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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

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des débats
(Hansard)**

E-43

**Standing Committee on
Estimates**

Ministry of Energy,
Northern Development
and Mines

Ministry of Indigenous
Affairs

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Thursday 17 June 2021

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Énergie,
du Développement du Nord
et des Mines

Ministère des Affaires
autochtones

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Jeudi 17 juin 2021

Chair: Peter Tabuns
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Peter Tabuns
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Thursday 17 June 2021

Jeudi 17 juin 2021

The committee met at 0900 in room 151 and by video conference.

MINISTRY OF ENERGY, NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT AND MINES

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Good morning, everyone. We're going to resume consideration of vote 2201 of the estimates of the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines. There is now a total of one hour and one minute remaining for review of these estimates.

Standing order 69(a.1) allots 15 minutes to the independent member of the committee. They will have the opportunity to use this time today if they wish.

When the committee recessed yesterday, the official opposition had 10 minutes and 20 seconds remaining. I'm assuming, MPP Monteith-Farrell, you have the floor? It's all yours.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Good morning, everyone. I am raring to go here.

I had some discussions last night with some people in the mining industry. They commented on how they are talking to the minister but wanted an opportunity to remind him that they felt there was some progress in the permitting process but it seems to, in some cases, be bogged down. That was the message they had and wanted passed on to the minister today. So I just wanted to start out that way.

This might take more than one rotation, but I know the minister stated yesterday that he was very excited about the changes to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, and that they initially took a pause and then they looked at re-vamping the program and the focus of the corporation on having different mandates, different program titles. There's the Community Enhancement Program, with a few things under that; the Cultural Supports Program; the Invest North Program; and the People and Talent Program. I was just wanting to explore this a bit more, some on the financial side but some on the philosophy side of this. How did the ministry come to these focus areas in providing that strategic mandate? What will you accomplish in those specific—and I'd like it for each program area.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Good morning. I'm sorry; I spilled hot coffee all over my hand on the way down here, so my hand hurts like crazy.

Judith, I appreciate your engaging the mining sector, as we do every day of our lives. You probably found a needle

in the haystack, and you probably found what we find all the time: good, hard-working mining people who face continual challenges. They're not all challenges born from the province of Ontario, I can assure you of that, and we deploy, as I said yesterday, really effective teams to address them. If you could just forward me the names of those miners you spoke to and their specific issues, I can assure you, they will be dealt with more expeditiously than you could imagine, okay?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right. Thank you.

Hon. Greg Rickford: We're lucky to find them. I have no doubt that they were in Thunder Bay, but it's good that you spoke to them. Thank you.

With respect to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, let me just say this: This corporation in general has had, over the course of time, a tremendous opportunity to serve the north and to define over the course of time what constitutes heritage. It's a bit of a misnomer, isn't it? Because there are streams in the new program and in the old one that don't necessarily speak to our heritage.

The existential question would be, "What does northern Ontario heritage mean?" Should the resources there, to the tune of \$100 million—more importantly, \$125 million, if you account for the fact that we put \$26,000 in NORP and have announced an additional \$25 million for the next two years. Should we focus on things that matter to our community? I don't want to be redundant—I'll get the hand for sure—but to your question and to the question of Mike Mantha yesterday around what kinds of things we can invest in in communities to keep people there, to keep young people, younger families with their kids as they grow up, perhaps even in the case of Kirkland Lake, how to do that—I've asked myself this question.

I used to run FedNor. FedNor didn't have any attachment, necessarily, to what mattered to small towns and cities across northern Ontario, but the heritage fund, as it was laid out, attempted to do that. It also attempted to ensure that it was funding projects and businesses that represented the future of northern Ontario, that represented activities that maybe from a heritage or historical perspective didn't go on but were doing important things.

Yesterday, somebody mentioned Letterkenny and other TV and film pieces, and I was all for that, Judith. To the extent that we could support film production certainly, at the very least, at Canadore College in North Bay and the work they're doing in Sudbury, of particular note Science North, I was all game. I used to tease Guy Labine. He's a

close friend of mine. When I was a FedNor minister—this is going to go on the public record—I said to him, “Guy, if you don’t change, you don’t start offering things to the rest of northern Ontario, I’m going to apply for a name change. I’m going to call it Sudbury North, because the only people who get to see what’s going on here are people who live in Sudbury and anybody who visits Sudbury.” I live closer to Calgary than I do Sudbury, Judith, and you know that. Why wouldn’t I just go see dinosaurs in Drumheller as opposed to making my way over to Science North?

Science North got it. Very quickly, they started to spread across northern Ontario. That’s why now with their funding you see them in your city of Thunder Bay. We see assets here in Kenora. They’re running Science North camps in Kenora, in North Bay and other towns across the region because Guy took that seriously. That program is now looking at expanding its physical infrastructure to have some permanent homes across the north. I’ve got a pretty good feeling that it makes perfect sense that Thunder Bay might be one of those destinations.

So I hope you’ll join me when we stand in the Legislature to financially support these incredible opportunities, because they’re making a difference in the lives of children. My children, Judith, are going to Science North camp in Kenora. I don’t have to send them to Sudbury. I’m not sure my wife would let that happen anyway because they’re not old enough, but that’s—if you want to stop me, go right ahead.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I just wanted to clarify, because my question was about each program area. I think you mentioned people and talent. I would assume the film industry was supported from there. When you’re talking about Science North, is that community enhancement? Is that where they get it from?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Well, I was using an example—

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: They get money from FedNor, right?

Hon. Greg Rickford: They do, and I was going to cover that off, Judith. This is not a simple answer. I’m about to go through each and every program, but these examples are important.

There are also a couple of other things I have to say about it before I talk to the other programs. First of all, as the former minister of FedNor, we asked ourselves questions about how we could most effectively stack the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund and FedNor, potentially with other programs, both within the provincial government and the federal government to help proponents with what they got. There’s one important element of it.

The second, Judith—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two minutes left.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Oh, gosh. I’ve done Judith wrong here, but there’s just too much.

The second major problem, Judith, was the disparity in some regions of how many resources they actually get. I track this every business quarter to try and understand which regions, political ridings, so that one day my goal

can be to make them all fair across the region. What were the structural barriers? In short, if I get another chance, maybe I’ll ask one of my colleagues to ask me more about this so I can finish your answer. Do you get another turn?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes, I get another.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Okay. Well, then we can cover it off then, if you so desire, or if you have other subject matter—but this is rich and it’s important, because I’m sure there are thousands and thousands of people watching across northern Ontario and they’ll want to know how and why we made the changes to NOHFC.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: And I believe there are many people who want to know why maybe their projects aren’t being approved and maybe want more clarity.

Hon. Greg Rickford: There aren’t many of those, Judith. If you want, I’ll only use up about one minute of your 20 minutes telling you about the applications that don’t get approved. Usually it’s because they’re structurally flawed. That’s it. The NOHFC rarely turns these projects down.

0910

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: And then what happens? And, like I said, I’d like to know what kind of spending is happening in each area.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Do I still have time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have 15 seconds.

Hon. Greg Rickford: So what I’ll finish with is that, most notably, Judith, Indigenous communities and/or their businesses in those isolated and remote Indigenous communities were virtually accessing zero of this. That’s not on—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): And with that, I’m sorry to say, you’re out of time.

We go to the government. MPP Smith, the floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Dave Smith: Minister Rickford, you talked yesterday about the size of your riding in particular. I did a little bit of digging last night, just to put it into perspective, because a lot of people in southern Ontario don’t really appreciate the vastness of what northern Ontario is. Your riding is roughly the size of Denmark. You’ve got about 58,000 people, give or take; Denmark has 5.8 million. So there are some significant challenges that are faced in northern Ontario that people in southern Ontario truly don’t understand and truly don’t get.

I want to talk about one thing in particular that most people in southern Ontario have no idea about, unless they watch the TV series *Ice Road Truckers*, and that is winter roads. We know that the northern part of Ontario is rich in culture, in diversity and in critical minerals. We’ve talked about critical minerals a fair bit. It can’t be overemphasized, the vast resources that are there. Mining and critical minerals have played an essential part in the economy and prosperity of northern Ontario. But accessible transportation is something that is very, very difficult.

Again, I want to point it out because this gives an opportunity for us to talk about something that anyone who is in the GTA, anyone who is south of the French River really has no idea about. For us, the timely delivery

of essential goods and services is something we take for granted, but it has been an ongoing challenge for northern Ontario communities. Issues related to weather and roads have complicated transportation and services since the region was first settled. You've got the extremes of hot weather in the summer and extreme cold in the winter, so having a traditional road built in the way we do in southern Ontario, you're going to see a lot of heaving as a result of it, and it's a bigger challenge for us to do something up in the north.

We know that accessible transportation options remain a large part of what this ministry does, and our ongoing commitment to prosperity and economic development in the Far North, so much so that in 2021 Ontario has committed \$625 million into highway programs for northern Ontario. It's a historic investment, and it will create and sustain about 4,300—almost 4,400—direct and indirect construction jobs for northern Ontario. These are all jobs that are very good-paying and offer a lot of benefits for people. It's not just something that is seasonal. They're not there for 10 weeks and then not having something else. These are ongoing, long-term jobs.

Programs like this help promote improved traffic, safety and other strategic considerations. If you look at the expansion of Highway 69 in northeastern Ontario and Highway 11 in northwestern Ontario, for example, these are key infrastructure upgrades for reliable, safe transportation for everybody.

But winter roads are something that are very important to northern communities and serve, really, as a lifeline for a lot of these places. The temporary winter roads serve about 21,000 people in Ontario and provide affordable transportation options for northern job creators and employers. They really do help sustain economic development. I think anyone who has watched Ice Road Truckers gets that, that if you want to build a home and you need to get your building materials in, there aren't a lot of options to do it in the spring or in the fall. We see that a lot on Ice Road Truckers, the challenges they have when they're trying to bring things up.

To northern Ontarians, winter roads are known to be essential, but not all Ontarians are aware of the value of these roads and what it means for remote and Indigenous communities. For many southern Ontarians, highways and roads are easily accessible. They provide safe and reliable modes of transportation. Could you explain in more detail the province's work to support expanded and more reliable winter roads, why they're important and when they are typically open?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thanks for that, Dave. I just want to take this opportunity to thank you. My in-laws live in Lindsay, as you well know. We have family, therefore, in Peterborough. "Traitors," they call them. I don't understand that Lindsay-versus-Peterborough thing; is it Beaverton or something? I don't know. There's some long-standing rival there.

In any event, when I start to head into the Kawarthas, I start thinking very much about northern Ontario: Sturgeon River and Rice Lake and then all the way up. The north

really starts there. I'm sorry you can't be a part of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, but then we'd have to share more money, and Judith would get cranky and Mike would start firing questions at me. The next thing you know, there would be complete upheaval in the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. Judith, we don't want to share, do we? No, no. Sorry, Davey; as much as we love the Kawarthas and think they are northern Ontario, you ain't gettin' no cash from me, so don't ask.

But you also know, as my parliamentary assistant who has helped me greatly by travelling the north, moving into all the small places on secondary highways and tertiary roads and then likely coming to a shoreline in a couple of those winter trips you took and going, "Oh, okay, so this could potentially be a shortcut" and actually seeing that MTO services some of those roads on lakes—they are, without question, an extraordinary link between the communities. As somebody who lived and worked in isolated and remote Indigenous communities for eight years of my life as a nurse, in the extended role, whether it was because I was driving out of the community by my own means, transporting where flight wasn't available or moving to some of the satellite communities by automobile, these winter roads aren't just to connect communities and people; they're often a lifeline for supplies, for services and to deal with matters where people are in some level of distress. I think that, first and foremost, lays the groundwork for the importance of the network. There's a really good map—I think I might have one around here—that shows you the winter roads.

Now, the winter roads are, in fairness, subject to weather. I think it's pretty safe to say that over the course of time, the winter road network has been more compromised. It's a bit of a moving target. Some years are different than others: They start sooner; they stay later. We've had a couple of winters in the past decade where they've lasted as long as any.

But the winter roads, for me, as critical as they are—and I'll talk about the agreements and work we do. They provide employment etc. They also represent, for many isolated and remote Indigenous communities and municipalities they link to, importantly, an opportunity that the province has somewhere down the road, either through new corridors—for example Watay Power; I talked about the corridor to prosperity—to move highways into the north and convert some of those winter roads into all-year road access for a number of Indigenous communities that want them.

Now, I know there are one or two communities out there where, as it stands right now, road access is not something they're looking for, and I completely accept and appreciate that. But they won't dispute that there is a vital link to be gained from winter roads.

Funding is allocated, Dave, to each community according to the length and the class of the road. For example, the heaviest-trafficked roads receive the most funding, followed by community connector roads and then trails with less traffic. There's a full list of communities receiving funding—how much and a description of the road

being built—in each community that’s available. I don’t know if you, in your intrepid research, found that, but I’d be happy to supply it and accompany it with a map, because it is quite interesting. Theoretically, if you wanted to go farther north than Pickle Lake, you could understand how to do that, so it’s pretty cool.

0920

The changes from single-year to multi-year funding for the Winter Roads Program, for us, helps to cut red tape. It allows quick delivery of crucial funding and it ensures stability for long-term planning for communities reliant on the Winter Roads Program.

Beginning with the 2021 season, winter road agreements will now be structured over three years as opposed to one, again going to that certainty. This change to extend the funding term will both reduce the administrative burden on the communities—these are pretty typically Indigenous communities, isolated communities—as well as allow for funds to be provided earlier in the season so that they can buy the kind of equipment and materials they need to keep those roads safe. While the agreements will be put in place for three years, funding amounts allocated to the Winter Roads Program will continue to be decided on a year-to-year basis. Therefore, as is currently the case, the funding does vary from year to year.

The decision to not build a winter road due to COVID-19 did not impact future funding agreements for winter roads, Dave, and Ontario continues to work diligently with our partners at Indigenous Services Canada and Minister Marc Miller to ensure that the needs of the northern Indigenous communities are met by making capital funding available to ensure proper COVID-19 precautions are in place. COVID-19 precautions that Ontario can support include the provision of enhanced PPE checkpoints, construction of staging areas outside communities where goods can be stored and facilities to transport drivers to stay overnight where they can enter the community.

So, Dave, that’s a little snapshot of how winter roads work. But I’ll just leave you with this: There’s a really good book called—and some might say it’s a stretch to say this, but I don’t because I know; I’ve lived in these communities. There’s a really good book called *Killing the Shamen*. It talks about the historical connectivity between northern Ontario communities and northern Manitoba communities: for example, the ties between Garden Hill First Nation in northern Manitoba, Sandy Lake and St. Theresa Point. Those are all communities I’ve lived in extensively and worked as a nurse in charge. I had an opportunity to be a lawyer for some of those communities on certain files over the years.

In addition to telling an important substantive story, you start to understand the connectivity between these Indigenous communities and the familial relationships between them. Some of those winter roads and their secondary and tertiary versions, right out into trails that can be groomed and maintained—snowmobile trails, for example—link those communities together because they are significant to the traditions and the history of how First

Nation original settlements occurred and then other communities evolved, from time immemorial to their being, to their existence. So there is some significance to the winter roads for those folks who love literature and the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, but particularly of the relationship between Ojibway and Woodland Cree Indigenous peoples in western Canada—which you can appreciate, as northwestern Ontario, living 22 or 24 hours away from you, we kind of feel at least like “Mantarians,” but certainly the gateway to western Canada.

So it’s just some interesting kind of stuff. I’m not trying to take up air time here, but I thought colleagues would benefit from some of the observations I’ve made in terms of how winter roads have been proposed over the time and why they are where they are. Thank you for that question.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have about six minutes, MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thanks, I appreciate that. One of the things I forgot to mention when I was talking about winter roads, there’s actually a movie coming out this week—I think it’s scheduled to be released—starring Liam Neeson, and there will be a component of it that is the winter roads here in Ontario.

I really don’t think that a lot of people in southern Ontario appreciate some of the challenges that northern Ontario faces. If I can pivot just quickly on that, the winter roads open up a lot of opportunities for us when it’s cold enough to do it, but there is an awful lot of fly-in access that is needed. The support we’ve given to the remote air carrier I think is something we need to touch on. I apologize that we’ve only got about five minutes; I’ll try to keep it short.

Small air carriers serve the Indigenous communities in northern Ontario. It’s something that, again, most people here in southern Ontario really do not appreciate. For us, a 15-minute wait is a challenge. Having to wait for something to be delivered by Purolator or through Amazon overnight, it’s almost unheard of that you have to wait that long, and they’re going to show up right at your door. But that’s not the case when we’re talking about the remote communities in northern Ontario. Small air carriers provide remote northern Indigenous peoples with necessities of life, really. It’s the connection for essential services and critical supplies such as health care. You know, we wouldn’t have been able to get PPE into a lot of those communities if we didn’t have those small carriers flying things in, and support from various levels of government is crucial to make sure that these supplies can come in.

Can you go into a little bit of detail for us, please, in the three or four minutes we have left, about the remote air carrier support program and help people in southern Ontario understand how much this means and how much support is available for Ontario air carriers under the program?

Hon. Greg Rickford: That’s a great follow-up question, Dave. I think of winter roads, and those airstrips in particular, as lifelines. As a nurse who has stood on the

apron of a landing strip in an isolated remote community with critically ill people way more times than I certainly would have liked to, as I look back on my career, they literally mean the difference between life and death for the people who live in those communities. But as you said, they also represent the only way, for probably nine to 10.5 months of the year in some years, that supplies can get in.

I struggle with that, Dave, because it also means that it's likely true—it is true—that some of the items that are transporting in there include diesel fuel. That diesel fuel goes to power generators, big generators, for electricity, and I'd like to change that. We subsidized that program. I know how the Chair feels about subsidies. I hope he doesn't want me to pull this subsidy—my goodness; this is how they have electricity. But moving forward, what I really want to focus on is understanding which communities want the road access so that there's not as much pressure on this.

But nonetheless, the remote air carrier support program—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two minutes left.

Hon. Greg Rickford: —is absolutely essential. That's why, last year, just at the end of the year, we entered into a three-phase bilateral partnership with the federal government to develop and administer the remote air carrier support program. The program, Dave, has provided much-needed financial assistance to four small air carriers who are deemed eligible. They provide critical service to the isolated communities and they applied for that funding, covering certainly a portion of their COVID-19-related revenue losses. But they provide an essential service; if they don't operate, nobody is flying into those communities.

Ontario's allocation of federal funding for the initial six-month period, or phase 1, was more than \$11 million. This funded a lot of important transportation of goods, but more importantly, some carriers based across northern Ontario—including, importantly, in Thunder Bay, so I'm pretty sure Judith doesn't want to see them go away. These are, outside of COVID, vibrant carriers that do a healthy business outside of the pandemic. They service, Dave, 28 remote First Nations communities, and they rely on scheduled air carrier services to provide things like employment, health care, education, justice, child and family services, and social services. Some northern air carriers use scheduled passenger services to subsidize the cost of transporting essential goods. These planes can be 50-50 passenger and cargo.

0930

Canada-wide, the federal government is establishing a \$75-million program for the first six months, and up to \$174 million over 18 months if needed. That's important funding here in Ontario that we're involved with, and under the bilateral agreement, the province is spending about \$14.2 million to operate remote airports—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm sorry to say that you're out of time on this rotation.

Before we go to the next rotation, I understand MPP Kusendova has joined us. I need to have her confirm her

identity and the fact that she's present in Ontario. MPP Kusendova? Is she there?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Fair enough. We will come back to her.

Just to note, to ensure the remaining time is apportioned equally, it will be split as follows: eight minutes and 15 seconds to the official opposition, and eight minutes and 15 seconds to the government. I should note that if no independent member shows up, there will be a further seven minutes and 30 seconds for each party before we wrap up.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Good morning, Chair. My apologies. I was trying to unmute; it was not allowing me to unmute. This is MPP Kusendova, and I am indeed in Ontario. Apologies about the interruption. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): No problem at all. Thank you for confirming location and identity.

We now go to the official opposition for eight minutes and 15 seconds.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'm going to continue the questioning on the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. I wondered, since our time might be limited, if we have the breakdown of spending in each of those four program areas.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I just asked one of my folks to give you a snapshot, because it's not a precise thing. Each and every business quarter—once I became the chairman of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, we agreed to meet every business quarter, in order to provide certainty for the timing and the expectations of yes or no to projects. Because they historically, and even today, are not necessarily capped, there are pressures on different programs that make it impossible to tell you, except, by summary on an annual basis, for a couple of things we like to track.

First, how much money is spent in each area: We don't purposely do that unless we're alarmed, right? I can allude to tile drainage and tell you that in northeastern Ontario, there was a disproportionate amount of money going to tile drainage. Tile drainage is good for agriculture in northern Ontario, but your robust farming community in Thunder Bay and the one out in the gateway to the Prairies, across the Fort Frances/Rainy River belt, wasn't getting the resources. The question was why, right? So we spent more of our time getting our officials with northern development and mines to understand what the barriers were so that we could even that out.

I'd be happy to give you, on background, Judith, a snapshot of how money is spent. For example, at our March meeting, we approved \$38 million worth of projects: \$3 million of that was internships—you don't have to write any of this down, Judith, unless it goes to your question; I'm happy to provide you with that information.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Okay.

Hon. Greg Rickford: The total approved projects and internships amount to \$52,383,648 plus \$26 million for NORP. But then it rolls over to the following year. In short, it's not easy to do that. It really depends on who's applying to what programs. We don't guide that; the businesses themselves do.

Now, you wanted me to speak to each new program, Judith?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Well, my time is limited, and I have one other question, so maybe—I have more than that, but I have one that I'm interested in. Maybe I'll go to that one, and then if I get extra time, I'll come back to the explanations on—

Hon. Greg Rickford: Absolutely.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: —areas, and maybe I can follow up with you after this committee, send a letter about it and ask for some data.

Hon. Greg Rickford: And Judith, I'd be happy to provide you with an extensive briefing on the new NOHFC program, if you haven't already had one.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Right. Thank you, Minister.

The next area I'm really interested in—and I'm interested in all things science. I'm just a big believer that science should guide us in many of our decisions in government. I hear that you're sending your daughters to science camp, so I guess it's a background that you also believe in.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I have a bachelor of science, so yes, I'm interested in science.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: The Ontario Geological Survey sounds like it's doing some very exciting work. Considering the growth in the mining industry and exploration, are they going to be seeing more investment? And could we have an overview of what the programs and the areas are that they addressed in their extensive work as indicated in the briefing book?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Sorry. You're talking about the Ontario—

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: —Geological Survey.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Yes, thank you for that. The Ontario geological society, Judith, is obviously a significant organization that we rely on for critical information, not just in mining but also in forestry. It helps to guide us in matters around forest fire management. We start to understand the contours of water and lake and soils. They've been tremendously helpful in a number of key places, so it's not just limited to those activities. If you just give me a second here—I was looking up an important fact. In any event, Judith, the work they do obviously is an important contribution to the mining sector. It helps us to identify, especially with some of the new technologies that are being deployed—the aircraft capacity to look down and not just bring contours to the land and tap into what resources might be there, but also discover and understand, as opposed to just random drilling, where the most optimal place might be to actually extract the mine.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two minutes left.

Hon. Greg Rickford: That, Judith, triggers some important pieces because, on the basis of that, obviously the relationship or nexus between the land use planning that's done by Indigenous communities through the only part of the Far North Act that they even like, frankly, because the rest of the act deals with parks that include their communities in them—that's a whole other story. It sets the pace,

if you will, and the process for, after exploration is achieved, what would come of a mining operation, where it would occur and what the implications are for environmental assessments, so fully integrated.

This is important information that we can't live without, that we can't actually do our work without. I'm speaking from the government. You obviously understand that the private sector taps this as well. So it's essential, and we think it's a critical part of the work we do each and every day at northern development and mines.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: It's very fascinating that it's such a large area. Is there co-operation between your ministry and other ministries when you do these surveys? Is it used by other aspects of government?

Hon. Greg Rickford: We have Geology Ontario, obviously, that's in our ministry. That's important as well for work that is done in areas such as abandoned mines, developing our mineral deposit inventory, the Ontario—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm sorry to say, with that, you're out of time on this rotation.

0940

We go to the government for eight minutes and 15 seconds. MPP Smith, the floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Dave Smith: Minister, when Judith was asking some questions about NOHFC, it got me thinking about this. We have been trying to foster and maintain relationships with all the stakeholders in the north. I think what we see is that with those strong, productive relationships, we're ensuring that we're giving the highest quality of service we can deliver. We've reached out to the northern stakeholders to make sure that they're providing the government of Ontario with on-the-ground experience and giving us that information we need to make sure that we're listening to them and we're developing the program specifically for what's going to serve their needs.

For more than the last few years, we've taken every opportunity to engage with those northern communities, with Indigenous partners and not-for-profit businesses to get feedback on the NOHFC programs. The focus of the engagement has been to make sure that the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp.'s programming continues to meet the unique needs of northern Ontario. If it's not meeting the unique needs of northern Ontario, then we're not doing the job correctly. We've had to make sure that we are well engaged.

NOHFC, with that engagement with the northern stakeholders, appears to have informed some of the decisions around the new programs. And with the new NOHFC programs making it easier for more people and businesses to apply for funding, ultimately supporting more projects in rural and northern communities that target both existing and emerging industry sectors, we're providing more work opportunities for Indigenous people and addressing the skilled labour shortages up in the north. Through the new programs, the Ontario government will continue to build strong and resilient communities while supporting an environment where businesses can thrive, grow and create jobs.

We take it for granted here in southern Ontario that these types of programs are just going to work, but there

are unique challenges in northern Ontario that NOHFC has been able to address. Can you explain a little bit more for us, please, what the stakeholder outreach for NOHFC has facilitated, and give us a little bit more detail about how other supports to stakeholders are being provided during the pandemic?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thanks, Dave, and thanks for bringing a question that's complementary to what Judith's inquiry was because she ran out of time, and if she doesn't get that time then I think she, like the rest of the panel here today, deserves to know and understand what is behind the work we did.

The bottom line is that the NOHFC has refined its programs to better serve the needs of all northerners. I mentioned in my answer to Judith, as a pre-emptive statement—which I thought was important, and I know people want the details—that what bothered me the most was simply the fact that there were things that were not being funded that I felt, and the board felt, should have been, and that there was a tremendous disparity, one that I just couldn't stomach any longer, between different kinds of communities across the north. It had to come to an end.

I was teasing Mantha yesterday a bit, but Algoma-Manitoulin, for example, and Timiskaming-Cochrane, with its agriculture and forestry, are places that offer up something a little different than some other parts of northern Ontario. There are larger-scale businesses. These aren't simple little farms anymore in Timiskaming-Cochrane; they're huge networks. There are bigger family farms than there has ever been, so tile drainage is extensively done up there. Nobody disputes the need for that. There are big businesses in Timmins. North Bay has a thriving film industry. In Sudbury, there's a lot of activity. Thunder Bay, interestingly enough, has had peaks and valleys depending on what the applicant profile looks like.

But the small towns—every riding has them—and the Indigenous communities, whether they're rural or remote and particularly isolated, simply weren't getting access to this program. And so, over the course of a couple of years, we took the time to try and understand how and why. We consulted for more than two years. We took every opportunity with northern communities, Indigenous partners, not-for-profit companies, and businesses to seek feedback on what we could do to be better. We even spoke to municipal leaders, because it isn't just how businesses work for their communities; it's how the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund could maybe address gaps I mentioned yesterday in broadband and things like that.

So that's why we developed the new program, made it easier for businesses to apply for funding, standardized the application and endeavoured to support more projects in rural and northern communities, targeting both existing and emerging industry sectors and providing more work and opportunities for Indigenous businesses—and an emphasis on internship programs bifurcated into two streams: the Indigenous Workforce Development Stream and the Workforce Development Stream stand-alone.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two minutes remaining.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Dave, these programs would effectively allow us to deal with what I believed was a significant disparity between what small towns and what big cities and what Indigenous communities, many of whom have no anchor tenant business to make sense of any economic activity, would require. I think one of the biggest innovations was actually the Community Enhancement Program. Whether you're an isolated Indigenous community or a small town in a municipality, we created a sub-stream, if you will, the rural enhancement stream, and we have a titration, as I described yesterday, of the smaller you get, the more money the NOHFC is willing to contribute to your project.

Now, this is just one example, but it helps the Kakabeka Falls of the world, Judith, to speak to you, through Dave. It helps Sioux Narrows. It helps Rainy River. And it helps, most importantly, the Indigenous communities who simply have not been able to access this corporation's resources comparatively equitably over the course of time. The new-look NOHFC, obviously comprised of those programs, in its modern state I think will serve us better. It won't take much time to find out, because we are coming close to the end of our first business quarter and we hope to be reviewing applications under the new stream by the end of this summer.

I think I've run out of time there—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Yes, you have indeed. That rotation is over. We do not have an independent member present here and so their time will be divided between the official opposition and the government: seven minutes and 30 seconds each. When those two rotations are done, we will go to the vote.

I go first to the official opposition: MPP Judith Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'm appreciating some of the details on the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. Do we have an indication of how long it takes from the initial application to people actually looking at getting some money?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Judith. That was a fundamental question. When I was the minister of FedNor, we had set up a time frame, that within seven days you had a preliminary indication of whether your application was intact and met basic requirements to proceed, and then within 30 days you could get a signal.

Federal works differently than the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. It wasn't my intention to take a wrecking ball in there and upset the apple cart, but I did want to address that issue. We try, with the exception of the pause we had to introduce in the Northern Ontario Recovery Program, to ensure, Judith, that, where reasonably possible, the people submitting an application in one business quarter would be reviewed by the end of the following business quarter.

0950

It doesn't always work out that way, because sometimes they're applying for something that's further out. That couldn't and wouldn't be the responsibility of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. But under the new

stream—because, again, I didn't want to upset the apple cart under the old stream when I knew that we had the intention of fairly substantially overhauling it—I'm hopeful that we will have a model similar to what I instituted in FedNor so that people know where they stand.

I've always had a simple philosophy when it comes to this, Judith: We have to be just as effective and efficient at saying no, which we don't say very often, as we do yes, to provide greater certainty—or at least, as I'm sure you would agree, to give a signal as quickly as possible to the proponent that the application just doesn't fit anywhere or fit the contours of the intended stream, and then go out and work with that proponent to see how we can make it fit. And I'll tell you, we do that a lot more often than any other funding program that I've ever been associated with.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: With the emphasis on smaller organizations, smaller municipalities or areas—you're saying those smaller communities are getting an emphasis, which is probably a very good thing.

You talk about support. That was going to be my next question. Often, these groups don't have the capacity, or if they've never been successful before and they're taking their first shot at trying to get some money for a project—because I think a lot of people have just given up ever getting any of that money. So now, let's say they're hopeful of trying once more: What does that support look like?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thanks, Judith. I used that medical term: The titration I spoke about is largely confined to the Community Enhancement Program and the rural enhancement program.

Can everybody hear me? I see the sign here that says the host is not allowing to unmute.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): No, we can hear you, Minister.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Take it down, computer man, so I can see my colleagues. Thank you.

So that scalable investment is what we focus on there. The other important piece to this, Judith, is working with the proponent to understand how much—so there are three things. That's the first thing.

The second thing is, for the proponents who are not municipal entities or a community-based applicant, but more likely a business, particularly not-for-profits, the next step in the analysis and working with them is really to understand how much skin in the game they can put. We're pretty lenient with that, depending on the organization, and significant funding can be allocated to it if the safeguard, which is some scrutiny by Meyers Norris Penny, merits it. Then the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund feels quite comfortable with funding a significant portion of a given project. We consider the profile of how much the organization has put in, how much money they've raised through other means.

And then, of course, the third component is the loan-grant mix, and you'll find—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two minutes left.

Hon. Greg Rickford: —pretty consistently—I'll finish—that for those organizations that are the most

vulnerable in terms of a potential lack of resources, they find themselves getting mostly, if not all, grants, as opposed to a loan they may have difficulty servicing.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right. And if I have people who are having problems with that system or any of the MPPs in the north, we should direct them to the ministry liaison and try to get that clarified?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Absolutely. As I say, the new stream is coming on board, Judith, and we'll take our criticisms with our compliments and change it. But this was not without hearty consultation, and I can assure you that just outside the boundaries of the beautiful city you live in, there are a lot of smaller communities that deserve access to this program. I think as early as Q1, you're going to hear a lot of favourable responses to how this will start to work for them. It will probably become a problem, to be frank with you, and a good problem to have.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I don't know if there's enough time there, Mr. Speaker. Is there just—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Forty-five seconds.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Judith, I just wanted to let you know: Under the rural program, for communities under 1,500 people, 90% of project costs up to \$200,000 will be covered by NOHFC; if you're over 1,500, 75% of the costs up to \$500,000. That's that moving scale I'm talking about. Two hundred grand puts a new roof on a curling rink, doesn't it—or one of those covered rinks thereabouts. So paying for most of that is, I think, important. And I appreciate the Chair letting me—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm sorry to say that you're out of time on this rotation.

We now go to the government for their seven minutes and 30 seconds. MPP Smith, the floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Dave Smith: Judith made me think of something else. I want to do a little bit of an expansion on the NOHFC and one program in particular, and that's the Northern Ontario Recovery Program.

As we were responding to COVID-19, I think a lot of people up in northern Ontario had some very distinct challenges. Yesterday MPP Mantha talked about how most of the tourism industry in northern Ontario is based around US people coming up to northern Ontario, and they weren't able to.

With the Northern Ontario Recovery Program, we had to commit some targeted investments to support business owners and all of those entrepreneurs in the north part of our province. It has been a challenging time for everybody, not just in southern Ontario, not just in northern Ontario. It has been a real challenge, but the resiliency that was shown in northern Ontario really has been something that has carried us through. They have overcome some unprecedented difficulties.

NORP, the Northern Ontario Recovery Program, was designed to support northern businesses in particular with COVID-19. It was run through the NOHFC, because that's our venue for providing that type of support in northern Ontario, but really it was a specific program for COVID relief for a lot of these businesses.

I think that it worked well, if I can toot our horn on that one. I think that NORP served its purposes very, very well. There were a lot of businesses that received funding, and they were able to continue serving their communities for it. Again, to kind of toot our horn a little bit on this, do you have any specific success stories you can point out as a result of the Northern Ontario Recovery Program? And what were the eligibility requirements for those businesses to get the funding and then truly be successful as a result of it?

Hon. Greg Rickford: It's a bit of a stretch to say that there were eligibility requirements. Look, on a serious note, the program was established to help businesses that were in a very difficult situation, and I appreciate the question.

A couple of quick points: One of the first things that NOHFC did was defer repayments on any of the loan portions that applicants had got during the first six months of 2020, commencing from the date shortly after the emergency order was put in place. Then we waived all interest that accrued on those loan periods and extended the maturity date of those loans by six months, Dave. Those were people who had just recently got off the ground with an application and the expansion of a new business or something like that, and said, "Whoa, Nellie, I've got to deal with this now," so we gave them the relief.

But the Northern Ontario Recovery Program—obviously, what I like most about it is that I had a chance to put my pen to paper on this. I'm a policy wonk. People know that. I get teased a lot about it, but I'll take that any day. The ability to actually sit down and write government policy with my colleagues, both in the ministry and with a very talented northern staff on my political ministry staff—we set to the task of designing this program, so it was homemade. I want to thank the folks in northern development and mines for their extraordinary work.

1000

But the \$26 million—the \$27 million, really—that ended up going out with this, effectively went in \$25,000 tranches. The stories will give you goosebumps. They were intended to do two things, Dave: First of all, they were legitimately there to help a business deal with the reality that COVID had thrust upon them, and it varied. Some businesses simply had to do some renovations. Some businesses wanted to put a patio out there, once and for all. Some towns wanted to convert part of their downtown to space that could be used for walking safely, as opposed to just driving through, so that there was some outdoor space for things like shopping.

One of them that I want to talk about was Vermilion Bay Lodge. These lodges, these tourism operators, had been hit particularly hard. But the reality of it is that they needed more dock space during the summer, to put what fewer customers they actually had into their boats more safely, so some of them applied to double their dock space.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two minutes left.

Hon. Greg Rickford: That's not only COVID-19-appropriate; it's legacy infrastructure, because their capacity when things start to improve is better. They expanded

the patio sizes of restaurants. Some of the lodges made their decks much bigger so that tables could be spaced farther apart. Some of their cabins were expanded, especially with patios, so that people who were not permitted to mix with other cabins if they weren't family could have a more pleasurable experience after a long day out on the water, catching northern Ontario fish. We weren't just acting in the best interests of COVID protection, supplying with an ability to access PPE or set up safe spaces in their business or outside of their businesses; we were actually creating the kind of legacy infrastructure that would matter to a business when the pandemic was over.

We approved 1,246 projects over \$5,000, and we approved 138 projects under \$5,000. There were very few projects declined, Dave. They tended to be applicants who simply didn't fit the contour—some of them were hocus-pocus numbered companies; you always get that in every program—but the overwhelming response was very positive. In fact, Dave, it was the largest announcement I've ever been a part of in my political career. It eclipsed some 900 people, and it was tremendously well received across northern Ontario and obviously complemented the small business loans and grants programs for COVID that we had as a government.

Interjection.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. You're—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Yes, I'm sorry. With that, that rotation comes to an end.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines. Standing order 69(b) requires the Chair put without further amendment or debate every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. The first question, of course, is: Are the members ready to vote? I see no objections, and I see nodding heads. Excellent.

We will go to the first. Shall vote 2201, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It carries.

Next vote: Shall vote 2202, northern development program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It is carried.

Shall vote 2203, mines and minerals program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It is carried.

Shall vote 2205, energy development and management, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It is carried.

Shall vote 2206, electricity price and mitigation, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It carries.

Shall the 2021-22 estimates of the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It is carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2021-22 estimates of the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It is carried.

We will now recess for 10 minutes before beginning consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs. Before we do that, I want to thank the minister, the associate minister and all the staff at energy, northern development and mines for their participation. It's much appreciated.

Ten minutes from now, we'll go to Indigenous affairs. Thank you.

The committee recessed from 1006 to 1019.

MINISTRY OF INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Good morning. The committee is back in session. We're about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs for a total of five hours. Are there any questions from members before we start? No.

We have a new member joining us this morning. MPP Mamakwa, would you confirm your identity and your location in Ontario, please?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Good morning, Chair. It's Sol Mamakwa. I am, in fact, in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you, sir.

I'm now required to call vote 2001 which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 30 minutes from the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, followed by a statement of up to 30 minutes by the official opposition. Then the minister will have a further 30 minutes for a reply. The remaining time will be apportioned equally among the two parties, with 15 minutes allotted to the independent member of the committee later in the proceedings.

Minister, the floor is yours.

1020

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the colleagues who were on previously—I appreciate your commitment to this process—and to the new ones who have joined us today. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you today from Treaty 3 territory. It's a great privilege and an honour to serve the constituents of Kenora–Rainy River, otherwise known as Treaty 3.

I also want to acknowledge the findings of the remains of 215 Indigenous children buried at a former Indian residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. This national tragedy reminds us of the darkest chapter in the history of this country. The continued harms of the Indian residential school and its impact on survivors, their families, their communities, and the Indigenous population as a whole across this province is recognized. It also speaks to the tremendous resiliency, frankly, that the Indian residential school survivors and Indigenous communities continue to demonstrate in spite of the trauma inflicted by the Indian residential schools. The Indian residential school era is not only a chapter in Canada's history that must never be forgotten, but an ongoing and painful reminder of the painful legacy of Canada's colonialist policies, which continues for many Indigenous peoples even today.

Our government is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous leaders and organizations to support healing and make identification, recovery and remediation real. We want to advance initiatives that will make a meaningful difference in the lives of Indigenous peoples. In my right of reply, I will speak to our government's approach to supporting the identification of Indigenous residential school burial sites in Ontario and the actions we're taking to move this important work forward, led by Indigenous peoples, collaboratively and respectfully.

I'd like to begin by talking about COVID—it seems like everything kind of comes back to that in modern times—but specifically to talk about supports for Indigenous communities. Now, it's important to understand how quickly both the Ontario Regional Chief—I congratulate Glen Hare, by the way, who is the newly elected Ontario Regional Chief, and I look forward to working with him—and RoseAnne Archibald, through the Chiefs of Ontario, how closely we worked together. We started out meeting every single week, not just with the Indigenous leadership council, or the leadership council as it was referred to, but also the Chiefs of Ontario forum just days later every week. And every week we met, for several months.

As we got somewhat of a lift in our work—a relief, I should say, between wave 1 and wave 2—we spread it out, but nonetheless we remained committed to connecting through this forum and frankly, as a result, a far more meaningful, regular, almost immediate communication network between myself and all Indigenous leaders across the province by way of text. Very quickly, we were able to rapidly respond to not just COVID issues and opportunities but also with respect to any other challenges or opportunities at Indigenous communities. This was a forum that the Premier attended on a number of occasions and several of my ministerial colleagues. In fact, I think all of them appeared at one point or another, of course, at the request of the Indigenous leadership. So this was an extraordinary opportunity in many respects to develop what I like to think of as “a relationship” with Indigenous leadership. That would be something different than “the relationship,” which has been rightly characterized as some of the more formal elements of the relationship between the crown and Indigenous peoples, but focused more on the ability to just pick up the phone and talk to and/or text someone. This was very helpful. Very quickly, we were able to put the pieces of a response together through this forum.

We knew in the first instance that Indigenous communities, particularly those in remote and Far North regions—a place where I had spent more than six years of my life living and working, here in northern Ontario—were at higher risk for COVID outbreaks, spreads and had a comorbidity profile that lent itself to being far more at risk for more serious consequences of COVID. And of course, it goes without saying, with some challenges accessing health care, that could lead to more severe outcomes.

For the benefit of the folks here today, I had the privilege of working as a nurse in an extended role in just about

every isolated community we have in northern Ontario. There might be a couple out on the James Bay coast I didn't have a chance to work at, and certainly there were a few communities at the time I was practising that didn't even have a nursing station; they were satellite communities at the time. But what an amazing opportunity to live and work in those communities. And then, of course, there are some that I spent a great deal more time at in comparison to others. To this day, some of my closest friends live in those communities. So I feel somewhat well positioned to understand what, from a government perspective, would be required to support the COVID-19 response.

At the onset of the pandemic, our government acted quickly to support the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples and communities. We mobilized in the first instance to invest more than \$37 million to support the COVID outbreak in planning, prevention and mitigation efforts. Some \$16.4 million was used for emergency funding for food, household goods, critical supplies, transportation, and support and care.

In the previous ENDM estimates, Mr. Chair, there was a question put to me about the northern air supplementary program to assist in this. Just to break some of that funding down, \$16.4 million was used for emergency funding for food, household goods, critical supplies, transportation, support and care. My ministry immediately disbursed \$4.4 million in base funding for First Nations communities to assist them with even the most basic of administrative requirements to mobilize various committees, groups and responses at the community level.

Emergency funding of \$6.6 million was also made available to First Nations communities, tribal councils and provincial-territorial organizations to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. This funding was made available through four specific funding streams, including the distribution of people and goods, prevention and awareness efforts, pandemic planning, and self-isolation facilities in remote and northern communities.

Working with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, \$25 million in funding was also provided to assist colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes with their most pressing needs during the pandemic. Indigenous institutes received \$1.5 million of this funding to address supports for students and staff transitions and/or accommodations to respond to the impact that COVID brought to their academic experience: infrastructure related to the provision of online learning and telework, increased use of cleaning supplies and increased reliance on mental health supports.

To date, my ministry has delivered more than \$6.1 million to urban Indigenous organizations. This funding was used to purchase food, medicine and other necessities for people living off-reserve in urban and rural communities and to support urban Indigenous organizations that deliver mental health and addiction services.

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My ministry is investing an additional \$4 million to support First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and urban Indigenous organizations. This funding will help

Indigenous communities respond to the pandemic's escalating impacts and its effect on social and public health emergencies. That's on top of our \$50-million investment announced in the provincial budget to support community-led vaccination in First Nations and urban Indigenous communities. The investment will also help establish on-site clinics to support vaccine rollout, bringing Ontario's total investment to protect Indigenous people to over \$120 million.

To ensure an effective response to COVID, we continue to work across Ontario ministries with our federal partners to ensure a coordinated response, and our thoughts to that end are very much with Kashechewan. Today I had a chance to at least leave a message with Chief Leo Friday. He's not an easy guy to get a hold of. He is super busy right now, obviously, but our ministry officials have been in close contact with the community, providing significant support and response. Just yesterday I spoke to Minister Marc Miller on a second request for assistance, which of course ramps up even more services and program support for Kashechewan through PEOC, the provincial emergency operations committee, and its coordinated work with the federal government.

We remain in close contact with Indigenous partners, leadership and federal departments to identify pressing needs in First Nations and urban Indigenous communities, and respond appropriately. My ministry in particular is providing culturally responsible COVID-19 supports and services that are not only a key part of Ontario's plan to beat COVID-19 but will help prevent future health crises in Indigenous communities.

I want to talk a little bit about the COVID-19 vaccine distribution. To help distribute the COVID-19 vaccine in First Nations communities, my ministry established the First Nations vaccine distribution table. This would prove to be an important table, a stand-alone table that I chaired with support from Ontario Regional Chief RoseAnne Archibald, a member of the government's COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force. The table advises on vaccine distribution to Indigenous populations with the support and participation of First Nations' political and technical representatives involved in responding to COVID in their communities.

The First Nations vaccine distribution table developed a prioritization matrix that sequenced communities for vaccinations according to the COVID-19 risk and vulnerability. An urban Indigenous vaccine distribution table was also formed to advise on vaccine distribution to Indigenous urban populations. Discussions at this table focused on prioritizing vaccinations to urban Indigenous communities across Ontario, given their increased risk of COVID-19 and vulnerability factors, not unlike the populations in rural and remote and isolated Indigenous communities. These tables have ensured effective, equitable and culturally appropriate COVID-19 immunization programs for First Nation populations on reserve and in urban settings.

Ongoing engagement with Indigenous communities and their leadership, organizations and health care providers has and continues to be essential to ensuring an

effective and culturally appropriate approach to vaccination. A communications table was also established with Indigenous health and my ministry partners. Its purpose was to develop and distribute culturally appropriate communications and public education materials for First Nation, Métis and Inuit people. This table identified and continues to identify opportunities for collaboration around vaccine communications so that our government can meet Indigenous communities' information needs while promoting understanding, reducing vaccine hesitancy and addressing other concerns associated with the COVID vaccination rollout.

I want to talk a little bit about Operation Remote Immunity. At the beginning of the year, Operation Remote Immunity, co-developed with Nishnawbe Aski Nation, led by their incredible leader, Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, whom we wish all the best in his endeavors to become the national chief, and led by Ornge—for those folks who don't know, Ornge is the emergency air ambulance organization tasked with moving patients in and out of isolated communities who require various degrees of more advanced or critical health care services, but they also serve as a coordinating body for things like a pandemic response. In this case, the collaborative effort was between my ministry, the Ministry of Health, the Solicitor General, natural resources and forestry, Ornge, our federal government partners and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. In collaboration with the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority and the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority, public health units took the lead to ensure remote and fly-in communities received adequate vaccine access.

What a success it was, Mr. Chair. Operation Remote Immunity ended on April 28, with 25,614 vaccines administered in 31 fly-in communities and beautiful Moosonee. The Ministry of Health and Ornge continue to work with public health units and authorities on a transition plan to ensure access to vaccine beyond Operation Remote Immunity, and as of June 2, over 265,000 vaccine doses have been administered to First Nations communities and Indigenous populations living in urban settings.

I want to talk a little bit about vaccine interval dosing. On March 20, 2021, Ontario adopted the National Advisory Committee on Immunization's recommendation to extend the interval between first and second COVID-19 vaccine doses to four months for the general population. To ensure the prioritization of Ontario's most vulnerable populations, our government is enabling all First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals, including urban Indigenous populations, to receive their second vaccination dose on the 21-to-28-day product monograph rather than the extended four-month interval.

I want to thank Ontario Regional Chief Archibald for her incredible leadership. We wish her all the best in her leadership endeavors for the national chief, as well. It's great to have a couple of very strong Indigenous leaders from Ontario vying for the national chief position. This hasn't happened in a very, very long time, so I'm hopeful that one of the two will emerge from Ontario.

But it was through the Indigenous vaccination table that we garnered overwhelming support and took the

unprecedented step in the context of this vaccine of ultimately overriding the decision or the directive of NACI, and actually ensuring that not just Operation Remote Immunity, from the very beginning, was going to get their intervals consistent with the product monograph, but also that road-accessible Indigenous communities would be under the same regime and, furthermore, urban Indigenous people would be shortly thereafter. That is to the full credit of that table and how they informed our government.

I want to thank Premier Ford for wasting no time in understanding the importance that we be entirely consistent for all Indigenous populations, because in the end—outside of what's happening in Kashechewan right now, dealing with a particularly difficult co-variant—the fact of the matter is that any clinically significant major outbreaks were actually occurring in road-accessible Indigenous communities. Operation Remote Immunity had been terrifically successful and the numbers were, for the most part, very, very small in terms of spread and contact, so we thought it was important to do it that way.

I also want to talk about youth vaccinations. On May 13, the province announced that youth between the ages of 12 to 17 would be eligible to book an appointment to receive their first dose of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine beginning May 23, 2021. My ministry is working with the Ministry of Health, Indigenous partners and local public health units to ensure Indigenous input is included in the development and rollout of the youth vaccination strategy.

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I can report to this committee that on May 31, our government launched Operation Remote Immunity 2.0, which will vaccinate approximately 6,000 youth aged 12 to 17 in the 31 fly-in First Nations communities, including Moosonee. Operation Remote Immunity 2.0 is a multi-ministry, cross-government effort in partnership with Ornge and of course, our most essential and most important partner, Nishnawbe Aski Nation. As of June 2, over 700 doses were administered to youth aged 12 to 17 through Operation Remote Immunity 2.0. We anticipate this initiative will deliver both first and second doses by the end of August.

Let me pivot to economic growth and prosperity. As Ontario continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring economic well-being for Indigenous communities, organizations and, importantly, their businesses remains an ongoing priority. We know that Indigenous people in Ontario face significant and unique economic barriers. In fact, we've had an opportunity today and yesterday to talk at great length about the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund and the disturbing findings we gathered over a couple of years that told us that Indigenous peoples and/or their communities were largely excluded and/or minimally able to access the resources of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund.

I simply would not tolerate that. We had sufficient data that told us that the program needed to be changed and focused on key areas. I'll expound, perhaps, on that in a little bit, because I think the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund is an important discussion for the purposes of today

in terms of how we can better serve Indigenous communities.

But thanks to Regional Chief Archibald and the Indigenous leadership, we announced recently that my ministry is partnering with the Chiefs of Ontario to establish the first-ever First Nations economic growth and prosperity table. It took us a while to put this together, because we were spending a lot of time, both within the ministry and outside, working with other consultation tables we had with Indigenous leadership and business, as well as responding to the request of some chiefs, in particular Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, who said that he thought this might be a good idea, but he wanted to understand how the treaty would play a role in the economic growth and prosperity table. And so we grappled with that, tried to best understand how this might work, and we came to a place where we decided mutually that we would let this prosperity table do its work and understand what role the treaty would play in an economic growth and prosperity table's work.

Our focus was to support economic advancement and well-being in Indigenous communities. The Chiefs of Ontario will use the prosperity table to identify opportunities and initiatives to support post-pandemic economic recovery for a lasting economic prosperity that's more equitable within Indigenous communities as compared to other towns and cities across the province. The recommendations from the prosperity table will inform discussions and establish partnerships between First Nations communities, local industry, businesses and municipalities.

Let's break that down a little bit and talk about supporting Indigenous-owned businesses. One year ago, our government launched the Indigenous economic development advisory council, the council I referred to moments ago that helped inform some of the work we might be able to do at the prosperity table. It was made up of seven experts in Indigenous business and economic development to inform response to the economic impacts of COVID on Indigenous communities and business. Following this, \$10 million was invested to support Indigenous-owned small and medium-sized businesses with much-needed capital, capex, as the province could finally start to see a gradual reopening. Loans of up to \$50,000 were made available to support Indigenous-owned businesses that were either ineligible or unable to access existing federal and provincial COVID-19 response initiatives for small businesses. Up to 50% of each loan was in the form of a non-repayable grant with no interest due on a loan portion until December 31, 2022. This funding mitigated the unique challenges facing these businesses, helping them cover general expenses such as payroll, rent, utility and taxes. Recipients could use the funding for other purposes such as increasing production, product development, online marketing or facilitating upgrades.

Let me talk a little bit about land claim progress. This is an important issue to me. In my former capacity as the member of Parliament for the great Kenora riding, as the parliamentary secretary to the very large ministry of Indigenous Services Canada, as it's known now, and the federal minister responsible for northern development, it

became abundantly clear that the previous government needed to move faster on outstanding land claims and flooding claims. That was particularly and abundantly clear out here in Treaty 3 territory and in some areas of Nishnawbe Aski Nation territories, the other treaty lands that cover this region.

With a focus on reconciliation, our government has modernized its capacity to review, negotiate and implement Indigenous land claims—that was the first step I took—as well as other land-related agreements while ensuring a balanced government-wide approach to land claim negotiations. We continue to take the remaining long-term recommendations of the Ipperwash Inquiry report seriously by embedding them into the work we do across government, foundational to this province's recognition of Indigenous communities' role in the planning, the designing and the delivering of programs and services for their communities.

On July 30, 2020, we transferred the former Ipperwash Provincial Park to Canada, allowing Canada to undertake the remaining steps to add this land to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point reserve.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two minutes left, Minister.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Maybe before I go into another topic, I'll just finish on land claim progress.

We moved at lightning speed to resolve at the request, in many instances, of Indigenous communities and/or their organizations who were involved in negotiations when we took over. I was pleased to finally be a signatory to the Williams Treaties. As the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, that was long overdue. There are many land claims and flooding claims, particularly out here in Treaty 3, that we have signed off on. Later this spring and later this year, a number of communities out here in Treaty 3 territory will actually be receiving the awards of those negotiation processes to advance their community members', and their community's as a whole, economic interests as a result of those revenues and various other details of the negotiated land and/or flooding claim agreements.

Maybe I'll just leave it there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): That's fine, Minister. Thank you.

We go now to the official opposition. MPP Mamakwa, the floor is yours, sir. You have up to 30 minutes.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Minister, for the points you have made in the presentation. Again, it's important to acknowledge the 215 remains that were found in Kamloops. It's important to acknowledge the families, the communities. There are people across the country who are feeling the pain, the hurt, the sorrow. And then also, it's important to talk about how we're going to prepare ourselves as Indigenous people, in moving forward. I just wanted to make that comment.

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Certainly, in the presentation I did hear a lot of programs, a lot of services, funding, and I know towards the end we talked about some of the treaty land claims,

some of the stuff that's happening—very minimal. But I think, as a First Nations person, an Indigenous person who grew up in the community, I see things that happen. I've seen governments come and go. Like programs, services and funding, they come and go. It's important to recognize, as well, and acknowledge that these governments, whether it's provincially, federally, chief in councils, they come and go. Programs come and go. But what these programs do is—I will call these programs, how would I call it, incremental change. Incremental change perpetuates the crisis in our communities. Incremental change perpetuates oppression of our people. Incremental change perpetuates colonialism in our communities.

Sometimes, we do not talk about the fundamental changes that are required to move forward. It's important when we talk about treaties, when we talk about land claims, when we talk about self-determination, and I think it's really important that we move in that direction.

As First Nations, we get caught up in these programs and services which perpetuate that system of colonialism, oppression. We live it on a daily basis. What we see in the communities, such as access to clean drinking water, sometimes access to housing, access to dental services, vision care—it's all those things. I used to think that these systems were broken, but they're actually working exactly the way they're designed to, which is to take away the rights of our people to the lands and resources in the north. I just wanted to make that clear, from my perspective, anyway.

I think it's important as well—I wanted to ask this question to the minister: I know a decision was made to fold Indigenous affairs, then called Indigenous relations and reconciliation, into energy, mining, and northern affairs and that the minister is the minister for all of these complex areas. How much time of the minister's day is spent on IAO, typically? Like, daily briefings, weekly—that would be my question.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for that question. First and foremost, for absolute clarity, the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines is, as a corporate matter, in the context of government, a stand-alone ministry. It was combined. That particular bringing together, if you will, of energy and northern development and mines was regarded even by previous ministers as a critical pairing, particularly in the context of the challenges in northern Ontario, not just for industry but the opportunities to understand the importance of energy supply to northern communities and, in particular, if you take a look at the allocations of spending, to support major energy infrastructure projects like Watay Power and the opportunity that we are looking at in the wake of the environmental assessment process being undertaken by Webequie First Nation and Marten Falls First Nation.

The second piece is, of course, the stand-alone Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, of which I am the minister. We think it's important to preserve and protect that ministry. As its minister, I can actually tell you where, on my own calendar—and judging by the texts, I was just looking at it, and calls I do, I think it's pretty safe to say that I spend

a majority of my time engaged with community leaders and the business of operating an Indigenous ministry than I do the others, frankly.

There are times in a minister's allocation of times, depending on the issues and opportunities of the day, where I may be invested in one ministry over the other. But I think it's pretty important to understand that my time is split fairly and equitably, but in real time, far more of it, not just formally, goes to Indigenous affairs. Informally, at least more than half of my week, to the member's question, is spent on the phone talking to Indigenous leaders and the organizations after hours, addressing myriad issues and opportunities, and I take great pride in that. Frankly, I can't think of a week where the Premier and I haven't been involved in conversations after hours.

So this is not something that I believe is problematic. In fact, I've had many people comment that the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines as well as the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, for the purposes of northern communities, has helped to identify significant opportunities, as I'd mentioned by way of example earlier, and, frankly, is synergistic for many of it.

I have to be very, very careful, because in southern Ontario there are obviously many Indigenous communities. There is business, if you will, and the affairs of government focused on those, which have nothing to do with the north. And of course, being a northerner, I have to make sure that my—I don't want to call it a bias, but that my proclivity, I think is the word the Chair used yesterday in questions he was putting to me, is not to turn my mind to northern matters at the expense of any southern issues or opportunities, particularly in the context of Indigenous affairs. Thank you for that question.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Another one is, is the IAO budget up or down from 2019-20? Is it up or down?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Originally, the budget, in the first year that we were in government, was framed under a four-year framework. The emphasis there at the time, of course, was to deal with a significant debt profile of the province. Obviously, the impact of COVID affected the entire province and Indigenous communities, without exception. So over the course of time, the investments through my ministry have increased, but the important thing is that there are a number of resources in other ministries, at my prompting, that would represent additional funds.

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As I had said in a question prior, one of the important things to understand is that the federal government, for example, has a massive Indigenous Services Canada budget, but in actual fact, almost 50% of that would be reflected across other ministries. So there is a significant investment and, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, additional resources, either through my ministry and/or through other ministries, to serve Indigenous communities.

I would finally add this: As recently as earlier this week, I made a request from the treasury for additional funds, which will be reflected in next year's estimates, for

the Indian residential school burial sites announcement I made. The allocation overall is a 9.1% increase over last year. That is up \$7 million.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for that, Minister. You spoke about 2018 and some of the measures you had to do, whether it's cuts and whatnot. I know that one of the things that was cut, even though it's not under your ministry, was the—you know, when we talk about Indigenous curriculum writing. And I know that when we talk about the residential schools issue that's happening now, that Indigenous curriculum writing would have been a good chance, an opportunity, for our children and our grandchildren to learn about the real history of Canada, the lived experience we have.

I'm just wondering, is there a possibility that that would be brought back, or did you have any input into the cut?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Mr. Chair, to the member opposite: I'm here to focus on the estimates that are pertinent to the ministries I preside over. I can say that, at every turn, we do a couple of things. One is to ensure—and I've instituted this—that there is, I'll call it, a pause or a screen, if you will, to ensure that any evolving policies across different ministries are assessed and evaluated by the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs Ontario to ensure that we fully appreciate how we are creating opportunities as opposed to creating issues.

To that end, I do have a voice. Of course, there's always going to be a difference in opinion—that's what defines a democracy and different political parties—as to whether that was actually a cut or not, but rather a policy innovation to advance greater educational opportunities in the broader education system to inform students more thoroughly about the important parts of Indigenous history as it relates to Canada.

Obviously we can debate that, and certainly it's available to see, in previous estimate profiles, whether that was actually a cut or not. I don't have those estimates from another ministry from another year at my fingertips, but I can say that it will remain absolutely important, particularly in the context of the Indian residential school legacy—as I was explaining to my little girls intensely over the past couple of weeks; Abigail, in particular, wanted to know all of the details—that this be a part of their curriculum.

I can tell you, finally, that we are working with the Ministry of Education to look at updates to the curriculum in these regards, and we're hopeful that there will be a commitment forthcoming. Thank you for the question.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you, Minister, for that. I'll go back to the original question. IAO: Is the budget up or down from 2019-20? That was my question, if you can answer that. I didn't seem to get the answer.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Yes, sir. In fact, with all due respect, Mr. Chair, I did answer. The allocation this year is up 9.1% over last year, and that as a monetary figure is \$7 million. Thank you for the question.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for that. Also, when we talk about the \$10 million that was announced earlier

this week—if I understand correctly, you went to the Treasury Board this week. When did you go to the Treasury Board? If the resources aren't allocated yet, when will they start flowing?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for the question. Through you, Mr. Chair, the request to Treasury Board took place, I want to say, last—what day is it today?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Today is Thursday.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I believe it was a week ago Tuesday. I'd have to take a look at my calendar. June 8, I think, was the day I went to the Treasury Board. Obviously that would have been after a presentation to cabinet, and then the funding is sought through the Treasury Board and approved by the Treasury Board and then to full cabinet for final approval.

The resources are available. They'll be reflected in next year's estimates. I believe you and your staff received a full briefing yesterday on the full amount and then the phased resources. The ones allocated for phase 1 and phase 2 are available now. It doesn't mean that phase 3 isn't, but phase 3 deals largely with commemorative elements, so we'll wait to see what the Indigenous-led process is there for that to understand.

Some Indigenous leaders have spoken to me already about site-specific commemorations. Others have approached me about a more elaborate, if you will, commemoration at a location. I've heard lots of ideas, frankly, from Queen's Park to every Indian residential school location, as they were called at the time. Those are obviously available in a fiscal year, and that was new money. Unlike the federal government, who simply announced funding that had already been committed through other programs, this was new resources.

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Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for that. Is there a plan for more than that \$10 million, if that amount won't be reflected until next year's budget cycle?

Hon. Greg Rickford: We have structured it in a way, through the phases, as I'd said publicly in extensive media—this attracted the attention of people from across Canada and around the world, and was overwhelmingly supported not just by the general population but, most importantly, by Indigenous leaders across the country as a responsible, “good start,” I think, was the familiar refrain. It's structured in a way that additional resources may be available on the basis of what activities are required to be performed.

If you consider the fact that Ontario had 18 Indian residential schools—and, again, I'm just going to get this over with: I'm calling them Indian residential schools, to the member opposite, because that's what they were called. I don't spend much time on the Twitter echo chamber, but I saw a couple of people out there saying that that was a racist comment, to call it an Indian residential school. I don't know how the member feels, but I take exception to those people. I'm glad I don't spend much time there on that forum. In fact, I don't spend any, except that I happened to come into contact with the thread. I'd be interested to know what the member opposite's views are

on that, and I'm happy to change the name of it, but that's what it was known as. For the listeners out there who are watching this and fixated on things like Twitter, this was what it was called. Until I'm advised otherwise, that's what I'll continue to call it, and that's what I've been advised by some of my closest Indigenous friends to continue to refer to it as. So I just want to clarify that.

The short answer, Sol, is that, yes, this has the opportunity to be an investment that will grow from \$10 million. Obviously, we don't have an infinite resource of money at the treasury, but on this matter, our cabinet unanimously supported what we submitted and was aware that I may have to return for additional resources. That will occur when we have come to understand, through appropriate management of those funds and what we're hearing from the Indigenous-led advisers who are part of this program, that we have fully leveraged the institutional—within government, I should say—assets that we have, so the office of the coroner and forensic capacities, as well as those of private or third parties, and frankly and most importantly—I'm not sure how the member opposite feels about this—the federal government and their willingness to do this.

My understanding is that they announced \$27 million. I don't have the most immediate facts and figures; they're changing as we speak. But I have some understanding that there are a number of applications from only one province already that are accounting for a significant portion of that. So \$10 million as a function of \$27 million is in fact an overrepresentation in financial terms of what the federal government is doing. But we're not in a contest here. We believe that on the basis of the work that we think the Indigenous-led advisory council will lead us through and to, that \$10 million is, as has been widely recognized across the province and across the country including and most importantly by Indigenous leaders, a great start.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Minister. I know you mentioned the 18 former Indian residential school sites, but when the announcement happened, you mentioned 12 sites. I've got to know where that 12 came from. Could you elaborate on that?

Hon. Greg Rickford: The 18 Indian residential schools, and then 12 burial sites. There are a number of numbers here, Sol, based on the information we know now and what may be further revealed.

As you should know, the information I've provided to this point publicly and in the Legislature reflects in some respects the work that the province of Ontario did in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in particular recommendations 71 through 77, if my memory serves me correctly, pertaining to burial sites. The number 12 is the burial sites that were identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch again for the answer. I'm going to go back to the expenditures. How much of the current expenditure is one-time COVID funding?

Hon. Greg Rickford: How much of it is one-time COVID funding? Well, in my opening remarks, obviously, I gave you an estimate profile of what has been spent.

I believe, in its aggregate, if I'm not mistaken, it amounts to \$120 million as we roll over into this fiscal year.

If the question is what further resources are required, as it stands right now, we work within our internal budget allocations. But, as you can see with the Indian residential school burial site programs, we were compelled to go to the Treasury Board to seek additional resources.

Again, some of the resources that we have spent will be reflected in next year's estimates, but if the question is with respect to whether there will be additional COVID supports available, I think everybody at this committee can appreciate that this has continued to be a moving target for anybody and everybody.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): There's about a minute left.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Without exception, businesses, families, small businesses, large businesses, farmers, Indigenous communities, Indigenous businesses, depending on what each wave has thrown at us—I hope we're finished with waves, but as it stands, COVID support has proved to be fairly nimble and absolutely responsive to the issues and, frankly, the opportunities at hand to continue to do what has to be done to help communities, businesses and the like recover from the pandemic and deal with whatever the COVID pandemic is still throwing at them, i.e. Kashechewan.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: How much time do we have, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Your time is finished on this rotation. We now go back to the minister, who has 30 minutes to respond.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Okay, thank you—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I apologize, Minister; I omitted one item here. MPP Kaleed Rasheed has joined us. In order to have you properly in the committee, MPP, we need to have you confirm your identity and the fact that you're in Ontario.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Good morning, Chair. This is MPP Kaleed Rasheed, from Mississauga, Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you very much, sir.

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Minister, sorry to have interrupted. The floor is yours, sir.

Hon. Greg Rickford: That's fine. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to continue to talk about some other important areas that our ministry is involved with. Last month, in response to the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, our government announced a comprehensive action plan. This was done to confront and eliminate the root causes of violence against Indigenous women, children and two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual plus people. Indigenous women in Canada are estimated to be three times more likely to experience violence and six times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous women.

The strategy, known as Pathways to Safety, responds to the national inquiry's call for justice and was created in

collaboration with the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council and other Indigenous organizations and leaders. Its six strategic pathways include 118 initiatives to create systemic changes, including addressing gaps in support, such as better access to stable housing, health care, education and employment.

I'd like to also talk about truth and reconciliation initiatives. In 2008, the TRC was launched to tell the whole story behind Indian residential schools; to document experiences reported by survivors, their families and communities; and to guide the reconciliation. The commission released 94 calls to action in 2015—I've already spoken to half a dozen of them specific to burial sites—with Ontario directly associated in roughly one third of the calls or recommendations to action and indirectly associated in many others.

The work actually began with the previous government, but it was mostly our government who began to implement a range of initiatives in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action. We continue to advance reconciliation that makes a meaningful difference in addressing key socio-economic needs and inequities. These include initiatives that focus on protecting and supporting the province's most vulnerable populations, including Indigenous children, youth and women.

Through Ontario's child welfare redesign strategy, we're addressing the overrepresentation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth in Ontario's child welfare system by focusing an enhanced community-based prevention and early intervention services for families. Our government also released an anti-human trafficking strategy with an investment of \$307 million over five years. Indigenous-specific resources are embedded throughout the strategy, including public education targeted to Indigenous communities, multi-sectoral training with Indigenous-specific components and increased funding for the Anti-Human Trafficking Indigenous-Led Initiatives Fund.

We also established a new Indigenous Women's Advisory Council, and I want to thank my amazing colleague Minister Dunlop for the work she's done there. This is made up of Indigenous women and two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual plus leaders—it's easier for me to say it like that than the acronym—and First Nations, Métis, Inuit and—well, I'll try—2SLGBTQIA+ violence prevention experts who could provide culturally relevant advice, expertise and input on issues, including human trafficking and child, youth and family well-being. Finally, as part of Ontario's strategy to address violence against Indigenous women and girls, the mandate of the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council has now been extended beyond March 2022.

I want to talk about some other subject matter. We're also advancing opportunities for employment and resource revenue-sharing with Indigenous partners and northern communities, including the mining and forest sector. Indeed, I've expounded on this over the past two days in my presentation for energy, northern development and mines.

Our government made the first two payments under its resource revenue-sharing agreements with Grand Council Treaty #3, Wabun Tribal Council and Mushkegowuk Council totalling over \$48 million. We continue to explore opportunities to expand resource revenue-sharing. As more resource projects, mining sites and/or forestry development onboard the communities in the proximity of those developments, it will be important to move forward on resource revenue-sharing agreements with them.

Let's talk a little bit more, then, about economic development, because this in some respects reflects some of the experience I've had living and working in and for Indigenous communities for most of my adult professional life. It's my fundamental belief that economic opportunity lies at the heart and soul of a more equitable and meaningful sense of fairness and opportunity for Indigenous communities to experience prosperity.

The programs we focused on support training, job creation, community infrastructure and consultation capacity in communities. That's why we invested \$8 million annually over five years in a new Rural and Urban Indigenous Housing Program, to help create and maintain 1,500 residential units in areas where the need is greatest, including rent-geared-to-income housing. This is in line with the province's Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System, released in March 2020. I want to thank Minister Tibollo for his extraordinary work. Our government is funding culturally appropriate mental health and well-being services and supports for Indigenous individuals and communities across Ontario, importantly and notably through some new innovations which include mobile units.

I think I'd like to spend a little bit more time talking about the Indian residential school burial sites announcement. I appreciate the more technical questions and the need to understand the numbers, many of which are for public consumption. Some are still confined under either the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement or, through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work, the exclusive rights of Indigenous peoples and/or their communities and organizations, and so they would be released, obviously, at their discretion.

But in terms of what we know, at least 4,200 children in Canada died in the care of Indian residential schools, a number based on known death records. Of those children, only 2,800 have been identified. At the provincial level for the province of Ontario, at least 426 children attending residential schools in Ontario are known to have died, while an unknown number are still missing. The number of children cited by the NCTR as having died in residential schools is believed to be significantly underestimated.

Roughly 10% of the estimated 80,000 Indian residential school survivors live in Ontario. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada identified 18 residential schools in Ontario, with the last Indian residential school in Canada closing in 1996. Many Indian residential school sites have since been repurposed or destroyed, or abandoned in some cases, following survivors' wishes.

Survivors of Indian residential schools and Indigenous communities have indicated that there are unmarked burial

sites of children who died while attending the schools, on or close to Indian residential school sites across Canada. Preliminary work by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada identified 12 unmarked burial site locations in Ontario, with varying levels of certainty and detail. Sadly, as I have said as a matter of public record, there are likely to be more, so more work is needed to fully understand the scope and scale of the number of burial sites of children who died as a result of being forced to attend Indian residential schools in the province of Ontario.

Earlier this week, I announced our government's \$10-million commitment over the next three years to identify burial sites at Indian residential schools and surrounding areas, building on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Our government will work collaboratively with Indian residential school survivors, Indigenous elders, leaders and communities, who will and in fact are already working to identify sites. We're committed to working in partnership and in the spirit of reconciliation to support the necessary work involved to identify, maintain, protect and commemorate Indian residential school burials, based on the wishes and the express desires of the impacted survivors, their families and Indigenous communities.

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Our work will also support actions that Indigenous communities may request. They include supporting the collection of oral histories and knowledge from survivors to help in locating burial sites; establishing site-specific processes and culturally appropriate protocols at each Indian residential school site to guide research and fieldwork; and providing trauma-informed mental health and wellness support for Indian residential school survivors, intergenerational survivors, Indigenous individuals, their families and communities.

The process of identifying, protecting, maintaining and commemorating Indian residential school cemeteries and unmarked burial sites will take significant time. That's why we have to work together to undertake this work respectfully and appropriately, at the direction of the Indigenous-led process and the Indigenous survivors, their families and their communities. We need a principled and collaborative approach to uncover the truth, rectify past wrongs and meaningfully contribute to the difficult work of true reconciliation and, frankly, healing and the opportunity for recovery of these remains so that the families can actually begin to mourn in some respects. This approach will inform Ontario's next steps and ensure our actions are grounded in partnership with Indian residential school survivors, elders, leaders and communities. It's critical to ensure that each phase is centred in community-based processes and that ongoing, culturally appropriate support for healing and trauma are available. The principles of Indigenous ownership and control of information will be adhered to throughout the process. I addressed that earlier.

In collaboration with Indigenous partners, over the next few years we will seek to identify, protect and maintain

Indian residential school cemeteries and unmarked burial sites. The work will require significant specialized expertise, which is why our government will also seek to create a roster of technical experts. The roster will include archaeologists, forensic specialists and historians, who we will supply with specialized equipment and facilities to lead the research, analysis and technical fieldwork. We will also leverage the extensive experience of Dr. Pollanen, Ontario's chief forensic pathologist, who has led exercises like this internationally, and of course, Dr. Huyer, Ontario's chief coroner. Dr. Pollanen and Dr. Huyer will help our government ensure that this critical work is being done to the highest standards possible and under the auspices of the Indigenous-led process.

The initial identification of burial sites is only the first step in a much more extensive process, pending the express wishes, desires and advice of Indigenous survivors, their families, communities and the advisory council. We'll work to ensure that existing provincial records and survivor testimonies from previous inquiries such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, as it was called at the time, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls final report can be used as a starting point from which to conduct their further work and minimize re-traumatization.

While some communities may wish to undertake this work immediately, there will be some that are not yet ready. The wishes of affected families and Indigenous communities must and will be respected, and approaches will be flexible and community-driven. We acknowledge that some communities may wish to proceed outside of the provincial process, and we will ensure that communities have access to credible experts with the necessary experience in undertaking this work, should they wish to access these services themselves.

It's our view that local processes will need to be guided by the work at each individual residential school site in recognition of the fact that children from multiple communities were often sent to schools very far away from their home communities. We're prepared to work with the federal government to ensure that we are providing comprehensive supports and funding. In fact, in a text exchange last night with Minister Miller, we confirmed our intention to work together on this.

However, the news from Kamloops and the calls for action from many Indigenous leaders meant that we could not wait for the federal action. Our concern is that there may be pressures on their existing resources and the program framework, to the extent that it's clear it's not enough, and the time is now to do our part for Indigenous communities in Ontario. The Premier enunciated that just days ago, as I did with him, and we will continue to provide leadership and support to Indigenous communities as we work with Indigenous Indian residential school survivors, Indigenous elders, leaders and communities.

Given the questions already with respect to COVID funding supports, maybe I'll take an opportunity just to walk through some of that. As mentioned in my opening

remarks, my ministry, along with the Ministry of Health, provided \$6.6 million in 2021 for COVID vaccine supports and will provide a further \$43.4 million in the fiscal year 2021-22. This includes \$30 million in application-based funding that will soon be available to address the ongoing challenges facing First Nations and urban Indigenous communities by supporting ongoing enhanced COVID-19 vaccine rollout activities and public health measures.

The additional funding meets costs for setting up and operating vaccination clinics, hiring program coordinators, community drivers and communication liaisons in providing food and child care at vaccination clinics. The funding will also support communications development to address vaccine hesitancy and ongoing pandemic response measures, such as testing, contact tracing and public health supports in First Nations schools.

Our government is committed to supporting community-led COVID-19 vaccination efforts and ongoing response measures in First Nations and urban Indigenous communities. Dedicated engagement with Indigenous communities, organizational and health service providers is essential to ensuring an effective vaccine rollout. Working with Indigenous partners, we will ensure that Indigenous communities, organizations and leaders have the tools and supports to improve COVID-19 vaccine rollout activities and public health measures and, frankly, to start to form the foundation for greater public health capacity by Indigenous health authorities across the province.

We're providing base-level funding to all 133 First Nations, as well as key urban Indigenous organizations, with \$30 million made available through application-based funding.

First Nations and urban Indigenous organizations with local catchment areas can apply for funding of up to \$200,000 per applicant. Tribal councils and regional urban Indigenous coalitions can also apply for \$200,000 per consenting member, to a maximum of \$2 million. This can effectively double the resources that those communities take, and those tribal councillors obviously perform significant integrated and aggregated work on behalf of their member communities.

PTOs and urban Indigenous organizations and health care providers with regional or province-wide catchment areas can apply for funding of up to \$2 million per applicant. This investment provides much-needed support for First Nations communities and urban Indigenous organizations in implementing vaccine rollout and in performing public health activities and awareness efforts. Applications for this funding will open soon.

Further to that, we provided \$6.5 million in 2021, and we'll provide \$4.4 million this fiscal year, in addition to Indigenous-specific COVID supports from other ministries, so considerable resources. The question always remains how effective they were, but if Operation Remote Immunity and other public health activities performed in many instances by Indigenous-led organizations are any indication, we have gotten full value for the resources we put behind our COVID-19 response.

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I want to pivot back to economic activities. Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have nine and a half minutes, Minister.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Okay. Thank you.

I want to talk about something that was important to me in my ministry: doubling the Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program. Ontario is working with Indigenous communities to create lasting economic prosperity. We discussed that, the importance of social well-being and the assistance provided for the COVID-19 response and—now, hopefully—recovery efforts. That's why my ministry has committed to doubling the investments in the Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program. This will help long-term infrastructure needs and fast-track shovel-ready on- and off-reserve projects. As part of this investment, our government will provide \$6 million annually to fund upgrades to critical infrastructure, address COVID-specific capital needs and support long-term economic recovery in Indigenous communities.

Since its relaunch, this program has provided more than \$11 million in funding to support 93 major and minor capital projects and related studies and assessments in Indigenous communities. By providing the additional funding, our government will enable more communities to plan and undertake infrastructure projects. This is to act on vital economic development opportunities, while increasing their social infrastructure capacity. Indigenous communities are facing unique challenges; we need to create unique opportunities as a result of the pandemic. In response, our government will continue to provide tailored supports that achieve meaningful results.

The Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program is a competitive, applications-based program to support Indigenous community infrastructure projects. They include learning facilities, community centres, business centres or a combination of these. The additional funding will assist Indigenous communities in planning and executing infrastructure projects that support economic participation both on- and off-reserve. The program will help address the long-term infrastructure needs and fast-track shovel-ready projects. Upgrades under the program could include improvements to ventilation systems or air flow in communal spaces, along with the construction of community infrastructure such as business and training centres.

Given the impact of the pandemic on Indigenous communities, priority will be given this year to applications that support economic resiliency and recovery. Applications are currently being evaluated and funding announcements will be made starting this summer. These initiatives represent reconciliation in action. We are creating real opportunities to strengthen relationships with Indigenous partners and make life better for all Indigenous peoples.

I'm going to pivot and share with you an interesting program that has been very well received in northeastern Ontario, if you will—we're such a vast district; it's important to make that distinction—and that's the Fire Keeper Patrol program. Our government understands that

First Nations community and Indigenous peoples living in urban areas are particularly vulnerable with respect to some of the other impacts of COVID-19. Since the beginning of the outbreak, our government has invested \$194 million in mental health and addictions supports in response to COVID-19. On March 4, 2021, we announced an additional \$12.8 million to immediately expand and enhance culturally appropriate mental health and addictions services for Indigenous peoples and communities across Ontario.

We are investing in community-based mental health supports and services for Indigenous peoples and collaborating with Indigenous partners so that we can actually deliver targeted and immediate culturally appropriate services. We are investing more than \$1.3 million, for example, for the Mushkegowuk Council to establish a Fire Keeper Patrol. Now, this is a great program. It's a mobile Indigenous street outreach program that's operating out of Timmins. The Fire Keeper Patrol is an on-the-ground program that will offer a lifeline for vulnerable Indigenous people in the Timmins community. The program includes patrolling outreach workers, mental health workers, a mental health nurse and a social services liaison.

The Fire Keeper Patrol uses a model of care that reflects Indigenous cultural knowledge and values, and was developed in collaboration with my ministry, the municipality of Timmins, Porcupine Health Unit and other urban service providers. The program will offer outreach, harm reduction, mental health counselling and support navigating social services to Indigenous people in need in the Timmins area, many of whom are coming from isolated, remote and other local Indigenous communities to the Timmins catchment. These include members of First Nations represented by the Mushkegowuk Council and the Wabun Tribal Council.

I want to thank the Mushkegowuk Council for developing the program, with support from the federal government and our ministry and in collaboration with the municipality of Timmins, Porcupine Health Unit and other providers. It was great work and a team effort.

The investment reflects our commitment to increase mental health and addictions support, to help people get the care they need. This is critical for the Timmins community, where the Porcupine Health Unit recently declared an opioid crisis. It was noted that increased overdoses during the COVID-19 pandemic are manifest.

We will continue to invest in community-based mental health programs that support Indigenous communities, children and youth. By supporting Indigenous-led programming, we can ensure that the services are culturally appropriate and address community needs. My ministry remains in constant contact with Indigenous leaders across this province and will continue to act as an information hub for their needs. That includes my trusty iPhone here, in keeping in contact with Indigenous leaders across the province.

Let's bring it a little bit closer to home, if I might: the Rainy Lake flooding claims negotiation update. While significant work is under way related to a number of land

and flooding claims, I'd like to specifically highlight the important progress our government has made in reaching final settlements of the Rainy Lake First Nations flooding claim and fulfilling Ontario's and Canada's outstanding legal obligations concerning First Nation reserves flooding in northwestern Ontario.

We continue to take appropriate steps to correct past actions and administer the flooded First Nation reserve lands, both above and below the waters of Rainy Lake, as provincial crown lands. The settlements with Couchiching and Mitaanjiigamiing First Nations will also address the status of the Two Chain Allowance lands.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two minutes left.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Negotiating final settlements will bring certainty to First Nations communities, stakeholders and the public within the region.

Due to the COVID restrictions, my ministry is unable to host open houses or in-person meetings. Consequently, engagement will be virtual, and written materials and an interactive map have been created to support information sharing.

It remains a top priority of this government and my ministry to advance—in co-operation with other ministries, in particular the Attorney General's office—and to address outstanding land and flooding claims. Our government, in a short couple of years, in an unprecedented manner recognized by Indigenous leaders across this province, has moved quickly not just to bring these claims to a close for the economic prosperity, so that communities can move forward on the basis of those negotiated awards, but also in the context of reconciliation, as we endeavour and remain committed in every sense of the word to create opportunities for prosperity for all Indigenous people of this province, their families and communities.

Thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you, Minister. With that, we go to the official opposition. MPP Mamakwa, the floor is yours.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Chair. A question on COVID-related funding: How much of last year's \$9-million increase was related to COVID?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Sorry, how much of the—

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: How much of last year's \$9-million increase was COVID-related?

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Hon. Greg Rickford: All right. Let me see if I can get the exact amount here. Sorry. The \$9 million is the amount of the increase—I want to make sure we're talking about the same thing. The allocations for 2021-22 are a 9% increase over last year, up \$7 million. That's the allocation for this fiscal year we're in. I wouldn't be able to tell you how much of that will be committed to COVID.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay. Meegwetch. Also, going back to the announcement of the \$10 million, how much consultation was done with First Nations leaders, community members and survivors prior to the public announcement?

Hon. Greg Rickford: First of all, I want to thank the ministry, as well as my ministry staff, of which there are a

number of Indigenous and Métis people employed within the ministry. I also want to say that because this is an Indigenous-led process, the efforts of the government were concentrated on creating a very basic phased program whose technical elements and work, in every sense of the word, would be led by an Indigenous advisory council. The function of the government in arriving at that basic framework was to put together the foundational pieces in a very preliminary sense so that it could actually evolve as an Indigenous-led process.

In the context of consultation, the consultation takes the form of advice from the very beginning of the rollout of the program, led by Indigenous groups. My efforts to socialize parts of the program and discuss with various Indigenous leaders what they thought were important were also a part of this process in the run-up to this program.

We understood the need for an immediate response and one that would permit groups already working on this—for example, Mohawk, Six Nations and other groups. I had received calls from chiefs who had already been organizing work and trying to understand where they might be able to get resources to pursue children they deemed to be missing, who have not returned to their communities—people like Chief Russell Wesley, an old friend of mine from Cat Lake, and other Indigenous leaders—to ensure that this program, in its basic sense, would be something appropriate to get started with, but that the commitment would be that its specific contours would be built out by the Indigenous-led advisory council and technical experts they work with to roll out what we announced.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I just wondered about how much consultation was happening before the announcement. Was there any planning or discussion by the government prior to this to undertake the work identified by the TRC: to identify, mark, honour the victims; consult with communities and survivors; and plan for repatriation where appropriate?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Absolutely. As I'd said in my remarks, Ontario had responded quickly, as they should have, under our government and my ministry to the specific recommendations or calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. That's why we were able to report some of the findings we had already come to realize.

The other important piece to this, of course, is the fact that Canada is involved in those since they administered Indian residential schools and, of course, any and all information collected through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I think one of the most important pieces of work we're going to have to consider in this process is what the church can account for—or the churches, given that, in fact, quite a few of those churches administered Indian residential schools.

So we will be engaging with individuals involved in the TRC process. I don't think that there's any other way we could proceed to ensure that if there are outstanding calls to action, we will complete them. The importance of working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is going to be, I think, important to us as a government. But

again, this is an Indigenous-led framework, and that was at the specific request of Indigenous leaders before and, frankly, after the horrific announcement of the findings in Kamloops.

That's what we remain committed to, but every indication is that a number of groups, especially who are doing work that's well under way, are also working closely with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, because much of the data and information they have come across will be important to guide the work for individual members, survivors, their families and communities or other organizations that are doing this.

We'll also be working with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and my counterpart in the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services to transfer all death records in Ontario's possession that may be pertinent to the work that needs to be done to support the activities that will commence, I suspect, in short order and support some of the activities that are currently ongoing.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you.

Chair, are we breaking for lunch soon, or how does this work?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): We are breaking in about a minute, MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay.

Certainly, meegwetch for the response, Minister. As parliamentarians—there are 124 of us here at the Ontario Legislature. Are you open to the work that is required? Are you open to working in a non-partisan way with me? I have the lived experience. I know a lot of communities that have families who never came home.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Yes, and I would put an emphasis on “non-partisan.” I don't think it's productive at all, as we embark on this process—what we rolled out may not be perfect by everybody's assessment, but gauging the overwhelming response from Indigenous leaders across the country and beyond our border—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I apologize, Minister—

Hon. Greg Rickford: It should be non-partisan, and I'm hopeful that the member opposite will—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Minister, we're out of time.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Sorry. You guys are hungry. That sounds like a hungry Chair. It's only 11 o'clock here, and so I'm not hungry yet. I apologize profusely, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Not a problem, sir. We will be recessing.

I just wanted to say I won't be chairing this afternoon because of the schedule conflict. I wanted to thank all members of the committee for their diligence over the last few weeks. I've really appreciated working with you. My thanks to MPP Skelly and MPP Parsa for chairing, and chairing very ably.

We are now recessed until 1 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

The committee recessed from 1201 to 1302.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna): Good afternoon, honourable members. In

the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, it is my duty to call upon you to elect an Acting Chair. Are there any nominations? MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes, I nominate MPP French.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna): Okay. And does the member accept the nomination?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I do.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna): Great. Are there any further nominations? Seeing none, there being no further nominations, I declare the nominations closed and MPP French elected Acting Chair of the committee.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Good afternoon, everyone. I recognize that MPP Cuzzetto has joined us since this morning. MPP Cuzzetto, could you please confirm your identity and your location in Ontario?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Chair. It's MPP Rudy Cuzzetto, and I'm here in Port Credit.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you very much.

Again, good afternoon, everyone. We're going to resume consideration of vote 2001 of the estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs. There is now a total of three hours and 19 minutes remaining for the review of these estimates.

Standing order 69(a.1) allots 15 minutes to the independent member of the committee. They will have the opportunity to use this time today if they wish.

When the committee recessed this morning, the official opposition had nine minutes remaining. Who will be speaking for the NDP? MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Chair. Thank you to the minister for the responses this morning. One of the things the minister referenced, as well, is what's happening in Kashechewan. I know that since the COVID outbreak, an emergency was declared. I'm just wondering how many times you have spoken to Chief Friday.

Hon. Greg Rickford: My mute button is off, so—

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: It's on now.

Hon. Greg Rickford: It's on now? Okay. Thank you.

I have not, in this instance, spoken directly to Chief Friday. I left a voice mail. I take great pride in having regular contact with chiefs across the province for a variety of reasons, but in particular emergencies. I always do my checkups. That said, we have mobilized quickly to support Kashechewan. This isn't so much about a political minister speaking directly to the chief as it is ensuring that we have all of the supports in place. To that end, we mobilized very quickly to provide additional supports as well as coordinate a response with an official request for assistance to have military support come into the community.

A second request was made, and that was concluded yesterday in terms of the official request from the community and through the provincial and federal ministers seized of this. In this case, it's traditionally the Solicitor General, but because she and I work so closely together,

and Indigenous affairs has, as we have spoken about at length this morning, been able to provide not only predictable and stable funding for a variety of COVID supports, but as well, is able to leverage other kinds of support directly through my ministry for emergency pieces, the communications between the community and the ministries, both federally and provincially, that are seized with supporting Kashechewan in this situation are in fact in place.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay, thank you. As I understand it, there are currently 232 active cases in Kashechewan, and then at least 170 of them are under the age of 17, including two infants. I know that communities are usually in a perpetual crisis; it's one crisis after another. As First Nations, we normalize it. We accept it as just normal nowadays, and that's how things are. I'm wondering, in keeping in line with Kashechewan—Chief Friday has said, as well, that the province is delaying the approvals for the site move. Can you speak about this and provide some context on how far along we have gone with the agreement that was signed a couple years ago?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Sure. We have done everything in our power, to begin with, to facilitate and support that. We worked very closely with Chief Friday during that process. It was one of the first major undertakings that our ministry led the charge on. The site is long overdue. Frankly, I accept some responsibility for that from my time in the federal government, although my colleague at the time, Minister Duncan, was focused on annual evacuations. It was almost—well, I think it goes almost without exception that there has been at least part of the community evacuated.

The emphasis on an annual basis, much like your valid point around community leadership acting in perpetual states of crises—in Kashechewan's case, it was time to put this one to rest, and so we worked with the federal government on the technical elements of a site. It may be Chief Friday's view that the province is not moving fast enough, is likely the case by his perception, but we are actually working as quickly as any government could or would on this with Indigenous Services Canada for the relocation to site 5, and we're also waiting to be further engaged with Fort Albany.

1310

Respectfully, perhaps I'll double-check with Chief Friday and take his concerns, but frankly, I'm not aware of anything that the provincial government isn't doing from the outset of this to ensure that that community makes a safe and efficient and effective relocation. It's a massive undertaking.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes.

Hon. Greg Rickford: As somebody who has been to Kashechewan a number of times, I can tell you that we understand our responsibilities, the scope of work that has to be done and the coordinated efforts that have to occur between the provincial and federal governments. Those steps are being taken, and they're being taken in the sequences that we've agreed to, that this should proceed in.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay. Just going back to the crisis itself: I know you spoke about the military and that they're on the ground. I know the province doesn't bring in the military directly, but I'm just wondering what specific supports the province is providing to Kashechewan today?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Right. We facilitate and support through the request for assistance, which is triggered by the community. In discussion with the Solicitor General's office, and as I said, as our government, we arrange and support for the military—in this case, the Rangers—to go in there. That has been an extremely successful program.

I can also tell you that we have sent in our Emergency Medical Assistance Team. Those are certainly extraordinary circumstances there, and those are the kinds of circumstances that merit the Emergency Medical Assistance Team. As well, we continue to believe—and the evidence supports this—that while we support important contact tracing and management of people with active COVID—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): That's time for this round. Thank you, Minister.

We turn now to 20 minutes for the government. Who will speak? MPP McKenna.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Minister, like so many Canadians, I was heartbroken by the news of the burial site containing the remains of 215 Indigenous children at the former residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. These tragic finds highlight the importance for governments across the country to commit to the work of investigating Indigenous residential school burial sites.

On Tuesday, you and Premier Ford made an important announcement. You announced a concrete plan, including funding, to work in collaboration with and to support Indian residential school survivors, Indigenous elders, leaders and communities to identify, protect and commemorate residential school burial sites and cemeteries. Minister, can you please elaborate on the steps our government is taking to support residential school survivors and their families, please?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for that question. It has been a very busy couple of weeks in the lead-up. As I'd said to folks I had talked to, we understood the need to move quickly on this, but we also needed to ensure that we got this right—right enough to begin a process that would be led by Indigenous people, an Indigenous-led advisory council, and that an appropriate resource was put behind it.

Madam Chair, I am trying to get a one-pager put up here. We're checking to see if my deputy minister can put it up for viewing. Has that been done before at this committee? It's just helpful to walk through the phases for the benefit of educating people. He's checking right now. My staff are checking. If that's possible, that would be great.

But in any event, obviously, we've spent some time in remarks and in questions making sure, Jane, that transparent information is forthcoming for the purposes of this committee, even though this is now money that would not show up in estimates, given the profile and the sensitivities, which I greatly appreciate. Our subject matter today has dealt with this important matter, and for the purposes

of an estimates committee, historically being the last fiscal year, it will be on the books for this year. We're doing this because we think it's important and we know that the critical mass of people who watch these proceedings have an opportunity to perhaps gain information on more contemporary issues, and certainly this is one of them.

As recently as last night, we reaffirmed with the federal government that we would focus on a partnership. We remain concerned with the resources that were allocated by the federal government. I'm not aware of it. In fact, I understand it's not new money, and I'll be encouraging them to commit additional resources, because as I already know, there are considerable pressures on the existing allocation. It couldn't possibly meet the demands, as has been pointed out by Indigenous leaders across the country, for the kind of work that's being done.

Madam Chair, I understand that if you're able to share the screen, we can put the piece up, if it's the desire of the committee. I'll leave it to you, Chair; I don't want to bring on any new precedents for how we do things technologically, but if there's consensus from the committee to post it, I can walk people through it.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Minister, what I've been advised by the Clerks is that you're best to table it with the Clerk so that they can distribute it to committee members.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I see. Okay. Well, that's cool with me. The old-fashioned way: put it on paper and get it to people. The problem is, Madam Chair, that I don't think we can, unless we use the Internet to email people, so it's too bad that we can't post it. Hopefully the Clerk and the support people who do this can get up to the times with computers and help us put stuff like this up, because I think it would be extremely helpful.

But back to the question, Jane, because so much of the information of this announcement has been covered: One of the other important things I'm leading, and we're in the process of drafting it right now, is an invitation to all of the provincial ministers of Indigenous affairs to convene—at least preliminarily, likely virtually—to see and gauge and understand what other provinces are doing that's the same and/or may be different, to garner support from all of the provinces to help inform and complement what the federal government has proposed to do and could potentially do in the future.

One of the things we identified very quickly is that we didn't want elements of what Ontario was doing to be redundant to what the federal government is doing, and, obviously, to make a made-in-Ontario plan for the Indigenous people, the survivors, their family and their communities from Ontario. But, as we know, tragically, the Indian residential schools did not necessarily operate by colonial boundaries. Children were transferred from very distant locations, oftentimes from other provincial jurisdictions, to different schools, so those would be some things that we would consider.

1320

As well, I had an opportunity to contemplate some of the thoughts of a friend and colleague of mine known to

many of you, Jody Wilson-Raybould. She spoke to me about the potential for a legal framework—gosh, I really wish we could put that one-pager up. You would see that we have a commitment for legislation, but it's confined to identifying a provincial Day of Mourning. I understand, Madam Chair, it's been sent to the committee. I'll leave it to the Clerk whether they can or want to post it. That would be at their discretion.

In any event, a legal framework that supported some of the things we heard from Chief Hill, things that the provinces wouldn't be liable for in a legal context, but because there are forensic implications and some chiefs, including Chief Hill, have spoken of potential criminal pieces, to take a look at what framework we might most usefully draw from to support Indigenous peoples in the entire process they will go through on these known, unknown and unmarked burial grounds. There's the opportunity for that.

Those are some of the things we are acting upon now, in addition to the content of the announcement that the Premier and I made with Ogichidaa Kavanaugh, notably the Grand Chief of Treaty 3, where tragically there were two large Indian residential schools right here in Kenora, where I am today, and as well, a number more, including day schools that are far too many here, at least, southwest of Sioux Lookout.

I think that there's more opportunity to make sure that the provinces coordinate their response. I understand that the province of Alberta may, as well, have outlined a support program. It makes perfect sense to me, Jane, that the provinces unite behind this important matter; provide some continuity for Indigenous people, survivors, their families, their communities and any other organizations; and as well, use it as an opportunity to share best practices and technologies. Full credit to the Indigenous leadership in Kamloops who used state-of-the-art technology—I think it's sonar technology—to bring these findings to light. To the extent that there's anything out there across the country that can aid and facilitate discovery and start closure for survivors, their families and communities, I think we ought to be doing that.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Minister, if I may interrupt, the Clerk is able to share her screen, but before we do that, I wanted confirmation from the PC members asking questions that it's okay to use their time to share the document. MPP McKenna?

Ms. Jane McKenna: Yes.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay, colleagues, what you see on your screen here—mine is blocked by the thing, so hopefully I don't disconnect. Am I still there, Madam Chair?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): You are.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Okay. You can see the framework here. It's an overall approach guided by:

- Indigenous-led decision-making;

- the flexibility for communities to proceed in the manner they see fit, with provincial partnership where

collaboration is sought, so for example, making provincial technical sources available to interested communities—forensic archaeology, archival/research expertise—and enabling access to independent resources for communities that wish to lead work on their own;

- immediate access to culturally appropriate trauma and mental health supports—we will leverage those through existing channels and recent, new ones that our government has invested in;

- we will respect Indigenous law, community protocols and cultural practices; and

- there's a public education component to this, working with Indigenous partners on the legacy of Indian residential schools and, as I alluded to, potential legislation for a provincial day of remembrance and site protection requirements.

I want to focus on phases 1 and 2, because they are the ones that prompt immediate funding, of course subject to communities' wishes: trauma-informed, culturally relevant and responsive mental health and wellness supports and information-gathering from survivors, families and others to help in the location of burial sites.

I want to qualify that by saying that as a signatory to the Indian residential school agreement and consistent with the information that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has in its possession, some of that information is absolutely deemed confidential, because it's the information given by a survivor, and it's up to the survivor—and/or their families, in some instances—to make that disclosure a matter of public information in the context of this matter, for the purposes of supporting and facilitating the identification of burial sites and specific remains.

To that end, the province will use an engagement process with Indigenous survivors, elders, community leaders and organizations to guide the approach. There will be membership/governance determined by our partners, as I've identified them, and site-specific oversight processes to enable inclusive priority setting and decision-making.

Now, "site-specific oversight" could make a few people nervous. That's merely intended not as something to imply that we're leading it, but more to support it. We will oversee, but not direct, what is going on so that we can make any provincial resources available within our various minerals—sorry, ministries; I've been talking about mining. My face is tired; I've been talking a long time here. There's burial site identification, supporting research, securing technical expertise, assessing site complexity, and initial on-site field work—largely non-invasive, to confirm sites and their extent—in addition to technical experts, which could include site monitors and a ceremonial presence.

Just a little piece on phase 3, the future work/funding subject to communities' wishes and the work of the advisory council, there is:

- enhanced field work/analysis, as determined by communities involved in site-specific oversight, for example, site disturbance, disinterment;

- death investigations and forensic examination relating to children's remains found at burial sites—I think

you've heard Chief Hill talk at length about that publicly, as part of his role in joining the Premier and I in the announcement; and,

—of course, repatriation and commemoration.

You can take that down, unless you want to reflect on the map there to see where the schools were located. Maybe leave it up while I make some closing remarks on this.

I've had an opportunity to speak with my friend and colleague Minister MacLeod, who, through her ministry and as part of the heritage portfolio, spoke to me as recently as yesterday on mobilizing at the front end of this process, in full co-operation in the event that—as many chiefs and grand chiefs have called for—site-specific commemorations may be something we can do at the front end of this. That won't be our decision; it will be the decision of the Indigenous people leading these processes—but nonetheless, to access additional resources for the commemoration of these.

1330

As I had answered to a question from the opposition earlier, everything is on the table in terms of what commemoration might look like. Site-specific: Those would be known, unknown, unmarked, on or at the locations of the Indian residential schools, or to the extent that burial sites were found off the properties, they too would have an opportunity to have some sort of memorialization or commemorative piece attached to them.

I can go to another question, or you can take an opportunity to see how widespread the schools were.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two-minute warning.

Hon. Greg Rickford: We have put up there, Jane, the time spans under which they operated—incredible and unfortunate to see. Stirland Lake High School went until 1991. Poplar Hill—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Minister?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Yes, ma'am?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I can see that MPP McKenna is seeking the floor.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Okay. Sorry, I can't see because I've got the thing up.

Ms. Jane McKenna: I didn't want to interrupt, Minister. I know I only have a minute left. I wanted to say, from myself, I appreciate your leadership, especially all that's being done here. I'm a bit overwhelmed just looking at that map, as well. But I wanted to say that reaching out to other provinces so you aren't redundant and you're getting information from other people—I say to my kids all the time: When you work alone, you make progress. When you work together, you make history. That's what we need to be doing so importantly right now. So I just wanted to thank you for that.

I appreciate being on this committee. I know it's been a very long time. You've been speaking on two different portfolios. I appreciate all your hard work coming here, because I know it is. Coming here, I do learn a lot, because I am the parliamentary assistant for labour, training and skills development. Learning so much from today has been

very heartfelt as well. So thank you very, very much for your leadership and all that you've done for us in this estimates committee.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Jane.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. I'll just let all members know that the slide the minister shared, the map, is going to be in SharePoint and available to all members, and just another quick reminder to have everyone turn off their audio notifications on their computers, please.

Now we will continue with a 20-minute rotation with the official opposition. I recognize MPP Mamakwa.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Madam Chair, do I have mine off? Sorry. Am I good? I don't know what that means, audio—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): You're fine, Minister—or so far.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thanks.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetich, Madam Chair.

I know when we talk about the vaccinations and when we talk about Operation Remote Immunity—I remember a time when I used to use “First Nations remote communities.” When I used to live there, in Kingfisher, I used to say that. But I remember an elder coming to me who said, “We're not remote.” He told me we've been here for thousands of years. I don't know how long Toronto has been around. I don't know how long Ottawa has been around. They're the ones that are remote.

But anyway, I know there was much success with that operation. I got my vaccination done in Muskrat Dam in Sandy Lake, where I was invited. I think it's important that what's happening in Kash is showing us that vaccinations are not the only way we can overcome COVID. I know, when we talk about First Nations, to follow public health guidelines—overcrowded housing, even no access to clean drinking water, when we talk about inadequate infrastructure. We cannot really do those public health guidelines. I think it's important. How do we, when we talk about COVID and supportive, effective self-isolation in northern communities—even self-isolation. Can the minister provide details to the committee of what that process looks like, provide an example of how we support First Nations in this regard?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Sol. First of all, I agree with your assessment from the elder that it's the larger city centres that are remote. That's an opportunity I learned when I got up there. The terms are used out of convenience to where government centres and business centres are located, but there isn't any question of the time immemorial presence of those earlier. You may recall, I think I spoke at the energy, northern development and mines piece on a question about winter roads and how some of those roads—if you've read some of the great books, *Killing the Shamen*, for example—connect communities across provincial boundaries, for the traditional links, family and otherwise they have had.

Similarly, in the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund—and I can speak to that a little bit later—we've made some

significant renovations to encourage and incentivize communities, Indigenous communities in particular, to get access for complementary infrastructure. That goes to some of the issues you're raising. These are to support community centres, to support training centres, but more importantly, from my own experience, to create much-needed space, given that there is no sense—because it's a matter of fact that housing shortages continue to be one of the key components of, in the context of COVID, providing adequate living space for people who were under isolation at any point in time in those communities.

I think we were very fortunate that Operation Remote Immunity was particularly effective and that furthermore, the supports we put in place at the front end of this were able to at least create space for public health activities related to the pandemic and provide much-needed space for people who needed to isolate. As we know, there was not, in many instances, enough space in those communities, and some communities found themselves with members in self-isolation outside their communities.

So that's an important reminder, the pandemic, around the need to commit to the kind of essential infrastructure I think towns and cities—remote towns and cities—across the province take for granted, if you will, in terms of their ability to accommodate people requiring things like quarantine from three to 14 days.

1340

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I travelled to various communities to support them in the uptake of the vaccination rollout during the operation. What was the uptake in these communities of the vaccine?

Hon. Greg Rickford: You mean like specific percentages?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Yes. Out of the 31 fly-in communities that are there, is there a number? Was the uptake good?

Hon. Greg Rickford: It was excellent, actually. There were a few communities where the arrival of the vaccinations was slow to start, which is why we revisited those communities not long after. I had mentioned in my introductory remarks that we had done sequencing. Some communities were better positioned than others, so we targeted what science and comorbidity profiles and access to health services recommended, or it became obvious that they should be prioritized. As I said, a couple of communities—Kasabonika comes to mind. There was an initial slow start, but then we reappeared there, I think, about a month later and we got up to the kinds of percentages we thought would, from an epidemiological perspective, ensure the community's safety.

If I recall correctly, for the entire on-reserve population in the province, 75% have had first doses and 61% have had the second dose. We don't actually track Operation Remote Immunity figures separately anymore, because frankly, the program was so successful, and that's a compliment to the great work that the Nishnawbe Aski Nation did with us. But I do know that a number of the isolated communities are well over 80% for first dose and tracking closely behind for their second dose. Frankly, we remain committed to that.

I think it's pretty safe to say two things, that if we can get to the point very rapidly where we have the adult population first and second at the same percentage and the youth vaccination rates, which I think I reported in my earlier remarks, we'll be in a great place. Of course, we have to account with the number of communities not accessible by road—how about we define it or describe it as that—that some of that percentage can't be captured because those folks would have been living in towns or cities. I know that for Kenora, Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay in particular, given that a large number of Indigenous people from the communities without road access go to Thunder Bay for their trips out, medical, business or otherwise, they were captured there.

In short, the numbers are exceptionally high. There are really two distinct features about Operation Remote Immunity: They are exceptionally high vaccination rates, and up until Kashechewan and a few road-accessible reserves—I call them that for the purposes of the Indian Act, and no other reason—where the outbreaks of, as I said before, profound clinical significance prompted additional supports—like the ones we spoke about in Kashechewan.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Yes, certainly when we talk about Kashechewan—again, I mentioned earlier that there are 232 cases there as of today—I know certainly that's an issue we're working on that the community is facing right now.

I wanted to go back to the rollout, the operation itself. How much was allocated toward this operation?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Sorry, you're referring to the amount it cost to do the Operation Remote Immunity?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Yes.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Well, we're not finished, so the numbers can't be in. As I said to you before, estimates is a snapshot of the last fiscal period, and the books won't and can't close on that. That amount will be available and reflected in next year's estimates, so we'll be happy to provide them for you at that time. Of course, we've identified the supports that complemented Operation Remote Immunity. But the short answer to your question is that no resources were spared to ensure that this program was effective. By every account, I can only conclude, based on the discussions I've had with leading health Indigenous peoples in the north I'm closely connected to and from political leaders, including Alvin Fiddler, that the resources that were invested specifically into it were significant.

I would also say that any amount I could quote for you from Indigenous affairs wouldn't fairly reflect that the lion's share of the monies for those specific operations were borne by the Ministry of Health. I'm not sure if you've had an opportunity to meet with Minister Elliott on that matter, but besides operation immunity itself, the IAO contributed resources for on-the-ground supports in each of the communities, as opposed to anything you would find, or not find, importantly, in the estimates on the cost of Operation Remote Immunity.

I can tell you that there was significant uptake as Homer Tien—who now leads the vaccination province-wide as a

result of the extraordinary work of Operation Remote Immunity. I think the people of Ontario take great comfort in that after the retirement of General Hillier from his role as chair of the vaccination table.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you. Meegwetch. I know that, again, vaccinations are one piece, but there are other things that come into play when we talk about social determinants of health, when we talk about overcrowding, access to clean drinking water. If overcrowding contributes to why so many First Nations communities are vulnerable to these outbreaks, such as what we've seen with COVID, will next year's IAO estimates include any permanent allocations to mitigate the need for these temporary supports that were only available after the crisis had started?

Hon. Greg Rickford: As I said before in a question not unlike this from you, it's difficult to predict what those resources might be and whether they would come out of the existing allocations for my ministry. I mentioned to you earlier that there is, in fact, a 9% increase in my ministry's allocation, which amounts to roughly \$7 million, but if you take Kashechewan for an example, even though as a province we're moving out of the three waves we've had and hopefully advancing in a measured way to reopen, COVID is still, in baseball nomenclature—because I'm still smarting from last night's game against the Yankees—going to throw us a curveball or two, and we're going to have to pivot and make sure that the resources are there.

1350

As I said to you, with respect to the work we're doing in Kashechewan, coordinated with the federal government, we anticipated that the additional requirements of monies for this coming year would likely be related to a COVID response. In short, there is, how should I frame it, a nominal consideration, if you will, in budgetary terms, of more than half of that amount for the COVID response this year, which of course would have started on April 1.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Chair. And by the way, thank you for your co-operation on posting that document.

In this fiscal year, I think it's pretty safe to say that we would be able to respond to the role that IAO, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs Ontario, is doing on a situation-to-situation basis and base funding to each of the Indigenous communities.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for that. I'm just wondering, with the rollout of the operation, was there federal funding, as well, attached to it?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Most of what we've done, especially when it comes to the remote communities—I call them “remote”; how about we just decide to call them “the communities with no road access”—has significantly involved federal partnerships, because the efforts to do what we've accomplished were logistically extraordinary because of the fact that they have, for example, no road access, or at least limited access. I think it's pretty safe to

say that transporting vaccines on winter roads has a certain amount of risk to it. Having been on those roads yourself—and myself; I think the longest trip I ever took was from Cross Lake, Manitoba, to Winnipeg, and it was on an ice road for more than 10 hours. Anyway, I digress, and I'm sorry for that. I'll stand down there.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: How much time do you have, Chair?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Fifteen seconds.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay, I'm done.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay.

We will continue, then, the next rotation of 20 minutes to the government side. Who will be speaking? MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Good afternoon, Minister. I wanted to thank you very much for your detailed and expansive responses to the questions that have been posed to you thus far. I think, for many who might be watching or just listening in today, it provides insights and perspectives that wouldn't otherwise be gained if you weren't taking the time to share that information in a very precise way. Thank you.

Minister, I'm going to transition to economic development for a moment. You will know from your role in cabinet that the 2021 budget builds on the significant supports for families, workers and employers. In the course of that, the government is making good on our commitment to do whatever it takes to keep people safe while building on the foundation to create the growth we need for a strong economy.

Minister, could you spend some time, please, sharing with the committee members and those who are either watching or listening what the government is doing to support the economic well-being for First Nation communities? And within that particular response, could you also tell us about the First Nations Economic Growth and Prosperity Table? Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for that question, Lorne, and I appreciate your participation today. Let me start out by saying and reiterating to a certain extent what I talked about in my opening remarks, and that is, notwithstanding the fact that we obviously have to address on an ongoing basis a number of issues we endeavour to take and turn into opportunities, if there is anything that—a minister always looks back, and should, in my view, on a fairly regular basis to understand operationally that the ministry is doing its work: “How can it improve? We've got a great team, but what can we do better?”

And then there's that other part that's really important to me, and that is the question I think we all ask ourselves when we go to get re-elected: “Did I leave this place”—just in case I get unelected, and I have lost one election out of the three I have been in. Whether or not you win or lose, did you leave the communities you represented in a better place? That's important to the MPP, and for the purposes of a minister, it's really important, because the buck stops here. That responsibility and that accountability is something I take very carefully. So in arriving at that, the questions I ask myself are not existential. I look for things

that, to the extent that I may not be the minister of this portfolio in the future, I can look back on and say, “These were significant changes we made for the better.”

What are they? Mine was a particular emphasis on economic development, because I’ve lived and worked in several dozen Indigenous and Inuit communities across Canada in my capacity as a nurse. I’ve had the extraordinary opportunity to see first-hand and benefit from the richness of the cultural experience available and the traditions time immemorial in those communities. But the harsh reality, Lorne, is that many of these communities do not have some of the anchor business tenants or industries to provide sustainable economic activity. Economic development takes on an entirely different form when you start thinking about it that way. Indigenous communities more proximal to large city centres or large-scale resource projects often have many of their community members working there and Indigenous businesses servicing them. And so we see those successes and we try to think, especially when it comes to the communities that have no road access, how we can do that.

So I got down to the business of focusing on economic prosperity, and I told Regional Chief RoseAnne Archibald, who has done some amazing work in economic development for the community and the communities she’s represented over the course of her political and professional career, on really doing two things, (1) advancing the economic prosperity table—or, sorry, I should start with, and I’ve already mentioned this so I can address it quickly: The economic advisory council was populated almost exclusively with Indigenous business leaders to inform us on some of the challenges, but more importantly, the opportunities in a COVID recovery, and a lot of good information was gathered from that. That’s where Regional Chief Archibald and I thought it would be a really good idea to create this prosperity table, which, well-resourced, is going to put the voices of Indigenous leadership and Indigenous business leaders as, if not more, importantly—because not all and, in fact, most politicians are not business people. How we can create economic opportunities equitably—as the differences from Indigenous communities to non-Indigenous communities, and then within Indigenous communities, the disparity, in many instances, between what some communities have access to in terms of economic activity and its development versus others, which are—as I’ve said before, in particular with the communities who have no road access—very, very limited.

1400

That brings us to budget 2021. Building on the significant support for families, workers and employers, we’re effectively doing good on our commitment to build on the particular elements, within my ministry, of dollars committed to economic development. But as I mentioned, this budget committed to doubling the investments in Indigenous community capital grants in order to help long-term infrastructure needs and fast-track shovel-ready projects on- and off-reserve, off-reserve projects that Indigenous communities have a vested interest in seeing come to success.

As part of this investment, as I said earlier, we’re providing more than \$6 million annually to fund upgrades to critical infrastructure that go to support capacity for economic development and expansion and, in addition, offering a range of economic development programs and skills development. I’ve highlighted a few of those over the past couple of days.

Some that perhaps I didn’t mention include the Indigenous Economic Development Fund, which invests directly in Indigenous businesses, communities and organizations that promote economic development on- and off-reserve. The fund, Lorne, facilitates access to finance, supports economic capacity-building projects and improves access to skills training and employment opportunities for Indigenous businesses. This is in addition to what may flow from other ministries, like the announcement my colleague and dear friend Minister McNaughton made yesterday morning for the benefit of the Indigenous communities most proximal to Geraldton—in modern times, otherwise known as Greenstone—a skills training program focused directly on them as the prospect of the Greenstone Gold Mines opening becomes a reality.

The New Relationship Fund has provided over the past, I want to say, 10 to 12 years more than \$183 million to Indigenous communities to support their meaningful consultation engagement with government and private sector lands and resource opportunities. We continue to be big fans of that particular fund, and we also support Indigenous job creation and economic development through a variety of non-funding resources initiatives, which include the Indigenous business development tool kit, the First Nations community economic development guide and the Aboriginal Procurement Program, which in my respectful view could do even better. That’s enabled more than 185 procurements totalling over \$65 million across 11 ministries for Indigenous businesses over the past six or seven years.

So that’s a broad discussion around economic development. Lorne, maybe I’ll stop there and see whether you want to flesh out more details.

Mr. Lorne Coe: All right. Thank you, Minister, for that response. You highlighted the Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program. You know and others know that it’s an important funding component of economic support we provide to Ontario First Nations. Can you give the committee members a sense of some of the approved projects and what you see to be the effect of those projects within the communities that have received the funding for them, and particularly, the community infrastructure aspect, please? Thank you.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Yes, sure. That’s a great idea, actually. Why don’t I just walk through some projects to give people a feel for what we do, with a caveat that these, of course, have nothing to do with the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, which I speak about quite frequently. I have told committee members in the past couple of days, including here today a member of the opposition, that the renewal of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund is endeavoring to reconcile the dramatic difference between

businesses, especially in large city centres across northern Ontario, and communities and businesses in smaller towns, hamlets, unorganized territory and both road-accessible and no-road-access communities.

Some of those projects—let's unpack that. I've got a list here and I'll just cherry-pick from it.

The Chapleau Cree First Nation, the community centre feasibility study: That helps them come to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund or an infrastructure fund shovel-ready.

Garden River First Nation: an industrial park master plan financial and feasibility study.

The Hiawatha First Nation: research and planning for development of the Hiawatha economic development corporation.

The Inuit Art Foundation: expanding the economic impact of the Igloo Tag Trademark.

The establishment of a strategic opportunities officer for Lac des Mille Lacs First Nation—a little closer to home here, but certainly I think close to Judith's neck of the woods.

Métis: The Métis Free Trader LP enabled them to establish a joint venture program to partner with businesses for those opportunities.

Moose Cree First Nation, one of my favourite places: Our Community Store, the Moose Cree food co-operative.

The Rainy Lake Tribal Area Business and Financial Services Corp. established the Anishinaabe business and economic development corporation. Boy oh boy, you'd need another session or two for me to work through all of the exciting activities that they're involved with, everything from sturgeon harvesting to acquisition of major capital assets in the Rainy River district, forestry and other pieces. Some of the communities there operate golf courses and bought up stores—chains, if you will—in the region.

Webequie First Nation: a community co-op store. Of course, there's a community on the move, and very near and dear to my heart, that stands atop what I've described as the corridor to prosperity, the road that will ultimately connect from the Trans-Canada Highway and Aroland First Nation and provide access for Marten Falls and Webequie through the northern link, which they're currently leading in their environmental assessment process—and prospectively, assuming the impact assessment goes well, the prospect, no pun intended, of some significant mining operations developing there in the region known as the Ring of Fire. There are a number of other isolated communities or communities with no road access along that corridor, and there will be an opportunity for them to literally link up with it, should they so desire. Webequie is putting this money to good use, as you can see.

I also wanted to mention, because I just remembered that we provide Aboriginal financial institutes—in the last fiscal year, I think there's a line item; I don't have it at my fingertips in the estimates here. But here it is, right here, yes: It's \$4.2 million. They provide developmental lending. These are non-repayable grants and repayable

financing instruments, Lorne, to Indigenous businesses in the catchment area those financial institutions serve.

1410

I don't think that's a bad thing. I think that in many instances it's really good for all businesses, but particularly in building capacity with Indigenous businesses, to be versed in the realities of lending, borrowing, grants and the matrix that is used to support businesses. Those Aboriginal financial institutions are important places where that kind of capacity-building or developmental lending, as I've referred to it, helps promote entrepreneurship and manage risk as Indigenous-owned and -operated businesses can gain some experience.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Chair.

And then from there, the sky's the limit, right? We know that the major banking institutions now are building in Indigenous financial institutions and/or programs and making that a priority.

Through the Aboriginal financial institutions, Lorne, what happens is you get experience on the lending/borrowing aspect and reality of businesses, a much easier way to access capital, and it gives you a little bit of experience when you walk in, as we all do, to those big banks, which can be pretty intimidating, to seek additional instruments, debt or otherwise, to grow their businesses.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Chair, how much time do I have?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): About a minute.

Mr. Lorne Coe: All right. Thank you, Minister, for that response. I think it's important to add, as part of the 2021 budget, the government committed to doubling investments in this important grants program and in the course of doing that is helping to address long-term infrastructure needs and, as the minister indicated, to fast-track shovel-ready on- and off-reserve projects, going forward—very, very important projects.

Minister, thank you very much, once again, for the insights you provided and the effect of this important capital projects program. Thank you.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Well, I hope I get an opportunity to—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Unfortunately, that's time.

We will continue to the next round, but first, I recognize that MPP Kanapathi has joined us. MPP Kanapathi, if you could please confirm your identity and location in Ontario.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: It's Logan Kanapathi, MPP, joining from Markham, Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

I've been asked, MPP Coe, to point out that your audio has been a little bit temperamental, just to let you know that you were drifting in and out there.

Mr. Lorne Coe: All right. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We'll continue with the rotation. Next is the official opposition for 20 minutes. I recognize MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Chair.

I know in the riding of Kiiwetinoong, certainly, when we talk about health care, when we talk about public health—as you know, under the federal nursing program, there are 12 programs that nurses run. When we talk about public health, immunization, well-man clinics, there are 12 programs they run.

I know that in the area of, for example, health authorities, in the Sioux Lookout area, First Nations get admitted at the hospital for infections and diseases at six to seven times the Ontario rate. Also, even admissions to the hospital for chronic disease are two times the Ontario rate.

I think what we're learning by the example of Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority providing full public health services during the pandemic—one of the things they've requested from the province too is support for Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority's First Nations communities to have their own First Nations-governed public health system, by supporting approaches to community well-being. I know that one of the things they require is a full recognition of SLFNHA as equivalent to a health unit and for the public health physician to have some powers as a medical health officer.

That's one of the things they asked for from the province earlier, when the pandemic started. Are you aware of this request? How can you support First Nations in having their own stand-alone public health system?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for that question. I hope you'll indulge me in a response that our estimates couldn't possibly consider here today, because I'm the Minister of Indigenous Affairs; I'm not Minister Elliott. But I know why I'm being asked this question: because the member opposite knows I spent six years living and working in the communities without road access in Nishnawbe Aski Nation territory—Mishkeegogamang, actually, is technically road-access; I spent a lot of time there—and was the lawyer for the Independent First Nations Alliance physician services and health services group.

So that's likely why I'm being asked all of these health questions, Madam Chair, when they don't necessarily fit squarely into the estimates profile I would otherwise be responsible for. As a subsequent matter, with your permission, as well, I'll endeavour to address the member's questions, because they are important, and certainly the COVID pandemic—given the profile in the estimates here and the tremendous support we've given and provided for, things like Operation Remote Immunity, I'll expound.

Yes, I have received requests, both from the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority and in a parting debrief with our mutual friend and the tremendous leader of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation for a couple of terms, Alvin Fiddler, on a pathway to a public health unit, I think is probably what we can most likely compare this to, or what you might describe it as—it looks like you're saying yes—and whether SLFNHA fits into that.

First, let me say that my own experience of working as a nurse in isolated and remote communities has taught me that the province really should have a keen interest in what activities, from a health services and programming perspective, are actually happening on-reserve, so that they

can start to predict or anticipate, and then provide, the kinds of services they ultimately become responsible for anyway: that is, for folks who don't realize, once a person leaves the nursing station and the community as a result of any kind of requirement for health service or a diagnostic test or program or some kind of critical intervention or, as the member pointed out, high comorbidity and chronic disease profiles and the treatments they require to support them—become the responsibility, rightly, of the province of Ontario, through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

1420

Instead of having populations come from the Indigenous communities that have no road access by surprise, year in and year out, how and why are all these—what the heck is the federal government doing up there? I know that's a question the member opposite has rightly asked in other platforms, because this isn't all on the provincial government. But we have an interest, and certainly, to your question, public health is one of those, and I think that's what the pandemic has taught us. Obviously, prior to the pandemic, there had been some discussions about a reorganization—I'm not sure if that's the right word—of health units, and I'm glad that it, frankly, didn't occur, because I think the pandemic has taught us a lot more about how and what they should be.

So while I can't—and I won't, because I can't—as the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, make any announcement here at the estimates committee, I can assure the member that the considerations for public health capacity for the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority ought to be at the forefront of our considerations.

The Northwestern Health Unit, just for people's knowledge, does an extraordinary job—and a shout-out to them in the context of this pandemic. The land space they cover is the size of at least a couple of higher-profile European countries—that might be unbelievable to some of you folks who drive from your homes, even out there in beautiful Oshawa to downtown Toronto—and likely crosses five, six, seven, eight political ridings. My closest constituency office to the one I have in Kenora is 145 kilometres away, and the farthest one is 215, and I'm still in my riding by a long ways. Kiiwetinoong is obviously characterized by even smaller towns.

The Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority does an amazing job. I've been involved and watched their tremendous progress very closely. It seems like, based on the feedback we got, they may be in a position to undertake a greater role in public health, especially when it comes to things like a pandemic response.

How's that for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs not being the Minister of Health but signalling that we appreciate the point you're advancing, especially as it relates to the pandemic?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for that. Page 30 of the briefing book talks about how the ministry provides support to other ministries, and that's why I was bringing that up as well. Not only that, it's certainly an issue when we—let's say, during the pandemic and how public health

is so critical, or when no public health system is in place, how it impacts the communities. That's why I brought that up.

As an example, in the Sioux Lookout area, there were two deaths that happened during COVID-19 due to dental complications. Even right now, there are over 500 children who are on a wait-list for pediatric dental surgery. They are in pain. They are malnourished due to an inability to eat. In 2016, I know that preschool children received oral health surgery 14 times the Ontario average. That's one of the things that's happening. I'm just talking about that because that's what COVID is doing. It sounds like there is a dental crisis in the SLFNHA. What can the province do to address this issue and prevent further deaths from occurring due to dental complications?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Well, again, this falls outside of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, but you're right in pointing out that we, as is often the case, particularly in the instance of the pandemic, play a supporting role.

I think the short answer, and it just comes from my heart—it's not written down anywhere—and it's certainly something I've been working hard to advance within this government—and it's been very well-received—is health transformation. It has been occurring across northern Ontario. There are health authorities that have had tremendous success. I was there in the front end of a couple of them that had a rocky start, but they've done a magnificent job. That's why the Ministry of Health, in co-operation with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, is working on health transformation. Just for your assurances, my ministry is also at that table. In fact, I can tell you that the Ministry of Health recently appointed Charles Fox—whom I know you know well, as I do—as Ontario's negotiator for this, so I might direct you to that, if you didn't already know.

But obviously, from my time on working and living in those communities, dental services are absolutely critical for all ages. There's a strong link between dental health and cardiac health, and when you add in comorbidity profiles like we have in many of our Indigenous communities, particularly those that not accessible by road, it becomes even more complicated.

In the period of time between my federal career and this provincial one, I returned to serve as the lawyer and consultant for the Pikangikum Health Authority. I couldn't believe that the federal government's designs and plans for new nursing stations were based on population data and size from as far back as 10 or 15 years ago. In other words, by the time a brand new facility gets built, it's outdated. Furthermore, with respect to dental, the space allocated for that as a portion of the health centre—or the nursing station, as we refer to them—was too small.

Anybody who knows, and I've had enough crowns of my own to know, knows that if we pay attention to good dental hygiene and care at a place like a nursing station, so dental access to dental hygienists, probably one of the most secure jobs you can actually find right now—if anybody watching wants to become a dental hygienist and work in the vast, beautiful northern territories, there is all kinds of availability—that would prevent many of the

complications you speak of. Anyway, it's just maybe a little off-track there.

1430

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for that. I spoke about dental services and I spoke about children for a reason. I know you gave me an answer with respect to jurisdiction: That's outside the ministry itself but even the responsibility of the province. The reason I asked is—when we start talking about children's dental needs, how will the province address this issue and meet and uphold the province's side of Jordan's Principle commitments?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I know the sensitivities around I think what you framed in the Legislature as jurisdictional Ping-Pong or something. It might have been tennis or volleyball; I don't know. But I take the point, except that there are very, very important historical and constitutional reasons why provinces and the federal government have powers that lead to requirements for providing specific kinds of services. And you're right, as I would think of it, that that's not an excuse.

But in the case of dental and, more broadly speaking, health services, as I said to you, the profile of, certainly, mental health, child and family services and justice programs that are offered on-reserve are monitored very closely by the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs for two important reasons: first, to make sure that there's an all-of-government approach, because especially when it comes to the communities you're talking about now, which are the northern communities not accessible by road, principally—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Greg Rickford: —the province has a better ability to understand how and why health and dental health and complications come about in those communities; to get into the business of working with the federal government on supporting some of those and being in a better position to support them community-based, which we both know is a far more effective way to deal with health, including dental issues; and as well, to be able to put pressure on the federal government in much the same manner that you do, to ensure that their responsibilities for health infrastructure, health human resources and health services and programs reflect what the province goes on to address once they leave their communities and enter the health system of Ontario.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: How much do I have, Madam Chair?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Forty-five seconds.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the answer. I know when we talk about jurisdiction and Jordan's Principle, it's important.

I know youth mental health is also an issue. From 2008 to 2017, the SLFNHA mental health program increased to 18 times the original number. I know in the north, in NAN territory, 2017 was a very bad year for the number of—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. That's time.

We'll continue the rotation with the government side. I recognize MPP Barrett.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. It has been a long couple of days for you. Actually, this committee—I get the feeling we started meeting last winter some time, but I think we are drawing to a close.

I wanted to raise the issue of Six Nations and Caledonia, an issue that has been going on for 15 years and three months now. More recently, in the past year or so, there has been a great deal of coverage regarding the occupation of the McKenzie Meadows housing development in Caledonia. Again, this is part and parcel of over 15 years of occupation of the Douglas Creek Estates subdivision. The specific question would be, what is our government and, more specifically, Indigenous affairs doing to address some of the long-standing, unresolved issues behind a lot of this activity, issues that are federal, by and large? I know the federal government describes them as historical claims and land right issues.

I'd like to continue a little bit longer, because it was just suggested to me that the minister should maybe take a break, maybe get a glass of water or make a cup of tea, and I might say that to Sol as well. You've been chatting quite a bit, of course, during these deliberations.

So perhaps just to give the minister a bit of a break, I might maybe explain to our members of our committee here a bit of a background of the last 15 and a half years. I say that as a resident of the area. Fifteen years ago, I was the MPP for the mighty Six Nations and also the adjoining Mississaugas of the New Credit, as well as Haldimand county, Norfolk county and Brant county, so I was in a position to be dealing with all sides. It's not two sides. There are many, many sides; many, many factions.

When I was first made aware of this, I was at the Ontario Legislature. That would be February 28, 2016. I was told there was a big flare-up in my riding in downtown Caledonia. I was the Progressive Conservative opposition. Just before question period, I crossed the floor and I sat down with the late David Ramsay, who was Minister of Natural Resources with responsibility for Indigenous affairs, and he opened up his House books. He opened up two books. We sat down and went through and read the briefings on the background that would have relevance for what had just happened, the essentially taking by force of the Douglas Creek Estates subdivision. Myself and the minister—I'm Conservative; he's a Liberal minister—a bit of a crisis, going down line after line: federal, federal, everything was federal.

So I told my colleagues, "I'm out of here," and I went home. The next morning, I walked back into this site and, understandably, nobody would talk to me. I hung around for an hour or so. There were only a couple of people there. I came back the next day. I came back several days, and finally, leadership decided to have a chat with me. I asked them, "Well, I've been here for a couple of days. How come nobody would talk to me?" They said, "It's federal. You're provincial. It's got nothing to do with you."

I got to know the two leaders at the time, Janie Jamieson and Dawn Smith, over the ensuing weeks. I think I was

labelled a runner. I met with the clan mothers. I was given a large number of historical documents from the people who were occupying the site. I drove to Ottawa and personally delivered those documents to the Governor General, the Queen's representative. Her Majesty the Queen is held in very high regard by the Six Nations people. I feel I can say that. Queen Elizabeth has come down six times to visit the Mohawk chapel just outside of Brantford. So we're talking a lot of history here.

1440

I will ask the minister to interrupt me at any time when he has had a bit of a break.

There's been so much written about the history, of course. The Six Nations people have certainly had European contact for 300 years. They are indigenous to New York state, I think as anyone knows who follows this, and came, essentially, as United Empire Loyalists, the same as my family, because we fought and lost the Revolutionary War and the writing was on the wall regardless of—I don't get into the race thing at all. Regardless of who you were, if you fought the American colonists, you were not welcome in those colonies. My family arrived in 1792. Many of the Six Nations people arrived in the late 1700s—I think it was 1786—at what was called Mohawk Village, where that church stands to this day. It's probably one of the oldest churches in North America.

So here we are. Land was ceded. The Six Nations Indigenous community was set up in the 1850s, referred to as a reserve, the former Tuscarora township and other land there. Land was sold, held in trust; interest accrued. There are some accounting claims. To my knowledge, the Six Nations, elected or hereditary, have not put forward a formal land claim. Over the years, the federal government indicated, through Barbara McDougall, Chuck Strahl and various people, that there are no valid land claims, but there are issues to be settled—"issues" is the term the federal government uses—historical claims and land right issues to be resolved.

I know it has dominated question period, over 15 years, on occasion. Many MPPs and cabinet ministers have come to visit over the years. I know Sol was down there recently. I'm there probably every week. Tough times—it's very tough when the main street of a town is taken over time and time again, when provincial highways are shut down, when CN railway lines are shut down and there's destruction. It's an incredible cost and incredible lost opportunity cost with businesses that have pulled out, up and down the Grand River, whether it be Brantford or downstream in Dunnville, or who just never did decide to come because of the tactics that are being used, the intimidation and the fear that continues to instill in the community.

So I would like to stop talking there, and I just would like to repeat my question again. What is the provincial government doing—and several ministries are involved; of course the Solicitor General, but more specifically, our Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, their involvement—to address some of these long-standing issues with respect to those who are involved in some of these actions, essentially on the border between Six Nations and Caledonia?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for that. Frankly, I haven't even worked up a sweat yet, as the saying goes, there, Toby. But I do appreciate your discussion on a matter that, frankly, even given my own background in Indigenous affairs nationally—pan-nationally, if you will—and provincially, I couldn't hope or attempt to do justice to, the subject matter you spent a considerable time of your intervention talking about, not only because, in the context of your long-standing, very successful political career, you have, as you said, performed a variety of different roles between the parties implicated in this, but you offer up far more expertise on the dynamics there as somebody who is part of a family that's been in that region for 300 years, or two-hundred-and-a-lot years.

I know we've spoken about my own connection to your region. Six Nations of the Grand River is a community very near and dear to my heart. My grandparents are buried in that community, and I had close relationships with that community growing up. In fact, to this day, our family—growing up on Erie Avenue, out there in the southwest end of Brantford, a right-hand turn in Caledonia is not too far down the road, as is Ohsweken and Six Nations. We've only been around there for a hundred and—I want to say 120 years.

I don't have all of the answers for that, but I know that we've been actively involved in it, Toby, and I want to recognize your contributions to, in many instances, defusing some of the tensions and providing important information for us to act on. Mayor Ken Hewitt has become a friend and a regular text buddy, although I think he's upset at me right now because I haven't texted back for a little while. I've been swamped with some other things.

We've made some progress there, and we have to stay focused on some of that, because there is a long, rich, very complicated history here, as there is with many claims, Toby. You well know, and in my capacity as a lawyer and involved in the political negotiations of many of these kinds of historical claims, they involve, obviously, very, very complex historical and legal issues, ranging from reserve boundaries to breach of treaty provisions, flooding, questions of title, overlapping claims, often multiple parties involved in negotiations and especially lawyers. You know them. Rest assured that my ministry conducts a thorough review of all land claim submissions, and as you pointed out, there are several ministries typically involved in this.

But the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs is in some respects a clearing house for the status and the progress, at least in terms of accountability to this, because I have strong views that many of these claims just need to be addressed and move on, and that's what we hear from Indigenous leaders. It's what we hear from municipal leaders. That's why we've been working—we've redoubled our efforts, frankly, by comparison to the previous government—to negotiate land claims, including the provision of land and settlement of claims, which sometimes requires consultations with other Indigenous communities where there may be overlap, especially on traditional lands, and frankly, working to modernize and

enhance our capacity to review, negotiate and implement Indigenous land claims and other land agreements. It's one thing to settle them; it's another thing to implement them. And we've seen how quickly things can go awry if that kind of oversight is not there.

The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, over the past couple of years, has worked really hard to put a particular focus on that. I'm proud to say that we've addressed a huge backlog of land claims in assessment identified as a source of concern in the Ipperwash report. This has occurred, Toby, through a realignment of our resources, including the number of expert staff assessing claims with historical and legal rigour and implementing a three-year benchmark for the assessment of new claims and thereby reducing the length of time for assessment by more than half, among other actions.

1450

So what does that mean? Well, since entering office in September 2018, we have accepted four new land claims for negotiation, and we are in negotiations with 55 land claims and land-related matters, including treaty negotiations with the Algonquins of Ontario—one of the geographically largest and single most complex set of land claims, for obvious reasons. This work is being undertaken in the spirit of reconciliation, respect, co-operation and partnership.

Some concrete examples of this: In September 2018, we were newly elected—and I was surprised that this file was still in the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs—and we addressed the mercury disability benefits for the people of Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong by indexing the mercury disability benefits for current and future beneficiaries. I will recognize that the previous government had started this work, but—I live out here. Grassy Narrows is only 90 kilometres away from me. In my federal capacity as the member of Parliament that Grassy Narrows was situated in—it's now in Kiiwetinoong as a provincial political riding—it was shocking, frankly, that this had not been done sooner. So I'm giving some measured accommodation to the fact that the previous government started it, but it should have been done a long time ago. For the first time, payments were indexed to individuals who qualified for mercury disability benefits that were decades old and had never been increased. Those payments began in November 2018.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Not only that, but they were made retroactive.

We did the signing ceremony for the Williams treaty, something I'd been working on in my time as a federal person. This put to an end the Alderville litigation—we forget sometimes that these big claims can settle a whole bunch of other claims that are embedded in them—and \$4.5 million in payments to the Six Nations of the Grand River as part of a 20-year agreement for their interests in Casino Brantford land. Of course, last summer, Ontario transferred the former Ipperwash Provincial Park. We are also working on a couple of other ones, finalizing them.

They include the Flying Post First Nation settlement agreement, Pays Plat land and larger land base final agreement, and, of course, the Pic Mobert addition to reserve of 1,038 hectares of land.

So a lot of work has gone on, colleagues. There's more to be done, but it's getting done faster, and we're hearing from it—I attend the Chiefs of Ontario meetings every time they're held, and we hear consistently from Indigenous leadership that as a government we're, over the course of time, getting better at it and faster at it. Some would say you can't do it fast enough, but there are processes in place that we respect for the benefit of everyone involved. I think it's fair to say that we've accomplished more in a three-year time frame than any recent government—and I'm including those of our own political stripe over the past several decades in Ontario that could be completed. It's time.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): And that is time.

We will now begin our next full 20-minute rotation. It will be the official opposition, followed by the government, and then after that full rotation, we'll go into slightly reduced—17 minutes and 30 seconds each.

For the next 20-minute rotation, I recognize MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Chair. Again, thank you for the committee and also the minister for this day. I know one of the things we talk about, when we talk about Indigenous people, First Nations, is that data is so important. Data is integral to how services are provided.

In saying that, we learned recently, for example, that the government's human trafficking information about impacts on Indigenous young women and girls is being collected by the Anti-Racism Directorate, that they're the experts. But the ministry responsible for the strategy couldn't say during the recent briefings on Bill 275 what the Anti-Racism Directorate's methods and sources were.

I'll frame that in a question: What does this ministry know about the role of the Anti-Racism Directorate in collecting race-based data about Indigenous peoples?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for that question. Obviously, my own level of participation I won't say is confined to but very much includes two elements: (1) my role as a member of cabinet; and (2) what we have instituted is—I think I described this earlier as a screen, if you will, from our ministry on any and all matters—some of the most general and some of the most specific, and in the context of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls—to support their efforts.

We're not directly involved in the data collection per se as a ministry, but what I can tell you more squarely within my ministry is that we jointly roll out the programs' administration and services to respond to this. I could walk you through, if your briefings have not included this information, the programs that the province and the federal government have developed jointly and give you a sense of what the financial allocations to them are. They fall outside of my ministry in many respects, but we do play an important role in working closely with the Ministry of

Children, Community and Social Services to lead and combat human trafficking and ensure that on the support side they're reflective of the diverse needs of not just the communities, but the victims as well.

It's my understanding that the data collection is something—and again, I don't have this information because my ministry is not seized of this principally. To better track data—it doesn't come up in some of the most obvious ways. As you would know, many of the young women and men—increasingly more boys, unfortunately—find themselves trapped in this situation. We see it here in the streets of Kenora, Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay, in particular. That data collection has its own set of complexities.

1500

But we are working with the Anti-Racism Directorate to update their anti-Indigenous racism strategy. I can tell you that the engagement will include discussions on areas where race-based data collection will be considered. To the extent that your question reflects a concern in this area—and it does, and it should—I want to provide you with assurances that we are playing a role in it. We have begun the process of exchanging letters between the directorates, and that work will begin—well, it's partly under way, but it will begin even more substantially in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for that. Do you have input on the gathering of data, for example, for the human trafficking strategy and that type of data they're collecting? Are you saying you don't have input, or do you have input?

Hon. Greg Rickford: It's a great question. I have input to the extent that my ministry—as the estimates will reflect, we play a lot of supplementary and complementary roles in things other ministries do, like the Attorney General, like the ministry of child and youth services, and like the Ministry of Health. Obviously, given my own background, I don't miss an opportunity to chime in. Establishing the screen, if you will, has put the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs in a far more prominent position in terms of government policy and decision-making, because our ministry has become known as the “not so fast” ministry if we see something we think would create issues or to the extent that they don't necessarily enhance the opportunities that are embedded in them. That's more often, I think, a fair assessment of what role that we play.

My officials have had discussions, especially with the Chiefs of Ontario and the Inuit, on data-sharing agreements for health information, which I know your own background lends a really good understanding of, given the complexities of what these statistics reflect, and that is real people and real victims. The information is often sensitive, and there are protections that need to be put in place so that once the information is used for a specific purpose, obviously it's protected for the benefit of the individual and, of course, any other recourses that might be available to that person for the impact they suffered from this, in the case of human trafficking in particular.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Yes, I was just looking at data. I was thinking about how data is collected. Are you able to

provide an example of how data is collected or even disseminated and how this information is shared between ministries when we talk about this type of data?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Again, I wouldn't be in the best position to speak to data collection, not just because of the complexities from where it's derived—so towns and cities and Indigenous communities across the province. It shows up at mental health and addiction treatment facilities. It shows up in the justice system and what have you. There's no question about it that this is a Herculean effort, to aggregate this kind of data. Your line of inquiry, while likely outside of the estimates I've come here to speak to—again, I appreciate their significance in the context of the role my ministry plays to support them.

To that extent, I can assure you that what we do do is provide supports. This has been particularly true in the case of the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls rollout. I might add that that was guided by an Indigenous-led women's council with Minister Dunlop. So we provide support. In providing support, we're responding to the data, and if the data is insufficient in terms of either how it's collected or how it's reconciled across ministries, I take your point. I'm happy to raise this as the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and understand how we might be able to do that better, and then, as a ministry, to expand—refocus, if you will, as required—the kinds of supports we provide in the context of human trafficking, as it impacts Indigenous people, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and obviously in the justice system as well.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for that. I know that we talk about what this ministry does, and when we talk about justice, when we talk about health, when we talk about mental health, when we talk about children and when we talk about Indigenous people in Ontario, it crosses all ministries.

I know that when we look at the estimates briefing book, on page 30 it talks about how this ministry provides significant support to ministries, in collaboration with the Ministry of the Attorney General, in assessing and reviewing the implications of federal legislation, policies and commitments to Indigenous communities and organizations in Ontario, including Bill C-92, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families; but also federal Bill C-15, An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the federal actions to implement the declaration; but also federally-led recognition of Indigenous rights and self-determination discussion tables in Ontario. I was wondering if you would be able to provide a brief description of what this "significant support" means and also what the collaboration with other ministries looks like.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Well, you've known me long enough to know that "brief" is a personal challenge I have. I hope that the Chair is not smiling behind that mask; it's difficult to tell. No, she's not, so that wasn't even remotely funny.

But brevity has not necessarily been my strong suit, because, particularly when it comes to these matters, I feel

like I have a lot to say. I take the position, especially with respect to my role as the Minister of Indigenous Affairs in Ontario and a credible amount of experience living and working in Indigenous communities across this country, but in particular in northern Ontario—indeed, it would be an understatement to say that it has come to define who I am and how I feel about things as a person.

1510

What that means is that with the support of an amazing team at the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs—and we've got a great group over there. I think they've reached out to you on numerous occasions—I'm speaking of ministry officials—and provided you with various briefings and backgrounds on a variety of subjects. They're available to you at your request.

In short—because I'm really going to try to be brief here and finish up in the next sentence or two—we make it our business to ensure that everything possible coming through any cabinet processes draws the scrutiny or attention of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, as I said earlier, to identify issues that may not have been considered and/or to enhance the opportunities that would be embedded in that policy decision-making process, to the extent that they manifest themselves in things like programs and announcements from various programs. How is that for brief?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: That's not bad.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Not bad? Okay.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: How many minutes do I have?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes, 45 seconds.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay. As a follow-up with what we just talked about: At the high level: What was IAO's advice to the rest of the provincial government on C-92, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Sorry, what was the—

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: What was the ministry's advice to the rest of the provincial government on C-92, which is An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families? Is there any advice, high-level advice, that was provided to the rest of the ministries, to the provincial government? Was there any advice?

Hon. Greg Rickford: You mean from the federal government?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: No, from your ministry. Is there any advice to—

Hon. Greg Rickford: Oh. Look, I don't have it right here at my fingerprints as a matter of written record. I provide counsel and advice on a number of different pieces of legislation. We do our work, obviously, through federal and provincial territories, so the ministers responsible end up conveying that information. Some of it, obviously, is subject to cabinet confidence to the extent that it's work in progress and has not been announced, and that includes federal legislation that may impact services.

I can tell you—I know there's not much time left, and we can revisit this—that I do play a prominent role with the ministry of child and youth services when it comes to

child and family services, especially the ones that provide those services in our regions of Kiiwetinoong and Kenora—Rainy River—and, for that matter, Thunder Bay—but I can expound on that—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. That's time.

We'll now continue the rotation with 20 minutes to the government. I recognize MPP Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Minister, for your input today and yesterday. I know it's been a long—you'll be here before us for 15 hours in total. But this is an important subject today that we've been talking about. I've learned so much about Indigenous affairs, and I do appreciate your input and certainly MPP Mamakwa's. It's always interesting to talk to him. I've crossed the floor a couple of times to talk to him about his culture and different things, and I do thank him for answering the questions I ask him.

I want to talk to you about Indigenous supports during COVID-19, Minister. We've touched on a lot of this throughout the last few hours, but I think it's important, if we have touched on it, that we repeat these things, because we need the people of Ontario to know how we are supporting Indigenous peoples during this crisis we've been going through—I don't know, a year and three months or four months, whatever it is. It's certainly longer than we'd hoped it would be.

We've known about the impacts that COVID has had throughout the province, and we've seen it especially through vulnerable populations such as Indigenous people and communities. I wonder, could you please tell us what kind of supports the government did provide during this time?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for that question. I agree that while some of it may be repeated, there are a couple of general rules. The first one for all politicians: We should never expect or probably even accept any sympathies. As a minister coming to the estimates committee, there's a lot of information, as our discussions today have reflected. They've crossed back and forth or in between policy discussions, financial allocations as they're reflected in the estimates, and then accountability for diverse subject matter. Frankly, it's my firm position that as a minister you have a responsibility to know and understand all of those things as they pertain to your ministry.

Where it gets difficult and the tasks sometimes ominous—and I'm not seeking the sympathies of this learned committee, but when we cross over into other ministries, we don't always have the information that we can. The reason I think that's important is because sometimes I think that—especially at today's proceedings. The member prior to you raised some compelling matters that beg us to have ministers sitting together talking and reflecting on how we work together. I've described processes. The COVID-19 supports are a really good example of that, Randy, because the ministry's response was largely in a significant but supportive role to the things the Ministry of Health and, frankly, the federal government

were doing; and understanding the challenges of those communities, the Indigenous communities, throughout the province of Ontario, as has already been discussed—things like the fact that many are not road accessible, many live long distances away from sizable towns and cities that can provide services, and others who may live closer to them still face some barriers in accessing the kinds of supports and services that were born out of COVID-19.

But at the end of the day, like the province at large, this is really about ensuring, beyond the challenges of COVID-19 in other areas, frankly just getting vaccinated. I want to focus on that, because there's a good story here with respect to Indigenous peoples. I know it's one that they rightly should be given tremendous credit for, because we work in lockstep with them and relied on and accepted information from Indigenous-led organizations and the Indigenous vaccination table to roll out our vaccines for Indigenous peoples. That's why I can tell you today—this is a number I haven't put out there today—that, to date, we've delivered over 306,000 doses to First Nations communities and Indigenous populations living in urban settings. That's important, Randy. It's important because you can't make the assumption that those urban Indigenous populations are actually living long-term or permanently in urban settings. Many of them are not permanent.

1520

You take a look at the city of Thunder Bay. I think they have a census population of about 100,000, but on any given day there are around 125,000 people living in the city, drawing on its services. A significant portion of that 25,000 are Indigenous people coming from the communities that have no road access or are proximal in a relative way, because we're a big country out here, as you know, and what might be around the block for—well, you understand, Randy, out in your parts. But when I tell you that I have three constituency offices that are 150 kilometres and 215 kilometres away from where I currently am right now, you get an idea very quickly of the draw that we're talking about. The city of Thunder Bay has a lot of people. This involves a significant, complex strategy.

We've talked at length about Operation Remote Immunity, but I think we have some real achievements. I mentioned earlier today the eligibility of urban Indigenous people on the basis of what I just described, the importance of standing our ground; respecting and understanding the valuable, critical information of the science table, their doctors and scientists, and NACI and their important work—but sometimes you've just got to take a stand when you know, Randy, and that is that the urban Indigenous populations and what they typically reflect were just as important to immunize in accordance with the monographs of Pfizer and Moderna, the 21-to-28-day dose intervals, as it was anywhere, because, to finish that thought, many of those people move back and forth between town and city centres and their home-based communities. That accounted for some of the reasons why there was some community spread. It explains, for example, to some extent what's going on in Kashechewan right now.

But it really highlights the reason why, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we made a commitment to ensure that road-accessible Indigenous populations and urban Indigenous populations received the dose intervals indicated in the Pfizer and Moderna product monographs. In fact, up until Kashechewan, as I had said on a couple of occasions, the only real significant outbreaks—so those are thresholds where there is critical and significant community risk for a variety of reasons through a COVID outbreak—had only occurred in road-accessible Indigenous communities. The same kinds of challenges with comorbidity and overcrowded houses and a lack of space to move people into safe quarantine and recovery places existed there. In addition, urban populations have higher-than-usual migratory patterns between a city centre and their community, even if they live in those towns or cities.

And so for those reasons—I think that’s a COVID support we don’t talk enough about, which we focused on and, really, with the co-operation and the leadership of Regional Chief RoseAnne Archibald and Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler and the leadership council themselves, made the case for. In our first conversation with Premier Ford, there was no hesitation on his part, and we moved with confidence to NACI and to our own Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Williams, to inform them that we would ensure that the entire Indigenous population would be treated the same.

It didn’t occur immediately. It started with Operation Remote Immunity. To their credit, many public health units across the province made independent decisions to ensure that dosage intervals were consistent with the product monographs of Pfizer and Moderna, but that might have compromised some of their supply.

In planning for Operation Remote Immunity and other supply outside of the Toronto regions additional vaccines were given to, this was a significant support that, as I said, outside of the spread in Kashechewan right now, explains why, by all accounts—vaccinations and therefore minimizing the number of positive COVID cases—subsequent waves 2 and 3 have been for the most part non-impactful in a significant way for Indigenous communities and the Indigenous population at large in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Minister. I’ve spoken to a number of members, and I don’t know whether you know this or not, but I used to do a bit of part-time trucking. I did go out west a couple of times—well, actually more than a couple of times. Driving through northern Ontario and back is quite an experience. I think that a lot of people in Ontario don’t realize how big this province is. So Operation Remote Immunity was an important initiative by this government to make sure that we could get vaccinations out to remote areas. Our Indigenous people here in southern Ontario live closer together than most do up north, so I think the vastness of this province does create some challenges.

I can remember the first time I did go out west, I drove to Winnipeg from here, wondering if I would ever get there. It just seemed to go on and on. I remember stopping in Nipigon to fuel the truck up for the second leg of the

journey and then driving and starting out again, and it’s still a long, long way to Winnipeg from Nipigon. That was quite an experience, but it did open my eyes to the size of this province. When we have challenges such as COVID-19 or any other challenges that affect the province, the distances that have to be travelled sometimes to fix a problem or address a problem are certainly magnified by the size of this province.

Operation Remote Immunity is quite an operation, if I can say that again. I know Ornge helicopter was involved and the Ministry of Health, you, the Solicitor General, natural resources, and also the federal government was involved in that planning. I wonder, sir, if you could explain to us how it was all put together and the co-operation you’ve had from everybody involved.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thanks for that question. We’ve touched on Operation Remote Immunity, but I do want to revisit it because there are some things I didn’t cover and, frankly, to acknowledge the participation of a number of other organizations for the benefit of the critical mass of viewers who may be watching us today, at least on public television.

But, Randy, it’s probably worth noting that it took basically until the end of day 2 for us, as a committee, to recognize that I’m operating in a different time zone and that our province is big enough to have two time zones. So when the Chair says we’ll commence at 9 a.m., and I get a document that says 9 a.m., I show up at 9 a.m. But my staff, of course, want to reach out to me and say, “Minister, you’ve got to be there at 8.” “What? I’ve got kids in online learning; I’m not ready for this.” Notably, most of the documents furnished from the Legislative Assembly, I might add—this is nothing to do with the important and thorough work of this Chair and the estimates committee—ever issue their materials to reflect the fact that we have a second time zone.

1530

I was born in Paris, Ontario. I left there at a young age, to work as a nurse up in Sioux Lookout. On one of my ventures, I went to the University of Victoria. I thought I’d never get out of the province of Ontario. I live 1,800 kilometres away from Toronto and 2,600 kilometres away from Victoria; it’s 1,000 kilometres longer. The difference, Randy, is that you get a change of province every once in a while, when you travel from Kenora to Victoria. In 45 minutes, I’m in friendly Manitoba, and then Saskatchewan—I don’t want to turn this into a Stompin’ Tom Connors song. At least I get to go to Alberta a handful of hours later, scale the mountains, and come back down and land in Vancouver, and take the ferry over to beautiful Victoria, where I received my bachelor of science in nursing. So even though it’s 1,000 kilometres longer from Kenora to Victoria, there’s at least a greater change of scenery and jurisdictions than Ontario.

On Operation Remote Immunity, let me just say this: We’ve actually evolved into Operation Remote Immunity 2.0. I mentioned it earlier, but I want to give full credit where credit belongs. This was co-developed by the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and operationally led by Ornge,

Dr. Homer Tien, who now leads our vaccination table and served, as you identified, 31 communities—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Greg Rickford: This was a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Health, Ornge, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, the Ministry of the Solicitor General, natural resources and forestry, and the federal government partners.

On May 31, we launched Operation Remote Immunity 2.0, building on the successes of the original. Our mandate is to fly in COVID-19 vaccines. Over 25,000 have already been administered, for youth and for any community members who, as a timing function, may have missed the first visit to the community and/or the second to receive their first or their second vaccination, Randy. We're very proud of that accomplishment—and thank God we did. As we've seen in Kashechewan, when a covariant comes into town and it affects, in particular, youth who are not yet vaccinated—and we should pay careful attention to that across the broader province—we're doing important work.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm glad you mentioned the variants. We've seen some outbreaks, in my area and Kitchener way, of the variants. They're very concerned that they could get away on us, so they're working very hard to put some extra vaccines into my area and Waterloo and Kitchener in order that they can, hopefully, get a handle on this thing. It's more dangerous, as I understand, than the other variants we've been involved with or the original COVID-19. The younger folks have got to be careful about this. Hopefully, everybody who can get vaccinated, who wants to get vaccinated—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. That's time.

We will continue the rotation, but they'll no longer be a full 20 minutes. To ensure that the remaining time is apportioned equally, it will be split as such: 17 minutes and 30 seconds to the official opposition, and 17 minutes and 30 seconds to the government. We will begin this round with the official opposition, and I will recognize MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Chair. I'm just wondering, Minister, if the ministry or you as the minister provided advice on the federal government's appeal of the human rights decision where the federal government is in court fighting against Indigenous children. Has there been any commentary or advice or support that has come from your office?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I have not given any information on that federal piece of legislation as a matter of public record. I can say to the committee here—and again, this is well outside of anything the estimates are contemplating here today, except a reference to the financial allocations in a supportive role of my ministry to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, which is more operational than substantive to federal policy matters.

As I explained to you, or was attempting to before our time ran out, we have been more intimately involved with child and family services matters in our region, the ones

that serve Kiiwetinoong and Kenora–Rainy River. They're actually much larger than that, as you know, but I get involved from time to time for advice or counsel and support on those matters.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay. I know on page 30 of the document, the estimates briefing book, it states that the ministry “provided significant support to ministries” in collaboration with MAG, “in assessing and reviewing implications of federal legislation, policies and commitments on Indigenous communities and organizations in Ontario.” I'm just wondering what the ministry advice or support was on how to relate to the federal UNDRIP legislation, because it talks about it here in that document, right?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Okay. I'm sorry. We've switched to UNDRIP?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: UNDRIP, yes.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Okay. So this is a great question. I'll be honest in saying to you that initially—and I think this was widely shared by Indigenous leadership across the province—while there may have been a keen interest in advancing UNDRIP, in particular FPIC, it was the position of our government that the federal government introduce this legislation. And I'd be interested in your position; I don't think I've ever heard it. That may be because through your private member's bill you're advancing a provincial one—I'm not sure—but it wouldn't preclude you from informing me on your own feelings about the federal piece of legislation.

But the consultation was virtually absent. As a matter of record, the provinces were given virtually no time to consider this. I got a notification late last fall of the federal government's intention to advance UNDRIP. We attended one FPT virtual forum, and we were not consulted; we were told.

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I suspect that you can relate to the frustrations of a process that is that incomplete. There are significant implications, issues and opportunities with respect to this, but we had experienced this before through the famous Bill C-69, the Impact Assessment Act, which the federal government brought to bear, as you may very well know, on the Ring of Fire—legislation that would ultimately override the province's constitutionally protected rights to work with any and all communities on a given project, be they Indigenous or otherwise.

So the short answer is, there wasn't much opportunity. I remember clearly, if I was to characterize it, being lectured at the one consultation event I attended. There was a subsequent one that was confined to the Attorneys General. That's unfortunate because the Attorney General of Canada wasn't just a professor of mine at McGill University's faculty of law; we played on the same hockey team together for three years, and including a congratulatory phone call on his voice mail and a long-standing relationship. I would have thought that Ontario would have been given a greater opportunity to go back to the Indigenous communities in the province of Ontario and understand their position.

I know, at the time, Regional Chief Archibald made public statements expressing her concern at—this is not verbatim or a quote—by my assessment, a complete absence of consultation and engagement with Indigenous leaders and Indigenous people in the province of Ontario. The Indigenous leaders who were in support of it, which I can completely respect and understand, were national leaders of Inuit, the AFN and the Métis. But the impact of UNDRIP, its issues and its opportunities, from the perspective of the federal government bringing this forward, also, as I said, seriously implicated the provinces and the province of Ontario. I know for a fact that there remains an extremely high level of dissatisfaction by the provinces with how the federal government proceeded with this particular piece of legislation and, frankly, may have missed an opportunity to understand how provinces could work with an UNDRIP framework, especially considering the constitutional limitations as they're enunciated in sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution of Canada; to understand how UNDRIP could be reconciled between the vast separation of powers as they're enunciated in the Constitution.

I'm hopeful that I'm doing the Attorney General of Canada proud, since he was a former law professor of mine, but I won't miss the opportunity, for the benefit of this committee—and your question, to you personally and professionally—to express my disappointment in the process. It has proved so far not to be an effective way, especially if we are to look at Bill C-69 and how they've used that tool so far. I'm happy to expound on that, because I think it has some implications for UNDRIP on resource projects that don't cross provincial boundaries.

I know that UNDRIP is not all about that, but it was a heavy-handed approach and it was a disappointment, in my respectful view, by the Attorney General of Canada and, more broadly speaking, the government of Canada to bypass critical opportunities for more thoughtful and lengthier consultations and engagements, not just with the provinces but with the Indigenous communities in each province because, as you well know, UNDRIP means different things to Indigenous populations in the provinces and territories across this country. I would have thought that they had the right to chime in on that.

I can't speak to their formal record of consultation with Indigenous people, communities and/or their leadership for the purposes of advancing that legislation. I think, frankly, they have probably gotten a bit of a free ride on the technical requirements that are typically associated with a piece of legislation that so intimately affects constitutional powers and/or Indigenous peoples and the treaties and the non-treaty lands that are formally and/or informally recognized as, for example, traditional territories of Indigenous communities.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for that. What about the ministry itself? Or what is your advice on bringing my private member's bill on UNDRIP through the committee, then to third reading? Was there any advice that you provided, since we're on UNDRIP?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I haven't given any specific advice as to it. There are a lot of things that, in my own

political career, I've done successfully. I've been called on, almost counterintuitively, with the legal and health background—winding up as the Minister of Energy federally, I guess, was related to the riding I represented, because of its abundance of resources, but doesn't necessarily speak to my background. My point is that I could never profess to be someone who pays careful attention to the parliamentary or legislative processes that private members' bills and/or legislation, except for my own, have to follow.

But what I can tell you with respect to that, and it's a position I have always maintained, is that there is an incredibly lengthy consultation and careful consultation that must be made before this kind of legislation became, as the expression might say, the law of the land. In the spirit of the body of work you're navigating through the Legislature in your private member's bill with respect to UNDRIP, we have made significant progress, by way of example, in ensuring that the spirit and, in some respects, the substance of UNDRIP is reflected in legislation that we are currently developing.

There is no greater example, of course, than the Far North Act, which I know you're very familiar with: lengthy conversations, formal and informal engagement with Nishnawbe Aski Nation. I remember living and working up in the communities that have no road access in my various capacities and the outrage that was expressed by Indigenous leadership when the Far North Act was effectively crammed down their throats. There is no formal record of the consultation and engagement we've come to respect and to be, in fact, legally obligated to do in the modern day on that.

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I remember some of my friends who were chiefs at the time saying that some of their communities were engulfed in public parks designated by the previous government. Now, if that doesn't get you out of bed in the morning, friend, I don't know what does.

But I can tell you that our responsibility in addressing the Far North Act was to do two important things: (1) to ensure that elements of that legislation, over the course of time, particularly land use planning that was performed on the basis of that legislation by Indigenous communities, continued, because the communities saw that as the platform for which they would give their support—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Greg Rickford: —and something like consent for a given project, but, as importantly, (2) to ensure that the province had every opportunity to use words like “joint decision-making” and “moving beyond consensus,” as I called it at the time.

To the credit of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Minister Yakabuski has taken that advice and counsel, and the ministry officials and my ministry continue to work on it and ensure that elements of what UNDRIP is attempting to advance are enshrined or reflected in pieces of legislation we advance in the absence of an UNDRIP legal framework, as they conceive of it, in

the province of Ontario or any other jurisdiction in Canada.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: How much time do we have, Chair?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Fifty-five seconds.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: You spoke briefly earlier about the Ring of Fire, but also the Far North Act and land use planning and all that. I grew up in the north and I grew up on the land, and I know that really sometimes people don't understand who we are, where we come from. I learned my language from the camp, and the history of the lands. I learned everything about the names of the bays, the islands, the animals in my language first. It wasn't until I started going to day school when we realized that English—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. That's time.

We now continue the next 17 minutes and 30 seconds for the government. I recognize that two MPPs have their hands up, so I'm going to recognize MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thanks, Chair. I just want a clarification on the time. We have 17 and a half minutes on this round. Does that include the 15 minutes from the—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It includes 17 minutes and 30 seconds for this round. Then, following that, should the independent member not claim their time, we will equally divide 15 minutes by both the opposition and the government after this round.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that. I'm going to turn it over to MPP Cuzzetto.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize MPP Cuzzetto.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Minister, for all the work you've done federally and provincially for this province and for this country. As you know, I represent the riding of Mississauga-Lakeshore, which has the Credit River running down the middle of it. There's a lot of culture and heritage in this community. My family goes back four generations, and I think that's a long time, but there's way more than that in this community.

As well, I've been working very closely with the Eagle Spirits of the Great Waters, because we have a development down here that used to be the old coal power plant that's being developed. It's 253 acres, and 175 acres will be developed. Out of those 175 acres, we are working with the Indigenous community to build a turtle lodge and a community for the Indigenous community in our riding.

As well, I would like to talk about the economic well-being for First Nations. It is an ongoing priority of our government, particularly as we work to support our First Nations community organizations and business recovery after this economic challenge during the COVID-19 crisis. What is our government doing to support the First Nations and Indigenous community?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Well, we've spent a great deal of time today talking about various economic development initiatives my ministry is focused on. I spoke about it as a

personal matter, almost, in terms of what a legacy might look like when one walks away.

But you know, Rudy, one of the most important, fundamental things a person would want to do to support economic development is actually engage in the important exercise of building infrastructure in the communities that can be used for a wide variety of critical operational pieces for Indigenous communities, but also for economic capacity.

We see this time and time again, and it's one of the reasons why we moved so quickly to commit additional resources to the Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program. It's an important foundational funding component of economic support that Ontario provides to Ontario First Nations. Indigenous communities across the province, to that extent, had received operational funding as part of our COVID-19 response, but as part of budget 2021, we have committed to doubling those investments in the Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program, because they help address long-term infrastructure needs and fast-track shovel-ready projects that are in their communities, but, as importantly, Rudy, ones that are not in their communities. That may be the difference between on-reserve and off-reserve; on-reserve and traditional lands; or communities that are close by that serve an important role in supporting the community socially, from a health perspective, and economically.

As part of this investment, Ontario is going to provide \$6 million annually to fund upgrades to critical infrastructure, address COVID-specific capital needs and support long-term economic recovery. This, of course, complements the work I've spoken at length about today, from the Indigenous economic advisory council that then gave rise to the economic prosperity table that we recently established with the Chiefs of Ontario.

I'll walk you through some examples of why and how this is important through what they do. Upgrades under the program would include improvements to ventilation systems or airflow in communal spaces—so community centres. Many Indigenous communities, particularly ones in rural settings farther away from the larger city centres and most certainly the isolated ones, often have only one or two big buildings that perform a variety of functions. You may go in there for your groceries, and attached to it is maybe a small mall and the band office. They're complexes, typically. They provide a myriad of services and programs, there are businesses built in, and many people congregate there. They include training centres.

So the Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program actually supports the construction and renovation of Indigenous community infrastructure projects that contribute foundationally, I think is the word I was looking for, to economic development, to job creation and social benefits to the community. The program has been around for a while—some 30 years, I want to say—and I believe the previous government did their version and made best efforts for a relaunch. Since that relaunch, we've understood the importance of some renovations to the program, to enhance what these resources are intended to support and, frankly, to provide more resources for them.

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To that end, more than \$11 million has been put forward to support more than 93 major and minor capital projects and related studies assessments for eligible products, including community centres, elder and youth centres, and—a newer phenomenon, which I'm very pleased to see—small business centres. This hit home when I was in Webequie First Nation and saw the potential for a small business centre when the initial prospecting and exploration of the Ring of Fire was occurring. Webequie, through support at the time, in my capacity as a federal minister, and the provincial government at the time, got together to support the construction of the facility that ultimately provided a host of different things—a larger-scale meeting room so that we weren't always meeting in the local gym or community centre, either at the school or at a community centre, taking up that space to compromise kids' ability for recreational time. It included a grocery store. It included an office designated for land use planning activities performed by local community members, in mapping the historical significance of the land in and around Webequie First Nation, which is very close to the epicentre of the most exquisite quantity and quality of minerals framed as the Ring of Fire—and then, of course, a grocery store.

I rent a home not far from your riding. I think we take for granted the countless strip malls and business centres and restaurants and whatnot that populate, certainly, Lake Shore Boulevard and beyond.

But when we bring it home to Indigenous communities, obviously, for a variety of different reasons—and it's a very dynamic thing. Sometimes it's a conscious choice by Indigenous entrepreneurs to own stores off-reserve, in communities where their membership visits, to try, Rudy, to have a presence there and stimulate, whenever and wherever possible, economic opportunities. As a complement to that—and I've mentioned it countless times, but it really goes to my efforts to raise and elevate the profile of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, to provide additional business supports that are very entrepreneurial and small business-focused. As I said, in renewing that this past spring—hopefully, significantly improve the prospect of Indigenous communities and small businesses to apply to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund and build this kind of infrastructure that either supports, provides capacity or is quite legitimately the actual infrastructure and/or business supports for them to operate and hopefully expand.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Minister, I was talking earlier on about the Eagle Spirits of the Great Waters wanting to do this project here on the lake, at Lakeview, on the old power plant facility. What do you think of that for the economy?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Sorry; I was just getting some refreshment. Because I'm in a different time zone, my food intake is all messed up. Having Kentucky Fried Chicken at 11:15 is never a good thing here, so I'm actually having raw fruits and vegetables as punishment, but also to calibrate my adjustment to the Eastern Standard Time zone proceedings.

I think it's great. Rudy, one of the things I like to talk about, whether we're building a building, a large one, and

the significance of it is self-evident, or other major legacy projects—we often forget and don't talk about the economic spike and the capacity that are actually derived from building these assets; the employment opportunities, particularly as they might be focused on Indigenous peoples.

I've spoken about the corridor to prosperity. People talk about the Ring of Fire and building a mine and stuff; that's all great. These mines, once they're built, sustain some healthy long-term direct jobs, and—no question about it—they support indirect jobs. But when you think about building a huge building—for example, Ojibways of Onigaming have in mind a similar kind of project—the amount of economic activity that's generated from their purchasing power, the business activities associated with this, the actual construction of the project and the legacy potential of those buildings afterwards for those reasons, they go well beyond just the intended symbolic importance of the building in the first instance. So I'm very, very supportive of these.

Obviously, we are custodians of the treasury, on behalf of the citizens of Ontario, and we have to treat those resources respectfully. Particularly in the context of the COVID-19 recovery, we are staring at an important obligation to advance key policies and programs to emerge from this, but at some point to deal with debt. So it's not an infinite supply of money. At the same time—and we try to do this through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund and through the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs—we provide critical support for these kinds of buildings, because we know the multi-faceted economic potential they bring to a given Indigenous community.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): You have just shy of three minutes.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Minister, I'm hoping that you'll be able to come down to this riding to look at the beauty of this riding, of our First Nations and Indigenous communities, what it was before we ended up coming here. I'm hoping that you will come down so I can introduce you to the Eagle Spirits of the Great Waters, to talk to them about our economic development, as well as what we can do with Indigenous communities to move forward.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I'm happy to do that. I just biked to the yacht club there—that's a fairly extraordinary point—with my little girls not long ago, and we stopped and enjoyed some delicious Ontario strawberries at Lanzarotta's.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: That's exactly where that development is happening, on the old Lakeview plant.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Yes. That's one of the reasons I went down to check up on it. It's surrounded by some very intense and very beautiful Indigenous drawings around the building, so you can't see it yet. But I tried to do a couple of jumps up to see what was going on there, and it looks impressive. It sounds like we have a date with destiny to be involved in honouring the important work that's being done there once it's open.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: That was the nice thing: The developers there worked very closely with the Indigenous

community to do that artwork, to be part of that whole community. I think that's a great idea and that we should continue doing that through the whole province of Ontario, to bring everybody together.

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How much more time, Chair?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Just shy of a minute.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I just want to thank you, Minister, for everything you've been doing. When you were in the federal government, you did a lot as well, and now as a provincial minister. I want to thank you for everything you're doing with the Indigenous community to build a stronger relationship so that we can continue moving forward. So thank you very much for everything you've been doing.

Hon. Greg Rickford: It's a tremendous opportunity, but it's an incredible responsibility. It's one I take seriously. Frankly, I know that there are still more challenges and issues out there, but we have a tremendous Premier who believes, in the very fibre of his being, in a commitment to Indigenous peoples and moving forward in a positive and constructive way—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. That is time.

I recognize that we have been joined by MPP Anand. If you will please confirm your identity and location in Ontario.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you, Chair. My name is Deepak Anand. I'm the MPP from Mississauga–Malton. I'm in the beautiful riding of Mississauga–Malton right now.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

I will confirm that the independent member will not be using their time today. Because that time can then be split between the two parties here, the remaining time will be divided equally, with seven minutes and 30 seconds for the official opposition and seven minutes and 30 seconds for the government.

This will be the last rotation, so we will begin with the official opposition for seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Chair. Minister, I want to go back to page 30 of the document. There's a statement there at the beginning whereby the ministry "provided significant support to ministries" in collaboration with MAG, "in assessing and reviewing implications of federal legislation, policies and commitments."

I'm just wondering if I can focus on the federal legislation, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, which is Bill C-92. What was your advice to the ministries on this federal legislation?

Hon. Greg Rickford: I thought that we had covered this off, but to the extent that we haven't here—and I just want to double-check here, on page 30—

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: The reason why I ask—I know I asked that before, but it was more that they were all

lumped together. You answered my question on the same question in a different way on UNDRIP. That's why I'm going back to it. I asked on UNDRIP and you answered it.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Okay. Well, I have to say that I was not directly involved in anything that compares to the process for UNDRIP. As stunted as it was for UNDRIP, obviously, in my capacity at the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, I was seized of that matter in a far more substantive role.

The same can't be said about Bill C-92. The lead ministry for that, obviously, would be Minister Smith and Minister Dunlop. Those conversations that might interest you from a policy perspective or position per se are a function of federal, provincial and territorial meetings and obviously have serious implications for other jurisdictions.

So because it's this particular piece of federal legislation—one might refer to it as "push legislation," to the extent that the federal government brings it forward because they have significant responsibilities on-reserve. The realities of it for the purposes of any role I might play are exactly what you see there on this now-famous page 30 you're referring to. That is more likely and more often a supportive role, and in this case on the operational ends of this.

To that extent, I should tell you that I stay in my lane on that. That particular piece of legislation is less my business in terms of giving advice than it is to respond to the operational demands, which are almost exclusively delivered through the ministry of child and youth services—I can just see the people on Twitter now going live with this, but I'll persevere on, Sol—and more to do what the estimates reflect, and that is to play a supportive role in the services and programs that are borne by Indigenous child and family services. For example, the ones most commonly known to you and me would be Dilico and Tikinagan.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes and 20 seconds.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Previously, in the last session, I know we were talking about the federal UNDRIP bill, and then also my PMB on UNDRIP. If I understand correctly, you haven't made any recommendations? You haven't even thought about the PMB? Am I correct in hearing that?

Hon. Greg Rickford: With respect, you're not correct in hearing it, because I didn't say that. What I did say was that while I'm not involved in the legislative processes of private members' bills as a minister—it's not actually, at least by way of convention, appropriate for me to insert myself into those processes. I'm only responsible for bringing my own legislation forward.

What I did say to you is that out of an abundance of respect for the spirit and some of the legal principles that are embedded in UNDRIP and the contents of your particular private member's bill, I gave you assurances that for any legislation I'm involved with, be it born from the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines or the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, and in particular,

where this often comes up, in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and/or the Ministry of the Environment, and there are others—the spirit and some of the applicable legal principles are developed. That’s why I’m hopeful that, in response to Indigenous leadership’s request to revisit the Far North Act and—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. That’s time.

We will continue with the next round of seven minutes and 30 seconds for the government. I recognize that we have in the committee room MPP Parsa, who I believe is going to be asking the questions.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Good afternoon, Minister. Thank you very much for the last couple of days. They’ve been very informative, and all the committee members really—it has been a good session.

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Minister, I want to start off by not only thanking you for the work you’ve done here in the province, but some of us are very familiar with the work you’ve done in Ottawa—you’ve touched on this many, many times, not just today, but yesterday as well as in the House and many times in the past—which is so important. But perhaps because of the news we heard a few days ago—it is a dark chapter, as you’ve referred to it many times in the past as well. I want to thank you for your commitment, to making sure that, as you said, you were going to be working in collaboration with Indigenous communities, the Indian residential school survivors and their families.

One word I want to ask you—in fact, “reconciliation” is more than a word, Minister; we’re hearing more that reconciliation needs to be shown through our actions. You’ve talked about this, and I’m wondering if you can elaborate a little bit more and tell us exactly what our government has done in terms of concrete actions to make progress on reconciliation, because again, Minister, it’s so important for so many of the families, for the community and for Canadians. In fact, the world is watching.

You’re somebody who believes in results, and you believe in action. I’m just wondering if you can elaborate a little bit more and tell us what our government has done and what we will do going forward. Thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for that. And thank you for the work you do, and I should say, Chair, to you, to your predecessors over the past couple of days and, frankly, to all of you—but in particular a number of you, especially my parliamentary assistant—for being involved in these proceedings over the past few days.

I take the responsibility of estimates committee very seriously, and it may be a bit of a different approach than what folks are used to, but I see it as my job to make sure that I’m available and I’m accountable to you for as much of this as I possibly can. I can only do that because I’m backed by great teams in both ministries, not just ministry officials, but also my amazing ministry political staff for the purposes of today, some of whom are Indigenous. I couldn’t do it without you.

To your question about reconciliation, Mike: Look, sometimes when words like this leap out of the dictionary

to have some extraordinary significance for an event that has happened in a country that attracts the attention of the world, you have an obligation to do it justice. At the same time, you never want to run the risk of the word becoming diluted in its strength by merely engaging in symbolic exercises of things around reconciliation, and so reconciliation has to be reconciliation in action. As a Tory pragmatist myself, one born of several generations of them, originating in southwestern Ontario—a rare combination of southwestern Ontario and hardy folk from the far western border of Saskatchewan—we need to see examples of the kinds of things that we do.

I think the discussion today is well documented around our response to the Indian residential school burial discovery in Kamloops, so perhaps I’ll talk about some other initiatives that help to fill out our understanding of this very powerful and important word, a word that is foundational in the name of a commission that has done some incredible work. As we continue to advance meaningful reconciliation in action, it’s important that we deepen our collective understanding—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Greg Rickford: How much?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Two minutes remaining.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Oh, boy. Okay—so that we remain committed to the things that matter:

- Ontario’s Child Welfare Redesign Strategy, addressing the overrepresentation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in the child welfare system;

- the anti-human trafficking strategy, again with an overrepresentation of Indigenous, Inuit and Métis young people in it, with public education, multi-sectoral training and increased funding for initiatives to address anti-human trafficking;

- as I mentioned earlier, establishing a new Indigenous Women’s Advisory Council, made up almost exclusively of Indigenous, Métis, Inuit and 2SLGBTQ leaders, on violence prevention, to provide culturally relevant advice;

- amending the Marriage Act to legally recognize the role of Indigenous marriage officiants and ceremonies—this doesn’t sound like a big thing, but, oh my God, their reference to their spiritual connections are often framed as the Creator;

- recognizing the important contributions of the varied Indigenous populations across this province—that’s an important matter to them;

- advancing employment opportunities;

- infrastructure commitments; and

- a new and refreshing role in major resource projects.

They’re all examples, whether they’re obvious or not, of reconciliation. It isn’t just about participation. It’s about substantive involvement in any and every aspect possible of how this great province—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. That is time.

Folks, this concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs.

Standing order 69(b) requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 2001, Indigenous affairs program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

Shall the 2021-22 estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? Carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2021-22 estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs to the House? All those in favour, please show. All those opposed? Carried.

Thank you, everyone. After 90 hours of estimates, I would like to take this opportunity, as the final Chair, to thank the staff and the Clerks and the folks behind the scenes and everyone who has participated in the hearings of nine ministries and 90 hours of estimates. Thank you, again. This concludes our business for today, and the committee is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1629.

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