

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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## **Official Report of Debates (Hansard)**

JP-16

## **Journal des débats (Hansard)**

JP-16

### **Standing Committee on Justice Policy**

#### **Estimates**

Ministry of the Attorney General

Ministry of Indigenous Affairs

Ministry of Francophone Affairs

### **Comité permanent de la justice**

#### **Budget des dépenses**

Ministère du Procureur général

Ministère des Affaires autochtones

Ministère des Affaires francophones

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Wednesday 7 June 2023

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Mercredi 7 juin 2023

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Chair: Goldie Ghamari  
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Présidente : Goldie Ghamari  
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
JUSTICE POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT  
DE LA JUSTICE**

Wednesday 7 June 2023

Mercredi 7 juin 2023

*The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2.*

**ESTIMATES**

**MINISTRY OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Good morning. The Standing Committee on Justice Policy will come to order. The committee is about to begin consideration of the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of the Attorney General for a total of two hours.

As this is the first ministry before the committee, I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the purpose of the estimates committee is for members of the Legislature to determine if the government is spending money appropriately, wisely and effectively in the delivery of the services intended. As Chair, I will allow members to ask a wide range of questions pertaining to the estimates before the committee to ensure they are confident the ministry will spend those dollars appropriately.

In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports the ministry approach to a problem or service delivery, or about the competence of a ministry to spend the money wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make the questioning relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issues being tracked by the research officer. Are there any questions for members before we start?

I'm now required to call vote 301, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Attorney General.

Minister, the floor is yours. You may begin.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Thank you very much. I'm just thrilled to be here. I'll just introduce some of my team: My Deputy Attorney General—I think some of you know him from previous hearings in different forms—and I have more of my team for technical assistance and some online as well. So if we get into that, we can drill right down.

Thank you again, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to be here at estimates again. I think, historically, the Attorney General's office hadn't been asked to attend estimates, and so I appreciate that we got to do it last time and we get to do it again. I had a lot to say when we were here in November, if you recall. In part, this was because the Ontario justice sector landscape has changed and evolved so much over the last several years and we've evolved with it. There has been so much change, and in a very positive way.

Starting in 2018, my ministry has put forward a tremendous effort to strengthen the justice system. As a long-time member of the justice system myself, starting as a court clerk—I was the one who took the filings over the counter, and then I took on other roles after that. I was a court registrar and sat in the courtroom in front of the judge, helping the judges learn how to do that side of the job after they had been practising lawyers for several years. I got a real insight into how the system was working, how the system wasn't working and things that we could do to change it. Fast-forward several years: I find myself in the chair as Attorney General and I've got a basket full of things that I want to fix. We started as soon as we got here.

The continual improvement of the justice system is a prime motivation for me professionally and personally. This is something that we have to do for the people of Ontario. There's just a better and smarter way to serve the people of Ontario. I'm proud to be serving the people of Ontario as part of this government, in collaboration with our justice sector partners, as we continue to transform the justice system for the better.

Before I continue, this would be a good place for me to actually thank some of the partners without whom we would not have succeeded in achieving the success that we have: the Ontario Court of Justice, the Superior Court of Justice and the Court of Appeal. As most of you if not all of you will know, we have three levels of court in Ontario. We have the Ontario Court that deals primarily with criminal and some family. We have the Superior Court that deals with civil disputes, some criminal and some family. And then we have the Court of Appeal, which is just exactly what it sounds like: It's the appeal court for decisions at the Ontario court and the Superior Court.

The way the Constitution was set up in the first place and the way that it operates is that we appoint the judges to the Ontario Court and the justices of the peace, the federal government appoints the judges to the Superior Court and to the Court of Appeal, but we are charged with running

the entire system. So there's a real collaboration between us and the federal government in terms of being able to run a system with different inputs. Without their help—without the help of the Ontario Court and the Superior Court and the chief justices and the Court of Appeal—we would not have been able to do the work that we're doing.

I can tell you, in my short time as the Attorney General of approximately four years, I'm now working with my sixth chief justice. When I first got there, Chief Justice Heather Smith was there; I knew her from previous involvement with the legal community. But about a week later, Chief Justice Morawetz was appointed, so I've only technically worked with Chief Justice Smith—I didn't even find the bathrooms by the time we had a change there.

In the Ontario Court, we've had a change: It's an eight-year term and we have a new Ontario Chief Justice in Chief Justice Sharon Nicklas. She's starting her eight-year term. We wish our former Ontario Chief Justice Maisonneuve well, as she's finished her eight-year term. And to keep the politics out of it, those eight-year terms aren't renewable; it's set in statute. This is how it should be.

In the Court of Appeal, of course, Chief Justice Strathy was a phenomenal, phenomenal Chief Justice. He retired, and we now have Chief Justice Tulloch. Some of you were there for his swearing in—just a magnificent leader.

Without all of their help, we wouldn't be able to do what we've done.

I want to speak to some of the initiatives that we're working on and implementing, and this relates to estimates. Everything costs money—or most things cost money—and most things require resources, and we know that their collaboration is going to be instrumental in moving forward on those things as well. It's no secret that for decades, Ontario's justice system had fallen far behind people's expectations of how justice should be done. It wasn't particularly user-friendly. It was an antiquated, paper-driven system that produced long delays and wasted resources.

I'll just give you one example. When I was a court clerk back in the early 1990s, you took a document in and you filed it, and you couldn't use a credit card to pay for that filing. Fast-forward to 2019, when I became the Attorney General: When you took in your filing, you still could not use a credit card. I could rent a condo on my phone and I could pay for it on my phone, and yet I couldn't file a court document—that held the balance, sometimes, of people's lives in the hand. So we changed that. We have changed so many things; that's one very small example.

I'm pleased to say that we've made and continue to make significant progress in moving away from outdated systems, ones that we inherited and that have been going on for decades. We've moved towards a more modern, people-focused experience. In fact, by using available technology and innovative practices from around the world, our government has been successful in delivering some notable results for Ontario's system, moving our system forward by decades in a matter of years.

I'll be outlining some of these results in a moment, but first I would like the committee to know that my ministry is continually assessing how best to deploy our resources

and improve, modernize and transform the processes we use to deliver our services. In fact, in the year ahead, we will continue to implement two ambitious and system-changing strategies: justice accelerated and our criminal court backlog reduction strategy. I'll highlight some of those parts, and I'm sure we'll get into them in the questions.

First, our justice accelerated strategy launched in 2021. I knew at the front end, it was going to be a game-changer. I had high expectations and they're being realized. By breaking down barriers in the system, overhauling processes and moving more services online and closer to Ontarians, including rural, northern and First Nations communities, this multi-year strategy will deliver the most significant upgrade to justice services in Ontario's history. Once complete, the justice accelerated strategy will have delivered the most significant upgrade to justice services in Ontario's history. And no matter where you live in our province, the growth and well-being of our communities remains easier, with faster access to a justice system that works for people—and for all people.

Under the umbrella of justice accelerated, there are a number of initiatives we're working on. The most extensive is the Courts Digital Transformation Initiative. This will be the most significant single step forward in the digital evolution of justice in Canada, if not North America, replacing outdated paper-based procedures with an online platform to manage cases, documents and schedules. Streamlining the process will help transform how people resolve their legal matters at the Superior Court and Ontario Courts of Justice, key partners in the initiative.

I don't want to just gloss over that. The fact that we'll have one system for both those levels of court is in itself historic. We've been running parallel systems: separate systems with separate IT needs, separate maintenance needs, separate filing requirements, separate everything. We're going to have one system for the people of Ontario to use and the users of Ontario to use. It's designed around the user. It's an end-to-end digital system that will feature online self-service, integrated case tracking and more efficient court operations. No more lost information, as my friend MPP Dixon would have experienced in her time as a crown; no more hunting for paper behind filing cabinets and underneath the cabinet of the fax. It will be intuitive. It will be exactly what you would expect from an online platform in the modern age.

#### 0910

And in the shorter term, my ministry has been diligently and regularly implementing service improvements and moving many processes online. Together with our partners, the Superior Court of Justice and the Ontario Court of Justice, we've taken action to establish the CaseLines platform, a sort of junior courts digital transformation, which allows filed court documents to be easily shared online for court, either civil, family or criminal. And to make life more efficient for Ontarians, our electronic filing capabilities have grown to more than 700 types of documents. So, again, it's not just starting from zero. That's 700 documents that were paper-based before that are now being filed electronically.

It will also let people access certain court information without having to get in line at a courthouse. It's not just the people of Ontario; it's also the media who have found this very useful. They can do their jobs without trudging down to the courthouse to try and find out information about things they're working on, and that transparency is good for the people of Ontario in a secondary way.

Speaking of courthouses, we're proud to have recently opened the Ontario Court of Justice in downtown Toronto this past February. At 17 storeys, this is no ordinary building. It's built to some of the highest standards of energy and environmental design. It's a state-of-the-art courthouse, bringing most of our criminal court services from six different locations throughout Toronto into one accessible location. With 73 judicial hearing rooms, modern technology that allows for virtual and hybrid hearings in every courtroom and upgraded security features, it's truly a courthouse of the future. It was designed by Renzo Piano—for those of you who have architectural interests, he did the Shard and he's done other notable buildings around the world. It really is a work of art in itself, let alone the function that you're hearing about. It's an incredible new facility, and it will meet the unique needs of drug treatment, Gladue courts, youth and mental health courts, as well as supports for victims.

It also has many accessibility features. If you go in the building—it's down not too far from here; I can certainly help point it out. But if you go in the building, you'll see that there's braille stations, barrier-free courtrooms, fully accessible daises, textured and slip-resistant flooring and more. It's been well thought-out for the user and all users.

And it also makes good financial sense, since we're here to talk about estimates. Consolidation of the Ontario Court of Justice criminal proceedings in one Toronto courthouse allows for centralized criminal case management, a greater concentration of expertise and the effective scheduling of resources to support the processing of criminal matters.

Of course, over the past few years it's become clear how important virtual and hybrid hearings are as well. That's why our government has made a critical investment of \$65 million in new technology. This will ensure that people can participate in hearings through video or audio in courthouses in every region of Ontario, including in more rural, northern and Indigenous communities. In 2021-22, 40 installations were completed, with another 50 completed in 2022-23. An additional 16 courtrooms are targeting completion in 2024 under phase 1, and another 50 rooms under phase 2. This means that every courtroom in Ontario will eventually be wired so that they can manage online and hybrid hearings. It's one more big step towards moving justice into the online world and closer to the communities that need them.

On the tribunals front, we're seeing the benefits of our landmark Ontario's Justice Accelerated Strategy investment in an end-to-end digital case-management system with Tribunals Ontario. This \$28.5-million investment for a digital case-management system will help reduce delays and backlogs at Tribunals Ontario. The system greatly

improves access for Ontarians and will help in reducing delays with online dispute-resolution tools along with case and document management and a user-focused self portal. This is now up and running with the Landlord and Tenant Board. It went fully live at Christmas, and we're working to introduce the system with other tribunals.

Improving how the Landlord and Tenant Board operates has been a real focus of the work of our government to address the housing crisis in Ontario, and I'm pleased to say the board has been working tirelessly alongside Tribunals Ontario to address a case backlog that has accumulated over the past few years. Less than two months ago, we announced another investment of \$6.5 million to appoint an additional 40 adjudicators and five new staff, which doubles the number of full-time adjudicators at the LTB. This will help address the backlog, improve client service and allow decisions to be made in a timely manner. It builds on our 2023 budget announcement of \$12 million for tribunals over three years, including \$4.7 million this year to help the Landlord and Tenant Board hire more support staff and expand hearing hours. This investment is in addition to \$4.5 million over the next three years, announced April 2022, to help hire new staff and appoint additional adjudicators, and \$1.4 million announced last year to help resolve cases and improve customer service. Our government is very serious about giving the board the resources it needs to do its job. Increasing resolution efficiency at the Landlord and Tenant Board will help both the landlords and the tenants.

The Ontario Land Tribunal: Some of you would know its predecessor, or part of the predecessor, as the OMB. The Ontario Land Tribunal, as you may recall, is a group of five land-based tribunals that were consolidated for hearing purposes. We've been increasing the housing supply for people and families by getting those cases heard. As an impartial adjudicative tribunal, it's independent of the government. The Ontario Land Tribunal helps create more housing by breaking the cycle of delays caused by proposed development disputes. As we announced in the 2023 budget, our government is investing another \$11.8 million over the next three years to help the Ontario Land Tribunal speed up case resolution, improve client service and support faster housing creation by hiring more support staff, improving client service and investing in technology for digital and hybrid hearings. We're also investing, as announced in the 2022 budget, an additional \$14.7 million over three years to help the Ontario Land Tribunal appoint more adjudicators, hire additional staff and expand the use of expert mediators and online services. You're starting to see a theme here, Madam Chair.

Now, transformation of the justice system is a key strategy that my ministry is spending a lot of time and resources to implement to better serve the people of Ontario, but it's not the only strategy. We're also laser-focused on addressing the backlog of criminal cases that was driven up by the COVID-19 pandemic and has accumulated over the last few years. In October 2021, we launched the criminal court backlog reduction strategy and continue to work closely with our justice sector partners, including the courts, police

services and government agencies, to ensure justice is done while keeping our communities safe. Our \$72-million investment has supported the hiring of 340 new court employees, including crown prosecutors, court services staff, victim/witness support staff and bail vettors. You may not know what a bail vettor is; it's an experienced crown attorney that facilitates faster bail decisions and resolutions when appropriate. We're confident that these improvements will boost trial capacity as we work to bring the number of pending cases to a sustainable level.

Now, in recent months, Ontario has been seeing an increase in serious violent crimes, allegedly involving individuals already released on bail. This is deeply concerning. These events reverberate throughout our communities, affecting peoples' lives and well-being each and every day. That's why our government is investing \$112 million over three years to ensure that high-risk and repeat violent offenders comply with their bail conditions, and prosecutors have the resources to prepare for and conduct complex hearings.

As part of this initiative and this investment, we're devoting \$26 million over three years to establish within my ministry intensive serious violent bail crime support teams. These bail support teams will ensure that there are dedicated crown attorneys and business professionals province-wide who can prepare the best case possible on bail matters involving serious and violent crimes, including firearm offences and serious repeat offenders. It's our hope and our expectation that the teams will work with local police services and bail compliance units, and that will help reduce the risk of individuals accused of serious violent crimes of reoffending and, as a result, improve public safety. The \$26-million investment will also expand the work of existing firearm bail support teams operating in Toronto, Peel and the east regions of Ontario.

We're also increasing court support staff and judicial resources so there's more capacity to hear bail matters and make timely bail decisions. These reforms will help ensure that our criminal justice system functions effectively by strengthening the bail system and keeping our communities safe.

Criminal court backlogs and delays are acutely felt in northern communities. The justice system must be accessible and responsive to all people within Ontario, including Indigenous people living in northern fly-in communities. Last year, we announced \$2.5 million in reliable, affordable high-speed Internet access and video conferencing equipment to enable virtual court proceedings in 29 fly-in court communities. Since that announcement, I'm happy to report that 34 Starlink satellite units have been installed across 18 fly-in communities, and we're anticipating the remaining 11 communities will have their installations complete before this summer.

We understand that many of the installed units were put into immediate operation, and we've received positive feedback about their ease of use, speed and audio-video quality. In fact, the day after the Starlink unit was installed in Attawapiskat, it was used to support virtual witness testimonies during a scheduled fly-in court session. The crown

attorney reported the picture quality and sound were incredible. This new satellite technology will help support our shared goal of a modern, accessible legal system that meets the needs of all people.

**0920**

We continue to innovate how justice is delivered for the vulnerable and marginalized communities. In many Ontario communities, we see a revolving door of repeat offenders struggling with poverty, mental health issues, addictions, lack of secure housing and unemployment. Ontario's justice centres represent a new and innovative approach to criminal justice, combining traditional courtroom processes with education, health and social supports, all in an effort to target the factors underlying criminal behaviour.

Introducing early supports have been shown to reduce the risk of reoffending and improve outcomes for justice-involved and high-needs communities across Ontario.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Forty seconds left.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Let me just say, I'll talk more about the justice centres during questions. I'm very proud of them. We've invested \$764,000 in our justice centres to support their design and implementation.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I have that and other things to say as we go through the process. Thank you, merci and meegwetch. I look forward to any questions.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you.

We'll now start with our first round of questions, beginning with the government—

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Oh, okay. We have to begin with the official opposition for 20 minutes. Who would like to begin? Okay, MPP Wong-Tam.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Thank you to both the Attorney General and the deputy for the presentation. I look forward to today's discussion.

I'm interested in knowing a bit more about the new Toronto downtown court, recognizing that the intention was to open up that facility and then start to collapse and close the ones in surrounding areas. Shortly after the courtroom opened, there were reports about courtrooms staying dark. In one week, there were 17 courtrooms dark, and in the next week, there were 22, largely due to a shortage of staffing.

I'm curious to know, what is the appropriate staffing levels for court reporters as well as clerks in order to keep the lights on all the time so that the building is running at top efficiency?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, it's a great question. I'll set the stage and then I'll ask my deputy to comment on how we've adjusted to deal with that phenomenon.

Back when I was in private practice, I represented somebody who had multiple franchises that sold coffee. Of the people booked to work in those franchises, 50% showed up, so there was a staffing scheduling challenge. As we moved to the consolidated courthouse, we knew that staffing was transitioning as well. In those first few days, there were some bumps, absolutely, and we've been very open about that. What we did is we said, "We need to build in redundant capacity; we need to take resources from other spaces to backfill."



With the actual mechanics of it, maybe I'll pass it over to my deputy to flesh out our line of sight on how we did that.

**Mr. David Corbett:** As the minister said—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** May I just ask you to state your name for the record?

**Mr. David Corbett:** Yes, I'm sorry; thank you. My name is David Corbett and I'm the Deputy Attorney General. For the first few days, we did have some teething problems, I would describe them, and we didn't have enough courtroom staff. It was largely because people were absent. We've had a challenge with attracting and retaining courtroom staff, and we have programs in place to rectify that.

With respect to the New Toronto Courthouse, what we did instantly was we did training for people outside of Toronto so that they could virtually serve the functions in the New Toronto Courthouse. That took less than a week to get people trained up, because there are new systems in the New Toronto Courthouse, including what we call DIR, which is a system that allows information to be transferred back and forth within the court—

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Thank you, Deputy. I recognize that 20 minutes is going to fly by very quickly and my question was—and I'll just try to be as clear as possible: What is the appropriate staffing level in order for the lights to stay on and the courtrooms to run efficiently at that facility? How many additional clerks and court reporters do you require? I'm just interested in getting the numbers. And if you don't have that information right now, I'll be happy to receive it in writing later on.

**Mr. David Corbett:** I can answer that. In terms of the appropriate number, we have the appropriate number. The question is to get people in and make sure that we have backups. We now have the backups electronically, and so, virtually, people can fill those capacities.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** What are those numbers? How many people are not showing up to work? And if you don't have the answer now—just because the clock will run—I'm happy to receive that information in writing afterwards.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'm happy to give the answer here. The question is, how many staff do you need, what's the appropriate number? And the answer is, scheduling is in the purview of the judges, of the courts. Depending on what they schedule, we need to match that with resources. What my deputy has reinforced is that we are matching it with resources currently. So depending on how they schedule on a go-forward—we can't give you a future number of what's needed until they tell us what they're going to do.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** With the exception of—I think that if you know you have a courtroom of 20 rooms, you want to be able to schedule those rooms as fully as possible. Is there not any coordination between yourself and the judges to make sure that you know well in advance, forecasting out, that this next month or next month afterwards you'll need this many staff, both court reporters and clerk, in order for those rooms to be fully staffed and up and running? I'm going to just move on, just because I think

we're—if you can provide that information to me in writing afterwards, I'd be very appreciative.

I'm also very curious to know about security in the courtroom. In the early reports, there was a breach around cyber security; I think we've all experienced it at unfortunate times. But because Zoom bombing did take place, court trials were disrupted and may not have been able to continue at that point in time. I'm just curious to know how many trials were actually disrupted and how many had to be rescheduled because of the early security breaches, which I'm assuming have now been rectified.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I don't know that we have a tracker on how many were disrupted and what a definition of a disruption is. Some are clearly a disruption; some are tech issues and people being in the wrong space and that kind of thing.

In terms of rectification, absolutely, we're working towards best practices. We're talking to other jurisdictions. I happen to sit on a committee convened by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada along with some other members from across Canada, and we're talking about those kinds of things: what are best practices, what is working, what's not working, what should be online, what's better in person. We're having all those conversations. It's a bit of an iterative—so, again, unfortunately, I don't have an actual answer as things are changing as we go through.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** I appreciate that. If you can provide that information to me in writing afterwards, I would also be deeply grateful to have that.

What I'm interested in knowing, ultimately, is, have the security issues been entirely addressed? So therefore, the reports that meetings and trials were Zoom bombed, where Nazi comments were made, where we had racist comments made online—there were reports that everybody had to shut down the trials very quickly just to keep the offending partner out and also to keep the courtroom secure. I just want to have absolute assurance that that issue has been dealt with and that we won't be seeing that again.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Well, what I can give you assurance of is every time something happens, there is a reaction and an action. Just as in the non-online world, bad people will do bad things. I can't give you the assurance that won't happen. But there are safeguards in place and there are protocols in place, and the technology is being adjusted so that we're minimizing, if not eliminating, those possibilities to keep people safe.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Thank you. So you'll get for me the number of trials that were disrupted because of the cyber security breach, and I also anticipate that you'll have for me how long those disruptions were—

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'm not committing to that.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Okay. I'm just asking. It would be helpful if—recognizing that security is a big issue, if you know the problem, then you know how to deal with it. So, Minister, if you don't have the information, I certainly hope that the people in charge of security would be able to advise you on that.

Just moving to the topic of tribunals: I know it has taken up a lot of time and energy, both in the House as well as

the Ombudsman's time, with respect to the historic high backlogs in all the tribunals, but in particular at the landlord and tenant tribunal. I'm just curious to know: Do you now have the resources in place in order for the number of adjudicators that you actually need to be able to run that system efficiently, so that you can bring that number from 40,000 down to zero? And how long will it take?

0930

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes. I believe that we have the resources that we need. I do believe that we have that. We're onboarding still, so I have the allocation of resources. I'll qualify that and say that I have the allocation for the doubling of the full-time adjudicators. That competition just closed I think a week or 10 days ago. Tribunals is going through that process or has gone through that and is making recommendations over—so that's in motion.

In terms of the resources for the staffing to support that, part of the announcement that we made, the \$6.5 million, was for back-office staff—five for that as well. I think we're matched properly there, and tribunals has the ability sort of put his hand up. There are 15 tribunals in Tribunals Ontario, so they have the ability to be a bit flex to cover there.

So we are on the right track. Just to set expectations: We're not saying—nobody would say that we're going to get hearings down to zero. It's getting many as done as they're coming in.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Eventually, hopefully.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, well, getting as many done as are coming in, in a reasonable time frame.

So we're making progress. We're monitoring that. I had a conversation yesterday with the head of tribunals just as a check-in to see that things are moving in the right direction.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** I'm just going to push back a little bit, and forgive me; I feel like I need to do this. I hope that the ministry is striving to get the backlogs down to zero. I recognize it's not going to be done overnight, but I don't want us to think that that is an elusive target that we'll never reach. I think that's the target that we need to look at every single day and think about: What is the path to justice and how do we get it down to zero?

My question—I'm just going to flip it around a little bit, because I think it's important, especially given the number of hours that the Ombudsman's office put into producing that report to ensure that this government is resourced for success: What is the actual vacancy, the number of vacancies that need to be filled in the tribunal system, both adjudicators as well as administrative and clerical staff, in order for you to be operating at full function?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** We had advertised for the 40 spots. We got the allocation, the \$6.5 million for the landlord and tenant tribunal. Sorry, if I can go backwards for a quick second, I thought you had said—

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Just to clarify: Are you talking about the adjudicators? Forty?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Okay. Thank you.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I think we were talking about something different when we were saying "getting to zero."

Getting backlog to zero? Absolutely. Getting cases to zero? Of course, we will never—

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** The backlog.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, I was talking about something different, so I just wanted to clarify that. But yes, the goal and the intention is to get to zero on backlog, absolutely.

In terms of the adjudicators, we've advertised and we're awaiting recommendations from Tribunals Ontario for the balance of those to get them in seats and get them trained up, if they're not trained already, and get them doing hearings and helping towards that.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Okay. Thank you. I'm just curious to know—because the Ombudsman's report came out several weeks ago. The response of the ministry is that you're going to take it under advisement; you're considering the report. I'm assuming you've now had enough time to read the recommendations and the report. Are you in agreement with the findings of the report? And will you be operationalizing the recommendations—meaning that you'll be going back, if required, to ask for additional resources, funding for you to actually execute and deliver on the recommendations?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Of the many parts in the report—we did receive it; I have read it. I think everybody in our shop has read it. Some of the things that were in there were already in motion, because it took quite a while for him to dig through and put his report together. Some things had already started independently. Some things are operational with tribunals. They're independent; they'll have to make some decisions on that. Some are reg, rule, statute change, and it would be in contempt of Parliament for me to say we're going adopt it without consideration by the House. So I have to be careful in my answer on that. But it was well received—

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Can you answer as the minister? As the minister, would you be recommending to government that you move forward with those adoptions of regulatory changes?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I don't know that I can commit to saying what the government would like to do on that. There's a process to go through, but we are working with it.

Maybe I'll turn to my deputy in a second as well because they're digging in and working on parts of it as well. You've been part of the conversation as it has been rolling. I don't know if you've talked to them directly since or not, but—

**Mr. David Corbett:** That is, the Ombudsman?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes.

**Mr. David Corbett:** I have talked to the Ombudsman. I think it's fair to say that largely, the recommendations are received by the ministry as appropriate—not entirely; there are some technical issues. So we're largely in favour of it, and it will be up to, as the minister said, the government to decide, on the regulatory side, which will be implemented. But it was well received, and I had a very good discussion with the Ombudsman about that. I think I had an understanding with him and he with me about what we can do.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** That's very encouraging to hear.

My next question would be timelines and actual commitments. Again, recognizing that such a large report and recommendations can't be executed overnight—we can all appreciate the finality of time in a day—what is your timeline to ensuring that the Ombudsman's report will be acted upon? Is it a year? Two years? What can we expect?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** There are many parts to it, obviously. I'm a very impatient person, as I expect many of us in the room are. Time is passing, and I get up in the morning and I'm like, "What are we changing today? What are we doing? Let's go, let's go." I think the first step was receiving it, understanding it. We're still working through some of it. As the deputy mentioned, there are some technical things that we'll have to wrestle with and have that conversation. But to say that, like any sort of audit, like any sort of opportunity, I look forward to it. If we can find a better way with another set of eyes, I'm open to it. We've already started some of the pieces in it; some were already under way. So in terms of timeline, I would say it's happening in real time for some of it.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** If you are able to arrive at an actual plan to execute on the recommendations, I would request that perhaps that presentation come back to this committee. I think all of us have a lot of interest in the well-functioning of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

I'm just going to move on to the Human Rights Tribunal, which I believe has a backlog of around 9,000 cases, if not a bit more. The Licence Appeal Tribunal has a backlog of over 17,000 cases. The Social Benefits Tribunal has a backlog of probably 10,000 and larger at this point. What is the overall strategy on clearing the backlog of those tribunals, which are sizable? I know that you have received the Ombudsman's report on the Landlord and Tenant Board. I'm curious to know what the strategy of the Ministry of the Attorney General is on clearing the backlog in all the tribunals.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** It's similar in that we need to make sure that we have the appropriate adjudicators in place, we need to have the back-office support and we need to have the hearings happening, and all of those things are happening. We're making great, great progress in the LAT—the Licence Appeal Tribunal—and the Social Benefits Tribunal. We're seeing the numbers that you've quoted changing and coming down fairly rapidly. We also have that happening in the Ontario Land Tribunal. We had approximately 1,600 legacy cases; that's down to 210. We're seeing, in each of our areas—we're not focused just on landlord and tenant; we're trying to push the backlog down in all of them at the same time.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Would you have a plan in place, just like you're about to develop a plan for the Landlord and Tenant Board, to clear that backlog? And if yes, may we also have a copy of it at this committee?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** You mean a written plan of this and—

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Yes, an actual work plan on driving down the backlog numbers to zero.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** The work plan is to effectively put the resources in place, which we've done, let the independent tribunal do what it does; and they'll give us reports. I can't reach in or dictate, "Here's how you do..." unless we're changing rules or something. And that gets complicated because the rules for the Landlord and Tenant Board are set by municipal affairs; the rules for Social Benefits Tribunal are set by community and social services. So, let me be clear: The plan is to make sure that we have individuals that can adjudicate trained, in place, doing adjudications, and we have the back-office support actually helping them.

0940

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Minister, because you couldn't commit to previous answers in writing, can you commit to providing in writing a strategy, a plan—even if it's on the back of a cocktail napkin—something that demonstrates to us that your ministry is gripped with the crisis in the tribunals and that you'll be working to bring the backlog down to zero?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Well, here's what I can do. We've taken heat for alleged—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** —plans on backs of napkins, so here's what I can say: You've got numbers today; you've cited some numbers. Let's have a question in question period in September, and I'll report back on where we are at that point. That'll give you a sense of movement.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** With all due respect, Minister, I think I have the right to ask for this in writing here. I don't want to go to question period, where oftentimes we don't get answers. I'm interesting in knowing: Can I get the answer back at this committee?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** When I'm here again next year and you want to see answers—this isn't a committee that we report back on sort of periodically and do report backs, so I don't know functionally that that works.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** But I do have the right, Chair, just to clarify—a point of order. I do have the right to ask for answers in writing if answers are not available today.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** You're asking for future numbers, and you're asking for plans—

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** No, I'm asking for—

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Point of order.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Sorry, I have the floor.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** I have a point of order as well.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Okay.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** I believe the Attorney General has answered the question, as has the Deputy Attorney General. I believe this continuous exchange of dialogue has gone beyond.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. MPP Wong-Tam?

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Madam Chair, I am simply asking for what I believe should be a very basic outcome. The Attorney General recognized that the tribunals are in some state of disrepair. Some have described it as a crisis. I think that as a committee member here of the justice

policy standing committee, I have every right in my position as an MPP to ask the minister—if he cannot provide the answer today verbally, I can ask for it in writing.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** So the way it works is that you are entitled to ask your question. If the ministry undertakes to respond in writing, they will do so. At this point, the minister has not undertaken because the minister and the deputy minister have said that they have answered your question. So I'm not quite sure what you—they've said that they've answered your questions. I've been listening. There has been back and forth on this, so—

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** I certainly appreciate that, Chair. I think what I am taking issue with is that the minister is inviting me to ask the question to him in question period when I'm asking the question of him here. I specifically said that if he doesn't have the answers today, I certainly understand that. I asked that he could provide it in writing to the committee—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** And again, as I explained, the minister says that he has answered the question. You are entitled to ask for responses in writing. However, you're only entitled to get them if the ministry undertakes to provide. They have not undertaken.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Chair, can I ask you for a position or a ruling on whether or not it's appropriate for the minister to ask me to ask my question of him in September during question period?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** I can't comment on the content of the debates. But at this point, we're eating into everyone else's time, so I think we should move on.

We'll turn now to the independent for 10 minutes. MPP Collard, you may begin.

**Mme Lucille Collard:** Thank you, Minister Downey. It's always a great opportunity to get to exchange and maybe raise some of the issues that you may or may not be aware of. I wanted to talk about the technology side of it. We've had discussions, you and I, about that before. I know that technology is definitely a great part of the solution to address the backlog and to improve the services to Ontarians regarding our boards and our court system. However, I'm sure you can acknowledge that some vulnerable people or the technologically challenged may not have all the tools that they need, so just turning 100% to online is not necessarily a service to those people. I'm just wondering: What are you doing to provide assistance for those people that are either technologically challenged or even disabled and have issues maybe with trying to get a hearing on their phone.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** It's a great question. Thank you for that. We're trying different things in different spaces to get the water level to make sure that people are served properly. I'll give you an example of something that the tribunals are doing. They have a mobile unit that, upon request, can bring technology to people so that if they don't have the technology, they can help set them up to do the hearings. That's a fairly new service, but it has been deployed.

The other piece that they have is they've instituted—I don't know what the technical term is; I call them "Rogers minutes." We know that some vulnerable people, although

they have a cellphone, have limited capacity in their phone plans, so there's an arrangement where we can help give people that capacity without it being a financial burden in a way that it would be for some.

We've been looking at other jurisdictions as well. The social services tribunal federally is sort of a gold standard in terms of hearings. The anecdotal or the informal numbers that I have is that they're only hitting about 3% to 3.5% requests for in-person, so people are pretty satisfied with the remote. I can tell you, in the northern regions, for family law, the number of self-reps has dropped because they're able to access lawyers in other parts of Ontario. So there are different moving parts there, but we've deployed actual resources to people to be able to have their hearings done in a convenient way.

**Mme Lucille Collard:** Okay. Thank you. I still have people reaching out to me telling me that they really struggle with that online thing and that they would like to be able to speak to a real person and—anyway, we'll look into that further.

On another point, I'm sure you can appreciate that the real work during trials is often done not by adjudicators but by paralegals and lawyers working in the hallway, trying to strike deals and resolve matters. Were you aware of that, and if you are, can you explain why the chat function in the Zoom is turned off so that during trials, people cannot exchange and try to strike a deal?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I don't know why that is. The judges, with the clerks—they control the courtroom. It's something I'll ask about. I don't know why that decision was taken operationally. I can speculate, but I better not. That informal resolution is really important. What I am hearing from lawyers and paralegals is that the JPTs, the judicial pretrials, get scheduled. They happen on time. You don't have to go to the courthouse for them. They're facilitating other resolution spaces. Why that chat function is not there, I don't know, but I'll inquire.

**Mme Lucille Collard:** I'd be really interested to know. It was brought to my attention by some lawyers that are working for clients on the LTB side.

Speaking of the LTB—and again, I think I might be bringing something to your attention that you're not aware of. Even though I did mention that in the hallway at some point, we never had a chance to follow up. I'm sure you can appreciate the importance of having online decisions available, either for lawyers to build their case or even for the public or even the media. Right now, the Landlord and Tenant Board has published—in February 2022, there were 1,616 decisions published. Then there was nothing in March 2022. Nothing in April 2022. In May, there was one decision published. In June, there was one decision published. Nothing during the summer. Nothing in September. And there's been one decision published in October 2022, and nothing ever since then. Could you please investigate as to why that is? Those are precious precedents for people that are working in that field.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** So CanLII is a separate organization. I know the way the courts do it is they submit their own. So some judges do, some don't, that kind of thing.

The difference with landlord and tenant versus the other courts—I know you know, but for everybody else—landlord and tenant isn't a precedential court, so having that decision available publicly, although of interest, doesn't really carry weight per se with the next one.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Correct, but for whatever reason people may want to access those decisions, the fact is that they're not available and they just abruptly stopped. If you go to the LTB website, when you click on the decision, it says, "Click here"—the link to CanLII—"to get access to the LTB decisions," but they're just not there. It's just a weird thing, and it would be good to try to resolve it. If there were 1,600 published February 2022 and similar results in the previous months, it's hard to explain why, all of a sudden, the publication stops.

**0950**

Just moving on to a different topic: I want to speak a little bit about the impact on francophone communities of all these changes and all these investments. I'm just wondering—and I didn't see that in the chart, the organogram of your organization. I didn't see any francophone person dedicated to that. So I'm wondering how you get the francophone lens applied when you make policy changes, to understand what kind of impact it may have on francophone communities. Because, very often—and a lot of those changes that happen don't really take that into consideration—it can have an adverse or totally different impact for francophone communities. So how do you actually validate that?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, that's a great question and something that may not be in the materials. When we develop policy and we consult, I reach out to l'AJEFO, which is a French legal organization. I also have an advisory committee that's chaired by Justice Rouleau—you would recognize the name from the federal inquiry—and a collection of other individuals who are well schooled and well experienced in the pieces. So those are both resources that we use. In addition, we use the Minister of Francophone Affairs. Minister Mulroney has her department, and there's constant dialogue in terms of services in Ontario as they relate to our space. So those are the top three that we touch.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Okay. Moving on to—actually, regarding the francophone affairs again, I do appreciate you publishing the key performance indicators. In the key performance indicators, under "ensuring government capacity to meet the government's legal obligation to offer services in French," you do have, for 2020, that you've met that target with 64%. That means that 36% is not filled. But there is no data at all for 2021. Can you explain that void?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'm going to have to call a friend.

**Mr. David Corbett:** I'll have to do the same. I looked at that chart and I had wondered why. I don't know the answer—

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** All right.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** So we'll get back to you on that. We'll make note of that and find out what the gaps are.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Okay, just quickly then: Regarding access to mental health services and supports—you've mentioned that as a priority—we see that if we look at the figures between 2021 and 2022, there has been no increase. The number of services that provide mental health supports to Ontarians is still 14. We know there's been an increase in issues. Can you explain why that number remains the same and hasn't increased to meet the demand?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, I know service has changed. We've instituted a couple of things. In terms of mental health support for, for instance, crown attorneys, it wasn't as available before. We've opened the justice centres, which help deal and bring together mental health services. I don't know if it's a fair reflection that they weren't being provided in our space, just because the dollars didn't flow through our space. But I'll have to look at that line and see why that's the same, yes.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** We'll now turn to the government. MPP Hogarth, you may begin.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** I want to thank the Attorney General and the deputy for being here today and for your speech earlier on today. Something that is important to my residents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore is the Landlord and Tenant Board. I know that you had mentioned you had invested \$6.5 million for 40 additional adjudicators, and you talked about how the majority of them have been hired. Can you just outline how that process is going?

I do want to give you some feedback. I did have a call from a lady the other day. I called her back the next day and she said, "Case is solved." They are moving forward. So we're getting some good news. But again, you just put this money in in April, so was it the right amount of money, \$6.5 million for the 40 adjudicators? What's the goal to get this backlog taken care of?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Obviously, a simplistic answer is we doubled the number of adjudicators, but you have to onboard, train, get them in seats. So what we had been doing—and when I say "we," it's what the tribunal was doing. I'll claim all the glory and they can claim all the bumps. But because it's independent and they set their own case, they decide what gets done when and that sort of thing. So in some metrics, they're actually down to targets, and in others, they're not. They're working on that. They've been putting resources strategically in places, in particular to help the most urgent cases possible. There's a form, and I think everybody knows there's a form, where you can request a shortened time frame to a hearing or extension, which is less common, with reasons. If the reasons are compelling to the board or to the hearing officers, they'll truncate the time frame. So some of them are getting solved that way, where there's a particular egregious situation that needs to get heard.

The 40 additional: Some people have been interviewed, and they're in the process of going through the system for appointment. We'll hopefully have all 40 in the system in the next couple of months, but the rest are working like crazy. They're working long days, doing volume, getting orders out, doing all the things they're supposed to do.

Is 40 the right number? I think so. We looked hard at it, and we didn't want to tinker around the edges and then come back and say, "Oh, it's not quite enough." We went on a global scale. But you can't do anything without back office. You have to have back office, so it was making sure that those parts of the system are working as well.

You heard me talk about the \$28.5 million for the new system. The system that we were left with was literally put together with tape. There was a point at which it actually failed; they had to hand-bomb things. But at that point in time, we were already starting on the new system. It took us time to build it, to get it built and scaled and deployed. Then we ran parallel systems for a period of time. It was only this past Christmas that we completely dropped the old system and ran just on the new system, and that's helping because when you're running two systems, you're using resources to do it. We couldn't afford to not have redundancy while we tested it, but now that it's up and running, that's expediting what we need to do.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Just a follow-up question: It looks like we might be able to find some efficiencies in the future. Because we are in charge of the public purse, we want to make sure we find efficiencies; we can pay down our debt; we can reallocate those funds. Are you finding some efficiencies or do you forecast efficiencies in the future with some of the virtual world? Over COVID, I know we moved decades in days, so I congratulate you and your team on that move. But we're hoping that sometimes in the virtual world, there should be some efficiencies found eventually. Can you elaborate and maybe talk a little bit—I know it's hard to talk about the future, but maybe some forecasting?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Some of it's about allocating what you have to find those efficiencies and not go back for more. I can tell you, we shifted about \$2.2 million to front-line, part-time adjudicators when we were able to reallocate that money from travel savings of \$1.8 million, approximately. There's some infrastructure that we were renting. You can imagine the cost of rent, so we had to rightsize that. We saved about \$1 million in doing that. That money gets reallocated to front-line service, to either support staff or part-time adjudicators. That has made a difference.

These are my rough calculations based on what I see; these aren't the official pieces. But it's that kind of stuff that's happening, where we're saying that rather than go back to Treasury Board and ask for more, we reallocate to get exactly that.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** I'm sure my constituents would be happy with that.

I'll yield the floor to my colleagues. Thank you.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Saunderson?

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, for attending today. I have two questions. I know you've been talking about service delivery as well as bricks and mortar, so I have questions on the capital projects we've had. Certainly, the opening of the courthouse in Toronto has been a big event. I know it was phased in in terms of the operation, but it's consolidating a number of

other courthouses. I'm wondering if you can just comment on, now that we're about six months—if that—into the new courthouse, if it's working, what efficiencies we're finding and how you think it's performing.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, maybe I'll answer and then I'll ask the deputy. He has sometimes the same and sometimes additional, different conversations than I do.

The feedback that I'm getting is that the accessibility of the building is phenomenal. The wayfinding in the building is phenomenal. We had some early bumps in scheduling, as was mentioned by our friend, but we've worked our way through that. We're finding that the consolidation is creating some efficiencies. Where you may have a court collapse when a plea is given, those resources are in the building and available, or available to the building to go next door and expedite something else. That is working.

**1000**

It was a nine-year project. It took a long time to get here. People gave a lot of thought to what it was. We didn't break ground until we came into government, but as you know, a lot of the work was done in the lead-up to it. I think the vision is being borne out and it's a phenomenal opportunity to do more and do it better.

I'll turn it to the deputy on what you're hearing from stakeholders from your side.

**Mr. David Corbett:** As the Attorney General has said, we had some teething problems for the first few months, which is exactly what we would have anticipated. What I'm hearing is that it's working extraordinarily well and what we see for the future is, because we've got all of the judges located in one courtroom, as the Attorney General has said, we'll be able to move stuff around so that we can keep people busy.

One of the challenges that we've had so far is the courts work late into the night—like 7, 8, 9 p.m. when they were isolated. But now they will be able shift things around and we've got the technology to move the criminal information from one courtroom to another electronically, which is like, "Okay, now we're shifting this to Justice Such-and-Such, so let's move it up to that courtroom."

I think what we're going to see is, if you need a judge, you can find a judge in the same building. We anticipate, and are optimistic, that this is a real game-changer for us.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I'm glad to hear that. Thank you.

My second question is, again, dealing with bricks and mortar: You talk about the justice centres. There are four of them, the most recent being up in Kenora. These are focused on addressing some of the root causes, the social causes, behind having people before a court, and I'm wondering if you can comment on the efficiencies we're finding and diversion tactics by having these wraparound services available.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, and just to maybe flesh that out, as I didn't talk about it in my opening remarks too much, but the justice centre—if you can imagine having a courthouse and bringing all the social services into that space so that they're a resource for the machinery of government, whether it be the justice or the crown attorney

or even the police officer who's trying to help, if all those social services were in the building, you would have access to solve the underlying issues of why the person came in the first place.

Sometimes people are coming in front of the criminal courts for reasons that are, I'll say, not as malicious. Sometimes it's because there's a particular need, whether it be mental health or housing or otherwise. We, of course, don't have room in our courthouses to bring all those social services in. What we've done is we've taken a different tack and we've taken the court resources into a space where the social services are.

Now, as you know, not a lot of those spaces exist, so we've had to effectively create them. In Kenora, we worked in co-operation with the northern chiefs and they provided the building, the social services provided the people and the presence, and we provided the machinery of government. I can tell you, the early reports in Kenora are very, very encouraging. The deputy was up there and I'll get you to maybe share your experience on how that went.

The bricks and mortar are necessary for parts of it, but the magic is having the social services right there so that the judge can say, "You can go out that back door, you can turn left and fill out the form and get the help and get the supports so you're in a better place. Or, if you don't want to, if you don't want to take ownership of the issue, you can go out and turn right and we'll deal with you in a traditional way." And the early reports of the four justice centres that we have up and running—one in London, one in northwest Toronto, one in east Toronto—are very encouraging. It's a different way to do justice in Ontario and I'm really, really proud of it.

Maybe, Deputy, if I can have you relay what you told me about what we're chatting about and your northern experience?

**Mr. David Corbett:** I'd be very happy to. Before I do that, I'll say that we're getting statistics for the ones that are more established, like London, Ontario. The statistics are really preliminary but encouraging.

As the Attorney General said, I was up in Kenora two weeks ago—or maybe it's three weeks ago now—and I saw it in action. I saw an actual trial and I saw the interaction between the elders and the support health workers and the judge and the accused. The accused was a 17-year-old woman with a four-month-old child. Two of those four months, she was in the jail in Sault Ste. Marie and separated from her child. This is a woman who was accused of fairly serious assault charges, clearly has mental health issues, and I'm sure that in the normal court system they'd just ship her back to the jail in Sault Ste. Marie and life carries on; she gets out and she's probably going to be back in a court on another charge fairly quickly. What I saw was a deep experience for that person with the elder and with the judge. Expectations were set, and mental health experts were there to help her. So it's really encouraging that it may make a difference.

We'll see overall when the statistics come out, not just with that particular case, but generally. I've got to say that

I went in as a skeptic and I came out thinking, wow, this could have a real, meaningful impact on people and an economic impact on the province in being able to effectively deal with people who otherwise are just going to churn and churn and churn in the system and cause harm to other people. So my experience in Kenora was that this is something to watch, something to evaluate, but I'm really optimistic about it, and I'm optimistic because we've seen what's happening in London, which has been in operation now for over a year. In Toronto, we have two centres as well, east and west. So we'll watch all of that, and I think within a year we're going to have a good indication of how successful these centres are.

We're leading edge. We're leading edge with these centres, and other provinces in the country are watching us and saying wow. BC has justice centres, but they're not what we have. We have integrated centres. I think it's a really positive experience, both from an individual level and from a larger future perspective.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you. Very glad to hear that. Those were my questions.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Kusendova-Bashta, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Wonderful. Thank you so much, Chair.

Good morning. Thank you for your presentations. Just to follow up on the theme that MPP Collard brought forward, in the province of Ontario, we have 1.5 million Ontarians who speak French. I know your ministry works really hard to endeavour to allow access to all court services in the French language. There are some challenges because we have an ongoing shortage of the bilingual workforce in all industries, and so the Ministry of Francophone Affairs is working really hard with the Ministry of Labour to try to fill those gaps, and we have put forward strategies.

However, I have to also reflect on the fact that, for example, in Quebec right now—the linguistic minorities there—their rights to access justice in the language of their choice are being challenged. So I'm proud that our government is actually respecting our linguistic minorities' rights and we've put forward many initiatives to allow for that to happen. For example, as of February 1, 2022, Ontarians can file documents in every single type of proceeding, including criminal, civil and family law matters, and have those documents translated into French.

Can the minister please speak to that and why that is so important that we continuously build on that progress?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, especially with technology, the lack of access to some of the services in French—technology is making the excuse go away. There's no reason we can't be doing that. We can't wait for somebody to point it out or an ombudsman or anybody. We're thinking actively about what we can do to make sure that people are getting the service where they are the way that they want it in terms of the French language.

Another piece that we've recently done—because once you file, of course, if you want to have your hearing in French or if you want to conduct things in French—I'd

heard anecdotally that there were some people who were getting potentially screened either as JPs or judges for their French proficiency, but that it wasn't really being done in a consistent way. There's been a recent change now: If you're applying to be a provincial judge, your French will be tested by a third party, and so they'll sort of check the box. I want to encourage people to come forward to apply for these positions with the confidence they can do that check, they've got the checkbox, that's not an issue when they then get to the committee to talk about their merits and their abilities. So that's a fairly new piece that was in place. That was already in place with the JPs. That's now in place for judicial applicants. I really want to be able to expand the pool of talent, but I was really having a hard time getting people that the committee thought were qualified that also spoke appropriate French. So we're trying to find ways to attract.

1010

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Thank you for that answer. I know that your ministry has also been working in partnership with Ontario's Chief Justices and piloted programs at the Ottawa, Sudbury and North Bay court-houses. Can you expand on that a little bit?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, so we wanted to offer more service, and it was in coordination with Chief Justice Maisonneuve, who herself is bilingual. She had a keen sense of trying to expand the services, which is great, so we worked with her and her office and others to expand the pilot project. Yes, North Bay is the most recent one. We know there's a significant population in that space and, of course, Sudbury in that track, so we're trying to put the pilots and the resources where they will most be used as opposed to put them somewhere and have them atrophy.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Are there any other areas in Ontario that may have been identified as future sites of such pilot programs?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** It's a good question. I would go back to the committee. We can work either with the Ministry of Francophone Affairs or through—Justice Rouleau has been busy the last while so we haven't met for a bit, but back to his committee. That's where the conversation happened. Where do we go and where do we go next? I don't have top of mind the next two or three spaces, but that's something that I'll put on a docket and have a chat with him.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Certainly. My last question is, sometimes I hear from constituents that maybe they're a little bit apprehensive about actually requesting services in French because they may feel or think that this will actually delay their access to justice. What would you say to those stakeholders?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** We encourage people to ask for the service if that's what they want. There are also people who think that if they do that, they're going to get some sort of tactical advantage. We don't want that to happen either. So it's making sure that the resources happen in an appropriate time frame so that we take away the tacticians and we service the people who want the work.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Thank you so much, Minister.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** There are 40 seconds. We're going to save it for the next round, I guess? Okay.

We'll now turn to the official opposition for 20 minutes. Who would like to begin? MPP Wong-Tam.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Yes, thank you very much. I'm curious about legal aid. In conversations I've had with legal clinics in my community—and I suspect that this is happening across the city and probably across the province—many of the legal aid clinics have expressed great concern, I would say, maybe grave concern. Their concerns are that their operating cost continues to go up and yet, at the same time, the legal aid funding has, number one, been decreased back in 2018-19, but more significantly now, they're not able to keep up with their operational dollars. So they're having a difficult time retaining staff and staff lawyers are departing despite the fact that they love the work. Also, the legal aid certificates are not adequate in terms of covering the fees. I'm just curious to know: Is the ministry anticipating an increase of funding for Ontario legal aid, and if so, how much?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'm going to speak to the estimates of what has been as opposed to necessarily what's next, so I'll start there. As you know, there are the three branches of legal aid and you've touched on two of them: the clinics, the certificate lawyers and then the duty counsel piece. Each of them have interests and needs. I'm going to start with your point about retaining lawyers and the ability to retain lawyers. I also hear from different members of the clinic system—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** My apologies to interrupt. It's currently 10:15, and we do have to recess. Minister, you can continue your response when we resume at 1 o'clock.

Thank you so much. Committee will now recess until 1 p.m.

*The committee recessed from 1015 to 1302.*

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Good afternoon, everyone. We are going to resume consideration of vote 301 of the estimates of the Ministry of the Attorney General. There is now a total of 48 minutes remaining for the review of these estimates.

When the committee recessed this morning, the official opposition had 18 minutes and 17 seconds remaining. You may continue.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Good afternoon, Attorney General. I would just like to shift gears from this morning a little bit. We were talking about courts this morning. The government itself has spent a fair bit of time in court as well. Since the whole purpose of estimates is to try to make sure that the taxpayers' money is well spent and how that money was spent, there's a few court cases that—again, I don't want to talk about the court cases themselves. That is beyond the purview of this committee. But just a few of the issues that you've been involved in, specifically one: The government has been in court trying to—I'm looking for the correct word; "suppress" is probably too strong—has said that ministers' mandate letters can't be revealed



to the public. You might not have it at hand, but would you have available how much money the government has spent on disbursements on that case?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Thank you for the question. Obviously, we all know we can't talk about the case in particular. Obviously, we know that.

In terms of fees, I'll talk about, briefly, the way that we work in internally. It's kind of almost like a law firm, where we charge back to departments. So we do have a chargeback from departments, unless we go for outside counsel. Like a law firm, the accounts themselves are often covered by privilege as well. So I don't have a number that I can give you in terms of what did spend on disbursements, which can include everything from photocopies to travel.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** That would be—as in a law firm, all that information is protected by privilege?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Most of it is protected by privilege. There is some line there.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** So if I may, I will go through the questions. The ones that are protected by privilege are protected. The other ones, if I could ask that you could, at some point, forward the numbers to us.

You mentioned that funds on external counsel was slightly different. On the mandate letters, how much was spent on external counsel?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'd have to get back to you on the individual files.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** No, I appreciate that. I'm not trying to waste time. I am trying to find the numbers. Thank you.

On the next one—and I appreciate your first answer, so you don't have to answer each time again. But on the case revolving around the gas pump stickers, again, if it is possible, the official opposition would like to see the funds spent on disbursements—if they're not protected—the money spent on external counsel; if there are any adverse costs, awards, and how much; and if there are any damages.

The next case would be carbon pricing. As we all know, the provincial government took the federal government to court to challenge their carbon-pricing regime—just for the record, the carbon-pricing regime is actually a back-stop. So if the province had instituted their own carbon-pricing program, we wouldn't be subjected to the carbon tax. But the government decided to challenge the federal government's right to implement a carbon tax. That's the government's decision and that's not the purview of this committee. The purview of this committee is to look to make sure that taxpayers' money is spent correctly. So, again, we'd ask how much funds have been spent on disbursements, if not protected; how much on external counsel; and if there's been any adverse costs, awards, and how much.

And finally on the list, the government has also introduced legislation to limit its own liability on government decisions. I'd just like to know if there's money spent on disbursements, on external counsel, and if adverse costs, awards have been awarded in these cases. I appreciate if you could get us those numbers, the ones that aren't protected by privilege. We're not launching an inquiry here, but it is the job of estimates to find out the numbers.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** So if you don't mind, maybe I'll just pause and check with my team and see if there are any questions coming out of what you're asking for, if that's fairly clear.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Yes, please.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Really, the question to the team is, are we clear with what the request is? Okay. We'll be back to you.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I really appreciate that.

So when our first session was over, we were talking about legal aid. You were explaining how legal aid works, and I appreciate that. I have a much better handle on legal aid than I would have. I'm a layperson. But I do know that in my area, we have people who don't have access because the funding isn't there. The clinics don't take more clients and individual lawyers don't take more clients because it's basically a donation.

So my question is, how do we ensure that everyone has access to justice when we know there are people who can't afford access to justice? And in a way, doesn't that slow down the whole justice system? To make sure that everyone had access to quality legal advice, wouldn't it speed up the whole system and solve part of our bottleneck problem?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** In my past experience—and it's a good frame to talk from—if I was on a file, even just a corporate file, and we're negotiating something, and if both sides have strong lawyers, the negotiation goes better. I acknowledge that, for sure. We want to make sure that we have quality people in all parts of the legal aid system.

MPP Wong-Tam had asked about the challenge in retaining talent—in the legal aid clinics, in particular, she was talking about. And it can be a challenge, just as it is in the private sector, retaining talent. It's become more mobile, through COVID and people working remotely. Even the Toronto law firms are having a challenge keeping some associates from going to the States virtually. They stay in their condo in Toronto, but they're working—so the whole market is shifting a little bit.

The funding to the clinics is envelope funding, so it's not that we give funding for this purpose and this purpose and this purpose. They're managing, and some of them give different levels of service.

**1310**

I'm not as familiar with the one in your area as I am with some others. Often, I'll drop through Renfrew on the way back from Ottawa and get a bit of a line of sight. Some clinics are actually representing individuals, which is what I would expect them to do, but some clinics are simply handing out pamphlets and not representing as much. And we see that at the tribunal side. We see who's showing up to represent versus who's giving summary advice. So in my head, we need to get a handle on that to make sure that we're giving people actual representation through the system. That's important—

**Mr. John Vanthof:** If I could—

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I appreciate that response. I'm in a very rural area, and the way that I understand it works for

most in our area is that we don't really have clinics; we have lawyers who take on a certain amount of legal aid.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Right. So there's three branches: There's the clinics themselves and then the certificate lawyers. They're given an allocation, kind of like a chit, and they're private lawyers doing work on legal aid tickets. I used to do some of that work on the Consent and Capacity Board. I used to take certificates and represent people who otherwise were unrepresented. One of my law partners, her entire practice was family law certificate work, but she was a private lawyer.

Legal aid has been reviewing and discussing changes to some of that part of it, because we're hearing from lawyers, from the Criminal Lawyers' Association—we've been chatting with them—and some of the family law groups about what adjustments might make sense to make sure that we're retaining talent, that people will take the certificates. That's what I think you're talking about.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Exactly, because I know—and we're not going to talk about individual cases or individual people, but in one case that we are dealing with, she doesn't have access to legal aid. She is slowing down the system a lot and a lawyer would help her a lot, but nobody wants to do it because there's only so much pro bono you're going to do, especially as the legal field right now is very competitive. They're worth a lot, as all professionals are, as all people who are good at their job in the workforce, and it's really hard to convince them to work for what—and it slows the whole system. I think we actually agree on this.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** We do agree, and it's an ongoing challenge. The good news in the north, in particular, is that what we're finding is the self-represented litigants for family law have notionally dropped—not disappeared, but the number have dropped because they're getting access to lawyers in other parts of Ontario that will take the certificates and do the work where they otherwise were constrained. So that's a little bit of good news in the system. But the rightsizing of the certificate program is an ongoing challenge.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Okay. I'd just like to switch gears just for a second. How much time do we have?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** You have just under seven minutes left.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Okay. I'm going to switch gears for a second before I turn it over to my colleague. We deal with an issue specifically in Cochrane. When people are charged with something from the coast and they end up in the correctional facility in Monteith—the courthouse is in Cochrane. They get out of court, and they could be found innocent or—and they're basically stranded there. They don't have the envelope of service that I was talking about, that I was listening to in Kenora. They're basically stranded there, far from home. We need to change something. I was really interested when I heard the envelope of service in Kenora, because it's not like that in Cochrane and it causes a lot of issues.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** The connectivity, when somebody—and we found this in my space; I knew this from

before. If somebody was in Penetang, in the correctional facility, and they were transported to Barrie for the hearing and released on bail; their stuff was in Penetang. So it's similar. That's over in Sol Gen territory, that piece, but they came up with programs to help with that.

The really interesting thing, now that we're doing virtual bail and remand, is that the hearings are happening at the jail, and then when they're released—so we are watching that. That's the dynamic.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** No, I appreciate that. Especially in many places in the north, there is no Uber, no taxi, no bus, no train, no Metrolinx. In the north, we're very interested in Metrolinx questions, because we wonder what it is, right?

*Laughter.*

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Give us another mandate and we'll see how far we can get the subway going.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Okay. Anyway, I'd like to turn it over to my colleague.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Mamakwa.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Meegwetch, Chair. Thank you. Minister, as you know, Kiiwetinoong is a very unique riding. It's got 31 First Nations; 24 of those are fly-in First Nations. Last week, I was at the jail in Kenora, and I was able to see a lot of people that I know from our communities. When I looked at it, corrections—they just look after people. They're not responsible for who comes in and when they leave. So when we talk about the court system, I think that sometimes the court system works against people.

I know there are fly-in courts, and I've seen them in action. I've never been involved in court, but when I used to live in the First Nation, I used to see that. People come in and do their stuff and they leave again, and then they come back maybe three, four months later. That's normal in our area, but it would not be normal here.

I wanted to kind of get an idea on the number of courts that happen in all these fly-in First Nations in northern Ontario—not specifically in Kiiwetinoong, but the fly-in courts. If there is a number somewhere, how much we spend on that system with everything, with the rental of the hall, with the legal fees and the court fees and the planes, would you be able to—

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I can give you some sense of what's shifting, and then I'll try and do that. This morning, I was talking about Starlink and how we did consultation and we're now deploying—I forget the number; it was in my opening remarks. We have consent to put Starlink in each of the fly-ins, and I think we've deployed about 18 so far or 20-some—I can't remember. I'll get you the number. That's changed the dynamic of not having people leave their community, which is of inherent value, but also then saving on the flights and all the machinery of government that, as you describe, comes in and leaves. So we're changing the model a little bit. That's not for everything, but it's for a lot of things. In particular, if we can get there on family law and pieces like that, it will be a great, great boost.

The other piece that we're doing that I was talking about earlier was the justice centre that's in Kenora. I don't know if you've had a chance to visit it. I would highly recommend it. It's a phenomenal, phenomenal partnership

we have with the chiefs' council, where they took over the old Miner newspaper building and they've outfitted it. We've participated in the cost of many things. It's operating really well so far. It's new—newish—but it was in development for a very long time, a lot of consultation

So we're trying to do things a little differently in that space. The actual cost of the flights—I think those aren't done through us. They're a service provided to us. I think the bids are done by MNRF. Is that correct?

**Mr. David Corbett:** They are, but the bill-back is to us. And just to say, on the Starlink, by the end of the summer, all 29—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** So by the end of the summer, Starlink will be in all 29. In terms of the others, I don't know if we can get the number for the flights, but it changes year to year as things are opening up and as things are moving.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes, certainly, I think the airport issue, the plane issue is—I think airports are lifelines to access to legal services. This week, I spoke about airports and how critical they are to critical infrastructure, and I think that's so important. But I'll leave it there for now.

1320

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. There's no independent member, so we'll turn to the government. MPP Flack, you may begin.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** I appreciate the opportunity to be here and ask a few questions. As I think the minister knows all too well, we had a big announcement in Elgin–Middlesex–London earlier this year with Volkswagen and PowerCo coming to our region. It will add 3,000 direct jobs, and tertiary or secondary jobs—not secondary in their jobs, but supporting industry—30,000 throughout the province, many of which I would assume will be in southwestern Ontario, from Kitchener right down to Windsor, throughout London. As such, with other industry coming in, we're going to have an increase in population in this province of two to three million people over the next few years.

When it comes to your ministry and the service you provide to Ontarians, can you tell us how you'll ensure that backlogs, things like the Landlord and Tenant Board issues, other tribunals and justice centres that we heard about earlier are covered? It's good to hear that London is a good test centre right now and working, because other services, too, whether it's transit, whether it's roads, whether it's fire, power, policing—all these services are going to need to be increased. I'm assuming the AG ministry is also very important in this whole process, so maybe if you could talk a few minutes about that.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** We're approaching the growth and the challenges in a broad-look way instead of in these silos of what needs to be done. I'll give you an example. When we've recently announced on the carjacking and the car stealing—a car stolen every 48 minutes, which is outrageous. We worked with Sol Gen on that so that as they were increasing resources, we were matching resources. As we were putting prosecutors in place, we were putting support structure in place, trying to make it a continuum

instead of these little isolated pieces. Part of that continuum for us—some we outright can move in a direction and some we have to work with our justice partners.

I'll give you an example: the way that the justice-of-the-peace process works, because if you have more issues, you have more need to hear issues. The allocation for justices of the peace—where they are, how many there are, what is needed—comes through the Chief Justice of Ontario's office. They send us their request. If there's a budget piece to it, then that takes a secondary track. But traditionally, it's coming off retirements. They're projecting who is retiring within the year and where the need is.

Once we receive that, then, of course, we advertise, and the committee is doing its thing. But as we move those resources around, they may say, in this case, there are several down in St. Catharines advertised or that they're working on. If that's taking an allocation from, say, Brampton, we need to start shifting our core service resources to backstop that. So we're watching all of those pieces.

The one that often doesn't get talked about but is a critical, critical part of this is the victim services, making sure that we have the victim services in the right spots at the right time. When I came into this role, we looked at some of the victim services, and there were some very clear holes that made no sense to me outside of a political lens.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** What kind of holes?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** There were victim service organizations not—they just didn't exist in the Brockville area. I'll pick on that one. There was one in southwestern Ontario. I don't really know why they weren't there, but they weren't there. So we worked and we did our thing and we got some resources to launch those and make sure that services are there. Because so many things don't actually hit the courts all the time. Police officers are often resolving things at the front end. These wellness groups embedded within the police service are tremendous. They can put people in—we need the resources on our side to give them a place to put them or to help them. So we're working pretty hard at making sure that when we move a piece on the table—what's getting affected.

I know you like to read: Boom, Bust and Echo—years ago—David Foot's book. The piece he missed was immigration. The demographics made sense, but the immigration was missing. But we're onto that as a government. We know that people are coming. You mentioned it. We need to build for that. We know where people are going to settle. They go to urban areas. Quite often, if it's not an urban area, it's because of a job. Quite frankly, what you did to make that happen down in your part of the world, to unlock—I saw what happened when Honda set up in Alliston, and all those other businesses. It's incredible. So, yes, we need to be looking and we are looking at what services need to evolve down there.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Just a quick follow-up: Explain a little bit more—I'm learning here, as I think we all are—justice centres. How will they help complement this whole process of growth? Or do they?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, they do. The goal of the justice centre is a couple of things. One is to make sure that people are getting the services that actually help them. We know that there was an offence or an alleged offence; we know who all the parties are and whatnot. The last thing we want to do is go through some process, and whether they're reprimanded or found not guilty or whatever—we just don't want to do it twice. Why in the world would you want to go through that twice? Why aren't we dealing with the underlying causes of what's happening? If we can intervene, quite frankly, and give them those supports, whether they be mental health, housing, whatever social services supports, then that's a success for the government. It's good for the economy. It's good for the community from a safety perspective. And it's good for the individual who has come in front of the courts.

But again, let's not forget the victims. We need to make sure that the victims—but my experience with a lot of victims—and I've operated in that world for a very long time, long before I was a lawyer. Their sense of justice is sometimes a little different than our sense of justice as a system. Finding somebody guilty and putting them in jail doesn't necessarily address the core victim need for closure, for recompense or whatever, so the justice centres help with doing it differently to get to a different end.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Dixon?

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Minister, I can say, as somebody that was practising as a crown attorney until January 2022, I literally worked through a lot of the changes that you and the ministry brought in and saw how incredible they were and how practical.

I wanted to follow up a little bit on MPP Vanthof's question because I think, having practised, there are some things that are more obvious to me but not as obvious to those that haven't seen it. When we're talking about legal aid funding and about the opportunity to have our courts be virtual, what I think some people don't understand is that before we had these opportunities, we had individuals that would offend all over the place, and because of travel requirements, that type of thing, we would end up with—for one person—having defence counsel in multiple different jurisdictions, all essentially reinventing the wheel.

I wonder if you can go forward a little bit more on how the new digital nature of our courts and our documents has really helped with the efficiency as far as expanding legal aid funding—what it actually can pay for now in comparison to before.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Yes, there is an efficiency in terms of not having to do the travel. People that I knew who did legal aid would stack, so if they were going to go to the courthouse, they tried to stack them all up so they're doing them at the same time and it makes sense for them to bother going to the courthouse, and then they would work their way through the day.

What's happening now online is the same individual can literally be in Hamilton at 10 o'clock and in Sudbury at 11 o'clock, helping people on those certificates and trying to move things along. That alone is a huge savings. All you

have to do is watch Twitter; around that time of change, people were talking about how phenomenal it is that they can service clients all over the place. I think that's a huge win. There are unintended consequences for some things we do, and that was a positive one, where individuals who are prepared to do legal aid, prepared to do the certificates, could reach more people. I think that was phenomenal.

The movement of paper, whether it be search warrants, whether it be informations, whether it be any number of things—there was a time, especially when we talk about the north, or where MPP Vanthof is, which I call the middle of Ontario if you actually look at a map—

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Central Ontario.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Central Ontario. A police officer would literally get in the car, drive two hours to go get something signed to bring it back. This now happens like that. I did hear from a police officer who said, "I used to like my drives." He wasn't as happy.

So all of that has changed now, and also the ability to have documents flow. Once it's in the electronic system, if you have a change of counsel, you don't have the same problem either because you're not having to wait for the delay of the original counsel. It's subject to payment, obviously. There's always a solicitor's lien on certain things. But even that flow, I'm hearing, is a positive.

**1330**

There are so many great things happening that way. From the crown side, as you were, your ability to get more of a 360 on an individual—as opposed to, they did one thing in Sault Ste. Marie and one thing in Newmarket and one thing in Cambridge. That conversation is helping, and that's helping with our bail teams when we go to put our best evidence forward. We're able to do that as well.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Maybe by way of follow-up, seeing as you've sort of segued into it again—and this is sort of highlighting what I think are some of the really wonderful things that the ministry has done that may not be as obvious to people that aren't practitioners. Of course, as a bail crown and also sometimes a bail vettor—but more commonly, I was a bail crown because there was no bail vettor in most of the places that I worked. We'd get a stack of files that morning and I was expected to run the hearing then. Most people would wonder where the prep time was, where the time was to find documents and make decisions, and the answer was: I don't know. I split time and somehow make it happen. Maybe you can talk a little bit more about the supports for bail crowns and bail vettors and what that means as far as having better quality hearings and being more prepared and allowing the crown to be more prepared.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Absolutely, there are better supports in the sense that there's more chance to get prepared. Some of it is office by office, so there are variances, and I'm sure I'll hear about it now that I've said that out loud. We want the best evidence put forward in front of the judge or the JP; we just do. Whatever the outcome is, we want the best evidence. When you're rushing through things, you may or may not get the best evidence there, and so we had to do something to make sure that we have those supports.

We've expanded the bail vettors—which obviously you know, and I mentioned this morning. Bail vettors are experienced crowns who will go through the files first and help make a recommendation so you're not doing it on the fly as the crown. I think that's been very successful in the places that we've seen it. That's the feedback that I'm getting anyway. I think our ability to, again, allocate the resources where they need to be—if for some reason you would otherwise be in courtroom number two and the judge is into some other emergency, you can get redeployed to virtual courtroom number three and help out and get moving. So the ability to be flex is really something that we wouldn't have even thought about five years ago.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Coe?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Through you, Chair, can I get a time check, please?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** You have just under seven minutes.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Okay. Thanks very much.

Minister and Deputy Minister, thank you both for being here today. My question is on human trafficking. You both know that I live in the region of Durham, and I've had the privilege of serving Whitby for 20 years combined, with regional council and close to eight years as the MPP for Whitby. You'll both know that in March 2020, we announced a five-year strategy: \$307 million to combat human trafficking. Could you please speak, Minister, to some of the steps that you've taken? They've been significant and long-lasting, and they are making a difference, particularly related to victims and their families. Can you speak to those steps, please? And take your time when responding, because I think it's important that those people viewing and listening hear carefully those actions that you've taken along with the leadership of your deputy.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Thank you so much. I'll touch on a few, and I'll ask my deputy to tuck in a little bit as well. The scourge of human trafficking, nobody's immune from it, in any part of this province, any socioeconomic—people think they are; they are not. There's a book called *The Girl Next Door*; Laurie Scott brought it to my attention long before I was elected. Laurie Scott was working on human trafficking. She was cutting edge in terms of what was happening in this Legislature and really helped raise the profile. When she was in opposition, when our government was in opposition, she put together a group of people who—I believe it was a police officer from Waterloo who I had met and some others. She put together a group of people. She asked me to donate some time to that, and I did. The things that I learned you can't unlearn. It really is shocking, what's happening there.

When we came to government, at one point, I remember it being five different ministries sitting in a room and talking about, "How do we do this? What can we really do to make this a serious, serious effort?" We came up with all sorts of things. Obviously, victim supports, as I had mentioned—victim supports are so important. Training across the board: We wanted to make sure as many people were aware as possible, whether it be the police officers,

the front line. And it got me thinking about who's in contact with these people the most, the perpetrators, the people who are really the most heinous part of this? I got thinking—I was literally sitting at a pub with a friend and there was a coaster, and it had a message on it about something. And I thought: Why are we not messaging these people that are serving us? They're the ones who see a lot of this. They're in the public spaces. So I had a chat with Smart Serve—which is an independent organization; it's not a government organization—and said, "Here's a thought." And they said, "That's a great idea." They've embedded it in the training for Smart Serve now, and people are going through that retraining. Just an awareness—I talk about it at events all the time, whether it be tourism events, in particular, in my riding. I've had people say, "I had no idea—no idea." And I think that's what it is. We have to talk about it. That's the most important thing.

But then the resources we put in place—hundreds of thousands of dollars well placed to make sure that we have supports right from identification to follow-through. And now we have the most recent victim service awards that we reinstated. We've done them for three years now, the Attorney General's victim service awards. These are organizations, many of whom are involved in human trafficking, who are doing just tremendous work to make sure that people are getting what they need, including cleaning credit histories—all sorts of things, everything you can imagine.

I'm really proud of our government on this file. We're at the front end. But I'll leave a couple of minutes. I'll let the deputy pull on a couple of other strings there.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Deputy, before you respond, in your response, could you talk a little bit about the Vulnerable Victims and Family Fund and the effect of that on human trafficking survivors? I know that that's a program that has had a significant effect across the province, but in particular in my region. If you talk a little about that to begin and then maybe add some of the other steps you've taken in collaboration with law enforcement.

**Mr. David Corbett:** The Vulnerable Victims and Family Fund—is that the fund you're speaking of?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Yes, the Vulnerable Victims and Family Fund.

**Mr. David Corbett:** The advantage of that fund is that it's a fund that's dedicated to supporting victims, providing legal fees if they need them to advance their case. I think it's fair to say that it's very much appreciated because the victims don't necessarily have the funds to go forward and to protect them. We also see it in terms of the witness protection program. You can have a person who was trafficked and they're afraid of the person who has been the perpetrator of that. So the ministry has the responsibility of paying for their—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute left.

**Mr. David Corbett:** It could be their accommodation. It could be the accommodation for their children. It could be if they have a parent who also is involved and needs some protection. As you spoke earlier, there's \$307 million being put in over the next five years to assist, and it's

just money that's absolutely necessary to be spent to give them the protections they need.

I think it's also an attitudinal thing. The prosecution service is really keyed into the effect this has on people. They're just so vulnerable. So it's how we look at it, how the prosecutors look at it, and how we ensure that we provide support—not just going after the perpetrator, the accused, in terms of the prosecution, but it's how we deal with that prosecution, making sure they have the supports they need to go forward with it. Often, frankly, they don't want to. At one point, they're going to say—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time that we have.

1340

We'll now turn to the official opposition. Who would like to begin? MPP Vanthof.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I've had some time to think about it. Minister, could you explain again how it works when the government initiates legal action, how that is funded?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Sure. It's a bit of internal mechanics, I guess. If there's an issue and it's in a particular ministry—I won't pick a particular ministry, but let's say any other ministry—the way that the Attorney General's office is set up is that we have lawyers in each ministry providing service. They may not be litigators per se, but they may be subject matter experts in any given area. They're still part of the Attorney General's office, even though they're embedded in other departments. If we're into litigation, we will, of course, work with them, who may be subject matter experts. We have, quite frankly, for one, the best constitutional lawyers in the country; we do. We have the best department. We are the biggest law firm in the country. We're bigger than the federal government because we do so many prosecutions and whatnot. So it attracts excellence, and we have some really, really good civil litigators—absolutely top-notch.

What happens is, the litigators will pick up the file, they'll work with the experts in the other department and whatever other experts they need as they go, but we'll do a chargeback to that department. So it's not a free legal system, and, quite frankly, it's not even really market rate, but it's something to show who's doing the work and the accountability for it.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Okay. I appreciate that. I have no doubt that you have some of the best lawyers in the country, but that doesn't reflect very well that you continually—and not the Minister of the Attorney General. But you have lost quite a few constitutional cases. Some of the legislation that you're putting forward is probably not the best constitutionally based; for instance, the carbon pricing that went all the way to the Supreme Court.

Is there a record not of each cost, but of the total chargeback to whatever ministry or whatever office initiated that?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'll start with a 30,000-foot level. If things were simple, if things were obvious and things were of no dispute, quite frankly, the people of Ontario wouldn't need any of us here, right? So it's finding those spaces to develop policy, and then they sometimes get

tested through the court system, which is the way it's supposed to be. That's the way it's always been. There's nothing extraordinary about necessarily losing a case or whatnot. You've gone in with your best effort, and sometimes that's the way it works out. It's the same with companies and the same with people—same with all that stuff.

But in terms of the chargeback between, it's really more of an internal mechanism. It's not really reflective of the effort, if I can put it that way. That number wouldn't mean anything—

**Mr. John Vanthof:** So there's no overall—let's say, whoever initiated the carbon-price challenge on the federal government, there's no overall tally that, as this went through the various courts of the country, this has cost the people of Ontario X?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'm not sure—and again, we're going to follow-up along with your earlier questions.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** No, I appreciate that. I'm just trying to get this through my head—

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'm not sure if that's privileged or not, whether that's something we would be able to disclose. I don't know.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Because there comes a point—and I'm just using the carbon pricing as an example, but there comes a point where the value of challenging something is costing the people more than the value of the challenge. I'm just trying to get this through my head, how this—because even if there's a chargeback, at some point, there must be a total tally. If that's privileged, that's privileged.

I also agree—and I'm fairly agreeable—that there should be challenges. That's why we have courts and why we have this committee and why we have—if we didn't have anything to change or solve, we wouldn't have a job. But there is a pattern from this government of making a lot of court challenges and losing a fair bit of them, including this government rescinding a law that could have been taken to court. We're looking somehow for a cost-benefit analysis of, at some point, what benefits the people and what is more political ideology.

The carbon tax—please correct me if I'm wrong. You're not the Minister of Energy, so I'm not—but the only reason we have a carbon tax in Ontario is because the Ford government decided not to implement their own regimen and we fell back to the federal scheme. The government of Ontario decided to challenge the federal scheme instead of putting forward their own regimen.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Point of order, Chair.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I was waiting for that.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** I'm sorry, but I just don't see how it relates to estimates on the Attorney General ministry. Sorry.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** No, I appreciate that. I will bring it back.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I'm going to turn it over to one of my colleagues, so my colleagues had better get ready. I recognize the privilege, but I don't think anyone here would disagree that at some point, if we're serious about the process of estimates, there should be some kind of tally

on how much a government—and any government. If any government decides to challenge something, there should be a tally at the end of the day of how much that challenge actually cost the people of Ontario. Then they could make a decision on whether that challenge was worthy.

I'd like to turn it over to—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** How much time?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** You have two minutes.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I'll be very quick—a very interesting conversation with respect to challenges. I know over the last couple of months, there have been a lot of First Nations that have come here announcing that they're taking Ontario to court about the land rights, the unilateral decisions to take over the land. To me—everybody says, “crown lands”—crown lands are stolen lands. We're supposed to share the benefits of those lands, those treaties. This government does not do anything at all. I was just looking at the next minister that's going to come up and how they will be able to try the stuff that they're doing.

But, again, going back to the courts: What improvements can we do very quickly to the court system that, especially for First Nations people, leaves people in jails?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** Okay. A couple of things: The justice centres are innovative, co-operative—something we've done in tandem with the chiefs in Kenora. It looks like that's working. That's one piece.

Two, the new courthouse in Toronto: We've brought in culturally appropriate spaces for smudging and other—Gladue courts in particular. We can do more of that.

We're engaged with the First Nations on talking about bylaw enforcement, bylaw prosecution. That's pretty innovative. We're in the front end of that in Canada and, I think, the respectful conversation about who does what and what needs to be done. I think we have a pretty good relationship. The Indigenous justice division within my ministry is very, very active and helps inform. We've done Bimickaway training and I forget the number—we're over 5,000 people for that, and that's proper training to understand. The word “Bimickaway” means the footprints left in the snow on a journey.

So we're trying to do a number of things. It is a collaborative piece—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time that we have.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. I'd like to thank the minister for his time today.

Are the members prepared to vote?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Recorded vote.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** A recorded vote has been requested—for all of the votes?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Am I allowed to vote?

*Interjections.*

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I haven't been subbed in? Oh, never mind, then.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Yes, don't bother with it. We're okay without—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Sorry? No recorded vote?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** No.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** We've only got one voter, so.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Okay. All right.

Shall vote 301, ministry administration program, carry? All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed? MPP, you can't vote.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** It's not recorded.

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Carried.

Shall vote 302, prosecuting crime program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare vote 302 carried.

Shall vote 303, policy, justice programs and agencies program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare vote 303 carried.

Shall vote 304, legal services program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare vote 304 carried.

Shall vote 305, court services program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare vote 305 carried.

Shall vote 306, victims and vulnerable persons program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare vote 306 carried.

Shall vote 307, Political Contribution Tax Credit, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare vote 307 carried.

Shall vote 308, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare vote 308 carried.

Shall the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of the Attorney General carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare the estimates carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of the Attorney General to the House? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare that I shall report it—carried.

Thank you, committee members, and thank you once again to the minister. We're going to take a quick five-minute recess just for the minister to leave and the next minister to come in. We'll resume in five minutes.

*The committee recessed from 1353 to 1400.*

## MINISTRY OF INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Good afternoon. The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs for a total of two hours. Are there any questions for members before we start?

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 20 minutes from the Minister of Indigenous Affairs. The remaining time will be allotted for questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members of the committee and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee.

Minister, the floor is yours. Please state your name for the record, and then you may begin. You have 20 minutes.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** My name is David Gregory Rickford, for the record.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** You may begin.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Thank you, colleagues, for this opportunity. I appreciate all the work that you do here at committee.

The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs partners with Indigenous leaders and service providers. We take a great measure of pride in the work that we do to advance prosperity for Indigenous peoples and their communities. In 2022-23, we fostered strong relationships with Indigenous organizations through relationship tables, both in person and, of course, virtually. Our staff facilitated meetings between the Premier's office, the Chiefs of Ontario First Nations Leadership Council and government ministers to address shared priorities on a very frequent basis. IAO also promoted awareness on National Indigenous Peoples Day, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, and Treaties Recognition Week to foster learning and build understanding of Indigenous cultures and the residential school experience.

My ministry, colleague, has three overarching strategic directions. They are as follows:

First of all, promoting Indigenous economic opportunity, employment, economic development and community growth and prosperity: It involves developing government policies to enhance opportunities for Indigenous communities, providing funding for economic development and infrastructure and improving access to government programs and services.

Second, to make meaningful improvements in the health and social well-being of Indigenous peoples: This includes designing and implementing policies and programs for health, education and social services; addressing systemic racism; supporting the safety and well-being of Indigenous women and girls; promoting inclusivity for 2SLGBTQIA+ members; and coordinating responses to Indian residential school burial investigations and social emergencies.

Third, fulfilling Ontario's legal obligations on treaties, land claims and the duty to consult: This involves resolving land and land-related claims; supporting Indigenous participation in negotiations; promoting best practices for Indigenous consultation; and applying an Indigenous lens to policy development across ministries, identifying potential risks but, as importantly, opportunities, assessing their impacts on communities and meeting our various obligations including, and perhaps most importantly, the duty to consult.

My ministry believes in building and nurturing relationships with all Indigenous partners. The commitment is reflected in the establishment of relationship tables with various organizations, such as the Anishinabek Nation, Grand Council Treaty #3, Nishnawbe Aski Nation and other grand councils. Additionally, IAO is working towards developing priority-focused tables with the Mushkegowuk Council and the Eabametoong First Nation. The primary objective of these relationship tables are to foster consistent government-to-government relationships, establish effective

channels for ongoing communication and collaboratively set shared priorities and take action. I remain very open to these table concepts. I had a discussion just yesterday with Grand Chief Linklater of the Mushkegowuk-James Bay council, who had made a request for a table for Attawapiskat. This was a signing that had occurred a couple of years ago, and we remain committed to it and we had a good discussion yesterday about whether that would be best served at a Treaty 9 table, which I had re-established in the previous mandate, and meet with those communities in that fora or go to a table with a specific community. Those discussions are ongoing.

Needless to say, the primary objective, of course, is to look at community-level opportunities to bring solutions to the table and keep effective channels for ongoing communication moving forward, and collaboratively, with a consensus-based approach, set shared priorities and, as I said earlier, take action.

Our ministry takes on a lead coordinating role for all these tables, but I spend most of my time making sure, at the request of Indigenous leaders and our partners, that appropriate ministers are able to provide time and opportunity to discuss matters of importance to Indigenous leaders in the various forums that I had mentioned earlier. We will continue to take this lead in coordinating roles with partner ministries and facilitate joint efforts to achieve tangible goals and deliverables.

On economic development and prosperity, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs recognizes the importance of advancing economic priorities and prosperity and well-being for Indigenous people and their communities. We are committed to advancing Indigenous-led approaches to economic development, employment and wealth creation that respect the diversity of Indigenous communities and cultures and the economic opportunities across this province that I believe strongly, as does our government, they should be substantially involved with.

To support economic growth and community development, Ontario has established the First Nations Economic Growth and Prosperity Table, the first of its kind, with the Chiefs of Ontario. This forum allows First Nations leadership to provide direct advice to the government on economic objectives and community development priorities, as well as fostering relationships between Indigenous communities, Indigenous business leaders and surrounding economies' interests and business partners. We have also formed the wealth creation table, comprised of Indigenous business experts from diverse sectors, whose recommendations continue to inform the province's Indigenous economic policies and initiatives.

To that end, the ministry delivered the first year of funding from the ministry's three-year, \$25-million commitment to economic development and training supports, as announced in the 2022 budget, over the course of three years. This funding included:

- \$10 million for Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs to access low-interest loans and grants—loan and grant mixes;

- \$6.8 million for Indigenous training and capacity building in economic development priorities, including



support for economic development officers in First Nations communities;

- \$2.5 million to facilitate digitization and e-commerce for Indigenous businesses;

- \$800,000 to analyze issues in Ontario’s First Nations supply chain and map and promote the growth of First Nation businesses—let me rephrase that: supply chain mapping, so taking a look at different sectors where there currently are Indigenous businesses or there are not and how we can facilitate and support populating those supply chains with Indigenous-owned and -operated businesses;

- \$4 million to support skills training and Indigenous apprenticeships, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development;

- \$900,000 to support the ongoing work of the First Nations Economic Growth and Prosperity Table for economic advancement initiatives and community well-being.

We have also, colleagues, provided financial support through various funding mechanisms that include:

- the New Relationship Fund for Indigenous communities and organizations to engage in consultations and engagement with the government and private sector on lands and resource matters;

- the Indigenous Economic Development Fund for Indigenous-owned small and medium-sized businesses, as well as \$1.2 million for community recovery through strategic planning;

- \$6 million through the Indigenous Community Capital Grants Program for construction renovation and retrofitted community infrastructure projects that contribute to economic development, job creation and social benefits—I should add, colleagues, that these are often, in many cases, stackable resources that are attached to either federal and/or other provincial ministry funding for key infrastructure projects;

- \$1.7 million in funding through the Ontario Indigenous representative organization to support Indigenous organizational capacity and development; and

- \$3 million through the Métis economic development fund to support economic development within the Métis Nation of Ontario and the Red Sky Métis Independent Nation communities.

#### 1410

IAO is working to increase procurement opportunities with the provincial government for Indigenous businesses through the Indigenous Procurement Program. Colleagues, it still needs work, for sure. Since 2015, this program has facilitated more than 250 new procurements valued at over \$94 million for Indigenous businesses. I feel very strongly that we can do better.

IAO has also collaborated with ministry partners, including mines and natural resources and forestry, on important provincial economic priorities such as expanding resource revenue sharing and providing guidance on consultation and community identification projects in key developments around the province.

On the matter of health and social improvements, my ministry prioritizes the improvement of health and social conditions for Indigenous peoples in Ontario in a number of important ways. We’ve made significant investments in

addressing homelessness prevention, with an additional allocation to the Miziwe Biik Development Corp. and a significant resource to the Aboriginal housing services through the Indigenous Supportive Housing Program, and we work very closely with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on that. These investments are part of Ontario’s historic \$202-million increase in homeless prevention funding through the 2023 budget.

The ministry has also coordinated responses to various crises and emergencies, including infrastructure failures, natural disasters and social emergencies and residual COVID-19 outbreaks. Additionally, my ministry has been leading the implementation of the indigenous cultural competency training for the Ontario Public Service. We work to ensure that public servants have the necessary knowledge and understanding to work effectively with Indigenous communities. We actively addressed the recommendations of the seven First Nations youth inquest and submit progress reports to the Office of the Chief Coroner.

Efforts are being made to improve access to government identification for Indigenous community members, and collaboration with key ministries is ongoing to assess and review the implications of federal legislation, policies and commitments on Indigenous communities and organizations. The ministry is supporting the exploration of solutions to challenges associated with the enforcement and prosecution of First Nation laws and bylaws through the tripartite collaborative table, co-chaired by Ontario, the Chiefs of Ontario and the federal government.

Collaboration with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has incorporated Indigenous policy options into the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the child welfare redesign, including the implementation of the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy.

We have also played a significant role in COVID-19 vaccination efforts, providing funding for urban and Indigenous-led clinics. Public health nurses support Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities and First Nations and First Nation health providers that are experiencing high case counts.

In addressing the legacy of Indian residential schools, Ontario has committed \$62.3 million for the identification, the investigation, protection and commemoration of burials at former schools. Our ministry continues to provide support to First Nations communities in crisis and has invested in the regional social emergency managers program to develop capacity to respond to social emergencies. Looking ahead, our ministry plans to expand the regional social emergency managers program to central and southern Ontario First Nations in the coming year.

Land and flood claim progress: A third priority, as I mentioned, is fulfilling Ontario’s legal obligations regarding treaty, treaty settlements, land and flooding claims and the duty to consult. The Indigenous affairs office collaborates with government, Indigenous communities, municipalities and industry to ensure consultation obligations are understood and met. We developed tools, training and support to help Ontario ministries fulfill their duty to consult. We’ve negotiated land claim settlements at a rapid

pace, providing fair compensation to First Nations, rectifying and reconciling past wrongs and honouring obligations of the crown. These settlements, of course, bring significant economic benefits and certainty to First Nations and neighbouring communities, fostering economic opportunities in their community and in the surrounding area, and give rise to potential new business partnerships.

We've made significant progress in researching, assessing and negotiating these land claims. In 2022-23, the government settled 10 land claims, providing \$269.25 million in compensation. From 2018 to 2023, a total of 15 land claims have been settled, totalling almost three quarters of a billion dollars in compensation. In 2022-23, we have committed a further \$12.6 million of support through the Support for Community Negotiations Fund for Indigenous communities' meaningful participation in those negotiations.

We also signed flooding claim settlements with eight First Nations communities and finalized a settlement agreement with another First Nation. Two treaty land entitlement claims were settled, and the Nipissing First Nation boundary claim was accepted for negotiation and reached the first milestone by signing a protocol agreement. IAO also recommended and signed four orders in council for two treaty land entitlement claim settlement agreements, one final agreement and one lands and larger base final agreement.

I've had the privilege in participating in signing ceremonies for some of the land claim agreements. It's an honour to witness the appreciation of First Nations as they celebrate their settlement of historic grievances that have impacted their communities for generations.

I should say, colleagues, that in two chapters of my career, I cannot recall more agreements combined in treaty, flood and land claims in a five-year window. I'm very proud of that record, and I want to thank some of the people here, including my deputy minister, for supporting those efforts.

In closing, we are dedicated to working closely with Indigenous partners to understand the opportunities of Indigenous people in Ontario and effectively address those needs. The ministry actively engages with Indigenous political leaders, business leaders and community activists to ensure that provincial support is comprehensive, fair, equitable and accessible. The government remains committed to listening to the perspectives of reconciliation, striving for a better economic future, social and health of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people across this province. Thank you for this opportunity.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you very much, Minister, for your presentation.

We'll now turn to the official opposition for 20 minutes. MPP Mamakwa, you may begin.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Minister, meegwetch for your presentation. Just listening to some of the work the ministry is doing, it sounds so good; it's almost like you won't need a ministry soon just to deal with the Indigenous people. Because some of the work you outlined, when you make that comparison to the living standards of people, it's just so different. The long-term boil-water advisories, the needless deaths, unnecessary suffering, youth suicides, the

runways that we spoke about yesterday, the airports—I said before, it's so 1950s. The overcrowding: The jail system is full of our people. I went to Kenora last Thursday, and I saw it.

I know that there was this document that was given to me about a couple of years ago. But it was written back in 1958 by this former Department of Indian Affairs—it was a non-Indigenous person. One of the things that he says is this is what governments will do: gain the Indians' co-operation. It's much easier to steal someone's human rights if you do it with their own co-operation.

I always say that the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement. I think it's so important that there's more to do. But I want to focus on the estimates.

**1420**

On page 5 of the ministry estimates briefing book, it says, "Working with the Ministry of Mines ... to engage First Nations' leadership in a refocus of the Far North Act as well as support the development of operations and strategies related to the Ring of Fire area, including implementation of an MOU with supportive First Nations and supporting the identification of communities for consultation and engagement."

Very quickly: How is this identification done?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Thank you. They're great questions, and I appreciate your commentary. The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs supports the Ministry of Mines, when and where they have expressly asked, with respect to the duty to consult as it relates to section 35 of the Constitution. We also work to support community-based initiatives that may be directly or indirectly in support of development of the area, broadly, for the Ring of Fire. But to be clear, most of the projects that are occurring—I think there's 26 of them, if I'm not mistaken, in communities surrounding the Ring of Fire, if that's where we're landing here—are in an effort squarely to build and support vital community infrastructure and various other capacities.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** What is the process to identify which communities to engage and consult? Is there a process that you guys have within the ministry?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Is it with respect to the Ring of Fire?

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes. I was going by page 5 of the PDF document.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Again, our capacity is in support of their efforts. We're called upon. We have capacity funding to support those opportunities, but the substance of the consultation rests with the Ministry of Mines.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay. I know that there are some communities that are supportive First Nations—I know I had a map somewhere—where the Ring of Fire is, but there are other First Nations. What about them and not just the ones that are supportive? How are you engaging with them?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Yes, it's funny, because some of the communities who have been explicit and are leading things might ask the same question. I think they've asked you that question. Why aren't they getting the political support for that? In fairness, it's my understanding that

most, if not all, Indigenous leadership in that area generally support the principle of economic development and potentially resource and infrastructure development. Those are signals that have been made explicit to me.

The challenge—and I view it as an opportunity—is how that would occur. That’s what we’re focusing on, if you will. We continue to be very responsive to community-based projects, as you know. I know this is the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, but the Ministry of Northern Development plays a significant role through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund of bringing important projects for development in those communities, and I think it’s well documented, the progress that we’ve made there. The bar was pretty low at 1%, and in the last business quarter, it was 20%. It’s back down again, but we’re working structurally to address those. That’s my primary role and responsibility.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** What about when we talk about consultation, you know, a table or a framework with, say, for example, Matawa communities? And then there are claims relating to the road to the Ring of Fire. What steps are taken there to initiate that consultation? What does consultation actually look like, the process, from the ministry’s side?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Well, I think you’re pretty familiar with what’s gone on there. Obviously, two Indigenous communities have taken leadership roles in the environmental assessment processes, which recently have been subject to the federal government’s impact assessment. I will not make representations for the overlap in responsibilities in duty to consult for those, but what I can tell you is that those environmental assessment processes provide for opportunities for communities to participate in those environmental assessment processes, and we stand ready to support any of their efforts for that. I know at least one or two communities, of two, have suggested an interest in a broader understanding of what the corridor to prosperity would look like—at least that’s what I had called it in years gone by—and trying to understand whether—through the existing winter road networks or, in whole or in part—road access to that corridor is a way of gaining some consensus around the larger corridor.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** What resources or what funds have been applied in initiating these framework consultation tables? Where is it in the line items in the estimates?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** We’re often proactive with capacity funding. The communities make applications to our ministry; they can also obtain it through other ministries if it’s a specific duty to consult on a project that’s within that ministry. But we are more than just a backstop. Our ability to provide resources to participate in those processes—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So is there a number anywhere? Like an amount that you pay for those—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** It varies depending on the size or the scope of the project and an assessment of the actual duty to consult.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** No, no. My question is, is there an amount, an actual amount, somewhere in the estimates of what you’re going to be spending on the framework consultation tables?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** What we’re going to be spending on the duty to consult? I don’t think that we can fully appreciate what we’re going to be spending, but we obviously do anticipate expenditures for the duty to consult. I’m not aware of any concerns raised by partners with respect to—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I’m just wondering what amount is being spent. That’s all. I’m just wondering how much you spend on—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I think you asked how much we’re going to be spending, and I think the answer to that question is we’re prepared to spend resources to support communities’ meaningful participation in those. Year to year, there are larger-scale projects that may come on board that we will have to anticipate, and I think those line items in the future would reflect that.

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

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** You have just under 10 minutes.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I’m going to just switch gears a bit. I’m going to go to MTO. You and I had a discussion briefly regarding—on page 6 of the PDF file, it talks about working with the ministry—MTO and the Ministry of Northern Development—to develop a cross-government strategy to address roads and related infrastructure in the remote north, including all-season roads, highway safety, as well as infrastructure and operations.

My question would be, what role has your department played in ensuring that northern airports have the infrastructure they need in order to stay safe, to deliver the necessary services to fly-in communities? Practically, day to day, what role does IAO play in implementing the strategy referred to here?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** There are a number of things that we do. I was very inspired by your inquiry in the Legislature yesterday. You mentioned a specific community that’s paying a significant amount of money per litre for gasoline—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes, \$4.59.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** And I’m glad you put that on the record, because this community is making the single-largest reasonable ask of this government and the federal government to get road access so that they’re not as dependent on the airport.

That particular airport, over two chapters of my political career, has received significant funding because the traffic into Webequie First Nation over the past 10 years has been significant in relation to the prospect of developing the Ring of Fire.

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But more importantly, as you and I know and have shared, in the meantime, until the corridor to prosperity and other road access becomes a reality for isolated communities, it becomes a lifeline. Having landed on those airstrips and taken off on those airstrips with people whose lives hang in the balance, I have a full appreciation, as I expressed to you yesterday after question period.

We work co-operatively with the MTO. Obviously, our priority is on winter roads. But to the extent that the season doesn’t offer them up to the length that it should, we play

a supportive role in supplementary resources for cargo, shipment of fuel and various other activities.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Are you still up for that joint letter to the feds on the airport issue?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I absolutely am. We committed—colleagues, for your benefit—the Minister of Transportation, myself and the member for Kiiwetinoong, to stress the importance of the regulatory changes that the federal government had recently made that bring into play pilot hours. Of course, we never want to expense the safety of people travelling in there and out of those communities. But the regulatory change, I think we would both agree, is a bit tricky. It has had the, in my view, unintended consequence on a couple of occasions of actually cancelling scheduled flights in and out of communities, which is completely unacceptable. I shared with you that, at the very least, Chief Russell Wesley had explained to me at great length how that has affected his community.

I make this promise to you here and now to address anything that we can do as a Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and MTO to the federal government.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Meegwetch, Minister. Again, when we talk about lands and resource matters, can you provide some examples of how IAO has done “supporting the participation of Indigenous communities and organizations”—these are the words in the document—“in meaningful consultation and engagement with government and the private sector on land and resource matters”?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Just to be clear, that’s outside of land claims—so just general matters of duty to consult. It’s a great and fair question. Several times, we’ve had discussions, both in the Legislature and offline, around everything from UNDRIP; free, prior and informed consent; and the duty to consult. Increasingly, with the assertion of various rights by different communities, it’s abundantly clear that they’re overlapping.

Our responsibility is to, to the best extent possible, help to support and facilitate, both for the benefit of the communities—for example, municipalities—and anybody in the private sector, to understand how many different communities may have to be consulted—have to be consulted. We are very cautious in our approach to that—“cautious” meaning it’s better to consult more than it is less, not just quantitatively but qualitatively, but also strike that—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So how come you have not consulted Neskantaga on the Ring of Fire, for example?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I don’t think that’s a fair assessment of the process. For the record, and for your interest, Neskantaga has at its disposal every opportunity to participate in the environmental assessment processes that are going on with respect to any concerns or opportunities that they may have for the corridor to prosperity and, similarly, for any opportunities that have specifically to do with the mining aspect of the development of the Ring of Fire. We stand ready—I can only speak for my ministry—to support them with capacity funding to that end, should they so desire.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I’m going to move on to page 7 of the briefing material. It talks about the IAO continuing to assess federal legislation, policies and commitments in a

number of areas. Does this mean advising other ministries? Does this mean advising cabinet? Does this mean advising the Premier’s office on rights, responsibilities, possibilities of how to interact with federal legislation?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Yes.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So what advice does IAO offer to its provincial counterparts on the implementation of UNDRIP?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** First of all, the federal government, without consultation on the matter of duty to consult, advanced UNDRIP’s free, prior and informed consent. It’s not so much about how they implement it; it’s difficult to understand how they will enforce it, if that’s the right way to think about it. We’re aware of one other jurisdiction that has advanced this and not yet used it. There’s probably a very good reason.

The framers of UNDRIP, as you know—and I know that you spent a significant amount studying it, as I have—identified from the outset that nothing about free, prior and informed consent is an individual right or an individual right of a community. There’s very good reasons for that, colleagues. These are almost always—99.99999% of the time—about overlapping rights.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes, I remember your letter to the feds when they passed UNDRIP, and basically the question was that you weren’t consulted.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** That’s correct, yes. How ironic is that?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** “I kind of know how it feels,” I guess, is what you’re saying. “Welcome to the club.”

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes, that’s what I’m saying.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** That’s fair.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** That’s the work that needs to be done, and I think that’s really important to be able to acknowledge that.

My private member’s bill, when I first got here, was on UNDRIP, but because we prorogued, it’s not there anymore. I think I understood where the government is at with it, because they weren’t ready to put it to committee, and that’s unfortunate; even though you speak on it, you don’t do anything of it.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Oh, I don’t think that’s true, with the greatest of respect. You mentioned the Far North Act in your comments/questions. I think back to the Far North Act, when the Nishnawbe Aski Nation advanced proactively to have a discussion about words, at least, like “consensus.” We were very receptive to do that.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That’s all—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** You have to understand—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** My apologies, Minister. We’ll have to wait for next round.

We’ll now go to the independent member for 10 minutes. You may begin, MPP Shamji.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Minister, I appreciate you taking time this afternoon to walk us through the three priorities of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs.

I'm paraphrasing roughly, but I think, just to broadly capture the first one, it was essentially around promoting economic prosperity and development. Within that spirit, I couldn't help but notice on page 32 that there appears to be a pretty significant cut of approximately 46% to the Indigenous Economic Development Fund. I wonder if you could elaborate on the rationale behind the cut and the potential consequences of that.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** There's no cut to the Indigenous Economic Development Fund. I'm happy to verify your mathematics.

But I can assure you, in addition, that the only challenge we have with our resources in respect to the Indigenous Economic Development Fund is changing its name, because the Chiefs of Ontario, of course, to their full credit, advanced a proposal to the tune of \$25 million for an Indigenous Economic Development Fund that, through the wealth and prosperity table, they would put the contours to. We accepted that at face value with very few limitations, ones that would just ensure that the province's interests and exposure to any private sector activities would be protected.

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In fact, I was reading a magazine cover today about how excited the Chiefs of Ontario were to take control over—determination, if you will—the Indigenous economic development funding that comes from our government. I think I highlighted in my remarks the parts to that. That is in addition to the monies that we spend on the Indigenous Economic Development Fund and, Adil, I'm in the process of changing those names so people are perfectly clear on where those resources are coming from.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Minister, I of course take you at your word. Deputy Minister, to your side: perhaps you could just double check on page 32 where it references that cut.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** We'll be happy to provide you with the economic snapshot of the funding for economic development, but I'm not aware of—

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Okay, I appreciate that. I know the door is always open with you, so we can continue that conversation if necessary.

I did note that the ministry is holding operational expenses steady compared to last year. Considering current inflationary pressures—for example, the interest rate went up by 25 basis points today—is there any potential loss of service with the current operational spending?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I don't believe so. We've become a lot more efficient in our efforts to support communities. We do a lot of work to support other ministries, and there's some discussion around perhaps a consolidation of those and bringing them back into the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs just to avoid redundancy. Our resources overall as a ministry I think reflect additional pressures, and that could include operational expenses. But for the most part, we have become a way more efficient team in terms of how we respond to the opportunities both within government and external agencies and partners.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Thank you, Minister. Moving to the second strategic priority you had referenced, which was, of course, around health and social well-being, I noticed

in your remarks, actually, that your remarks were mostly focused on the social well-being part of that. I wonder if you could you take a moment just to highlight, moving forward, some of the efforts to improve equitable access to health care for Indigenous peoples in Ontario.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** To be perfectly clear, the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs is not the Ministry of Health, as you well know. We provide an ongoing capacity assessment, if you will, in a supporting role where there are emerging health challenges or health opportunities. Obviously, with COVID, our ministry mobilized very quickly to provide resources for things to support the Indigenous COVID response table which, in its versions, I think objectively did very well, served the Indigenous communities very well. Those are not my words; they're the words of the people working at the table in the communities.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I would concur.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Yes. So we don't have a health profile per se in terms of the kinds of things that you would see the Ministry of Health involved in, but what I can tell you is we do land every once in a while in our support for—for example, I mentioned public health nurse support. This is done to allow and to provide for emerging opportunities. For example, in Kiiwetinoong and Mushkegowuk, the Treaties 5 and 9 area, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation is involved in a health transformation exercise right now. I don't want to say that we sit on the sidelines—that probably doesn't make for good television—but we are there to provide a supportive role where emerging gaps might exist and support those. The Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, of course, would always want to be involved in those emerging trends, crises or what have you.

But as you may have heard me say before, either at this committee or in the Legislature, we support a role by either the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, particularly with respect to isolated Indigenous communities, emerging trends and priorities in health, broadly speaking, so that we can anticipate what shifting priorities may be in certain health care centres, I'll call them—the Sioux Lookouts of the world, the Thunder Bays. Move across the northern towns and cities who end up receiving people from Indigenous communities, particularly the isolated ones, and it's not a surprise or a phenomenon. It's, in fact, anticipated. So programming support in those communities by the province is, obviously, I think, an important activity, not just for overall better health, but frankly, also for cost, being able to understand and anticipate what it means if we're not there on the ground. In the mental health space, that's working, actually, very well now.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** As I'm sure you can imagine, of course, I appreciate the differences in responsibility between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Of course you do.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I will admit, though, that, for example, with the so-called landmark legislation, Bill 60, that was recently passed, one of the concerns that was highlighted during public consultations was the potential exacerbation in inequitable access to health care that could be experienced by Indigenous people. When an opportunity came

to improve that legislation specifically around Indigenous people, unfortunately, those amendments weren't accepted. How is the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs stepping in to ensure that in the wake of this legislation, there remains equitable access to health care, because the Ministry of Health—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Obviously, I don't share your views on the perception or the reality of the impact of Bill 60 in those regards. Maybe, more frequently, I should share with you the number of proposals that come from Indigenous communities and/or Indigenous businesses who want to create opportunities in health, particularly diagnostic services. These would not necessarily be—in fact, not be—private health care activities, but they would be ones that would enhance the access to diagnostic services, for example, in areas where they won't—you're asking that question of somebody, me, who lives 600 kilometres away from an MRI.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute left.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** So the optionality of various organizations, whether it's the Kenora Chiefs Advisory or others, to develop the capacity and business activity of providing different kinds of health—at least these diagnostic services that remain paid for by public funds on behalf of Ontario people, I think, are things that happen with some frequency.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** My question was grounded in some of what we were hearing during the consultations. Have any of those concerns been reflected through your ministry?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** It sounds like we hear different things.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Perhaps. But that's why we're having this conversation.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** It may be that we hear what we want to hear. My responsibility is to hear both sides, and I cannot recall a concern advanced by any Indigenous leadership—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's the time we have for this round.

We will turn to the government. Who would like to begin? MPP Jones, you have 20 minutes.

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** Through you, Chair, if I can beg the committee's indulgence, I'd like to bring the minister's mind back to the thought he had. He was about to embark on a story, to share a story and some experiences that arose from a question from my colleague MPP Mamakwa. If I can just beg the committee's indulgence and maybe have the minister return to that thought and share that story?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Sure. So for the benefit of us all, colleagues, the provincial government has been taking a serious look at consensus models—

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Sorry to interrupt, Minister. I just want to remind my colleagues here, if you want to have a conversation, please take it outside. If I can hear you, it's too loud.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** That's twice I've been shut down here now.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** My apologies.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** All right. Let me try this a third time: The balance that the government is trying to strike here is to serve—not necessarily protect, but serve—the common interest and sometimes the competing interests, at least in the moment, around Indigenous businesses. Let's just square this up within Indigenous businesses, peoples and communities and try to understand where our common interests lie. Because with the framers of free, prior and informed consent at the United Nations—I think one of the most important pieces of the work that they did was in their preamble, when they identified that the significant challenge would be—and that they ought to clarify, and so they did—around the notion that this was an individual right or claim of a person and/or a community.

**1450**

So you have an Indigenous business—maybe it's a joint venture, maybe it wants to build a corridor, maybe it wants the contract to clear gravel and build winter roads or a given corridor—and there's a political interest by a local community that's absolutely opposed to it. Is that a question that the government has to answer? I think what we have to be able to do, and I think what we have been doing, frankly, is ensuring that we move to a place where we have a common interest in certain pieces.

If we talk about the Ring of Fire in the context of this discussion point, as MPP Mamakwa pointed out, it may be that there are differences in opinion as to whether it should be developed. I don't share that view, and I think he's heard from communities and businesses that support that. But there are communities, no question, that have real problems with how it might be developed, both the corridor, the road and the mines, and that's fair. For us, and as a minister, what we're working on—whether it's the duty to consult or not—in the context of development is to ensure that we balance the interests and the opportunities that are available to everyone and converge on common interests.

The communities in that particular region—they're all on diesel fuel. Do they want diesel fuel as their source of energy? Absolutely not, right? That's why we worked so hard and poured billions of dollars into Watay Power, electrifying—what was it—26 communities, I think? Yes, 26 communities; 19 and counting or something. Better access to health, social and economic opportunities—there are real signals coming from communities that they want a road in or out of their communities.

So to the extent that somebody might be opposed to it, in the context of consensus-based decision-making—which is why we embedded it in the Far North Act in the first place, rather than the unilateral imposition by the previous government of the crown's sole position as the final decision-maker in how land would be used. Yes, there were accommodations for things like land-use planning, but the designation of parks occurred unilaterally, and I think it was a surprise to anybody who lived in those isolated communities.

When we spend time thinking about the duty to consult, and in the context of UNDRIP and, more specifically, FPIC, the government and our ministry spends a lot of time on not just making sure that everybody understands

who needs to be consulted on a given project, but how we can balance those interest and opportunities.

Let's bring it home to southwestern Ontario: With the two large-scale projects that are in play, obviously, we're making best efforts to meet with the treaty council and the at least five Indigenous communities that span between St. Thomas and Sarnia. Some have made assertions about land that's farther away from them on a certain project than others that are closer, and our responsibility then is to build consensus at the treaty council table, which we're endeavouring to do with the five communities there that you're very familiar with, to understand what role the government can do to support and facilitate those discussions and create those opportunities.

That, MPP Jones, is the very short story on the challenge, but the opportunity, to build consensus. We don't build those automotive plants, and we don't build mines. Some people think we do, but we don't, right?

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** No, we don't.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** We don't, but we do create the conditions for the prospect of something like that to occur and, at the same time, focus on the levers that government should be activating, and that is to build consensus.

I believe in my heart and soul, as a professional matter outside of my political career, that it's that kind of common interest and consensus-building exercises that get us to a place where, in a more perfect world, consent could be realized.

But those are the competing claims, and those are examples of where overlapping rights and assertions made by other communities or other interests have been problematic. To bring this home so that our folks in the GTA don't feel left out, this plays itself out in the capacity funding that we provide for Indigenous communities on things like major transit lines that we're building and the assertion of one group over another that may live farther away that it may be an attractive land, as opposed to, say, Mississauga of the Credit, squarely there in Mississauga.

Again, our opportunity—I don't like to call them “challenges” or “issues”—is to balance the interests of everybody, advance this legacy infrastructure for the benefit of all and, in the context of Indigenous affairs and Indigenous opportunities, make sure, at the very least, they're served well by the duty to consult in a very legal sense but also in the spirit of fairness. It just can't be that there are significant disparities between the resources, for example, that are provided to one group versus another on any given project. Those are the challenges that people think we have. We see them as opportunities and do our best to build consensus around those that's fair and transparent. We're doing that right now with Six Nations of the Grand River and HDI, by way of example.

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** I'd just like to add, to supplement that, between 2010 and 2018—and I've shared this with the minister and with MPP Mamakwa—I had the privilege of serving in communities like Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, Pikangikum, Weagamow. I got to witness, as a law enforcement practitioner and as a community partner, what the Liberal-NDP alliance did when it comes to the

investment and their sentiment in both our First Nations communities, our nations, and in northern Ontario. “No man's land” says it all, Madam Chair: no investment, no future and no opportunity to share in prosperity. Conversely, this government is truly advancing prosperity for both Indigenous communities, or nations like my friend says, and their businesses.

The minister mentioned briefly the Indigenous Economic Development Fund and, more specifically, why it was created. Can the minister please elaborate on who was consulted in the process and what's becoming of that important fund?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** First of all, thank you for your service. I can assure you, as I say, you are much better off from having had the extraordinary opportunity to live and work in especially isolated and remote communities. As somebody who spent more than a decade and a half doing that, my life is, in no uncertain terms, enriched by that experience.

But with respect to your question around Indigenous economic development and the fund, gosh, it's a good question. Come to think of it, we had had the prosperity table. Regional Chief Archibald, as she was then—

*Interjection.*

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Sorry, did you have a question—and Regional Chief Hare have advanced the wealth creation and prosperity table. The submission that you're talking about is one that came from them, one might say unilaterally. In essence, they just brought a proposal to us, sat down with the Premier and I and said, “Here are the categories.” It had a loan and grant component to it. It has an economic development officer. I'm sure you're familiar with this, but in smaller municipalities across the province, particularly in northern Ontario and Indigenous communities in particular—we found this with the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. In the absence of people to actually write applications to different governments, they go out to expensive consultants—or, God help us, lawyers—and those can be barriers. So those economic development officers are key.

**1500**

Getting with the times, with digitization and e-commerce: This is a fast-moving place for Indigenous businesses, and we recognize that. There's a fairly significant portion of the funding attached to that.

The one I really like the most, and it was supported by Indigenous business leaders, was the supply chain mapping. In addition to the challenges that I openly admitted to my friend MPP Mamakwa around procurement within government, the question for us was, how could we be more deliberate in identifying targeted economic development funding for businesses to populate supply chains that made perfect sense?

We're seeing this with the twinning of the highway in Kenora: joint ventures between Indigenous not-for-profit and Moncrief Construction. There you go. We continued the twinning of that highway across northern Ontario, which we should. I have provisioned that it would be at least a joint venture with an Indigenous company, or one fully owned and operated, that would do a significant amount

of the work in building that highway. That's the way it should be, particularly out in Kenora–Rainy River, because the geographical boundaries of my riding are essentially Treaty 3. Those communities have always wanted safe passage through their territory.

What the previous government failed to understand—I don't like to imbue this with political partisanship, but I have to say that the consultations failed. They didn't get done, and \$100 million left our region and moved over to Thunder Bay, where it was perceived, at the very least, that it was less difficult to consult. It turns out all the Indigenous communities wanted to do was to make sure that they were substantially involved in the economic opportunity of building a world-class twinned highway in northern Ontario—the only place in the country where it's not twinned, save and except for a little segment west of Edmonton. The future of things like those activities ought to be in the context of supply chain emphasis.

The other piece, of course, to support that—now I'm really fired up. Some of them aren't as obvious to us, but up in Bruce-Grey, we have a growing number of Indigenous-owned-and-operated businesses working in the nuclear sector. I think I've mentioned that maybe at this committee once prior. These are places where you might not expect them to be. But why not, right? There are treaty lands covering the entire province, so it makes perfect sense that those communities and the businesses that come from them would want their fair share—if not more, in my view, in certain respects—of the business opportunities associated with, more broadly speaking, the development of a large-scale project, whether it's infrastructure, a crown corporation, expansion of an asset or just a big project in the private sector.

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** Excellent.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. MPP—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I didn't get a chance to—is that it?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** No.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Sorry. Then, I was going to say, to support that, on the skills training and apprenticeships—I mean no disrespect when I say this, but I said explicitly: This is not about Indigenous people working for a road construction company holding a sign that says “stop” and “slow.” This is about actually having the capital to buy gravel crushers, like up in Mishkeegogamang, and doing some of the crushing and clearing for the winter roads that may ultimately become corridors. It does mean capital, and it does mean capital grants, almost in a trial balloon. We really want to see where this will go because that's a significant barrier.

But the other piece is the skills development. I mentioned the twinning of the highway. We just made another announcement with a commitment of over \$1 million to actually train 50 more Indigenous people in Kenora–Rainy River to work with the Indigenous owned and operated not-for-profit to continue the building of the twinning of the highway.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Chair?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Yes, MPP Dixon. You have three minutes.

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** Thank you.

Minister, I had the chance, being on the Standing Committee on the Interior, to go to Sudbury and Timmins when we were consulting on the new mining bill. It wasn't something that I had cause in my previous life to learn that much about, but I remember looking up that, in 2018, resource revenue-sharing agreements was one of the things that all the parties had agreed on. I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about what that could look like in practice, particularly given what you were just saying about the concept of capital and having funds to explore these self-determination projects, really, in these communities that could benefit from the agreements.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** So you have your land claims, you have your flooding claims, you have treaty settlements, and then you have this resource revenue-sharing component. This is more than just a good concept. In fairness, the previous government had moved into this opportunity to reconcile the ongoing extraction or uptake of resources on those lands. Communities most proximal to those developments would receive things like stumpage fees or royalty fees from mining activities. Our government has been far more aggressive with those, adding new agreements to the table and increasing the resources that are shared with those Indigenous partners. We're now up to 41 First Nations.

I'll say this, because I will probably get cut off—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute left.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** This has also had the extraordinary benefit in two important ways, and I'll say it really quick. It is for the Indigenous communities that are involved in these resource revenue-sharing agreements to use those monies for community-based priorities and projects, but also to leverage their equity position in businesses in the supply chain, so in forestry, for example, and in mining—and also, a far more sophisticated role in the licensing, for example, sustainable forest licences, and how sustainable development can go on. I'm thinking of Miisun and Miitigoog out in Treaty 3 and how they've mobilized to help actually enforce how forests are harvested.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time that we have, Minister.

We'll now turn to the official opposition. MPP Gélinas, you may begin.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Thank you, Minister. I would like to start with a request from two First Nations communities in my riding. The first one is Mattagami First Nation, Treaty 9, and the other one is Wahnapiatae First Nation, the Robinson-Huron Treaty. Both of them have written to you, to the Premier and to half of the ministers in your caucus to try to get the land that is owed to them.

Let me start with Wahnapiatae First Nation that, right now, lives on one square mile on the northwest shore of Lake Wanapitei. The treaty says clearly that they are supposed to have five square miles, but they only have one. There are many, many people who would like to move to Wahnapiatae First Nation, who would like to work at Wahnapiatae First Nation—there's a mine just down the road etc.—but they are landlocked. It's the lake on one side, the river on the other and their one square kilometre.



There is nothing but crown land all around Wahnapiatae First Nation, but those crown lands have somebody click for a mining claim, and that's it: That land cannot go to Wahnapiatae First Nation.

**1510**

This has been going on for a long time. Some of those claims have rolled over during that period of time, and somebody else went in and clicked and got the mining claim into their names again when this is their land. This is in the treaty. This is theirs. The map is there, the body of evidence to show that this is theirs. They have been in contact with you many times. How come we cannot move forward with giving them back the land that belongs to Wahnapiatae? I'll start with Wahnapiatae.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I don't know when the last time you checked in with them—and if it was yesterday, I apologize—but we're actively negotiating. We are very well aware of the challenges associated with the ability to click a mining claim to delay or impede those negotiations.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Would you be open to them getting the space that is owed to them outside of there? Because they have identified areas on the other side of the lake. They have identified areas south of the lake. They have other areas that are not connected to their one kilometre but that would give them back the land that we owe them. Is this something that you're open to?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** This is an estimates committee, not an active negotiation table. But I will tell you and I will assure you that we are actively negotiating with them, and I'll just say that.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. They told me the exact same thing. All right.

The second is that they have the Norman Recollet Health Centre. They have a wonderful nurse practitioner who goes there. They have a really good team of health practitioners that go there, who have changed the health of the people that live on Wahnapiatae First Nation for the better. But they get zero money from the provincial government. All of the staff who work at this Norman Recollet Health Centre at Wahnapiatae First Nation are paid for by Wahnapiatae First Nation's money.

They have gone to the Minister of Health. They have gone to you. They have gone to the Premier. Why is it that a First Nation has to pay for their health care system? They are Ontarians like you and I. It is the responsibility of the provincial government. How could you let that go by?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I think I said in my opening comments and in response to a previous line of questioning the importance that we place in investing in health programs and services on or in Indigenous communities, and the strategic value and importance, both from a priority and health-outcome benefit, of self-determination in primary care, public health and health promotion, seniors' care and hospital services. I won't speak to one specific entity, as you're raising. This obviously sits outside of the estimates discussion, but I'll take your question under advisement.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I appreciate that.

It's the same thing with Mattagami First Nation. Chief Chad Boissoneau has written to you, has written to the

Premier. They are the same thing. They are landlocked. There are a lot of people who want to move. There are lots of kids at Mattagami First Nation. There's a nice primary—not nice, but there is a primary school on their territory. The same thing: They are landlocked, but the treaty said that they're supposed to have way more land—and I forgot the right size of it—than what they have now.

They have been moved, and every time the government of Ontario that was before you moved them, they moved them from a floodplain to a worse area, to the areas that they are now, where they are landlocked. We owe them with their land back. What is your ministry doing to be respectful of those First Nations who want more land because more people want to move in?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I think our record speaks for itself in terms of land and flood claim settlements. You've been around a long time. I don't know if you've kept track, but we have settled more of these in the past five years than, if I'm not mistaken, a very long time prior to that. That's a matter of record, and as we speak, I think I've got a summer calendar populated with no less than another half-dozen events where those claims or settlements are brought into focus.

Again, I'm not going to speak to that specific detail on what they're asking for. I can just assure you that the active negotiations with the previous community are under way, and obviously, the community that you just mentioned has other aspects to it that we are involved and engaged in. I'm hopeful for positive outcomes.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Why is it so complicated to do this? Why isn't there a process in place? When we know that we have done wrong, when we know that Ontario has stolen the land of First Nations, why do they have to go through decades—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Sorry, MPP Gélinas. I'd like to remind the members that we're here to talk about the estimates and we want to keep our line of questioning to the estimates, which includes the financial affairs and what the ministry has reported. So let's keep our line of questioning focused on that. Thank you.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Yes—a process to get that done, Minister?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I'm sorry?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Is there a process to get that done?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** They have no active claim, but it isn't the sole responsibility, as you know—a politician long-standing understands that the federal government is also implicated in any and all treaty affairs, particularly with respect to additions to reserve. That's proved, in my view, to be particularly difficult. But there is no claim with respect to what you're saying, just to be perfectly clear.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. Thank you.

Gimaa Nootchitai from Atikameksheng Anishnawbek has written to you with six other First Nation chiefs about the hydro line going on their territory. They have not been consulted, but they would have those big poles and those big lines coming across their territory. What is your ministry doing with that letter?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** We take the duty to consult very seriously, particularly with respect to energy corridors and focusing on the opportunity. We just completed the east-west tie; it was a tremendously successful corridor. There are discussions under way around a couple of other corridors, and it would be my expectation that the Indigenous communities wouldn't just be consulted—if that's all you want us to do, those thresholds can be met.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I want you to answer their letter.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** But we would prefer to move to the model that we've had consistent success with, and that is where they become active partners in the development of that infrastructure itself.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Right now, they would like you to answer their letter.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I'm being very generous with my responses. They fall outside of estimates, but I'm not the Chair. If you have specific examples, I'd encourage you to put them to me in a letter and we would be happy to follow up on them if we haven't already. In the case of Wahnapiatae, we're actively negotiating. I'm not sure if you were aware of that, but your specific examples are taken under consideration.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. And the last one is the cleaning of—how am I doing for time?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** You have nine minutes, 40 seconds.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. The last one is the cleaning of the gold mine at Long Lake that is on the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnawbek. They can provide quite a bit of active help. Is your ministry willing to help so that the cleaning of the old gold mine that is leeching arsenic into Long Lake moves forward? Atikameksheng Anishnawbek has solutions; they need resources.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Again, Madam Chair, through you to the member, I'm here to talk about estimates with respect to Indigenous affairs. If you have very specific and detailed technical concerns around specific things, I would be happy to take those in writing and follow up with the respective ministries.

1520

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. Is there any money within your ministry to help the First Nations facing a gold mine leaching arsenic into their water?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Our resources don't focus on that, with the exception of mercury contamination as it relates to Wabaseemoong and Grassy Narrows First Nation.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. Sorry—Sol?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Mamakwa.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Meegwetch, Chair. I know that, at tables, sometimes when I see some of the work happening—and growing up in the north, I think there has to be some understanding when we talk about development and we talk about the impacts. I think it's always very—we have to understand the impacts of development. When we talk about language, language comes from the land, and that's where I learned the language. History comes from the land. Our ways of life come from the land.

Earlier today, we were talking about the Ring of Fire, and we were talking about some of the issues related to how to engage. I spoke about how Neskantaga has not been engaged. Hopefully that meeting, the one we spoke about earlier, will happen sometime soon.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I texted the chief “shemaak.”

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes. Shemaak.

But what I'm saying is, what is the cost of our way of life? If we're going to be fishing in that river, what is the cost of that? Is it \$2,000 per year? Is it \$20 million per year? Is it \$2 million per year? I don't know. I think those are the discussions that you need to have, because our way of life without the land—without that land, who are we? I think that's a thing that people do not understand. I think those things would be in perpetuity. You have to understand that it's not just about when we talk about prosperity; it's more than that. Prosperity is the easy part, when we talk about jobs. I think that's really important.

I want to get back to my line of questioning with regards to—I'm going to go to page 7. It talks about the response to social emergencies, natural disasters and critical infrastructure failures in First Nations. I just wanted to ask, what direct resources has IAO applied and, if not applied, facilitated to ensure that northern First Nations have the firefighting capabilities needed to prevent the tragedies which all too frequently continue to happen on-reserve?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** It's a good question and I wish I had a chance to respond to your comments. You do that on purpose, don't you? You give the comment and then an unrelated question. But let me focus on your questions as I humbly respond to them.

Our ministry plays an important coordinating function and, as I identified earlier, we're pretty typically the first one to identify gaps. We have exceptional contacts on the ground in the community and we participate in every cabinet committee that relates especially to emergency preparedness and the like.

Our real contributions, for the purposes of estimates, go into supporting the extraction of community members to different locations, supporting some infrastructure failures in certain examples, dealing with a crisis like blastomycosis in a given community and the mental health crisis. Again, we don't lead the funding in terms of the envelope, but we certainly provide—I don't even want to call it complementary, but we provide the kind of resources that create capacity conditions towards the ministries—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So there's no actual funding, but it's more that you coordinate where the funding is going to come from?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Our support has been done for things like natural disasters, so floods and fires, health crises in the case of COVID-19, and supporting appropriate mechanisms to deal with evolving situations on the ground, opioids and addictions. You mentioned not wanting—I don't know whether you were implying that you didn't want a Ministry of Indigenous Affairs somewhere down the road or not—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** No, I was just saying to—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Okay. But of course, the exercise there, as you can appreciate, would be to move all of that funding that occurs from different ministries and put it in the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs for exclusive purposes of Indigenous communities. I think the answer is somewhere in between. No question about it.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Yes. I think, obviously—I want to go to the next section, where we talk about Indian residential school burial sites. How has the identification of these burial sites expanded since the last time we discussed this?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Under the circumstances and the tragic legacy that we're reflecting on here, for me to say, "I think very well," sounds good in some respects but unfortunate in others. We continue to evolve with the underlying question about what kinds of resources would be required to support this and where they're best targeted. The 2023 budget included an additional \$25.1 million for this purpose, providing \$10.1 million in operating funding to support the specific Indigenous communities in planned and ongoing burial investigations. We have advanced, quite recently, a couple more.

We, as you know, can't necessarily anticipate these, but we can be ready from a resource perspective. We remain committed to an Indigenous-led process. It has worked very, very well. In fact, one might say that the communities themselves have really advanced this and gotten the support from the Indigenous-led—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute left.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** You mentioned an amount there. Do you think that's enough?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I think we stand ready to continue, as we've demonstrated in the past an ability to put appropriate resources into this as those discoveries—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** So are you saying it's not enough? You can do more? You could do better?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I'm saying that we've done very well so far. Objectively, the assessment has been we've been responsive and the appropriate resources have been invested into those communities' activities. Quite honestly, I haven't heard any negative feedback around a lack of resources to this point.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** The briefing material talks about exploring regulatory and legislative vehicles for the IRS recovery work. Can you provide some examples on what those regulatory and—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time that we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the government. MPP Hogarth, you may begin.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Thank you, Minister and Deputy, for being here today and sharing some words about your ministry and the great work that you're doing. One thing that stuck out for me, which I felt very positively because it's something that governments haven't done in the past—from your speech, in the beginning, this is what you said: "We are committed to advancing Indigenous-led approaches to economic development, employment and wealth creation that respect the diversity in Indigenous communities and cultures." I think that's really important that this government is moving forward with that.

We also talk a lot about the Ring of Fire and the Critical Minerals Strategy. We talk about EV batteries and other innovative technologies. With those two statements, throughout Ontario, we've seen many success stories of mining companies working with all levels of government and Indigenous partners to create legacy mining projects that actually can bring tremendous wealth to First Nations, but also job opportunities, job creation, skills—skills that they can use for anything. I'm just wondering, Minister, if you could inform the committee or elaborate on some of the statements you made earlier about how communities are benefiting from job creation from mining and even the forestry sector.

1530

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Let's just back up a little bit here. In the context of Indigenous affairs and the other ministry, northern development, this is where we converge. I realize this is confined to a discussion around Indigenous affairs, but to questions earlier around legacy infrastructure, it's actually the legacy infrastructure that's required to support many of these kinds of activities that is the real social, health and economic opportunity for Indigenous communities. We're advancing discussions with some communities way out in the far northwest of Ontario who have an explicit desire to have road access, and over the next five to six years. They appreciate and understand that there are both forestry and mining opportunities associated. One of those communities holds the exclusive sustainable forestry licence and its rights to develop that, and under the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, we've actually got a sawmill up and running there. I think that's pretty cool; I'd like to get a kiln in there one day, just to improve the quality of board foot that's being produced in there, largely for local purposes. That's one element to it.

The second piece is, just outside of the Ring of Fire right now, there are a number of base metal and critical mineral projects going on right now that substantially involve Indigenous communities and/or their economic development corporations, both in the infrastructure requirements and opportunity and in the development of a resource, and the same in forestry. As I said earlier, the challenge, really, is to make sure that as many Indigenous peoples as possible have employment opportunities in those jobs—some of them can be very technical, some of them require Red Seal, some of them require what I like to call "institutional technical training," so within the company, their own laddering, if you will. That's where I think that we've taken a multi-pronged approach where we've targeted skills training for—I mentioned the twinning of the highway—road construction. It's not necessarily laden with a lot of Red Seal requirements, but heavy machinery operation and some fairly basic engineering capacity—good-paying jobs.

The second thing I would say to you is that this is obviously more evident in the north than it is in the south, but the reality of it is the workforce required to support the infrastructure or the development of a given resource project actually depends on Indigenous people to be in that workforce. In other words, the projects can't advance if they don't. You've got some Thunder Bay blood coursing through

your veins, I know, but if you've been up there recently, you're never going to be able to plan your trip up there in a moment's notice. We're still, in my view, flying too many people from too many parts of the country into some of these projects when we have got local workforces. Now, that's changing. The east-west tie was almost exclusively person-powered by Indigenous peoples—is that the right term? Does everybody know when I say “person-power”—so not manpower, but person-power.

They wanted to take it back to a regulatory process, and I said no. The Indigenous leadership and the business said, “We want this to go ahead. We have two hundred and”—I think it was—“seventy-five Indigenous workers”—Shawn, was it?—“ready to start on that project, and we are already losing them to other major projects in the area.” So we pulled the trigger on it, and that's been built. That workforce is moving out to other major legacy infrastructure projects.

So we simply cannot—the royal “we”—imagine a concept of northern development primarily in and around Indigenous communities happening without them, and nor should it.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Nor should it. No, that's great. Thank you.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Flack?

**Mr. Rob Flack:** I enjoy this discussion, Minister. I'm always listening and learning.

As you know, I'm the parliamentary assistant to ag and food, or OMAFRA. We all talk about food inflation. I know part of food inflation involves the Liberal carbon tax, which has certainly exacerbated the situation.

But when you think about food inflation in our Indigenous communities, especially the fly-in communities across Ontario, it is obviously a concern. In talking to some Indigenous leadership around my particular riding, Elgin–Middlesex–London, this issue has been brought up. I know our government is taking action. Perhaps you could enlighten us somewhat in terms of what you are doing and what we can do to eliminate food inflation in these communities.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** This is probably, in my view, one of the greatest opportunities that we have on the ground, or in the ground—no pun intended.

I want to first thank you for the consultations and discussions we've already had with you, an expert in this area—you are, not me. I'm, of course, talking about food security and food sovereignty. These two topics find themselves in the history as far back as any oral tradition within Indigenous populations could recall, so it's already been there. One might say that it has been lost, so the opportunity is to bring it back.

We have a couple of communities that have signalled—well, more than signalled—actively gone out and partnered with the University of Guelph and their world-class expertise in agriculture. I've leveraged the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund to develop and support this. Communities like Eabametoong, or Fort Hope, as it was known prior, are looking at developing unique soil conditions that they have for micro-farming. They've been doing it for quite a while, but they're very interested in the—wow, I'm out on

thin ice now here, but I'll just say—greater efficiencies and effectiveness of things like micro-farming and community gardening, so the spectrum within relatively small confines of land, especially in the remote communities that are actually arable for agriculture. This wouldn't be stuff outside of seven to 10 acres in real terms. Marten Falls, Eabametoong, Neskantaga and—sorry, MPP Mamakwa, what was the one community we were talking about with the community gardening?

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Keewaywin.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Keewaywin—to name but a few in the isolated communities that are taking action, not just talking but taking action and working closely with us.

In fact, I spoke to the Minister of Agriculture this morning about formalizing our relationship around Indigenous food security and food sovereignty. I'm very interested that the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund is playing a role in that. But if a given sector opportunity grows exponentially, it puts a significant burden on that. Tile drainage is one. I shouldn't be talking about northern development when I'm in the Indigenous affairs estimates committee.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** But on that note, if I could, tile drainage—it was going to be my supplemental but you're there: Does that opportunity exist within Indigenous communities?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Yes, it does. Absolutely.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Because that has huge, huge potential.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** It does, for sure.

To qualify that for you southern Ontario folk, that would fall squarely within OMAFRA. Tile drainage in northern Ontario can come from OMAFRA, but we also do it with the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. You mentioned specifically isolated, remote communities. While there is not a formal, if you will, program for it, we're very hopeful to bring something like that to the forefront because I think it's of keen interest to us all.

The carbon tax supported by other political parties and the firm stand against relief for the price of fuel for planes to carry cargo into isolated and remote communities by the opposition in this Legislature is confusing to me, because that would help reduce the price of goods. But I think the real solution is, to the extent possible, production in the communities. That would go a long way to take the pressure off of “foodflation.”

1540

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Coe?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Thank you, Chair, and through you to Minister Rickford and his deputy: Thank you both for being here, and thank you so much for the information that you've shared with the committee thus far.

Minister, you'll know that budget 2023 outlines our government's commitment to resource revenue sharing agreements. Could you please, Minister, explain and share with this committee and those who are watching or listening today more detail about what these agreements achieve and what benefits, sir, they bring to First Nations and their community members? Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Thank you for that. We've had some discussion on it, but maybe I'll help to fill out the space.

There's approximately \$194 million in revenue shared with Indigenous partners since we've come to government in 2018. That reflects increases in existing agreements and it reflects new agreements. It includes seven agreements covering 41 First Nations communities and two agreements with organizations representing Métis communities. These agreements, as I said earlier, don't just provide economic benefits for aggregates and forestry and mining developments from them—so for them to prioritize projects—but they also have the benefit of, should they so desire, taking up equity positions in some of those operations that are proximal to them. The resource revenue sharing agreements are very focused on an activity that's happening and the Indigenous communities that surround it.

And then I said that, of course, in my view, the biggest benefit of all, if you will—to the point made earlier that it's not just about economic prosperity—is about the sustainable development of those and ultimately the role, in some instances, as I said earlier—the sustainable forest licences, the enhanced sustainable forest licence. I'm looking at my colleague here from Thunder Bay—Atikokan, who knows very well that, in the case of what we call ESFLs, their participating members are Indigenous communities. That has been a significant development in how we responsibly develop those.

It's also a very flexible and useful feedback mechanism when some First Nations communities disagree with neighbouring First Nations communities on the development of a given resource and facilitates and supports any disputes with respect to that, or around that, as between them and not something that the provincial government necessarily would have to wade into. That's a bit of an opinion, but I think in the examples I've seen so far it's been an effective forum for those kinds of issues but, at the same time, for opportunities.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Thank you, Minister, for that response.

Through you, Chair, to MPP Holland, please.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Holland.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** How much time do I have?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** You have four minutes and 40 seconds.

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you, Minister, for your presentation. You touched on this a little bit in your speech and in other questions, but I think it bears repeating: We all know that we're in a labour shortage crisis here in Ontario. Under Premier Ford's leadership, our government has an ambitious goal to address that shortage and the gap in the workforce. This plan involves strengthening the Indigenous workforce, ensuring that the next generation of workers have the skills we need to build Ontario.

You recently announced a nearly \$2-million investment in your riding that will offer Indigenous workers and at-risk youth skilled trade and apprenticeship training. Can you elaborate on this and how this investment will improve Ontario's labour shortage while stimulating growth in key sectors?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Well, first of all, I want to thank you for your work and support for both our ministries and for a particular emphasis on project-based funding for skills training.

I can give you the details of the Niiwin Wendaanimok construction capacity project—a special shout-out to Minister McNaughton, who has been particularly focused on pragmatic, project-based funding for the requisite training to ensure that Indigenous people have the opportunity to do more than just some of the most basic labour-oriented functions of a given project.

I mentioned the east-west tie earlier on, and new infrastructure projects in the not-too-distant future are going to be focused on supporting those training. The project that you mentioned, these are people that are going to get 39 weeks of training, the financial support while they're doing the training, the training situated right where they live, so there's no distance to us, and an integration into the high schools for construction-specific jobs. It is a multi-skills program, and I'm very excited about this kind of approach.

We don't want to lose sight of the ability of any young person, but particularly of Indigenous people, to pursue other careers. But the legacy infrastructure and resource jobs that are available have either Red Seal or specific skills training prerequisites, or work in progress, training in progress that they have access to, and we're endeavouring to make sure that they do that.

The other important thing I would want to mention is, and we did this up with SLAAMB there, in Sioux Lookout, to actually reconcile the time that Indigenous people have working on major projects in carpentry, electricity, plumbing etc.—did decades of work, and never accumulated the hours towards a Red Seal. Some of those programs we revisit, and we make best efforts to target our resources at that existing skill set, bringing some kind of, if you will, certificate or Red Seal pathway, some shorter than others—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute left.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:**—for, as was mentioned earlier, jobs beyond a specific project. The east-west tie had a timeline. It's finished. Where do they go now, right?

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Forty-five seconds left. No? Okay. That time is going to the opposition.

All right, we'll now go to the official opposition. You have approximately 12 and half minutes left.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I'm going to go back to this document I read at the beginning about how oppression and colonialism work. Number 2—it's almost like a handbook, eh? A handbook on how to colonize people. This one is from 1958, this guy named Gerry Gambill: "Convince the Indian that he should be patient, that these things take time. Tell him that we are making progress, and that progress takes time." Sometimes, when I hear government speak—not you, individually, but when I hear government speak—it reminds me of that time, of how oppression and colonialism work.

But because this is estimates, I want to go back to page 8, which talks about year 2 of the Pathways to Safety

progress report in response to the MMIWG inquiry recommendations. It says that it's expected to be released this summer. Do you have a timeline, or when can we expect this to be released?

1550

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** The Chair has extended you an opportunity to speak about a document that wasn't part of the estimates, but hopefully I won't get in trouble from the Chair by just responding and saying I wasn't born in 1958. There's nothing about the work that I do or the government is doing right now that reflects anything about that document and that era. I think we've made significant progress on a number of important fronts—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** “Think” is the operative word I heard.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Just for the purposes of Hansard recording the responses, let's make sure we're not speaking over each other. Let's just maybe allow the minister to finish responding before we ask our next question.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** With respect to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, let me just say that this is a shared responsibility between a couple of ministries. The Pathways to Safety, as you know, is Ontario's strategy in response to the final reports, and I can tell you that some of the key actions since we've released it include the \$36-million investment in community-led mental health and addictions supports for Indigenous communities, the Anti-Human Trafficking Indigenous-led Initiatives Fund, and a \$46-million investment, between 2020 and 2025, in, we believe, 27 new projects across the province, with a total of \$96 million in community-based services for victims and survivors of human trafficking. There is a second Pathways to Safety progress report that will be released in the fall of 2023 to highlight the progress made, but, to your point, most likely the challenges and opportunities that we can endeavour to pursue.

I can also just tell you that Ontario is implementing governance and accountability commitments and has extended the mandate of the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council to March 2025.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** You talked about the report in the fall of 2023. Will there be any new funding allocations expected as a result of the report?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Again, we're here to talk about what has and is being invested. Similar to the Indian residential school line of questioning, this continues to be a work in progress. I would note that the funding that I just mentioned includes years out and, as best as we can anticipate, covers a number of new projects that are focused on community-based services, particularly for victims and, therefore, survivors of human trafficking.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay. Thank you for that. I know that you spoke about the number of land claims that are accepted for negotiation in the province currently. I believe you provided that number, but what I'm going to ask for is: The 2023 budget included a sum of about \$5 billion as a one-time allocation for claim settlement. Is that for 2023-24?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** We are obviously involved in a number of treaty land and flood claim settlements. We have been vigorous in our efforts to close many of these, or settle them, if you will, and are funding, just as we had discussed at previous estimate committees, work in anticipation of what settlements may come about. This is obviously a significant amount of money, but it reflects appropriate accommodations for the potential for a number of settlements to be arrived at and, since some of those settlements are not closed—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Is there a timeline to be expected on involving that allocation for that \$5 million? Is there a timeline to be expected?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** As it stands, it remains for this fiscal year in anticipation of any and all settlements.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Does this amount include the possible results of court-ordered settlements?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** It involves the ongoing negotiations for a number of potential settlements. I can report to you that, at least in a couple of instances—one in particular—discussions have been very fruitful. The negotiations have provided an opportunity to realize the prospect of settlement or settlements—to the extent that they're plural—and I'm not in a position to disclose any more details.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** On page 9 of the document, it talks about “working with ministry partners, where possible, to seek negotiated solutions to issues currently under litigation.” How many lawsuits is the government a party to from First Nations seeking resolution of claims issues or to be consulted on policy impacting their way of life or traditional lands?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I will get that number. It came up in a discussion not too long ago on the exact amount, but I will get a number for you of how many we're actively involved in.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay. How much time do I have?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** You have about three minutes—less than three minutes.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay. How much is budgeted towards commitments to Indigenous peoples through the five-year anti-racism strategy administered by the Anti-Racism Directorate?

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I couldn't hear the first end of your question because there are whispers coming from the side of you there.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** How much is budgeted—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** The minister can't hear your colleague's questions, MPPs Gélinas and Wong-Tam.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I really can't. I'm sorry, but I could not hear the front end of his question.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** If you want to respect your colleague and his time, you can take your conversation outside. Thank you.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** How much is budgeted towards commitments to Indigenous peoples through the five-year anti-racism strategy administered by the Anti-Racism Directorate?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** I will get that precise number back to you, since it appears in a couple of different ministries' lines.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Do you know who administers it? Is it the IAO or the ARD?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Sorry, it's the ARD.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Okay.

On page 12, it says the IAO is "working with First Nation leadership through the First Nation leadership advocacy strategy for quarterly meetings with the Premier, Minister of Indigenous Affairs and cabinet ministers, on joint First Nation and provincial priorities." When was the last time one of these meetings was held?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Forty-eight hours ago.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I was aware of that. When is the next one scheduled?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Any day but September 24, which is my birthday, is what I said. But we committed to quarterly meetings. We've lived up to that: grand chiefs, deputy grand chiefs and/or their proxies. It's fairly generous and primarily aimed at the grand chief and regional chief level, but some chiefs do attend.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Where can the public or the members of provincial Parliament find progress updates on these meetings?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Well, we can—

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** I mean, I see the pictures, but we don't see the content of the—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** You don't read the tweet underneath, under the photos?

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** It's very general.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Oh, okay, it's very general.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute left, and just—

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** No, you know what? In fairness, he raises a really good point. I will discuss that at the next meeting, whether there's a joint release on the discussion points. I know that they're discussed at the Chiefs of Ontario level. I'll be going there next Tuesday, I believe. You will likely be there. They're not secrets, but to the extent that there's a desire to have a summary of what was discussed, that's not a unilateral decision that I can make. In the spirit of partnership, we would want the Chiefs of Ontario to weigh in on if not determine how that would be disseminated.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time that we have. This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs.

Standing order 69 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? I declare the vote carried.

Shall the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare the estimates carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs to the House? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare the motion carried.

We will now recess for five minutes—sorry, you wanted 10 minutes?

**Interjection:** Five minutes is fine.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** We will recess for five minutes to allow the minister—all right. Thank you very much.

*The committee recessed from 1602 to 1608.*

## MINISTRY OF FRANCOPHONE AFFAIRS

### MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Good afternoon. The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Francophone Affairs for a total of two hours. Are there any questions from members before we start?

I'm now required to call vote 1301, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Minister of Francophone Affairs. The remaining time will be allotted for questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members and 20 minutes for the government members.

Minister, the floor is yours. You may begin.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Bon après-midi, membres du comité. Good afternoon, committee members.

Je suis heureuse de comparaître devant vous pour discuter du budget des dépenses de 2023-2024 du ministère des Affaires francophones. Ces estimations démontrent l'appui et l'engagement de notre gouvernement envers les francophones de l'Ontario.

Depuis 400 ans, les francophones ont contribué à façonner l'identité de l'Ontario, ainsi que sa croissance et sa prospérité économique. La communauté francophone de l'Ontario, avec tous ses accents, est un atout culturel, social et économique majeur pour la province et se distingue par son dynamisme, sa détermination et son esprit d'entreprise. Nous avons renforcé cette communauté, et nous l'avons outillée afin d'en assurer la vitalité et de permettre à l'ensemble de l'Ontario de profiter de cet avantage concurrentiel.

Le ministère des Affaires francophones a un portefeuille unique. Il travaille dans l'ensemble du gouvernement, en collaboration avec les ministères partenaires. D'une certaine façon, mon ministère se situe au carrefour des politiques qui s'adressent à la communauté francophone. Nos ministères partenaires dirigent leurs initiatives distinctes. Mon rôle en tant que ministre des Affaires francophones est de veiller à ce que les besoins de la communauté francophone soient au premier plan des efforts de notre gouvernement.

J'ajouterais que je m'acquiesce de ce mandat en tenant compte des précieux conseils de mon Comité consultatif

provincial sur les affaires francophones, que les autres ministères peuvent aussi d'ailleurs sonder. Ainsi, chaque ministère a la responsabilité égale de veiller à ce que les besoins des francophones soient satisfaits et à ce que les membres de notre communauté francophone et bilingue puissent s'épanouir en Ontario.

Two major cross-government strategies guide and frame our efforts, providing a type of road map: our French language services strategy and our Francophone Economic Development Strategy. The French language services strategy focuses primarily on increasing the availability, accessibility and quality of the French-language services to which francophones are entitled.

La stratégie sur les services en français repose sur trois piliers. Le premier consistait à moderniser le cadre juridique des services en français, puisque la loi est restée inchangée depuis 1986. Nous l'avons fait en décembre de 2021, en adoptant la Loi sur les services en français.

Notre législation modernisée a renforcé la loi à bien des égards. Dans un premier temps, elle reconnaît la diversité de la communauté francophone. De plus, la loi modernisée a renforcé le principe de l'offre active, qui améliore l'accès aux services en français en les rendant aisément accessibles dès le premier contact. La loi modernisée a également renforcé la reddition de comptes puisque, maintenant, les ministres rendent compte annuellement au conseil exécutif sur la mise en oeuvre de la loi et de la qualité des services en français dans leur ministère.

Pour assurer davantage la reddition des comptes, la nouvelle loi exige également que, en tant que ministre des Affaires francophones, je publie un rapport annuel sur les progrès réalisés en matière de services en français dans notre province. D'ailleurs, j'ai déposé mon deuxième rapport annuel la semaine dernière à l'Assemblée législative. De plus, la nouvelle législation exige également que la loi soit révisée tous les 10 ans.

Après l'adoption de cette loi, notre gouvernement a travaillé à améliorer davantage les services en français en introduisant des changements réglementaires clés. Nous faisons de l'offre active un élément clé de la prestation de services de qualité en français. Donc, le 6 décembre dernier, mon ministère a introduit un règlement pour justement définir l'offre active. Comme vous le savez, l'offre active désigne le fait de rendre les services en français disponibles et connus du client dès le premier point de contact.

Le règlement, qui est entré en vigueur le 1<sup>er</sup> avril 2023, prescrit neuf mesures que les entités gouvernementales et les fournisseurs de services doivent suivre pour s'assurer que les Ontariennes et les Ontariens sont conscients que les services sont disponibles en français, et ce, dès le départ. Au cours des prochains mois, le ministère des Affaires francophones présentera d'autres règlements sur les régions et les organismes désignés, ainsi que sur les points de services prévus en français à l'extérieur des 26 régions actuellement désignées.

Le deuxième pilier de notre stratégie pour les services en français repose sur l'augmentation de la main-d'oeuvre francophone et bilingue. Comme vous pouvez l'imaginer,

si nous voulons que les services en français soient disponibles, nous avons besoin de personnes capables de les fournir.

Notre gouvernement travaille ainsi avec ses partenaires ministériels à des programmes de formation et de recrutement, particulièrement dans les professions clés, tels les fournisseurs de soins de santé, les préposés aux services de soutien à la personne, les enseignants, les éducateurs de la petite enfance et autres. Le gouvernement de l'Ontario et les fournisseurs de services peuvent également faire des progrès dans ce domaine en déterminant quels membres du personnel sont en mesure de fournir des services en français même s'ils n'occupent pas des postes désignés bilingues.

L'élargissement de la main-d'oeuvre francophone exige également que nous tenions compte du rôle important que les immigrants d'expression française peuvent jouer dans ce domaine. Le gouvernement de l'Ontario collabore avec le gouvernement fédéral à la création de corridors d'immigration francophone et à la reconnaissance des certifications professionnelles qui permettraient aux immigrants francophones de participer plus activement à notre économie.

Le troisième pilier de la stratégie pour les services en français repose sur l'amélioration de la planification et de la prestation des services en français. Nous nous efforçons de tirer parti des modèles de prestation de services communautaires existants, tels que les services en carrefour et les services mobiles qui se sont avérés efficaces dans les milieux minoritaires ou pour les populations dispersées.

Nous voulons également permettre aux organismes d'obtenir une désignation pour délivrer des services en français plus facilement et plus rapidement. Pour ce faire, mon ministère a introduit une plateforme de désignation en ligne en janvier 2022, et a rationalisé les exigences de désignation en réduisant le nombre d'exigences de 35 à 20.

Pour améliorer la planification des services en français au sein de la fonction publique, mon ministère a travaillé avec le Secrétariat du Conseil du Trésor pour s'assurer que, chaque année, tous les ministères détiennent un plan stratégique sur les services en français et rendent compte de leur capacité à offrir des services en français sur le plan des ressources humaines.

My two annual reports on francophone affairs are part of this strengthened approach to planning and accountability for French-language services. The annual report also highlights progress made in support of the critical Francophone Economic Development Strategy, which is the other cross-government strategy that has been guiding our actions. Our government introduced this strategy in 2021. It was a first for Ontario's francophone community. The strategy aims to increase the francophone community's entrepreneurial footprint, expand the francophone and bilingual labour pool, stimulate job creation and facilitate access to new markets for francophone businesspeople and entrepreneurs.

La Stratégie de développement économique francophone est également fondée sur trois piliers : l'entrepreneuriat et l'innovation francophone; une main-d'oeuvre



bilingue qualifiée, ce qui comprend l'éducation, la formation et l'employabilité; et la promotion de la communauté francophone de l'Ontario comme atout économique.

La stratégie préconise une approche pangouvernementale afin de tirer parti des initiatives et des programmes provinciaux existants qui peuvent appuyer le développement économique de la francophonie. Elle comprend également plusieurs initiatives financées par le ministère des Affaires francophones, qui a fait des investissements ciblés pour soutenir le développement économique francophone.

En outre, notre contribution au lancement de la Fédération des gens d'affaires francophones de l'Ontario, la FGA, a été l'une des premières initiatives financées par le gouvernement et a joué un rôle déterminant dans le soutien et la fédération de nos entreprises franco-ontariennes. Formée de 15 membres fondateurs, la FGA a réussi en seulement deux ans à réunir 46 organisations des secteurs privé, public et sans but lucratif. Elle compte aujourd'hui plus de 4 000 membres et se trouve dans une position unique pour amorcer des conversations qui mènent à de futures opportunités et partenariats au sein de secteur des affaires francophones.

Par exemple, au cours de l'exercice 2022-2023, la FGA a lancé le portail Web inkubo.ca afin de promouvoir plus de 100 services d'incubation et de mise en oeuvre d'entreprises francophones. Elle a également récemment ouvert officiellement les portes de son espace incubateur au centre-ville de Toronto.

En investissant 500 000 \$ par année, le ministère des Affaires francophones a été en mesure de soutenir les entrepreneurs et les entreprises francophones en finançant une gamme d'autres services d'incubation dans différents secteurs et régions, à savoir :

—les programmes d'incubation et d'accélération du Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario pour les entrepreneurs à Toronto, à Ottawa et à Sudbury;

—le nouveau Quartiers de l'innovation de l' Université de Sudbury;

—le programme d'incubateur virtuel de la Société économique de l'Ontario;

—l'incubateur agricole et agroalimentaire de l'Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens; et

—la série documentaire pour jeunes entrepreneurs du collègue La Cité.

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Le ministère a également financé un projet mené par l'Association francophone à l'éducation des services à l'enfance de l'Ontario, reconnaissant le rôle important que joue la disponibilité des services de garde d'enfants dans la participation économique des femmes. Le groupe, qui rassemble des exploitants de services de garde francophones, élabore un outil de recrutement et d'intégration professionnelle qui permettrait à ses membres de mieux attirer les nouveaux arrivants à travailler comme personnel dans leurs garderies.

Notre stratégie de développement économique de la francophonie favorise également le commerce interprovincial. Dans le cadre de l'accord de coopération et

d'échanges entre le gouvernement du Québec et le gouvernement de l'Ontario, l'Ontario consacre 205 000 \$ par année au soutien de projets entre les deux provinces dans divers secteurs, notamment le développement économique, la culture, l'éducation et le tourisme.

Nous avons également établi le premier Prix du commerce Ontario-Québec en francophonie en 2021. Le prix reconnaît les petites et moyennes entreprises qui ont favorisé le commerce interprovincial et la collaboration transfrontalière entre les deux provinces. Ce type de prix interprovincial favorise la croissance des exportations, fait participer le milieu des affaires francophones aux débouchés commerciaux interprovinciaux et fait la promotion de produits et de services qui ciblent les marchés de l'Ontario et du Québec.

Nos efforts avec le Québec ont été si fructueux que nous discutons maintenant avec le Nouveau-Brunswick pour explorer les possibilités de collaborations similaires.

Les partenariats que nous envisageons vont au-delà de nos frontières nationales. Nous voulons établir des partenariats internationaux en tirant parti de la position de l'Ontario en tant que membre observateur de l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. On dénombre 321 millions de francophones dans le monde. En fait, le français est la cinquième langue la plus parlée au monde. C'est aussi la seule, avec l'anglais, à être présente sur les cinq continents. Nous sommes convaincus que les communautés francophones du monde entier peuvent bénéficier du commerce avec les entreprises et les services francophones et bilingues de l'Ontario.

Nous croyons également que l'Ontario peut devenir la destination privilégiée des investisseurs, des entreprises et des créateurs d'emplois francophones. C'est précisément ce message que j'ai relayé aux délégués au sommet de l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, l'OIF, en Tunisie en novembre dernier. Cette réunion biennale de 88 États membres et gouvernements a été l'occasion de faire connaître la francophonie ontarienne. C'était l'occasion d'explorer les possibilités de coopération entre les secteurs tels que l'entrepreneuriat féminin, l'éducation et l'apprentissage numérique, ainsi que les échanges culturels et commerciaux.

C'est dans ce contexte que l'Ontario a signé un accord de coopération avec la communauté francophone de la Belgique. Il s'agit du premier accord de ce type signé avec un partenaire international. Cet accord générera des échanges et des partenariats entre nos deux territoires en mettant l'accent sur la culture, l'enseignement supérieur et la recherche, une francophonie économique et numérique, et le soutien aux jeunes, y compris les jeunes entrepreneurs.

Et c'est à ce même sommet de l'OIF que la FGA, de concert avec le Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, le Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick et la Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec ont décidé de consolider leurs efforts de promotion des entreprises francophones partout au Canada. Ces organisations, ayant une vision commune, ont lancé la nouvelle Alliance de la francophonie économique canadienne deux mois

plus tard, en janvier de cette année. Il s'agit d'une alliance passionnante qui réunira des gens d'affaires francophones et francophiles de partout au pays. Elle fera la promotion de l'espace francophone canadien comme agent de croissance pour les entreprises.

La communauté francophone de l'Ontario est plus dynamique que jamais. La promotion de cette population nous relie à notre histoire, célèbre notre identité unique, mène la province à de nouvelles entreprises commerciales et nous donne un avantage linguistique clé sur la scène mondiale. C'est un atout précieux et nous devons veiller à ce qu'il continue de croître et de prospérer. En fait, selon Statistique Canada, les travailleurs francophones et bilingues représentent 11 % de la main-d'œuvre de l'Ontario et génèrent 80 milliards de dollars de notre produit intérieur brut.

En tant que ministre des Affaires francophones, je suis extrêmement fière de ce que mon ministère a accompli dans la mise en œuvre de la Stratégie de développement économique francophone de l'Ontario et de nos efforts pour soutenir les organisations et les entreprises francophones. Nous l'avons fait en travaillant main dans la main avec la communauté francophone. Nous nous sommes adressés à toutes les personnes engagées dans le bien-être socioéconomique de notre francophonie, qu'ils s'agissent d'entrepreneurs, d'entreprises établies, d'exploitants sans but lucratif ou de partenaires institutionnels. Ensemble, nous avons jeté un nouveau regard sur la façon dont nous pourrions faire croître l'écosystème francophone.

Quelle sera, donc, la prochaine étape? Alors que nous cherchons à renforcer notre écosystème d'affaires francophones, nous devons examiner dans quelle mesure le paysage des affaires francophones de l'Ontario devient plus diversifié et inclusif. Selon la FGA, d'ici 2031, 13 % des petites et moyennes entreprises francophones exporteront des biens ou des services; les femmes détiendront 45 % des petites et moyennes entreprises francophones, en tout ou en partie; et 10 % de ces propriétaires de petites et moyennes entreprises francophones appartiendront à des personnes nées à l'extérieur du Canada.

Compte tenu du rôle essentiel de ces entreprises dans notre paysage économique, l'Ontario demeure déterminé à soutenir les entreprises franco-ontariennes afin qu'elles puissent générer de l'innovation, fournir des services en français ainsi que créer et distribuer des produits et des services dans divers secteurs propices à la croissance. Nos deux stratégies complémentaires sont agencées pour renforcer l'entrepreneuriat francophone.

Through the Ministry of Francophone Affairs, we will be investing \$3 million this year to support entrepreneurship and capacity building that can help francophone businesses develop and prosper. As such, our government is maintaining the previous year's commitments, including:

—maintaining the annual funding for the Francophone Community Grants Program to \$2 million per year;

—\$250,000 in annual funding to support the Ontario-Quebec co-operation and exchange agreement with respect to the francophonie; and

—\$800,000 to support the francophone economic ecosystem and the range of support services available to francophone businesses and entrepreneurs.

En tant que défenseurs des communautés francophones, nous pensons à l'avenir. Comment pouvons-nous rester forts sur la scène commerciale internationale? Comment pouvons-nous augmenter le nombre de travailleurs francophones et bilingues qualifiés? Comment pouvons-nous améliorer l'accès aux services en français? Et comment pouvons-nous continuer à faire de l'Ontario un endroit favorable à la prospérité de notre francophonie?

Tout ce que nous faisons s'inscrit sous trois résultats clés :

(1) Les services gouvernementaux en français sont facilement accessibles dans les régions désignées de la province.

(2) Les entreprises appartenant à des francophones, exploitées par des francophones et celles qui fournissent des services sur les marchés francophones ont accès à du soutien ciblé pour les aider à assurer leur croissance et à contribuer à la prospérité de la communauté.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Et (3), les politiques, les initiatives et les programmes gouvernementaux visant la communauté franco-ontarienne sont élaborés en tenant compte de ses champs d'intérêt et de ses besoins.

The spirit of innovation and collaboration drives the work that we do. Through partnerships, new doors to progress and success will continue to open and Ontario's francophone communities will continue to flourish and contribute to the province's cultural and economic prosperity. Our government is committed to building a strong francophonie within a strong Ontario.

Notre travail est animé par l'esprit d'innovation et de collaboration. Notre gouvernement s'est engagé à bâtir une francophonie forte au sein d'un Ontario fort.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to the opposition for 20 minutes. MPP Gélinas, you may begin.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Merci beaucoup pour votre présentation, madame la Ministre. J'aimerais commencer avec l'éducation.

Comme vous avez bien dit, votre ministère travaille avec tous les ministères. Vous avez parlé de carrefours de politiques et j'apprécie cette entrée de jeu. Dans un premier temps, on sait tous que l'éducation en français pour les Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes est protégée par l'article 23 de la Charte. Avec la mise en place d'un projet de loi qui est en train de passer—c'est à la troisième lecture en Chambre en ce moment. Le projet de loi propose de jumeler les écoles francophones et anglophones.

Je suis sûre qu'on n'était pas là ni l'une ni l'autre, mais on a des membres de notre famille qui vont se souvenir du règlement 17 de 1913 à 1927, où le gouvernement de l'Ontario avait passé un règlement, une loi, qui empêchait l'éducation en français en Ontario. Les Jésuites nous ont sauvé la vie en mettant en place des écoles privées où les francophones pouvaient continuer d'avoir accès à l'éducation en français. Tout ça pour dire que ce n'était qu'aux

années 1960 que le gouvernement provincial de l'Ontario commence à financer les écoles francophones.

**1630**

Dans le temps, les écoles étaient gouvernées par des conseils anglophones et on avait beaucoup d'écoles—dans le nord de l'Ontario, en tout cas—où les francophones et les anglophones étaient sous un même toit. Ce qu'on a appris de tout ça, c'est que lorsque tu mets les enfants francophones et les enfants anglophones sous un même toit, ce que tu fais, c'est de l'assimilation. Partout où les francophones sont minoritaires—et c'est quasiment partout en Ontario; Hearst est chanceux, mais le restant de nous autres, on est minoritaire partout où on vit. C'était de grosses boîtes d'assimilation.

Là, on a un projet de loi, qui va passer dans quelques minutes, qui propose de jumeler les écoles francophones et anglophones. Qu'est-ce que votre ministère entend faire pour, dans un premier temps, respecter l'article 23 de la Charte et, dans un deuxième temps, ne pas permettre de mettre en place des boîtes d'assimilation pour nos enfants?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Merci pour la question. C'est une question fondamentale, bien sûr. Ça reflète une des craintes de la communauté francophone au niveau de—c'est une crainte de longue date. Je peux vous dire que notre gouvernement va toujours respecter ses obligations en vertu de la Charte des droits et libertés, et spécifiquement de l'article 23—toujours. Tout le travail que nous faisons avec le ministère de l'Éducation est guidé par cela.

Je pense que vous savez que, depuis déjà plusieurs années, notre gouvernement a fait des investissements très importants dans la construction de nouvelles écoles en Ontario, et spécifiquement, dans la construction de nouvelles écoles pour les francophones en Ontario. Je n'ai pas les statistiques précises, mais en tête, ce que j'ai, c'est : si on a une population d'environ 5 % de la population, je pense qu'on a dépassé 15 % des nouvelles constructions ou du budget de la construction pour les écoles francophones dans certaines années. Mais tout ça pour dire qu'on a investi de façon très importante dans l'immobilier pour s'assurer—il y a une très grande demande pour l'éducation en français, comme vous savez. Les écoles débordaient, donc il fallait absolument construire de plus en plus d'écoles, et c'est ce que nous avons fait.

Donc, pour ce qui concerne la nouvelle loi que nous pensons va passer bientôt, tout le travail que nous faisons à cet égard est guidé par nos responsabilités en vertu de l'article 23.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Alors pourquoi avoir mis dans le projet de loi la possibilité de jumeler les écoles francophones et anglophones? Pourquoi a-t-on ça dans un projet de loi si vous n'avez aucune intention de vous en servir? Pourquoi l'a-t-on mis dans le projet de loi—bien, dans la loi, dans quelques minutes, là. Je viens de regarder à la télé, puis ça va être fait dans quelques minutes.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Je peux vous dire que dans la loi, ce que nous proposons, c'est d'avoir des consultations à ce sujet, à cet égard, pour cette idée de partage. Et nous allons, bien sûr, nous assurer que si la décision est prise de partager un espace, que cet exercice aura

lieu de fonction qui est en accord avec nos responsabilités sous la Charte. Absolument, c'est la clé pour nous.

Mais comme vous savez, nous avons un besoin—même si nous avons fait de grands investissements dans l'immobilier, il faut trouver aussi des solutions innovantes pour pouvoir donner cette instruction, cette éducation en français aux francophones, et l'éducation bilingue aussi. Donc, c'est une partie de notre stratégie, mais je peux vous dire que tout sera fait en conformité avec nos responsabilités en vertu de la Charte.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Je ne veux pas vous mettre des mots dans la bouche—rien de ça, là—mais est-ce que j'ai votre assurance que l'on ne forcera pas une école francophone à partager le même bâtiment qu'une école anglophone?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Cela vient du ministère de l'Éducation, qui prendra cette décision, mais je peux vous dire que, comme je vous ai dit, toute décision sera prise suite à une consultation avec les parties prenantes.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Est-ce que votre ministère serait prêt à appuyer une école francophone qui ne veut pas être sous le même toit qu'une école anglophone?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Point of order.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Yes, MPP Kusendova?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** I'm really sorry to interject, but today we are here to discuss the estimates of the Ministry of Francophone Affairs, and this line of questioning has nothing to do with the budgetary items of this ministry.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Okay. I'd like to remind the member: Let's keep the line of questions to the estimates at hand.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Ça va me faire plaisir. Lorsque M<sup>me</sup> la ministre a commencé sa présentation, elle nous a ouvert la porte en disant que son ministère travaille avec l'ensemble des ministères du gouvernement—que vous êtes un carrefour des politiques. Donc, mes questions étaient par rapport à ça.

Lorsque l'ACÉPO était ici, on leur a demandé—encore, c'est pour l'éducation : est-ce que c'est responsable de construire une école pour 25 étudiants? Je peux vous dire que, où je demeure, on en a beaucoup d'écoles—que tu regardes à Levack, à Gogama, à Foleyet—de moins de 25 étudiants, parce que de demander à un enfant de six ans de prendre l'autobus pour deux heures pour se rendre à la pro-chaine communauté, ce n'est pas raisonnable.

Est-ce que, selon vous, étant donné le petit nombre de francophones dans certaines régions, c'est raisonnable de penser qu'on ait des petites écoles plutôt que de demander à nos enfants francophones d'être sur l'autobus plus d'une heure et demie dans une direction le matin et plus d'une heure et demie tous les soirs?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Bien, pour répondre aux besoins des communautés francophones à travers la province, même dans des régions où il y a des populations plus faibles de francophones, notre gouvernement, comme je vous ai dit, a investi des millions de dollars pour soutenir la construction ou l'achat de nouvelles écoles. Depuis 2020, nous avons investi près de 230 millions de dollars

pour soutenir la construction et l'achat de 18 nouvelles écoles de langue française et huit projets de rénovation ou d'agrandissements permanents. Une partie du plan au niveau du ministère de l'Éducation, c'est de créer plus d'espaces francophones à travers la province pour assurer un système d'éducation fort.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Ma question était plus précisément pour les plus petites communautés, si vous trouvez que c'est raisonnable d'avoir une école pour 25 enfants qui demeurent loin de n'importe quel autre centre.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Je peux vous dire que ça, c'est une question qui relève du ministère de l'Éducation et des conseils scolaires, mais quand il y a des communautés francophones qui viennent au ministère des Affaires francophones pour demander de l'appui pour différents projets, y compris de nouvelles écoles, on est là pour écouter. Si nous voyons que c'est quelque chose d'important, on peut aussi faire cette proposition au ministère de l'Éducation. Mais la décision relève du ministère de l'Éducation.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Est-ce que dans le passé, vous avez aidé des communautés à obtenir des écoles francophones? Est-ce que votre ministère l'a fait depuis que vous êtes en poste?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Depuis que je suis en poste? Je ne sais pas si le ministère lui-même—Jean-Claude?

**Mr. Jean-Claude Camus:** Jean-Claude Camus, assistant deputy minister at the Ministry of Francophone Affairs. I can't really comment—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Sorry, but could you just say your name for Hansard before you begin?

**Mr. Jean-Claude Camus:** Jean-Claude Camus.

**La Présidente (M<sup>me</sup> Goldie Ghamari):** Merci.

**Mr. Jean-Claude Camus:** I can't really recall at the moment.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Alors, je crois—moi, je dirais que non, depuis que je suis en place ou que Jean-Claude est dans le poste, non. Mais comme je vous ai dit, les décisions pour l'emplacement ou la construction de nouvelles écoles relèvent directement du ministère de l'Éducation. Il y a d'autres organismes, d'autres communautés qui nous viennent pour nous parler de projets communautaires. Ils nous demandent notre appui pour qu'on puisse exprimer l'importance de ce projet pour la communauté francophone, et nous faisons ce travail au sein du gouvernement. Alors, depuis 2019 ou 2018, on ne l'a pas fait pour une école, mais ça ne veut pas dire que—ce que je vous ai dit, c'est que c'est une décision du ministère de l'Éducation, qui est bien mieux placé que nous pour faire ces décisions finales.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Madame la Ministre, vous savez très bien que pour la plupart des conseils scolaires francophones, lorsque c'est le temps de bâtir une nouvelle école—et ça, il y en a partout en province—on nous donne les vieilles écoles anglophones qui n'ont pas de cour d'école, qui n'ont pas de stationnement, qui n'ont pas de gymnase. Ça, c'est ce qu'on donne aux francophones. Si vous faites le tour des écoles francophones versus les écoles anglophones, ça devient super apparent.

**1640**

Encore là, les conseils scolaires sont venus nous voir pendant la période où ils pouvaient faire des présentations sur le projet de loi pour dire qu'ils voudraient savoir à l'avance quelles sont les écoles anglophones qui sont surpluses, parce que, souvent, les conseils anglophones veulent vendre leurs écoles pour faire de l'argent, pour être capables de combler leurs déficits—

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Point of order, Chair. **The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Yes, MPP Kusendova?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** I'm really sorry, again, to interject; however, we've had opportunities to have public hearings and a line-by-line for Bill 98. This is not the purpose of today's hearing. Today's hearing is to be talking about the estimates of the Ministry of Francophone Affairs, so I would ask the member to direct her questions to that.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Absolument.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Donc, ma question, c'est vraiment du côté budget. Qu'est-ce que votre ministère peut faire pour aider les écoles francophones qui ont besoin de grandir, qui ont besoin de nouvelles écoles, puis qui ne sont pas capables d'avoir des réponses claires des conseils anglophones? Ils se doutent—ils ne sont pas prêts à fermer. Puis ça, ça se passe dans mon conseil, dans ma région. Le conseil anglophone va fermer des écoles anglophones, mais ils attendent de les mettre disponibles après que les conseils francophones aient pris leur décision.

Est-ce que votre ministère peut offrir de l'aide aux conseils francophones qui aimeraient avoir accès à des écoles anglophones en surplus?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Le budget du ministère des Affaires francophones est près de 7 millions de dollars, donc on n'a vraiment pas la capacité de donner de l'aide directe aux conseils scolaires de l'Ontario. C'est pour ça que ça relève directement du ministère de l'Éducation.

Comme je vous ai expliqué, nous faisons la promotion des intérêts francophones sur l'éducation, la santé, les besoins communautaires, l'infrastructure, et cetera. Donc, je travaille avec le ministère de l'Éducation, et le ministère des Affaires francophones fait la même chose avec les autres ministères, pour nous assurer que les responsabilités de la promesse envers la communauté francophone sont réussies.

À l'heure actuelle, on a 57 projets d'immobilisation—et bien sûr, ça ne relève pas de mon budget, comme a dit mon adjointe parlementaire. Ça ne relève pas de mon budget, mais je vais vous répondre. Nous avons 57 projets d'immobilisation pour des établissements francophones qui sont maintenant en planification ou en construction dans l'ensemble de la province.

Certains d'entre eux comprennent les suivants : de nouvelles écoles; un nouvel établissement scolaire mixte entre les conseils scolaires francophone catholique et public de Kingston, qui va permettre d'accueillir 600 élèves du secondaire et comprendra aussi des places de garderie; une nouvelle école primaire publique francophone à Ottawa;

l'École secondaire catholique Sainte-Trinité à Oakville; et l'ajout de l'école élémentaire et secondaire publique à Pickering, qui permettra aussi de créer des services de garderie.

Je pense que vous pouvez voir que le ministère de l'Éducation, à travers son budget, fait des investissements très importants pour la communauté francophone pour nous assurer que nous pouvons répondre à la demande qui continue à grandir pour l'éducation en français et que nous avons l'immobilisation et l'infrastructure en place pour accueillir ces élèves. Nous travaillons de concert avec le ministère de l'Éducation pour parler des besoins des francophones, mais comme je vous ai dit, ça relève du budget du ministère de l'Éducation—pas du budget du ministère des Affaires francophones, qui n'a pas cette capacité.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Non, ça, je le comprends. C'est juste, le processus—est-ce qu'un conseil scolaire peut venir vous voir comme ministre des Affaires francophones pour les aider dans une négociation avec un conseil anglophone? Quel genre d'appui est-ce que vous pouvez donner à un conseil ou à travers vos connexions avec le ministère de l'Éducation? Juste pour bien comprendre, quel est votre rôle dans ça? Qu'est-ce qui fait partie de votre rôle et qui n'en fait pas partie?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Bien, mon rôle est d'être ouverte à la communauté francophone. Je rencontre les intervenants, comme j'ai dit, en éducation, en santé et en d'autres secteurs. Nous représentons les intérêts des francophones auprès des autres ministères pour nous assurer que nous sommes en train de, en tant que prestataires de services en français, d'éducation en français—qu'on est bien, en termes de nos responsabilités.

Pour des négociations pour de l'immobilier, ça ne relève pas du ministère des Affaires francophones. Je pense que ça ne s'est jamais fait et je pense que ce serait hors du mandat du ministère. Mais pour avoir des conversations, pour représenter les intérêts des francophones, ça relève directement du ministère.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Je suis sûre que vous connaissez le rapport sur la pénurie des enseignants et enseignantes qui a été terminé en janvier 2021, où on dit clairement que chaque année, il nous manque 520 enseignants et enseignantes francophones pour nos écoles francophones catholiques et publiques. J'aimerais savoir : comment est-ce que votre ministère a répondu aux 37 recommandations de ce rapport?

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Just a reminder to the member to keep your questions to estimates. That report is not part of the estimates, so let's just focus on the estimates.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Oui, c'est vraiment dans l'entrée de jeu dont vous avez parlé par rapport à votre rôle avec les différents ministères.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Alors, je ne peux pas parler de ça. Encore, ça relève du ministère de l'Éducation.

Mais ce que je peux vous dire : pour adresser la pénurie des enseignants, c'est bien sûr une des priorités du gouvernement et on travaille avec le ministère des Collèges et Universités—on l'a fait en 2019—pour faire avancer le dossier de l'Université de l'Ontario français. On a mis sur

le pied la première université gouvernée pour et par les francophones.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** L'UOF a mis sur place, grâce au travail du ministère des Affaires francophones et du MCU, un nouveau baccalauréat en éducation. On espère qu'on verra peut-être un doublement du nombre de places. Au MCU, on travaille avec les autres institutions post-secondaires pour voir comment on peut former de plus en plus d'enseignants ici, sur place, en Ontario.

Il y a aussi le corridor de l'immigration qui va être créé par le gouvernement fédéral. L'Ontario a travaillé de très près avec le gouvernement fédéral sur ça. C'est une priorité pour nous d'essayer d'accueillir de plus en plus d'immigrants francophones, mais d'enseignants francophones. Comme vous savez, ce n'est pas juste un problème ici en Ontario; c'est à travers le Canada. Nous avons représenté auprès du gouvernement fédéral l'importance, en vue de la demande qui grandit pour l'enseignement francophone et bilingue en Ontario, d'avoir un plus grand nombre d'enseignants ici—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time that we have.

We'll now turn to the official opposition. Vous avez 10 minutes. Vous pouvez commencer.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Merci, madame la Ministre. Je veux souhaiter officiellement la bienvenue à votre nouvelle sous-ministre, Roda Muse. J'espère que vous aurez autant de plaisir à travailler avec elle que j'en ai eu dans mon ancien rôle. Je pense que vous allez être bien servie.

Bienvenue, monsieur Camus. On n'a pas eu le plaisir de se rencontrer, mais ça me fait plaisir de vous voir aujourd'hui.

Et merci, madame la Ministre, pour votre présentation et votre rapport. J'aimerais obtenir un petit peu plus d'information, à savoir comment votre ministère s'assure que la lentille francophone est appliquée au préalable de la présentation des projets de loi. Vous avez mentionné que votre ministère travaille avec l'ensemble du gouvernement. Je ne crois pas que vous avez nécessairement un représentant du ministère des Affaires francophones présent dans chacun des ministères.

Par contre, comment est-ce qu'on s'assure, avant qu'un projet de loi soit élaboré, qu'il y ait la lentille francophone qui soit appliquée pour s'assurer que le projet de loi ou les mesures de changement qui sont apportés n'aient pas un effet négatif? Là, justement, sur nos communautés francophones, commencer une mesure peut avoir un effet totalement différent sur une communauté minoritaire.

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**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Je vous remercie pour cette question parce qu'elle est très importante, puis elle est vraiment fondamentale en ce qui concerne le travail du ministère des Affaires francophones auprès des autres ministères.

Quand je suis arrivée en poste en 2018, je peux vous dire qu'il n'y avait aucune lentille francophone qui était appliquée de façon organisée auprès des autres ministères. Donc, depuis 2018, je travaille avec le « cabinet office »,

avec le Conseil du Trésor pour assurer que lorsqu'un projet de loi est proposé, le développement de la politique de ce projet de loi est fait—s'il y a la possibilité d'avoir un impact sur la communauté francophone, que le ministère des Affaires francophones est contacté et que quelqu'un du ministère puisse travailler et regarder la politique, mais aussi le projet de loi pour appliquer cette lentille. C'est un travail que le ministère a fait il y a plusieurs années auprès du « cabinet office » : quand un projet de loi fait son parcours au sein de l'organe gouvernemental, que la lentille francophone soit appliquée.

Bien sûr, il y a toujours le moment final où ça vient au Conseil du Trésor, d'autres comités et aussi le Conseil des ministres pour avoir ce regard final. Mais, nous avons réussi de façon, je pense, importante à nous assurer que cette lentille soit portée au niveau du développement de la politique.

Je peux demander, peut-être, à Jean-Claude d'en parler plus.

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Oui. En fait, c'est un travail qui se fait au quotidien, à mon niveau, en particulier, avec mes collègues dans chaque ministère. On a l'occasion de revoir, par exemple, les soumissions, de commenter, d'être au courant bien avant. Et ce que j'allais dire aussi, c'est que c'est aussi une raison pour laquelle on a élaboré deux stratégies qui sont des stratégies pangouvernementales, justement, pour montrer à quel point tout ce qui se fait dans les autres ministères est important pour les affaires francophones. Donc, ça nous permet également de commenter et d'exprimer un avis sur ce qui se passe dans les autres ministères.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** En effet. Dans la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français—et ça, c'était une des recommandations de la commissaire—nous avons responsabilisés tous les ministères envers leurs responsabilités sous la Loi sur les services en français.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Donc, ça se fait de façon systématique pour chacun des ministères puis chacun des projets de loi. Est-ce que ça se fait à l'initiative du ministère ou du ministre qui propose la nouvelle loi, ou c'est vraiment les affaires francophones qui doivent être à l'affût de ce qui se prépare?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Ça ne se faisait pas comme ça en 2018, mais maintenant, ça se fait : c'est l'initiative du ministère qui fait proposer, qui met de l'avant le projet de loi, de se mettre en contact avec le ministère des Affaires francophones et aussi Indigenous Affairs. Les autres, les plus petits ministères, où leurs populations pourront être impactées par le projet de loi, sont intégrés dans le travail sur ce projet de loi. Alors, pour nous, pour mettre cette lentille francophone—des fois, il n'y a pas d'impact sur les francophones, mais on est là juste pour vérifier. C'est un long processus, mais c'est quelque chose que le ministère a fait depuis 2018, parce que ça n'existait pas auparavant.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Et ça se fait malgré le fait qu'on sait que les projets de loi—le processus est quand même assez accéléré. Moi, je ne sais pas comment ça se passe avant que ça arrive en Chambre. Définitivement, quand ça arrive en Chambre, ça va vite. Mais on accorde le temps

nécessaire lors de l'élaboration du projet de loi pour évaluer l'impact sur les francophones; c'est ce que vous me confirmez.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Oui, absolument. Le processus d'évaluation ou de création d'un projet de loi peut prendre très longtemps. Mais dépendant de la matière du projet de loi lui-même, ça peut prendre plus ou moins de temps. Je ne sais pas, Jean-Claude, si tu veux en parler.

Le ministère de la Santé va se mettre en contact directement avec Jean-Claude pour lui en parler, mais aussi, on travaille de très près avec les autres ministères. Mon adjointe parlementaire et moi, on travaille avec le ministère de la Santé, puis elle—et c'est vraiment elle qui fait beaucoup de ce travail. On travaille sur les différents dossiers, donc on est au courant de ce qui se passe dans les autres ministères.

Il y a cette façon concrète qu'on a établie auprès de « cabinet office » et le Conseil du Trésor, mais il y a aussi une façon plus informelle, juste parce qu'on est très impliqué en santé, en éducation et dans d'autres domaines.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** OK, parce qu'un exemple très évident de cet impact—c'est avant votre temps : le gouvernement avait changé la durée pour obtenir un certificat en éducation d'un an à deux ans parce qu'il y avait trop d'enseignants anglophones qui arrivaient sur le marché de travail, alors que l'éducation francophone était en expansion et on manquait déjà à ce moment-là. On a exacerbé le problème pour les francophones parce qu'on a appliqué les mêmes deux ans pour tout le monde. C'est un exemple vraiment frappant.

Je veux juste passer—

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** C'est pour ça que votre question est très importante et on a fait ce travail depuis 2018. Je ne sais pas ce qui s'est passé avant mon temps, comment la lentille francophone a été appliquée, mais c'est essentiel pour le ministère des Affaires francophones d'avoir un processus systématique en place pour qu'on ne soit pas oublié à la fin quand le projet de loi est déposé—

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Je voudrais juste toucher à un autre point dont vous avez parlé. C'est le rôle de nos immigrants francophones pour combler la pénurie au niveau de la main-d'oeuvre, pas seulement au niveau enseignant, mais au niveau de tous les niveaux. La reconnaissance des compétences acquises à l'étranger, je pense, est une étape très importante. Je ne vois pas beaucoup de travail qui est fait sur ce front-là.

Par contre, on me ramène beaucoup d'exemples où des agences réglementaires—puis je vais quand même citer l'exemple de l'OQRE—l'ordre des enseignants, qui semblent créer un obstacle pour des enseignants formés à l'étranger. J'ai des exemples très concrets en tête d'enseignants francophones de la France qui viennent au Canada, qui sont en train d'enseigner dans des établissements privés et qui voudraient rejoindre notre système public, mais l'ordre des enseignants rend le processus tellement compliqué—c'est tellement long—qu'ils finissent par s'en aller du côté du Québec puis aller offrir leurs services là.

Alors, est-ce qu'il y a un travail qui est fait de ce côté, au niveau des agences réglementaires, pour essayer d'enlever les barrières? Parce que ça semble être très protégé pour les gens qui sont accrédités déjà.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** L'exemple de la France, ça—je vais peut-être demander à Jean-Claude. Mais je peux vous dire que pour la reconnaissance d'autres certificats, pour les infirmières, pour d'autres secteurs—pour ça, ça serait le ministère de l'Éducation, mais on travaille avec le ministère de l'Immigration. Notre gouvernement fait ça à tous les niveaux, pour tous les secteurs, d'avoir cette reconnaissance des certificats—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** —parce qu'on a une pénurie de main-d'œuvre, pas juste au niveau francophone, mais pour beaucoup de secteurs. Alors, oui, on travaille avec le ministère. S'il y a un problème—comme vous soulevez, le problème d'enseignants de France qui ont un problème de reconnaissance—on serait très prêt à travailler avec le ministère de l'Immigration ou de l'Éducation pour essayer d'enlever ces barrières, parce que ça nous aiderait à retenir les enseignants qui sont déjà ici, en train de travailler en Ontario. C'était un exemple concret. Il faudrait que je m'informe sur ça.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Je vais simplement vous remercier—je sais qu'on manque de temps—et vous dire que je ne peux pas rester pour la deuxième ronde parce que je dois aller en Chambre. Mais j'apprécie beaucoup le temps que vous avez pris à répondre à mes questions et je saurai où cogner pour mes autres questions. Merci.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to the government. MPP Kusendova-Bashta, you may begin.

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Merci, madame la Ministre, pour votre rapport très détaillé. Aussi, je voudrais souhaiter la bienvenue à la nouvelle sous-ministre M<sup>me</sup> Roda Muse et, bien sûr, à notre sous-ministre M. Camus.

Before I start my line of questioning, I just wanted to offer my comments as well in response to what MPP Gélinas had to say this afternoon. As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Francophone Affairs, I've had many opportunities to visit our francophone schools, especially in the last constituency week—actually, I visited four of them. I just have to say that we are so proud of our francophone schools and our two francophone school boards. We have over 500 francophone schools in this province. We see student outcomes, and when it comes to our francophone schools, they are achieving the best outcomes in the province. To suggest that somehow our francophone schools are put into buildings that are not up to par—yet they achieve the best student outcomes in our entire province.

In my recent travels, I was able to visit the école de la Rivière-des-Français, where we actually announced, with the federal government, an expansion of that school, and we're also turning it into a community centre. I had the opportunity to meet with the students there. I also visited Sainte-Trinité in Oakville, and the government is actually

funding an expansion of a second floor in Oakville. We recently broke ground—I think it was before the election—on a new school, a Catholic secondary school, in Vaughan, and so the government is clearly investing in infrastructure. **1700**

Specifically, with Bill 98, one of the things that it's doing is to build schools faster and implement measures to utilize current school spaces, ensuring Ontario is getting more classrooms into communities that need them. We know, in absolute fact, that school boards are sitting on surplus properties that are not being utilized for decades, collecting dust. We know that these properties could be put to better use, including for our francophone population.

Anyway, those are just my comments on that to respond to some of the issues that you brought up.

Mais aujourd'hui, on est ici pour parler du budget du ministère des Affaires francophones. Vraiment, madame la Ministre, je vous remercie pour votre travail des cinq dernières années et d'être une grande défenseuse et leader de la communauté franco-ontarienne. J'ai eu le plaisir de travailler avec vous les trois dernières années, et je pense qu'on a accompli beaucoup.

La modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français : notre gouvernement était le premier à moderniser cette loi en 35 ans. C'était dans notre premier mandat. Comme vous le savez, le gouvernement fédéral est en train d'essayer de moderniser leurs lois sur les langues officielles dans leur troisième mandat. Alors chez nous, notre gouvernement, nos actions parlent plus fort que les mots. On prend des actions concrètes et visibles, et la communauté francophone apprécie vraiment, spécifiquement, la modernisation.

Bien sûr, dans la modernisation, l'offre active—c'est un concept très important pour la communauté. Le règlement sur l'offre active est entré en vigueur le 1<sup>er</sup> avril de cette année.

Aussi, quelque chose de nouveau, c'est l'imputabilité des ministères, de tous les ministères du gouvernement de l'Ontario, qui doivent soumettre un rapport annuel à notre ministre, et après, elle dépose son rapport annuel sur les affaires francophones. Elle vient de déposer ce rapport la semaine dernière. Dans ce rapport, elle souligne nos efforts pour appuyer le développement et le rayonnement social, culturel et économique de la francophonie ontarienne.

Madame la Ministre, est-ce que vous pouvez décrire une des principales réalisations du ministère des Affaires francophones pour accroître l'accès aux services en français dans la province?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Merci beaucoup pour la question, mais aussi merci beaucoup pour le travail que vous faites envers la communauté francophone depuis trois ans. En tant que mon adjointe parlementaire, vraiment, vous faites un travail excellent, surtout auprès des intervenants, qui apprécient beaucoup votre esprit de collaboration.

Vous avez mentionné une des réalisations, je pense, les plus importantes de notre gouvernement envers la communauté francophone, soit la première modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français depuis son adoption en

1986. C'est vraiment la loi fondamentale pour les francophones parce que c'est tout pour la prestation de services en français du gouvernement.

Mais il y a d'autres éléments, il y a d'autres réalisations du ministère des Affaires francophones que nous avons et qui ont augmenté l'accès aux services en français. Je pense au processus de désignation. Avant que nous ayons modernisé la loi, on avait vraiment le processus de désignation. Donc, des organismes, des municipalités se présenteraient au ministère des Affaires francophones pour se faire désigner. C'est vraiment, je pense, un acte merveilleux de voir des organismes se présenter pour lever la main pour dire : « On aimerait être géré par cette Loi sur les services en français. On veut avoir ces responsabilités. On veut être un prestataire des services en français. C'est important pour notre communauté. »

Mais le processus de désignation était en place depuis 1994. C'était un processus assez laborieux, donc nous avons modernisé ce processus. Il y avait un nombre d'exigences, de critères—je pense qu'on en avait 35—et nous avons changé le nombre d'exigences. Nous l'avons diminué. Maintenant, nous en avons 20. Nous avons créé une plateforme en ligne. On a vraiment modernisé le processus et cette modernisation avait besoin d'un investissement important. Donc, le ministère a investi des fonds importants dans la modernisation du processus de désignation, qui est maintenant en ligne. Ça permet maintenant à un traitement plus rapide et plus rigoureux des demandes. Et ça, c'est en place depuis janvier 2022.

Je pense que vous savez, on a maintenant 26 régions désignées—non, nous avons 26; maintenant, nous avons 27, parce que Sarnia est la 27<sup>e</sup> région désignée—et nous avons un total de 259 agences qui sont désignées en vertu de la loi. Je pense que c'est vraiment encourageant de voir plus en plus d'organismes, de régions, de municipalités qui se présentent.

Comme vous savez, pour la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français, nous allons aussi porter notre attention à des points de service. Ce travail va être informé—c'est un travail réglementaire—par le travail de modernisation que nous avons fait sur le processus de désignation.

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Madame, dans votre rapport, vous avez dit que quatre nouveaux organismes ont été désignés en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français : le Foyer St. Jacques à Embrun, le Centre de santé communautaire de Timmins, l'Équipe de santé familiale académique Montfort à Ottawa et l'organisme Soutien à domicile Timiskaming. Alors, vraiment, on voit les résultats de votre travail : qu'on a modernisé la façon dont les organismes puissent demander la désignation, et aussi l'outil en ligne. On vit aujourd'hui dans un monde de technologie, alors c'est important que le travail de notre ministère soit aussi reflété sur Internet et que cet outil soit « available » pour les organismes.

Maintenant, je vais passer à M. Coe.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Yes, MPP Coe.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Through you, Chair, to the minister and her staff: Minister, thank you so much, and your staff, for the work you've done since 2018 and the difference

that you've made in the work that we as a government are delivering here in the province of Ontario. Thank you so much for that.

I know one of the aspects of the work of francophone affairs is interprovincial co-operation and its linkages to promoting francophone entrepreneurship. Adjoining my riding in Whitby is Oshawa, and it has a large francophone community by virtue of people who came up to Oshawa from Sainte-Thérèse, Quebec, to work at General Motors. But they also have the Spark Centre, and that Spark Centre is focused on entrepreneurship. Part of the Spark Centre is populated by francophones, going forward. Minister, through our Chair, can you tell us about an initiative led by the ministry that focuses on interprovincial co-operation to promote francophone entrepreneurship, please?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Thank you so much, MPP Coe, and thank you for highlighting the work of my team here at the Ministry of Francophone Affairs. I always say that the team is small, but it is mighty. They do a tremendous amount of work, working with some of the largest ministries in our government and making sure that the interests of francophones are always brought to the forefront and protected or promoted. They do that work, so I thank you for mentioning that, and it gives me a chance to thank them personally.

In August 2019, I went to New Brunswick for an Acadian summit. There, I saw the minister from New Brunswick and the minister from Quebec talk about their economic co-operation between the two provinces. There was so much energy from different members of their communities that were there talking about the different activities under way, and I was really inspired by that. I came back to Ontario and to the ministry and I said, "I think we need to talk about economic development. We need to have a policy here, because it should be Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario."

We had a lot of agreements in place with Quebec to support projects, but not on the economic side. But we did develop Ontario's first economic development policy. We created, and you heard in my remarks, the FGA group of entrepreneurs that come together. It's through the work that they do that we can identify additional opportunities for interprovincial co-operation.

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It's been actually great, I think, from an intergovernmental perspective to have that economic co-operation. I'm going to Quebec City for an economic conference next week and New Brunswick will be there and other provinces. It's great for Ontario to show that our francophone population is an economic asset for us. It highlights the resource that we have here of a bilingual workforce and I think it makes us even more attractive to companies, not just in Canada but around the world.

But with respect to interprovincial co-operation, we have a co-operation and exchange agreement in place with the government of Quebec. Last year, we had a call for proposals during last year's fiscal year and we funded some great projects. Last year, we funded an economic development project that was led by the Société Économique de



l'Ontario and commercial missions from Laval University in Quebec City. That involves a plan to promote networking and economic exchanges between Quebec entrepreneurs and students, and between Ontario entrepreneurs and potential francophone business partners. It's a great opportunity for our business owners and our entrepreneurs to network. It's a great opportunity for them to build relationships and build opportunities for greater economic exchanges. I'm very proud of the work that we've done there and it will only continue to grow.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Thank you, Minister, for that response. Thank you for your leadership. Thank you to your staff for your innovative work and support of other ministries within government.

Through you, Chair, I'll return to the parliamentary assistant to the minister.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** I will ask this question in English. I think it is important to ask it in English for the benefit of my colleagues because a lot of the work that we do at the ministry is really to raise awareness and promote la francophonie, and also ensure that our anglophone colleagues and anglophones in this province actually understand the huge value that our francophonie brings to Ontario.

There were several systemic measures that the Ministry of Francophone Affairs has taken to strengthen the offer of services in French across the province. One of them is the active offer. The regulation has come into life on April 1, 2023, and I just want to highlight some of the points in this active offer, again, for the benefit of my colleagues.

What does an active offer mean? For example, "If a person seeking services from an agency or institution, whether it be in person, over the phone or virtually through electronic means, is greeted in English, the person shall also be greeted in French.

"Any automated telephone systems shall provide persons, at the start of the call, the option of receiving services via telephone in English or French."

Another example: "If an agency or institution provides to the public an English document containing information about its services, such as brochures, pamphlets, notices and email communications, whether in electronic or physical format, a French version containing the same information shall also be provided at the same time and in the same format."

These are just some of the measures that are prescribed in the active offer.

Another systemic measure we have taken is our multi-year planning process. Minister, can you just elaborate a little bit more about both of these measures, the active offer and the multi-year planning process?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Thank you for that question. As we've discussed, the work that we did on modernizing the French Language Services Act is really fundamental. We needed to update this act, which guides how our government—any government—is required to provide

French-language services to its francophone community. It needed to be updated.

Really, the cornerstone of that act is the active offer, and francophones are entitled to receive it now, under our government. It is enshrined in law and it's laid out in regulation what an active offer means, but they're entitled to receive "dès le premier contact"—so, at your first point of contact—"des services de qualité"—French of good quality. I have to say, and I'm sure you heard the same, that was received very well by the francophone community, because it really is the essence of government's responsibility to be providing services in French and to make sure that it's well done.

We prescribed what that means in regulation, which came into force in April. Some of the measures—you highlighted some of them—are that there be an electronic or pre-recorded message to the public and that there be signs and posters and information documents intended for the public that are related. These are the things that they need to follow the active offer: the signs and the posters, web pages and all social media content. There has to be a process in place to ensure that the service user continues to receive the service in the language of their choice at each stage of the service without having to request it again. We've really prescribed this in regulation. At the same time, as part of our work, we have a bilingual workforce strategy. We have to recruit people into the public service so that they can provide those services. We've been working with the Treasury Board, with cabinet office on ways to attract more people into the OPS and the broader public service so they can provide these French "services de qualité" as required by the law.

Another part of the work we did as part of that was the multi-year planning process. It links a bit to what MPP Collard was asking about, which is how we ensure in the policy development process and the legislative process that the francophone lens is applied to the work that we do. We can't have a law passed that's never considered the impacts on francophones, especially when it's going to have an impact on francophones.

One of the key elements that we enshrined in law is that we have made all ministers accountable under the French Language Services Act. They have to report back to the executive council on an annual basis about all the things that they have done to meet their requirements under the French Language Services Act. Previously—I don't actually remember if it was under the previous iteration or if it was just the Minister of Francophone Affairs. But, as you know, the Ministry of Francophone Affairs is a small ministry. We advocate and we try to uphold and promote, but we are a partner ministry with all these other much larger ones that actually deliver French services, be it in health care, education or post-secondary. So those ministers have to know that they too are responsible for delivering French-language services of quality and in a certain way to our francophone population, and that's why it was key to have that enshrined in the law.

I have to say, it was so well received by our colleagues at the cabinet table, because they know how important it

is. They have many people within their ministries working on this, and so I'm sure that they also—I don't know if they liked it, because it's more work for them, from a paperwork perspective, but it is essential, I think, to making all ministers responsible and accountable.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute. MPP Saunderson?

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I think, for the sake of timing, I'm going to pass now and we'll go on to the second round. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Whatever you don't use now, it rotates—

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** I can use that one minute—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Yes?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:**—just to say that I think it's great that other ministries now are accountable and actually have to do the hard work of looking through their services and ensuring that they meet the key performance indicators that they set out for themselves and also put forward strategies in case there are areas that need improvement. They actually put forward strategies, and they report to you on those strategies.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** I think it will also show, for people who think that we aren't doing enough to support francophones, that our government is doing a tremendous amount on all different sectors. The Minister of Francophone Affairs is required to—"déposer"—provide an annual report, and you've read from it today. It highlights the extensive work that the Ministry of Francophone Affairs has done on all files related to francophones—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the official opposition for 20 minutes. You may begin, MPP Gélinas.

**Mme France Gélinas:** Ma première question est en ligne avec vos derniers commentaires où vous avez mentionné qu'en 2019, vous avez finalement été capable de mettre en place l'Université de l'Ontario français. Je sais que vous-même et votre bureau avaient travaillé très fort pour qu'on ait l'Université de l'Ontario français. Qu'est-ce que votre ministère pouvait offrir qui nous a amené à ce succès?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Je sais que ce projet était aussi très important pour vous, et nous avons eu beaucoup de discussions pendant 2018 et 2019 à ce sujet.

Donc, le rôle de la ministre des Affaires francophones et du ministère des Affaires francophones, c'est vraiment de bien représenter les intérêts de la population francophone de l'Ontario auprès des autres ministères, et au sein de son ministère pour les projets dont ce ministère est responsable. Mais lorsque le secteur de responsabilité—dans cet exemple, ça reposait au sein du ministère des Collèges et Universités. C'était de travailler de très près avec mon collègue le ministre des Collèges et Universités.

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Moi en tant que ministre et, je sais, ma sous-ministre à ce moment-là et aussi les autres membres de l'équipe avons travaillé avec le comité de l'UOF, qui était présent,

avec Mme Dyane Adam. Nous avons eu des discussions avec le gouvernement fédéral et la ministre, qui étaient intéressés à travailler avec l'Ontario pour mettre sur pied cette université, et avec les autres intervenants. Les membres de l'AFO et Carol Jolin, qui était leur président à ce moment-là, avaient un très grand intérêt à voir l'Université de l'Ontario français voir le jour.

Ma responsabilité pour ce projet, c'était vraiment de pouvoir parler pour la communauté auprès de mes collègues du gouvernement.

**Mme France Gélinas:** Je vous remercie de vos efforts. Je sais que ça n'a pas été facile, mais cela a porté fruit.

Depuis 1995, à Sudbury, la région que je dessers, on a le Collège Boréal. En 1998, on a eu nos conseils scolaires francophones, et en avril 2021, l'Université Laurentienne a annoncé la fermeture de 28 programmes en français. Ma première question par rapport à ça—et je sais que vous l'avez adressé dans votre rapport sur les affaires francophones—c'est : qu'est-ce qui arrive à la désignation de l'Université Laurentienne après qu'ils ont annulé 28 programmes universitaires en français?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Je ne sais pas si c'est Jean-Claude qui aimerait—puisque c'est le ministère lui-même qui s'est mis en contact directement avec le conseil d'administration, je pense, de l'Université Laurentienne pour leur rappeler leurs responsabilités en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français. Nous avons travaillé avec le MCU aussi à ce sujet. On a travaillé de très près. Bien sûr, c'est une institution indépendante qui a pris ses décisions de façon indépendante, mais nous avons tout de suite leur rappelé leurs responsabilités et nous avons demandé une reddition des comptes à ce sujet.

Je ne sais pas, Jean-Claude, si vous pouvez en donner plus de détails.

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Merci. Ce qu'il faut savoir aussi par rapport à la désignation, c'est qu'on a demandé à l'Université Laurentienne d'avoir un plan de conformité, justement. Donc, il y a tout un travail qui a débuté l'année dernière et qui est toujours en cours pour qu'elle soit conforme à sa désignation, en particulier par rapport à deux grades qui sont dans la désignation. Donc, ce travail est encore en cours.

**Mme France Gélinas:** Si je comprends bien, avec la Loi sur les services en français, une fois qu'un organisme est désigné, il ne peut pas annuler des services en français sans—c'est quoi le processus?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** En fait, ils doivent aviser la communauté. Il y a tout un processus pour dé-désigner un service qui est désigné. Mais ce qui est important aussi de savoir, c'est que la loi permet d'avoir un plan de conformité, c'est-à-dire que si pour une raison ou une autre, en particulier par rapport à des programmes au niveau post-secondaire, le programme ne peut pas être offert—il y a un manque d'étudiants, par exemple—la loi permet que l'établissement travaille sur un plan pour être à nouveau conforme.

**Mme France Gélinas:** Si je regarde spécifiquement, l'Université Laurentienne avait le seul programme de sage-femme en français lorsqu'ils l'ont fermé. Ça veut dire

qu'il n'y a plus de programme de sage-femme en français. Le programme de sage-femme de la Laurentienne a été transféré à une université anglophone. On n'a pas des droits avec la Loi sur les services en français que ce programme-là continue de nous être offert? Ou si je comprends mal—

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Je ne suis pas certain que ce programme en particulier a été désigné, en fait. Je ne pourrais pas vraiment commenter sur ce programme spécifique.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** OK.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** On peut vous revenir pour confirmer si ce programme était désigné, parce que je ne pense pas qu'il l'était.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** C'était quoi, les deux programmes désignés dans ce cas?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** C'était deux maîtrises : une maîtrise en kinésio humaine et une maîtrise en arts. En fait, je peux vous dire, d'ailleurs, pour la maîtrise en kinésio en particulier, l'Université Laurentienne a déjà des étudiants inscrits, et le travail est encore en cours sur l'autre maîtrise pour pouvoir l'offrir à nouveau.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Donc, la désignation d'une université, ce n'est pas l'université dans son ensemble, c'est certains programmes qui deviennent désignés. L'université n'a jamais eu une responsabilité d'offrir des services en français à tous les francophones qui vont là, seulement à ceux qui prennent le programme de kinésio et le programme de maîtrise en arts?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** La désignation peut varier selon les établissements. Là, on parlait des programmes. En ce qui concerne l'Université Laurentienne, ce qui était désigné, c'était des grades. Donc, la désignation faisait une liste de tous les grades, et c'est là qu'il y avait une obligation par rapport à la loi.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** C'est quoi, un grade?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Bien, c'est un espèce de diplôme, et il y a des programmes que vous pouvez prendre en fonction de ce grade, ce diplôme.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Donc, dans les 28 programmes en français qui ont été annulés, seulement deux de ces programmes—le programme de kinésio et le programme de maîtrise en arts—étaient sous la Loi sur les services en français.

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Deux de ces grades.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Il y avait des programmes au sein de—

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Il y avait des programmes qui les amenaient à ce grade, en fait.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** OK, je comprends maintenant. C'est un mot que je ne connaissais pas avant. Merci.

Mais le restant des programmes de l'université—que tu sois capable de faire ton inscription, que tu sois capable de demander de l'aide, que tu sois capable d'aller chercher ta passe pour ton stationnement : il n'y a rien de ça qui doit être offert en français?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** La désignation peut aussi s'appliquer aux services de l'établissement lui-même. En ce

qui concernait la Laurentienne, par exemple, sur ce qu'on a travaillé avec le ministère des Collèges et Universités, c'était surtout les programmes. Mais pour certains établissements, leurs services—certains services—peuvent faire partie, disons, de la désignation.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Et à la Laurentienne, les services n'en font pas partie?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Il faudrait que je revienne là-dessus.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Je pense que non, mais—

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** OK. Si vous avez la possibilité de me revenir, je l'apprécierais.

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Bien sûr.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Je dois vous dire que dans le nord-est de l'Ontario, depuis que les 28 programmes en français ont été annulés, les francophones ne sont vraiment pas de bonne humeur. On avait l'Université de Sudbury. L'Université de Sudbury existe depuis plus de 100 ans. En 1957, elle est devenue une université en Ontario. En 1960, elle est devenue une université fédérée de la Laurentienne. Et en 2021, elle était mise à la porte par la Laurentienne.

Depuis ce temps-là, l'Université de Sudbury veut devenir l'université pour, par et avec les francophones. Dans ma communauté, dans tout le Nord-est—l'appui pour une université pour, par et avec les francophones est partout dans le nord-est. Partout où il y a des francophones, ils le demandent.

En ce moment, les jeunes sont en train de faire application et je reçois des demandes sans arrêt. Ces jeunes ont 17 ans, 18 ans au plus. Ils ont vécu dans le nord de l'Ontario toute leur vie. Ils sont allés à la garderie, à l'école en français—toute leur vie. Puis là, on leur dit : « Bien, si tu es pour aller à l'université, il faut que tu ailles à Toronto ou à Ottawa ». Pour un jeune qui a vécu dans le nord toute sa vie, qui a 17 ans, les parents ne sont pas capables de prendre ces décisions-là. Ils veulent une université en français à Sudbury.

Donc, je reviens—parce que la ministre, elle a été pas mal bonne pour l'Université de l'Ontario français. Puis, là, je me demande, au niveau de votre ministère, ce qui peut être fait pour appuyer la communauté francophone qui veut que leurs enfants aillent à l'école dans une université pour, par et avec—et ça, c'est l'Université de Sudbury.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** D'abord, il y a un secteur postsecondaire en français qui est fort en Ontario. C'est vraiment une priorité pour le gouvernement. On veut que quelqu'un puisse se faire éduquer depuis la petite enfance jusqu'à la fin du postsecondaire en français, puis ensuite que cette personne puisse travailler et vivre en français et recevoir des services en français de son gouvernement. Ça, c'est l'objectif. Donc, on travaille à tous les niveaux dans tous les secteurs pour nous assurer que ça puisse devenir une réalité pour les gens qui le veulent.

Au niveau postsecondaire, on a parlé de l'UOF et on a vu comment c'est important d'avoir une institution qui est gouvernée pour et par les francophones. Nous l'avons mis sur place à Toronto parce que Toronto accueillait à ce moment-là, et accueille toujours, le plus grand nombre

d'immigrants francophones dans une communauté ici qui est en train de croître.

**1730**

Mais dans le Nord, bien sûr, il y avait à ce moment-là la Laurentienne. Il y a l'Université de Hearst. Nous avons aussi donné l'indépendance à Hearst. Ça, c'était un moment très important aussi pour la communauté francophone au niveau postsecondaire. C'est une étape importante, et je sais aussi que ça a été très bien reçu par la communauté.

On travaille avec le Collège Boréal, qui existe dans le Nord, pour ceux qui veulent continuer leur éducation en français, mais aussi vivre dans le Nord et rester dans le Nord. Je sais que la ministre des Collèges et Universités est très intéressée à appuyer l'éducation postsecondaire en français, mais aussi spécifiquement le Collège Boréal. Elle a une très, très bonne relation avec cette institution.

Pour l'Université de Sudbury, je sais que, comme vous me dites, c'est une revendication importante pour les personnes du Nord. Je le sais très, très bien, parce que quand je voyage dans le Nord, on m'en parle souvent. C'est pour ça que quand le plan d'affaires qui a été créé par le—il y avait un groupe de travail qui s'est formé suite aux événements à la Laurentienne. C'est un groupe de travail qui s'est formé et qui a très vite créé un plan d'affaires. Au ministère, nous avons évalué le plan d'affaires, et je sais que le ministère des Collèges et Universités a aussi fait ça. Il l'a accepté. Suite à ça, le ministère l'a donné à « PEQAB »—en français, c'est la Commission d'évaluation de la qualité de l'éducation postsecondaire. Donc, cette commission est en train de faire son évaluation.

En janvier de cette année, l'Université de Sudbury a présenté un plan d'affaires qui a été révisé, donc il y avait—je parlais d'un qui était assez préliminaire; maintenant, il y a un nouveau plan d'affaires qui a été présenté juste en janvier de cette année au ministère des Collèges et Universités, et maintenant, le ministère est en train de faire l'examen de l'organisation de la CEQEP et le plan d'affaires de l'Université de Sudbury.

Pour ce que je peux faire en tant que ministre des Affaires francophones, c'est ce que j'ai fait en ce qui concerne l'UOF. Je parle directement avec ma collègue pour exprimer l'importance de continuer à investir dans l'éducation postsecondaire en français et de voir l'importance et l'impact que peut avoir une institution qui est gouvernée pour et par les francophones dans le Nord, qui est une région avec une grande population francophone que nous devons appuyer; et aussi de nous assurer que—du côté administratif, le travail que le ministère des Collèges et Universités fait en termes de l'évaluation de la CEQEP et aussi le plan d'affaires—si le ministère a besoin de soutien de notre ministère, que nous sommes là.

Alors je ne sais pas si vous avez d'autres détails du côté technique de ce que nous faisons quand nous travaillons de concert avec le ministère des Collèges et Universités, comme ce qu'on a fait pour l'UOF.

Je peux vous dire que nous allons continuer à faire ce que nous avons fait avec l'UOF. Mais il faut que, vraiment, la commission et le ministère fassent leur évaluation. Je sais, aussi, que le ministère des Collèges et Universités a un plus

grand panel qui a été mis en place pour faire l'évaluation pas juste des institutions francophones mais des institutions postsecondaires du côté financier pour voir ce que le ministère doit faire et, du côté gouvernance, ce que sont les éléments qui doivent être en place pour assurer la vitalité de nos institutions postsecondaires. Et ça va aussi, je le sais, informer le travail du ministère des Collèges et Universités pour l'Université de Sudbury, mais aussi pour toutes les institutions en Ontario.

Je ne sais pas, Jean-Claude, si vous avez plus—

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Je peux ajouter que, pour des dossiers prioritaires comme ça, c'est sûr que c'est un travail qui se fait au quotidien. On travaille côte à côte avec, dans ce cas-ci, le ministère des Collèges et Universités, et ça commence dès le début. C'est la rédaction des soumissions, jusqu'aux soumissions et après. Par exemple, le dossier de l'UOF : on assiste aux rencontres avec le gouvernement fédéral, et cetera. Donc, pour tout dossier prioritaire, comme celui de l'Université de Sudbury, ça serait le même genre de travail.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Est-ce qu'il y a des possibilités de travailler avec le gouvernement fédéral pour l'Université de Sudbury comme pour l'Université de l'Ontario français? Je n'ai aucune idée comment ça fonctionne.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Je pense que l'étape où nous sommes maintenant pour l'Université de Sudbury, c'est une étape importante pour le ministère des Collèges et Universités. Le processus d'évaluation, ça se fait pour toutes les institutions, mais il y a aussi le processus indépendant qui se fait sur l'évaluation. En vue de ce qui s'est passé à la Laurentienne, le ministère—et ça, vraiment, ce n'est pas mon rôle de faire un commentaire sur ça. Mais c'est un projet qui est très important pour le MCU, d'avoir cette lentille des éléments de gouvernance qui doivent être en place pour assurer que la Laurentienne ne se répète pas.

En ce qui concerne le gouvernement fédéral pour l'UOF, c'est le gouvernement fédéral qui—d'habitude, le gouvernement fédéral ne se présente pas dans ces situations pour le postsecondaire. L'UOF était une situation unique. C'est le fédéral qui, dans les médias, a mentionné son intérêt à appuyer ce projet. C'est pour ça que nous avons agi de cette façon. La province est allée envers le fédéral pour voir si le fédéral était, en effet, sérieux avec cette offre, et ensuite nous avons entrepris des négociations à ce sujet.

Mais ce n'est pas typique pour le fédéral—je ne pense pas que ça soit typique pour le fédéral de s'impliquer comme ça dans ce monde-là. Ça serait plutôt une question pour la ministre des Collèges et Universités, parce que c'était vraiment au niveau des affaires francophones. Je ne sais pas si ça se passe pour les autres institutions aussi.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** La communauté francophone est très motivée en ce moment. Je te dirais que, même, ils sont un peu tannés d'attendre. Je l'entends beaucoup. Est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose qu'ils peuvent faire qui vous aiderait dans votre travail ou, au sens contraire, des choses qu'ils ne devraient pas faire parce que ça va causer plus de problèmes que du bien?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Bien, je vous remercie pour votre offre d'aide, mais je pense que, comme j'ai dit,

le processus de « PEQAB »—ou de CEQEP—qui a été mené est vraiment un travail de base qui doit se faire, et le ministère fait son évaluation. Moi, je ne suis pas ministre des Collèges et Universités, donc—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** —je ne connais pas ce processus très bien. Mais je peux vous dire que la ministre, elle-même, sait à quel point c'est important pour la communauté. Elle parle très souvent à Serge Miville. Je pense qu'elle a été à Sudbury récemment et la communauté a été très claire avec elle : qu'elle recherche une décision sur ce dossier, mais aussi que c'est un projet qui est important pour la communauté francophone de Sudbury. Donc, je sais que la communauté a très bien communiqué ça à la ministre et qu'elle a bien reçu ça, parce qu'on s'en est parlé.

Je pense qu'il faut attendre la fin de ce processus, mais on va continuer à revendiquer auprès de nos collègues. La communauté, l'AFO et les autres intervenants du monde postsecondaire francophone, je sais, font des revendications de façon régulière auprès de la ministre elle-même, ainsi qu'auprès de moi-même et, je suis certaine, auprès de la nouvelle sous-ministre.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time we have for this round.

We'll now turn to the government. MPP Saunderson? Yes.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I won't need my interpretation, hopefully.

Thank you very much, Minister, for your presentation today, and thank you to the deputy minister, assistant deputy minister and your team for all the work you do. What I think I've taken away from this conversation is how you work across the whole of government to make sure that the francophone interests are represented across all portfolios in the government.

Coming from Simcoe–Grey, we have a long, proud history with our francophone heritage, going back to the Jesuits and Samuel de Champlain. We have strong populations in Penetang and Lafontaine, and I'm very proud to say that the newest school in Collingwood is Notre-Dame-de-la-Huronie. It has 200 students from JK to grade 8. I was there recently to celebrate their 10th anniversary, although the building is just six years old. It's a fantastic facility. Thank you for your work getting that done. It's much appreciated.

My question, really, is dealing with entrepreneurialism and supporting francophone entrepreneurs and their role in our economy across the province. You've talked about the three pillars and the programs that you have and the incubators, and I'm wondering if you could expand on parts of that to tell us how you're supporting our francophone business people and entrepreneurs in the public and private sectors across the board to make sure that they have the conditions they need to be successful.

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**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Thank you so much for that question. As I said, our government is the first to introduce an economic development strategy just for francophones, so it was all new. As you know—and I've heard the Premier

say it many times; I'm sure you have too—you need to be able to measure. In order to understand whether you're successful, you need to be able to start measuring things. We had no data on what the francophone community was, from an economic perspective, and so the first thing we did was we had to go out and measure the community—this economic community.

Our government funded, for the first time, with \$500,000—we did it in 2020-21—the creation of, basically, a chamber of commerce of francophone businesses. It's called the Fédération des gens d'affaires francophones de l'Ontario. There was a group of, I think, 12 or 14 founding members at the time. Now there are about 46 members, but there are about 4,000 businesses that are now part of it. Through the funding that we gave this group, they organized, bringing together chambers of commerce from different areas around the province, reaching out to businesses. They created this network that had never existed before, and then they went out and they started measuring the francophone business community. They put together—with the help of l'AFO, which is the association—a white paper on what the francophone community is. That, to me, is a key element of the work that we've done on francophone economic development, because it sets the base level and, from that, we can measure the success of future investments that we make.

The idea is to strengthen the business communities so that they can then go and grow, right? Our government believes that we have to create the conditions for businesses to grow. We don't need to invest necessarily, but in this case, we did need to make investments to bring people together, to create that base, to invest in measuring, and then we can determine where we need to go next.

After that, we went to “les services d'incubation.” We looked at how we can help smaller French businesses get started and how we can support them through the different phases of their business growth. The reason it's important is, I believe that—you know, we have the Programme d'appui à la francophonie ontarienne, PAFO, which has been fundamental at the ministry for years. It was a million-dollar fund, and now our government doubled it—\$2 million to support community organizations, and we need to do that. But we believe the francophone communities will really thrive where they're more complete. It's not just about having a community centre where you can go and your kids can play in French and you can receive French services, but it's about having a much more complete French ecosystem, and that includes businesses being able to work in French, serve people in French, trade in French. Having more small businesses—those are the motors of our communities. So that's why it's been so important for our government to be able to do that, to have this policy. It's been great to see the success, because more and more francophones are coming forward with ideas about wanting to be able to live in French.

Francophones in Ontario will say—you know that the flag is green and white. They say, “It's not easy being green.” When you're in a minority situation in a vast ocean of anglophones, and you've got more and more people

coming into this province speaking different languages, it's really important that we make the right kind of investment so that we can support our communities as they grow. We believe that by giving this leg up on the economic side, we're really helping communities thrive in a different way.

We created the FGA and, as I mentioned to MPP Coe, we're also taking our work here and we're looking beyond our borders and seeing how we can help our French businesses develop their trading opportunities with French businesses in Quebec. I met last week—I've had many meetings—with my counterpart in New Brunswick. We'll be looking at putting together something more concrete in terms of our relationship with New Brunswick and being able to increase the ability to trade, do business and collaborate with francophones and French businesses and entrepreneurs.

Then the last thing I'll say is, we modernized the designation process, but the FGA also has a virtual element to it. The francophone community is spread out all over the province, and it's a vast geographic territory. By creating a virtual business community—it's called "le Quartier d'affaires"—people all over the province can join and participate and really feel connected.

So we've made some strategic investments that I think have been very well received. The community itself has taken those funds and invested them in the right way. Because we have measured the community, from there, our government will be able to see what impact those investments are making: Are they successful? We're asking for KPIs from the FGA. We're being very systematic in terms of looking at what they're producing and what we should be measuring and what we should ask for next time. But I think there is so much opportunity in investing in the francophone business community, and I'm very pleased with the outcomes we've seen so far.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** If I could, just by way of a supplemental: I know the program was started in 2021, so it's early days, but just tugging on the thread of the last comment you made, do you have any specific success stories you would like to share or ways that you've seen it benefit with having the interprovincial trade?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** I will say the biggest success we've really had was the creation of the FGA. But we've had more and more companies registering, so seeing the growth of that—and the feedback I've heard is knowing that they're part of a community has really helped them. They can go and search out special services or special things that they need. In order to grow their businesses, a francophone business may need something specific: translation services, access to certain kinds of products in French. They may need to advocate for something. We heard about licensing issues and things like that. By organizing themselves, they're in a better and stronger position.

We are taking a group to Quebec City next week so that we can further promote our francophone community but also find greater ways to connect our francophone businesses. There will be more to come.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you, and good luck on your trip next week.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Kusendova-Bashta.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Minister, you've answered so many of my questions, but continuing the theme of economic development—which is, I think, one of the most favourite subjects of our Premier. Le développement économique est très important pour notre premier ministre, et le développement économique francophone est important et une priorité pour vous et pour notre gouvernement. Vous avez parlé beaucoup de la stratégie de développement économique aujourd'hui et aussi dans votre rapport annuel. La stratégie se repose sur trois piliers.

Le premier pilier, c'est l'entrepreneuriat et l'innovation francophone. Dans votre rapport, vous avez donné des statistiques intéressantes. Alors, en Ontario, on a maintenant 30 150 petites et moyennes entreprises francophones, qui représentent 4,3 % des entreprises ontariennes et qui représentent 50 % des entreprises francophones hors du Québec.

Our Franco-Ontarian small and medium-sized businesses represent about 50% of all francophone businesses outside of Quebec. Who knew? That is a very interesting statistic, so thank you for sharing that with us through your report.

The second pillar: Le deuxième pilier de la stratégie du développement économique est une main-d'oeuvre qualifiée bilingue, l'éducation, la formation et l'employabilité. Un exemple d'un programme : en 2021-2022, le ministère du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences a financé sept organisations francophones pour fournir des services d'orientation, d'aide à l'établissement, d'information et de navigation dans les services aux nouveaux arrivants francophones à Toronto, dans la région de Peel, dans la région de Durham, à Hamilton, à London, à Windsor, à Ottawa, à Kingston, à Timmins et à Sudbury. Au total, plus de 3 500 nouveaux arrivants francophones ont bénéficié du programme et 337 nouveaux arrivants francophones et étudiants internationaux ont participé à des ateliers d'orientation. Ça, c'est juste un exemple d'un programme financé par notre gouvernement dans le deuxième pilier de cette stratégie économique.

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Le troisième pilier de cette stratégie, c'est la promotion de la francophonie ontarienne comme un atout économique dans notre province, mais aussi en dehors de notre province. Vous avez voyagé, en novembre 2022, à Djerba, en Tunisie, pour représenter l'Ontario au 19<sup>e</sup> Sommet de la Francophonie. Vous avez parlé de voyages futurs pour représenter notre province.

Alors, comment la stratégie de développement économique maximise-t-elle l'efficacité des programmes et des initiatives pour atteindre les francophones et les entreprises de l'Ontario? Existe-t-il des mesures ou des indicateurs que vous utilisez pour évaluer l'impact et l'efficacité de ces programmes?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Je répondrai à votre deuxième question en premier. Comme j'ai répondu à MPP Saunderson, quand nous avons mis sur place notre politique de développement économique, on n'avait vraiment pas une idée de l'ampleur de la communauté économique francophone en Ontario. Donc, en mesurant, on a mis en place un

seuil sur lequel on peut continuer à bâtir, mais, vraiment, on peut mesurer l'efficacité de nos investissements. Et en tant que conservateurs, c'est très important de pouvoir mesurer l'efficacité de nos investissements.

Quand je suis allée à Djerba, j'ai présenté à la conférence ministérielle, et je peux vous dire que l'Ontario était très, très bien reçu. Il y a beaucoup de membres qui sont venus me voir après pour me dire qu'ils étaient surpris parce qu'ils ne savaient pas que l'Ontario avait une population francophone aussi importante. Nous avons la communauté francophone la plus importante hors Québec. Au niveau mondial, ce n'est pas un fait qui est connu, et donc, c'est important—pas juste pour le développement économique, mais vraiment pour l'Ontario de faire ce travail de promotion à l'échelle internationale. C'est important pour nos institutions postsecondaires, pour attirer de la main-d'œuvre francophone. C'est important du côté culturel pour favoriser des échanges culturels avec des communautés à travers le monde.

C'était un moment important. C'est là aussi que nous avons signé le protocole d'entente avec la Wallonie-Bruxelles, une communauté que vous connaissez très, très bien. C'est vraiment la première entente internationale que l'Ontario ait conclue avec une communauté internationale. Je peux vous dire que c'est la première et je ne pense pas que ça sera la dernière.

Mais vraiment, pour la stratégie de développement économique, elle repose, comme vous avez dit, sur trois piliers, et tous les piliers doivent marcher ensemble. Avec un poids démographique sur lequel—on doit toujours veiller à ce qu'on puisse maintenir ce poids démographique. On a besoin de l'immigration, mais on doit faire la promotion pour faire cette immigration. Il faut démontrer sur l'échelle mondiale que l'Ontario est ouvert aux affaires.

Une des choses que nous n'avons pas faite au sommet de l'OIF, c'était que nous n'avions pas eu—comment est-ce qu'ils appelaient ça?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Présence au village—c'est ça?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** On n'avait pas de présence au village. Donc, il y a un village, comme pour les Olympiques. Il y a un village à l'extérieur de la conférence, et il y avait beaucoup de pays, de provinces et de communautés qui avaient une présence. Le Nouveau-Brunswick avait une présentation qui était vraiment très impressionnante. La prochaine fois, l'Ontario fera ça, parce que je pense que ça sera un autre moyen de démontrer l'ouverture de l'Ontario aux francophones et personnes bilingues.

Mais comment est-ce que nous allons—vous m'avez demandé comment est-ce qu'on va mesurer l'efficacité de cette promotion?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** We're looking for key performance indicators of how the strategy is working.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** We're looking at how many businesses that we have—are you talking about businesses? We're looking at how many businesses we have in place. We're looking at the number of businesses, how they grow them, and the number of sectors in which we find French business owners and French entrepreneurs present, and we measure that.

As we're doing the measuring, though, we're also seeing on the other side things that we need to consider, some of the barriers that specifically francophones may face. As we look for new KPIs, what are the things we're doing in terms of reducing those barriers? It's a multi-pronged approach.

One of the things that I have found so interesting as we've done a lot of the policy work on this is it requires a lot of creativity. You go around Ontario, Canada and around the world, and you see how other jurisdictions have successfully done this. We learn from others and see what works here. When you make an investment, it's great to see it pay off. But we will always have those KPIs and be holding the people who get these funds accountable for delivering on those.

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Merci. Je voudrais parler un peu du PAFO, le Programme d'appui à la francophonie ontarienne, car c'est un autre programme financé par notre ministère. Je sais qu'en 2021, l'enveloppe du programme a doublé pour atteindre 2 millions de dollars afin d'accroître son impact et appuyer un nombre accru des projets porteurs. Je pense que cette année, dans votre rapport, vous avez mentionné que 50 projets ont été retenus.

Je parle souvent aux intervenants francophones et aux organismes à but non lucratif francophones, et ils me disent que ce programme est vraiment important pour—for the sustainability of their activity. Et c'est très intéressant de voir que cette année—c'est dans votre rapport, encore—36 % des projets étaient au sujet des arts et de la culture, 24 % en éducation et formation, 12 % en soutiens à l'emploi, 8 % en préservation du patrimoine et tourisme, 8 % en santé et bien-être, 8 % en services sociaux et communautaires et 4 % en développement économique.

Ma question est : pouvez-vous nous donner un aperçu de l'impact du programme d'appui à la communauté francophone sur le renforcement du développement de la communauté franco-ontarienne? Y a-t-il des exemples de réussites ou des projets particuliers que vous aimeriez souligner aujourd'hui?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Le programme d'appui aux francophones, c'est aussi un programme très important pour la communauté francophone. Notre gouvernement, au début du développement de notre politique de développement économique—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Nous avons introduit un nouveau volet économique, mais le volet qui est vraiment le plus important du PAFO, c'est le volet communautaire. C'est vraiment un véhicule important pour le gouvernement d'appuyer des organismes communautaires qui font des demandes directement auprès du ministère des Affaires francophones pour des subventions.

Quand nous sommes arrivés en poste en 2018, le programme était 1 million de dollars, mais le nombre de demandes dépasse toujours les fonds qui sont disponibles. Le ministère a fait la recommandation, et le gouvernement a appuyé la décision, de doubler le Programme d'appui à la francophonie ontarienne. C'est très important. Depuis 2021, maintenant, grâce à ce doublement, nous avons financé plus

de 100 projets qui visent à fournir des programmes au niveau local—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time we have for this round.

We now turn to the official opposition. MPP Gélinas, you have 10 minutes.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Je vous remercie. Ma première question est par rapport à la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français, qui a été faite au mois de décembre 2021, et le deuxième palier de la modernisation, qui est l'offre active. Je te dirai que les gens sont contents de voir que l'offre active fait partie de la modernisation de la loi, mais on entend parler d'une période d'adaptation de trois ans. Je me demandais, qu'est-ce qui se passe pendant ces trois ans-là?

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Point of order, Chair.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Kusendova.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** I'm so sorry. I was under the impression that we must finish strictly at 6 o'clock.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** No. It's a committee deadline, so we go until the two hours are done.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Okay. I stand corrected. Thank you.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** You may continue.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Je suis heureuse de voir l'offre active dans la modernisation de la Loi sur les services en français, qui a été modernisée en décembre 2021. L'offre active est maintenant en vigueur, mais il semble y avoir une période de trois ans d'adaptation. Je voulais juste savoir : c'est quoi ça?

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**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** C'était essentiel de renforcer l'offre active pour la communauté francophone. Comme on s'en est déjà parlé, on a modernisé le cadre législatif, mais on a aussi élaboré une stratégie plus globale pour la modernisation de la loi sur les services. Ça représente le besoin d'engager une main-d'oeuvre, plus de gens qui puissent livrer ces services en français.

Donc, on a renforcé la loi, mais on veut être sûr que nous avons des gens en place pour livrer les services en français. Cette stratégie globale est essentielle. Il y a aussi le troisième pilier : la planification. Mais la stratégie globale est essentielle pour assurer le succès de l'offre active.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Est-ce qu'il va y avoir un système de renforcement pour qu'il y ait du succès? Est-ce que votre ministère va aider à mettre en place l'offre active?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Oui. Je vais demander à Jean-Claude—mais, oui, il y a des éléments très techniques. Je vais passer la parole à Jean-Claude

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Merci. Moi, je voulais d'abord préciser que le règlement est en place depuis le 1<sup>er</sup> avril. Donc, les attentes, c'est que l'offre active est, en fait, active—

*Des rires.*

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Bon choix.

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** —maintenant. On n'a pas demandé à ce que les gens prennent trois ans ou deux ans. D'ailleurs, on a travaillé là-dessus—ça fait deux ou trois ans qu'on a travaillé sur ce règlement pour vraiment préciser les

attentes par rapport à l'offre active. Donc, le règlement est en place.

Maintenant, avant que le règlement ne soit en vigueur, on a fait beaucoup de séances de formation. On a fait beaucoup de travail auprès des autres ministères, évidemment, pour qu'ils fassent du travail auprès de leurs organismes. Tout ça, ça s'est fait en amont, justement pour que les gens soient prêts.

Par rapport à votre question sur ce que, moi, je vais appeler l'évaluation, on est en train de travailler justement sur des précisions par rapport à nos attentes par rapport à l'évaluation. L'outil que la ministre a mentionné—l'outil de désignation en ligne—va aussi permettre au ministère d'évaluer les organismes en temps réel par rapport à tout ce qu'ils font et, en particulier, l'offre active. C'est à la fois le travail qu'on a fait en amont, l'accompagnement et puis aussi une évaluation pour être sûr que tout est en place.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Donc, juste pour être sûre que je comprends bien, pour les services gouvernementaux, depuis le 1<sup>er</sup> avril, c'est fini, c'est réglé. Ils doivent faire l'offre active. S'ils ne font pas l'offre active, ils ne rencontrent pas la Loi sur les services en français telle qu'elle a été modernisée.

*Une voix.*

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** —le règlement est en vigueur. OK. Vous utilisez bien moins de mots que moi, mais c'est bien plus clair que moi.

L'autre chose que je voulais demander—c'est la deuxième partie dont vous avez parlé. Les organismes qui sont désignés, eux aussi doivent faire l'offre active?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Oui.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** OK. Et eux, est-ce que c'est la même chose, qu'à partir du 1<sup>er</sup> avril ça doit être fait, ou est-ce qu'on leur donne une période de grâce?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** La plupart des organismes, c'est en vigueur pour eux aussi. On a donné un peu plus de temps, c'est-à-dire six mois de plus, pour les tierces parties, donc les organismes avec lesquels le gouvernement a un contrat pour offrir des services gouvernementaux. Mais sinon, pour la plupart des organismes, c'est en vigueur, en effet. C'est pour ça qu'on a fait ce travail en amont, en fait.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** OK, puis, je suis curieuse, avec ce que vous venez de mentionner par rapport au nouveau système en ligne, comment est-ce que ça devient un outil d'évaluation?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** On est en train de travailler sur une politique de désignation et d'évaluation justement—ça fait partie de tout le travail sur la stratégie de services en français—pour vraiment s'assurer qu'au niveau de communication, directives, négations et les attentes, tout soit clair et, en particulier, à quel niveau et à quelle fréquence les ministères doivent évaluer la capacité des organismes pour être sûrs que, à partir du moment qu'ils sont désignés, ils continuent à offrir les services. L'outil en question—je ne veux pas être trop technique, mais il y a un module dans cette plateforme qui va faciliter la tâche au ministère, justement parce que les organismes seront dans le module dans



la plateforme et on pourrait voir en temps réel où ils en sont par rapport à leurs services.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Puis ça, ce n'est pas seulement pour ceux qui demandent la désignation, mais c'est pour ceux qui sont déjà désignés? J'ai oublié le nombre, deux cent quelques—je ne me souviens pas du nombre.

**Ms. Jean-Claude Camus:** C'est 252, oui.

En ce qui concerne la plateforme, on a commencé d'abord avec les organismes qui faisaient une première demande. Puis en fait, cette année, on va inviter le reste des organismes à mettre l'information sur la plateforme. C'est pour ça, en fait, qu'ils ont institué ça avec, je vais dire, une meilleure politique de désignation et d'évaluation, si je peux le dire comme ça.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Excellent. Est-ce que certaines parties vont être disponibles au public ou seulement à votre ministère?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** L'outil, en ce moment, est visible à la plupart des ministères. C'est interne. Mais par contre, on aura, par exemple, le rapport annuel dans lequel on va pouvoir rendre des comptes sur tout ce qui se passe sur les services en français. Donc, c'est le but de ce rapport annuel aussi.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** OK. Je sais qu'on a une nouvelle région désignée, Sarnia, qui vient d'être la région numéro 27. On a 259—je l'avais écrit, puis j'avais oublié—agences. Je n'ai pas vue dans votre rapport combien de nouvelles agences ont été désignées dans le dernier exercice financier. Comment fait-on pour avoir cette information?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Dans le dernier exercice financier, c'était quatre. On a en moyenne six organismes qui demandent des désignations par an, donc dans le dernier exercice financier, c'était quatre.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Et cette information, est-elle disponible dans le rapport?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Je pense qu'on l'a mise, en fait—oui. On l'a mise dans le rapport annuel.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Donc, c'est là où est-ce qu'on attend le rapport à chaque année pour savoir combien d'organismes ont été désignés?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** C'est une façon de communiquer cette information publiquement. C'est pour ça que j'ai mentionné le rapport.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Pour les gens qui veulent savoir quels sont les organismes désignés et avec qui ils font affaire, comment font-ils pour avoir cette information-là?

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Alors, il y a une liste, en fait—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** One minute.

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Merci pour la question parce que, en fait, c'est un travail qui est en cours aussi. On a une liste qui existe—qui est, en fait, un règlement de la loi, où il y a toute la liste des organismes. Et on est en train—justement, on a entamé une mise à jour complète de cette liste justement pour être sûr que la communauté francophone peut trouver ces organismes dans leurs collectivités. Donc,

ça, c'est un travail qui est en cours. Mais le règlement existe déjà et est en ligne.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** OK. Si vous avez un petit peu de temps, la bourse du conseil des arts pour les organismes francophones a diminué cette année et les organismes du domaine des arts francophones ne sont pas heureux. Donc si vous pouvez parler à ce ministère-là pour leur dire que, après une pandémie, pour les organismes des arts francophones d'avoir accès à du soutien du ministère, c'est important.

**M. Jean-Claude Camus:** Merci. Bien sûr. C'est noté.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Merci. Ça l'aiderait. Puis, mon dernier, s'il me reste 30 secondes, c'est qu'on était super content de voir les programmes de baccalauréat en sciences infirmières qui vont être offerts dans les collèges du Nord. Mais ce ne sera pas à Boréal. On a besoin—

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Thank you. That's all the time that we have. This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Francophone Affairs.

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

Shall vote 1301, francophone affairs program, carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare vote 1301 carried.

Shall the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of Francophone Affairs carry? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare the motion carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2023-24 estimates of the Ministry of Francophone Affairs to the House? All those in favour? All those opposed? I declare the motion carried.

Thank you very much, and thank you to the minister and her staff for being here today. Merci beaucoup.

Is there any other business which members may wish to raise? MPP Hogarth.

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** I move that the committee enter closed session for the purpose of organizing committee business.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** MPP Hogarth has moved a motion. Is there any debate? MPP Gélinas.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I'm just curious how long it will be. Do I ask for a break now, or is it going to be short?

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Short.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I like your answer.

**The Chair (Ms. Goldie Ghamari):** Okay. MPP Hogarth has moved a motion. All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed. I declare the motion carried.

We are now going to move into closed session. We will take a one-minute recess just to clear the room. Thank you very much, everyone.

*The committee recessed at 1810 and later continued in closed session.*





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Ms. Christine Hogarth (Etobicoke–Lakeshore PC)

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Mr. Rob Flack (Elgin–Middlesex–London PC)

M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas (Nickel Belt ND)

Mr. Kevin Holland (Thunder Bay–Atikokan PC)

Mr. Matthew Rae (Perth–Wellington PC)

Mr. Adil Shamji (Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est L)

### **Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes**

M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas (Nickel Belt ND)

Mr. John Vanthof (Timiskaming–Cochrane ND)

### **Clerk / Greffière**

Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna

### **Staff / Personnel**

Ms. Heather Conklin, research officer,  
Research Services

Mr. Andrew McNaught, research officer,  
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