and engagement with government and the private sector. The New Relationship Fund supports about 650 projects by indigenous communities and organizations, built around consultation capacity, job creation, business partnerships and economic opportunities.

I'm going to just tell you about one project. This past summer, I was up in the Georgian Bay area and made an announcement: \$740,000 for indigenous economic development in the Georgian Bay area. It was built around Beausoleil First Nation, the Chippewas of Nawash, which is an unceded First Nation, and the Saugeen First Nation. Beausoleil, \$300,000; Chippewas of Nawash, \$300,000; and \$140,000 to Saugeen.

I said at the time, "The Aboriginal Economic Development Fund is helping indigenous ... communities and organizations create, diversify and collaborate. We're excited to see how these grants will help indigenous communities, workers and businesses in the Georgian Bay area have bright and prosperous" economic futures.

The chief of the Nawash said, "The harvesting of fish"—that plan was built around the fishing business—"as a commercial resource has a substantial amount of membership involved as an economic activity. We are now hoping to address capital investment opportunity to move to the next phase of the long-term plan," which is the cold storage and ice flaking equipment for the fish. "Our intention is to work with others to make our fishery a five-star operation and an economic driver" in the First Nation territory. That was Chief Greg Nadjiwon, chief of the Chippewas of Nawash.

The program was well-received and it's effective.

I'm going to ask Hillary to comment further on these programs. She's the assistant deputy minister in charge of the delivery of this.

Mr. Han Dong: Well, before you do that, I just want to make a comment that I can tell, from your explanation, that through this funding program you are really touching upon the lives of many, many indigenous people and providing them a future with skill-training opportunities.

I think, like you said, that access to capital is so important, because with that assurance, you are encouraging and cultivating a generation of innovation—innovative

minds that are coming forward with their skills, their knowledge, their entrepreneurship. I think this is something that we see quite often in non-aboriginal settings. For example, in my riding of Trinity-Spadina—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): And I'm afraid that your time is up, Mr. Dong.

We move to the official opposition. Mr. Miller.

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Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I guess I'll follow up on some of the questions that were just being asked, starting with the program that you were talking about, the aboriginal capital grants program. First of all, what is the total amount of money spent in the aboriginal grants program? Secondly, could you give me some specific examples of what you would consider to be successful outcomes from investments made with that program, where you think it has been a positive benefit in any way you can demonstrate—jobs were created—or what the benefit was from the investment?

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you for that question. I'm going to ask assistant deputy minister Thatcher, who has the delivery details, if you will, of some of these programs that you're interested in.

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: Hi. I'm assistant deputy minister Hillary Thatcher of the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

The Aboriginal Economic Development Fund was initially announced in the 2014 budget, at \$25 million. In 2016, the fund was extended, bringing the total, over 10 years, to \$95 million in investments.

The fund is broken down, as the minister had indicated, into three funding streams: the Business and Community Fund, the Regional Partnership Grant and the Economic Diversification Grant. With that, we've been funding, for three years, \$15 million to six aboriginal financial institutions through the Business and Community Fund. That enables those financial institutions to fund different community members and community indigenous organizations to undertake their initiatives and receive the funding that's needed so they can move forward their projects and programs—

Mr. Norm Miller: So just to pick up a little bit on that: I assume that the \$15 million is going to these aboriginal financial institutions and they, I assume, are lending or granting the money out like a bank, more or less?

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: A combination, yes, of lend and grant.

Mr. Norm Miller: Of grants and loans, then?

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: Yes.

Mr. Norm Miller: And they'd be private businesses of various kinds that they'd be—

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: That they would be loaning and granting them money, yes.

Mr. Norm Miller: Okay.

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: I just wanted to mention also the Regional Partnership Grant, which is another important part of the program. This gets down to the funding of some capacity-building for communities. A really posi-

tive example that we like to refer to, because it has shown a significant amount of results right away, has been an initiative that we did with Wahgoshig First Nation. In 2015-16 they received \$247,000 through the regional partnership stream for their partnership with Northern College training and Primero Mining. With that, they were able to develop the hard-rock mining initiative. This initiative got additional funding in this fiscal for 2016-17 of an additional \$248,000.

With this funding as an example, Wahgoshig First Nation members can earn their Basic Underground Hard Rock Miner Common Core certification. That's a program that's offered to the members not very far from the community. With this partnership, the community members receive support for commuting; it covers their tuition and other types of supports that students might require when they go to school—if you have a young family, caregivers and that type of thing. Since the spring of 2015, when it was launched, we're already seeing an 80% success rate of students who have graduated and have secured jobs in the mining sector.

We're able to demonstrate that through training initiatives that are offered through the Regional Partnership Grant—particularly when you've got a very specific apprenticeship-like training initiative, you can actually see results translate from getting some basic training, right into a job and securing jobs. Jobs in this sector are in the range of \$60,000- to \$100,000-a-year positions in the mining sector.

I know that you're probably all very familiar with statistics. The National Household Survey in 2011 looked at the indigenous peoples of Ontario and compared median incomes for indigenous peoples between the ages of 25 and 64 at \$28,618 compared to non-indigenous peoples at \$39,000 a year. So you can see that when you're doing specific training initiatives where it translates into a job, the outcomes of the program are extremely positive for indigenous populations across Ontario, both First Nations and Métis who are participating in the program.

Mr. Norm Miller: I think that's a very good example, and I would agree that that sounds like money well spent. How many students would that be? Do you have a number of how many? You said 80% were successful in getting a certificate and getting jobs.

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: I don't have the exact number, but that's something we would be able to pull from our records from the reporting back from that community.

Mr. Norm Miller: And I assume there's either a mine or mines close by—that they're getting the jobs at particular mines.

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: That's right.

Mr. Norm Miller: I would agree with you that, especially for the very remote communities, mining is the best hope for a lot of communities because there's great potential, especially in the Far North and the Ring of Fire, for substantial mines. Mining at this time does employ—I believe that 14% of the workforce in mining is indigenous people. That provides that hope, and, as

you just mentioned, they are very good, high-paying jobs. So that's an area where I'm pleased to see the government trying to do things to support indigenous communities.

The program I was asking about initially, the aboriginal capital grants program: Have you got examples of that one as well, or is that a different program than the ones you were just mentioning?

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: It is another program, actually, that I manage through my role as the assistant deputy minister. I can talk to the community capital grants program. It is an application-based program. It was relaunched this fiscal. Traditionally, it supported community economic development centres in First Nation communities.

It's a small program: \$3 million a year is allotted to it. When we relaunched it this year, we've tried to line it up and modernize the program to be an application-based program so that it's competitive, because with \$3 million a year you don't get a lot of infrastructure built but you can get some substantive projects built. We've released it as application-based so it's competitive among all communities. Also, it now lines up with some of the key priorities that our indigenous partners had flagged for us. Primarily in the past, it was focused on more EcDev centres and community centres—

Mr. Norm Miller: Sorry? What centres?

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: This is the capital grants program.

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes. I missed what kind of centres you were saying.

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: It would be more like an economic development centre in the community or a community centre where economic activity could happen, like business planning. It would vary from community to community.

What we've done is, we've opened it up to some other key priority areas for communities. We had a number of communities approach us about funding things like support for daycare enhancements on-reserve, or an elder centre so that elders in the community could stay in their community and have an elders' place, a gathering place, so they could stay in their community.

We've opened it up to additional opportunities so it's not as narrowly scoped as it was in the past. It's open to First Nations and Métis communities across the province. We support things like feasibility studies to ensure that initiatives and projects get that basic feasibility in. In federal funding, there are gaps in terms of funding available for doing basic feasibility and drawings for your infrastructure projects. This program tries to capture that, and then it actually funds up to \$500,000 for an infrastructure project, a building. It also supports retrofitting buildings and, in remote communities, up to \$700,000, recognizing the higher cost of transporting goods up to remote areas.

1700

Mr. Norm Miller: So almost like a municipal program but for the indigenous communities?

Ms. Hillary Thatcher: Yes.

Mr. Norm Miller: Okay. I'm going to go back to what I was asking about at the end of my last time, which was diabetes. Minister, you were about to tell me a good story, you said. I'll let you tell me that story and then I have a couple of questions.

Hon. David Zimmer: Yes. This is a human interest story that paints a very vivid picture of the tragedy of the diabetes situation, especially in the remote north. I've told you that we get into the remote north on a small plane that usually seats six or eight. As often as possible, we will take someone who has not been to a remote, because we believe that seeing is believing. There is a whole lot of awareness work that has to be done among folks who have never been to remote fly-ins. In fact, I would ask this group—I'd be curious—how many sitting around this square have been to a remote fly-in?

Interjections.

Hon. David Zimmer: We'll get the rest of you up there. Anyway, on the plane, we would take someone to show them.

These meetings are always: We arrive. There's a welcoming ceremony, and then we go to the band council office, where there's a prepared agenda. The agenda is worked out in advance with the chief, his council and my ministry. Diabetes is always on the agenda, as are many other items. Then we will conclude with a tour of the community and perhaps something to eat, and then we fly back.

On the tour of the community on this day there was someone riding in the vehicle as we drove around the community on the dirt roads who observed and asked the question, "I noticed almost all of these houses have a ramp to get up to the house. Why is that? Is that because it's easier to go up the ramp in the winter rather than steps in the snow?" Earlier, we had been talking about diabetes at the meeting. The chief, who was in the vehicle, turned and said, "There are ramps there to enable wheelchair access because, for almost every one of these homes with a ramp, the ramp is a sign that there is an amputee living there. The amputee is always—99%—the result of diabetes." It just stopped the person who was with us cold in their tracks. It just drove that point home.

Imagine these communities where the majority of houses have ramps instead of stairs, and that's to accommodate people with missing legs, and the legs are missing because of diabetes.

Mr. Norm Miller: That's an excellent illustration of just how bad it is and how serious a problem it is. Do you have any data suggesting what percentage of Ontario's indigenous people suffer from type 2 diabetes?

Hon. David Zimmer: Give me one second and I'll have that.

Interjection.

Hon. David Zimmer: We at the ministry don't have that percentage data, if you will, or numerical data. That's something where I would be happy to see what I can do with an inquiry to the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Norm Miller: That would be good. Obviously, from the story you were illustrating, it's bad. From

articles I've read, it's essentially epidemic proportions of diabetes.

Hon. David Zimmer: I've been to a small hospital in Red Lake, up in northwestern Ontario, where visiting surgeons come in for a few days from Toronto; I think there were some from Winnipeg, Vancouver, and, interestingly enough, if I remember correctly, a surgeon from London, England. They come in for a few days or a week and basically they do amputations.

Mr. Norm Miller: That is pretty terrible.

Is your ministry co-operating with the Ministry of Health on programs to mitigate the growth of diabetes cases amongst indigenous peoples?

Hon. David Zimmer: Yes. We, for obvious reasons, recognize that improving health care is one of the highest priorities for indigenous communities. Closing the gaps in health outcomes, investing in health care and wellness of indigenous communities, is one of the very, very important steps that we as a province are working on in our journey both for physical healing and emotional healing and reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

Ontario has invested \$222 million over the next three years for the First Nations Health Action Plan. I was with the Minister of Health, Eric Hoskins, I guess last spring. I think we did that announcement in Thunder Bay, at one of the health centres there.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): You have about four minutes left.

Hon. David Zimmer: That \$220 million is being spent over the next three years. That's specific for the First Nations Health Action Plan, to deal with diabetes and other things.

In addition to that, at the end of the three years—so starting in year four—we'll have sustained funding in place in the amount of \$104.5 million, and that will continue on an annual basis over the years to address health inequities, access to health services over the long term, access to culturally appropriate health services. We'll be spending a significant focus on primary care, public health and education promotion—especially in the case of diabetes, diet and lifestyle and so on—seniors' care, hospital services, life promotion and crisis support. It's a historic investment, that \$222 million over three years and then \$104 million a year thereafter on an annual basis.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care provides aboriginal health access centres; the acronym is AHACs. The aboriginal health access centres offer—and this is a very important issue—a blend of traditional indigenous approaches to health care and wellness combined with contemporary primary health care. We will do that all in a culturally appropriate setting.

I can tell you that there are 10 of those aboriginal health access centres, with sites both on-reserve and off-reserve. They are managed directly by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. I have a list of them here: Thunder Bay, Hamilton, Brantford, Fort Frances, Cornwall, Little Current, Sudbury, Owen Sound, London, Kenora, Keewatin. The point is, those community aboriginal health access centres are across the board.

I can provide you with a copy of a document entitled Ontario Aboriginal Diabetes Strategy. We'll see that you get that. You should have a close look at that.

The point I am trying to leave you here with, or the idea, is that we are committed to these issues of indigenous health. We have, I can tell you, over 450 various indigenous health and healing projects and initiatives, covering the range of health care issues and covering the range of geographic locations in this huge province.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): You have about 30 seconds to wrap up, Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: Well, I guess the question is, it sounds like there are lots of programs, but are we making any strides in terms of actually improving outcomes for indigenous people? How are we measuring that?

Hon. David Zimmer: I can tell you, in answer to one of your questions before, the rate of diabetes in indigenous communities is three times the rate in non-indigenous communities. The investments that I've talked about are designed to address that.

Mr. Norm Miller: The key is whether they're working or not.

1710

Hon. David Zimmer: Yes, and we have every reason to believe they are working—

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Okay, that will be about it. Thank you, Mr. Miller.

Moving now to the third party: Madame G  linas.

M^{me} France G  linas: Well, I was not going to go on AHACs, but since you opened it up I'm just going to—

Hon. David Zimmer: I'm sorry, I missed—

M^{me} France G  linas: AHACs—aboriginal health access centres. Your ministry does indigenous relations and reconciliation. A lot of it is to make sure that there are good relations between your ministry and the 10 AHACs. The number one priority of all 10 AHACs is that—they haven't seen a pay increase in eight years. The nurse practitioners, the people who work there, haven't seen a pay increase in eight years. I would like to know if your ministry is aware of that and, in your role in indigenous relations, what you have done to help them.

Hon. David Zimmer: As I said earlier in my answer to Mr. Miller, those 10 AHACs, as you know, are directly managed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. For the specifics and details of the remuneration, pay packages, benefits and so forth I have to direct you to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. But I will let the ministry know that you've raised the issue.

M^{me} France G  linas: I have raised it with them for the last eight years. But I thank you for that.

Just so that I better understand: How high of a crisis does it need to be in a First Nation before it reaches your desk? The fact that nurse practitioners working in AHACs have come here to the front lawn of Queen's Park; they have written to every ministry; they've done everything they can so that they can get a pay raise—because recruiting and retaining qualified nurse practitioners in aboriginal health access centres is really tough when the nurse practitioner down the street makes

\$40,000 or \$20,000 more a year than you do. You are setting them up to fail. How big a crisis does it have to be before your ministry becomes aware and starts to help?

Hon. David Zimmer: As I said, I've been to 83 First Nations, and I'll be doing some more visits in the next while. My commitment and my ambition—I hope I can satisfy it—is to get to all 130 First Nations. Because you're right: When you see what's going on on the ground, it triggers thoughts and reactions.

One of the things we do as a ministry is identify issues and bring them to the attention of other ministries or other sectors, the private sector or whatever. As I said earlier in my answer to your question, I will make your concerns known to the Ministry of Health, who are the direct managers of the 10 AHACs.

M^{me} France G  linas: Much appreciated. I'm sure they will appreciate it also.

If you've never gone to see an aboriginal health access centre, I strongly suggest that you go visit them. They are amazing. If they could recruit and retain a stable workforce you wouldn't see the level of amputations. It's only an unmanaged diabetic who ends up with foot ulcers and amputation. If your diabetes is well managed, then you don't have those complications. A little bit of health promotion and disease prevention goes a long way, and this is what AHACs are all about.

We promote them as a terrific model, and they are, but then we attach an anchor to them by not funding their staff at the same level that everybody else's staff in town is being funded at. In Sudbury, the Shkagamik-Kwe Health Centre is a phenomenal program. It is really, really good. It's one of the 10 AHACs. When a nurse practitioner working at the hospital or working at Pioneer Manor or working at the community care access centre makes \$40,000 more than the nurse practitioners who work so hard with a population that has such high needs and make so much less, you can see where it falls apart.

Hon. David Zimmer: I come from, on my mother's side of the family, a family of nurses. There were nine daughters, and they all became nurses but one. So I've got a spot in my mind for the opinion of nurses. I can tell you, on these visits that I've told you about, the 83—and I've just gone through the list of the 10 AHACs; I think I'm missing one—I always make a point of getting to the nursing station on-reserve, which is apart, separate from the AHAC. I make a point of getting to the AHACs and the health centres. The first person that I try to speak to is the resident nurse or the nurse on duty, because they're in the trenches and seeing it on a day-to-day, an hour-to-hour basis. I get some of my best information, constructive information and helpful information—and ringing alarm bells too—from the nurses who are there on a day-to-day basis, dealing with patients as they're coming in the door.

M^{me} France G  linas: I can guarantee you that you can walk into any one of the 10 AHACs in Ontario, talk to any nurse practitioners and they will tell you the number one priority is that they want pay equity with every other nurse practitioner who doesn't work for First Nations. Why is it that if you are a nurse practitioner and

have the exact same qualifications, knowledge and skills but you happen to work for a First Nation, we ask you to work for less? Can you see something so drastically against anything that talks to reconciliation when we've allowed this to go on for eight years? This is what we have in Ontario right now. You can go see any of them. They will tell you they want equal pay for equal work, and they want the same pension plan that everybody else has.

But I didn't want to talk about AHACs; I just wanted to help my colleague here.

I want to come back to Wahnapiatae First Nation. You and I talked about this in the spring. You had the opportunity to go to Wahnapiatae First Nation, a wonderful, wonderful, tiny, weeny, one-kilometre-square First Nation that should be in my riding but is in the riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane, three ridings away from where they are, an error made by somebody in Toronto who didn't think that anybody lived there. But a First Nation was there, and they were put in the wrong riding.

You and I have had this conversation. I know that you went and met with the chief through the summer, that they raised this issue; and I just wanted to ask again, are you willing to support that Wahnapiatae First Nation be moved into the riding of Nickel Belt rather than the riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane, which is 400 kilometres away?

Hon. David Zimmer: I am aware of the issue. As you know, Minister Thibeault, now the Minister of Energy, when he was the parliamentary assistant, before he became the minister—he and I went and visited Wahnapiatae. Again, we had the welcoming. We worked through the planned agenda. That was on the agenda. We had a lovely tour of Wahnapiatae. We saw some of the paleogeographics on the rocks. I know that you've got a private member's bill to adjust those boundary lines. I'm just not sure where it is in the system, but I know it's there.

M^{me} France Gélinas: No, it's not. We prorogued, remember? Everything's gone.

Hon. David Zimmer: It's not one of the ones you're reintroducing?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Everything's gone.

Hon. David Zimmer: So I do understand the concerns of Wahnapiatae First Nation on this riding boundary issue. As I said, I was at Wahnapiatae earlier this year with Chief Roque and his community, along with—as he then was—parliamentary assistant Thibeault. When it comes to issues like this, we are always open to consultation with First Nation partners to work out a solution to the challenges they face. We respect the aboriginal and treaty rights as recognized and confirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and we are committed to meeting the province's constitutional and other obligations. We do want to consult with the crown and we want to see consultations with the crown and First Nations to strengthen these relationships.

1720

Specifically to your question about amending the Electoral Boundaries Act, we believe that it would be inappropriate to selectively change electoral boundaries.

Having said that, we are open to discussions surrounding how best to represent the people of Ontario in the electoral process, in particular the Wahnapiatae First Nation.

There is some concern—I want to come back to this selective changing of boundaries—that if one change to the northern boundary is made, then other possible changes will also have to be considered. There could be many examples similar to the one that you've raised as the member for Nickel Belt, which you brought to our attention. The issue is, to change one boundary for one riding without having the opportunity to properly consult with the other areas that may also want to change would not be fair to the collective of ridings, if you will.

Further changes to Ontario's provincial electoral boundaries could be considered in the future, based on population shifts, growth and other factors. We remain open to having this discussion.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Population growth and shifts—those don't happen in northern Ontario. You're talking about a tiny, weeny, little First Nations community, one kilometre square. They're never going to grow big enough—100,000—so that they become their own riding.

What you're offering is, again, a made-in-the-south—in Toronto and in the GTA, and sure, the population is such that it warrants a whole bunch of changes. We have just made 27 such changes. But that doesn't apply to Wahnapiatae. Wahnapiatae is 36 families.

Hon. David Zimmer: I tried to give you a background answer about the challenges in changing and adjusting boundaries, keeping in mind that we've got 107 ridings in Ontario that have to be looked after or dealt with. But when it comes down to the detail of your request or suggestion, that's something that the Ministry of the Attorney General has to deal with. The delineation of electoral boundaries is something that the Minister of the Attorney General—Minister Naqvi—has responsibility for. I'd be happy to make you—

M^{me} France Gélinas: I realize which ministry the responsibility lies with, but chief after chief, band council after band council for the last 13 have been asking your government to do this change. They come to you as the minister responsible for reconciliation, the minister responsible for relationships with First Nations, to say: "Will you help us?" So is the answer yes, you will help them achieve what, for the past 13 years, the chiefs and councils have been asking this government to do, or no?

Hon. David Zimmer: That's one of the reasons why I went to Wahnapiatae First Nation, accompanied by then parliamentary assistant Thibeault—now Minister Thibeault—because we had heard about a number of issues at Wahnapiatae, this being one of them. I wanted to see for myself. Chief Roque explained the situation with the aid of maps and a tour in his vehicle, so I am aware of the issue and I will make your concerns known again to the Attorney General.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Madame Gélinas, you have five minutes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: So I can report back to Wahnapiatae that you will make their concern known to the ministry with the view of supporting their request?

Hon. David Zimmer: The responsibility for the delineation of electoral boundaries is the responsibility of the Attorney General. In my general answer to your question the first time around, I outlined the challenges with respect to the other 107 ridings and so on. I will make your concerns known to the Attorney General.

M^{me} France G elinas: They are not my concerns; they are the concerns—

Hon. David Zimmer: I will make the concerns about this issue known to the Attorney General.

M^{me} France G elinas: Okay. With the view that you support their position?

Hon. David Zimmer: I will make the concerns known to the Attorney General. As I've said earlier, the issue is selectivity of particular adjustments to particular riding boundaries.

M^{me} France G elinas: But I'm not asking you to—first of all, we have written to every single First Nation to ask them, "Are any of you in the wrong riding?" The answer is no. All of them are quite happy with where they are, except one: Wahnapi ae First Nation. You are the minister responsible for indigenous—the title has changed—aboriginal affairs—

Hon. David Zimmer: Ministry of Indigenous Relations—

M^{me} France G elinas: —and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: —and Reconciliation, with a big emphasis on "relations" and with a big emphasis on "reconciliation." That's one of the reasons, even before we changed the name to the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, that I went to Wahnapi ae to understand the First Nation, to get an on-site briefing. I've done that 83 times with other First Nations. I will make the concerns known to the Attorney General.

M^{me} France G elinas: With your support for Wahnapi ae?

Hon. David Zimmer: I will make your concerns known to the Attorney General and I will do that in a fair and objective way.

M^{me} France G elinas: Okay, so what will you say to the ministry?

Hon. David Zimmer: Ministerial conversations are privileged.

M^{me} France G elinas: I think that's a fancy way to say no, that you're not going to support Wahnapi ae. You realize that all of this is on record. That record is going to be shared with them.

Hon. David Zimmer: I know, and you have a political—

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Excuse me, just for a second. Yes, Ms. Kiwala?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'd like to make a point of order: I'm just not sure where electoral boundaries relate to estimates. It seems that the conversation is going a little bit off track.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Duly noted. Back to Madame G elinas.

M^{me} France G elinas: The Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation: What a good opportunity to do indigenous relations and reconciliation—than to support them in those efforts that they have put forward unsuccessfully for the last 13 years by putting on the record that you will go talk to the Attorney General and support their case that they've pleaded to you, that they've pleaded to me. That's what I was after.

Hon. David Zimmer: And I've said that I went to Wahnapi ae to understand the issue. I will make your concerns known to the Attorney General, and I will make the concerns of Chief Roque known to the Attorney General.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): You have about a minute and 10 seconds to wrap up.

M^{me} France G elinas: A minute and 10 seconds?

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Five seconds now.

M^{me} France G elinas: No, all of my others are way too big for that. I'll let it go.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Okay. Moving over to the government side now: Mr. Dickson.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you, Chair DiNovo. Through you to Mr. Zimmer and the senior colleagues who are with him today, I'm going to provide a little bit of dialogue on treaties and ask a particular question. Before I do, just in a lighter vein if I could, because I know there's been a great conversation here about health—and we'll leave it with the minister if he has time later on in the presentation, because I know he was really our health saviour one day. The very first time we flew to, I believe it was Sioux Lookout, where you land and then you drive up the hill, the plane was frozen, and we couldn't get out, so we needed someone small to use as a battering ram to knock out the rear window. Then a few of the smaller people could get out and they could put the steam to the large door. Then everyone was able to get out, because no one was getting out without that happening.

1730

Minister Zimmer, we know that treaties were foundational for the development of this country and continue to inform how we all live and work together in Ontario. I've heard that Ontario has a long history of treaties that is unique for the number and variety, with 46 treaties and land purchases that cover Ontario. They are solemn agreements to live together on this land through the formal exchange of promises that create rights and responsibilities for Canada, Ontario and, for sure, First Nations.

Both the Ipperwash Inquiry—and you might recollect later on down the road that it was the Deputy Premier at that time, Gerry Phillips—and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Indian residential schools highlighted the need for public awareness of our shared history in order to support reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians.

I recall that on May 30, the same day that the Premier had her historic statement of reconciliation with indigenous peoples in the Legislature, legislation was tabled to

declare the first week of November as Treaties Recognition Week.

Ontario's 2014 budget announced that the province is moving forward with a new treaty strategy, including funding of \$7.9 million over three years. The strategy includes a treaty education and public awareness campaign to raise awareness of treaty and aboriginal rights and meaningful discussions with indigenous communities on treaty relationships. It seems clear that Ontario is committed to working in partnership with First Nations and other indigenous partners to ensure that our treaty relationship is a modern and mutually beneficial one.

My question to you, Mr. Minister, is: Can you elaborate on what Ontario is doing to revitalize the treaty relationship?

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you for that question. I do remember that trip, when I, with my particular stature, was able to rescue you and—as he then was—parliamentary assistant Charles Sousa, as we climbed out on the wing through a window of a very small airplane and then leapt to the ground.

Your question is about the treaty relationship. You have heard, I'm sure, many times from the political leadership of Queen's Park and the political leadership of First Nations the expression, "We Are All Treaty People." That is not an empty expression. It's pregnant with meaning and responsibility. What does that term, "We Are All Treaty People," mean? That's the gist of your question.

Just by way of background, how did we get to this position where we, both First Nation and non-First Nation, now identify as treaty peoples, that we are all treaty peoples? Ontario has a long history of treaties, and it is unique for the number and variety of treaties between First Nations and the crown. The treaties had been negotiated between the years 1701 and 1923. There are 46 treaties and land purchases that cover Ontario.

The treaties were negotiated for a variety of purposes, intentions and terms, including military and trade alliances and land purchases, combined with gifts, the creation of reserves, the payment of annuities or some combination of all of these. Often included in the terms of the treaty was the protection of hunting, fishing and trapping rights on lands—and here's the expression—"not taken up by the crown."

Although they have been signed by previous generations going all the way to 1701, historic treaties continue to be as relevant today as they were at the time they were signed, and many, if not most, Ontarians do not realize that they are inevitably living in an area covered by a treaty.

As I said, there are 46 treaties in Ontario covering most of Ontario, and a treaty is really a contract, if you will, entered into by the parties. So 250 years ago, the then British crown negotiated a treaty with local First Nations and the treaty essentially said, "All right. We, the crown, this is what we'll do, and we promise wampum belts, symbols of these commitments." The First Nation, "All right. You're going to do this, crown, and we'll do

thus and thus and thus." There was an arrangement, a treaty, a contractual arrangement.

First Nation partners have expressed that they would like to reintroduce the principles of common prosperity, mutual support and coexisting, principles that flowed from the two-row wampum, the covenant change and the Treaty of Niagara, which is one of the first in 1763—King George III. There was the Treaty of Niagara. There was also the Royal Proclamation in which the British crown and what's now Canada set out their approach to the relationship with First Nations and then it was incorporated. There was the Treaty of Niagara and a host of other treaties that I've referenced.

Since the signing of treaties, though—here's the problem—a lot has happened to erode the relationship between First Nation leadership and the crown and to erode what was the intent of the treaties. We are recognizing that we have to get back to the respective obligations in these original treaties. It's a matter of a contract, if you will.

There are many historical examples when crown governments, including Ontario, did not take treaty obligations into account when they were making decisions affecting First Nations people after the crown had entered into the treaty. These decisions created a strain on our relationship. The decisions communicated a lack of respect to First Nations and, in turn, some of these decisions led to litigation and court rulings that have considerably changed the way governments conduct themselves in relation to First Nations.

In the last generation or two, there's a new generation of First Nation leadership, young lawyers, smart young First Nation lawyers, business persons and others, who sat down at a very practical level and figured out, "There's something wrong with what's going on between our First Nation and the crown. That's not the way it's supposed to be." You know what they did? They did a simple thing: digging out the treaty, reading it through, understanding it, analyzing it and essentially going back to the crown, the government, and saying, "Hold on here. The treaty said thus and thus. That's not happening, and it should be happening."

That's sort of where we are now. That's the basis of a lot of the litigation to recognize and, indeed, enforce the original treaty document and the obligations and responsibilities therein.

Treaties are a foundation of the crown's relationship with indigenous partners. We need to work together to define and refine these relationships and how we live together. As modern treaties and other agreements are negotiated between indigenous partners and the crown, and as new case law is made by the courts—several times a year there's an important case that comes out of the Supreme Court or other courts in the country. As this new case law is made by the courts and as new understandings are reached among the partners, we've become more focused on the need to reconcile our respective understandings of these treaty obligations.

1740

How do we go about revitalizing the treaty relationship? I can tell you a very important step was in August 2015. Ontario signed a document entitled, the Political Accord. The Political Accord committed the province and the First Nations to discuss issues of common interest, including treaty relationships: What do treaties mean? How do we honour treaties? How do we live within the meaning of treaties and so on?

In November 2015, an example of Ontario revitalizing the treaty relationship was demonstrated by the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Mushkegowuk tribal council and its member communities. Through that memorandum of understanding, Ontario and the Mushkegowuk tribal council agreed to discuss and address mutually identified areas of interest through a treaty round-table process. This was the first process that was established subsequent to the Political Accord and pursuant to the Political Accord.

It's through these respectful and meaningful dialogues that we will continue to work with indigenous partners to revitalize our treaty relationships.

Here are a couple of examples of things that we've done: Ontario launched the New Relationship Fund. I referenced that this morning. Thus far, the fund has helped almost 200 First Nation and Métis communities and organizations to engage in consultation with governments, industry and the private sector on resource-based economic development activities.

We've worked on the modernization of the Mining Act in 2009. It's the first legislation in Ontario that embeds consultation principles related to the established asserted treaty and aboriginal rights. So they've gone back, looked at the treaty, looked at the obligations and responsibilities and said, "All right. This is how those obligations and responsibilities will play out in the context of the consultation process," for instance, with the mining sector and other sectors.

The government also signed a historic regional framework agreement with the Matawa First Nations for negotiations on sustainably developing the Ring of Fire. So the Matawa tribal council is a tribal council consisting of nine First Nations that are essentially in what we know as the Ring of Fire area in northern Ontario.

We recently extended the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund that I referenced earlier this morning. That works to ensure that indigenous communities can create economic development and diversification opportunities.

We are very committed to restoring and getting back to a good place in a good way with the treaties, understanding what the intent was at the time and the obligations of the respective parties.

For that reason and in that furtherance of that initiative, the government—we've committed to something that we refer to as the treaty strategy. What is the treaty strategy? The treaty strategy is first going to promote public awareness about treaties. I will tell you a story, an anecdote that will drive the point home. Some months

after I became the minister, I was in my office—and on the wall I have a large map of Ontario, twice the size of that flat screen, with all the treaties marked on the map, colour-coded and with the date of the treaties. They range from the late- and mid-18th century through to 1923. In fact, there was a 1929 adhesion, as it's referred to, to Treaty 9, which is the Far North. There was a man sitting in my office—middle-aged, professional, not First Nation. He was speaking to me on another matter. His eye fell on the map and he asked what it was. I explained the treaties and the colour code and that all over Ontario were treaty peoples. He was an educated person, from southern Ontario, and he leaned over said, "You know, Minister, I had no idea that there were 46 treaties." I told him there were 133 First Nations. He said, "I had no idea. I knew there was a First Nation in Cornwall"—I can't remember the name he said—"I knew there was one in Rama, the casino, and I knew about the one up at Six Nations, in Brantford, and I think there's something in London." That was his extent.

So I walked him through the map. He was so taken aback by his—and I use the word in its technical sense, not in the pejorative sense—ignorance that he asked if I would give him a map, which I did. That then triggered the idea that if he doesn't know, there must be huge numbers of people who don't know. So I had a talk with the Minister of Education, a talk with the Premier, and we came up with the idea of sending out this treaty map to all 5,200 elementary and high schools in Ontario, with an instruction to the school to post it in a prominent place and to conduct a series of talks and lectures around the treaty map to make the kids aware.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Minister, you have just over two minutes left.

Hon. David Zimmer: We did the first exercise of unveiling that map. I exercised some ministerial prerogative and did it at a school in Willowdale. We had an elder from Mississaugas of the New Credit—this area was traditional territory—who explained treaties generally, how they worked in Ontario, how the Mississaugas of the New Credit—that the GTA was their traditional territory. We are since, on print on that map, up to 11,000 and something now, I think, Deputy?

Interjection: Yes.

Hon. David Zimmer: There's a huge demand. That's a good thing, because people did not know about treaties, they did not know about 133 First Nations, and there's an appetite—and that's a good sign—to understand these issues. That goes to awareness. Just ask yourself. Even in the last couple of years, I would expect that everybody around this table has an enhanced, a greater awareness of First Nations and treaties and First Nation rights and so on than you probably had just a couple of years ago. That's a good thing.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): You have about a minute and a half, if you would still like to take it.

Hon. David Zimmer: Ah, yes.

Supporting and promoting our treaty awareness initiatives, we've got activities going on, really, across the

province. In Thunder Bay, for instance, we have a Walk a Mile project. It's a film series that fosters dialogue among the viewers. They see a movie and then they can sit down and talk about it and ask questions about treaties and treaty relationships.

The Anishinabek Nation's We Are All Treaty People teacher kit: It's a learning resource that's connected with the Ontario school curriculum, grades 1 to 8. It's got teacher guidebooks, maps and DVDs, and it's got an 800-piece Treaty of Fort Niagara Lego wampum belt. They

can put it together. I've seen the children doing that. It triggers a huge amount of interest.

In Willowdale, in the school I told you about where we did the first treaty map, slightly more than half of the children at that session were recent immigrants to Canada. They were deeply interested in this history.

The Chair (Ms. Cheri DiNovo): Thank you. Bells are ringing; there's a vote. So we stand adjourned, then, until tomorrow afternoon at 3:45.

The committee adjourned at 1749.

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