

**KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE**  
**Managing COVID As An Endemic**  
**Committee of the Whole—2022-2023 Operating Budget Review**  
**Dept. of Health and Social Services—March 9, 2022**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. So after the four months -- well, okay. Yeah, I'm just trying to figure out how that's going to work because as I understand, once the public health emergency ends there's no more public health orders. So presumably compliance and enforcement operations are going to wind down very quickly. But I could see where there might still be need for, you know, some policy work, some sort of services around endemic management and so on. But the largest item on page 178 for the COVID Secretariat is compliance and enforcement. So should we expect that that's going to wind down very quickly, or how's that's going to transition? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the compliance and enforcement is primarily directed to the public health orders that are part of the public health emergency. But there is still scope for compliance and enforcement of containment orders, for example, should they be required during future outbreaks. And for more detail on this, I'll turn to Mr. Neudorf if I may, please.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Mr. Neudorf.

**MR. NEUDORF:** Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. So we are as working on winding down of the COVID Secretariat in keeping with the expected timing for ending of the public health emergency. So, you know, on April 1st, we would -- the orders would be dissolved and all of the operations or requirements of the COVID Secretariat would be wrapped up. So we are working this month to work on the orderly transition for that. Some of those activities will occur early into the month of April just so that we can properly wrap things up. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Okay, thanks. And, you know, I've always supported the COVID Secretariat and I've always understood that it was really -- really a coordination function and a lot of the people that were there were seconded, voluntarily moved around within GNWT, to perform valuable public services. What's the general arrangement for those folks now to be able to go back to their home departments and/or if they were on contract, has all of this stuff been sorted out in some sort of stepwise transition? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Yes, thank you for the question. The people who were hired at the COVID Secretariat were hired on a short-term basis knowing that this was an interim measure. But for the specific information about how the windup is going and

people returning to their home departments, I'd ask, through you Madam Chair, if Mr. Neudorf could answer.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Mr. Neudorf.

**MR. NEUDORF:** Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. Coming into the month of March, we had about 130 employees still on staff with the COVID Secretariat and as the Minister indicated, their employment contracts were timed to end with the end of the public health emergency. So there was about a dozen or so employees that have ended already when the isolation centre, the requirement to isolate following travel, ended and we shut down the isolation centres. The majority of the rest of those employees have employment contracts that end on March 31st. About a quarter of the employees that are hired on casual contracts that would end March 31st, about half of those 130 employees are actually term contracts. So those, both casuals and terms, they would be employees new to the GNWT and generally, they would be -- you know, they don't have another department to go back to. About a quarter, then, of those 130 employees are on transfer assignment from another department and we are working with those other departments to ensure that they have a, you know, properly -- proper landing spot for when their employment ends with COVID Secretariat and they go back to work with their home department. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Yeah, okay, thanks. I was furiously trying to scribble all of that down while the -- our colleague was rhyming off the numbers and so on. But is there a publicly-available document or plan? And look, I get that all of this is happening very quickly, but I think we may need to better communicate some of this not just amongst the MLAs but with the public. So is that something that's in preparation that the Minister is going to be able to share with the public sometime soon? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Member. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Yes, thank you for the question. Yes, it's important to let the public know in a holistic way what the plan is moving forward, and I expect to be able to share that information coincidentally with the end of the public health emergency so that people know what the best next steps are.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Just checking my notes here. How are we going to deal with -- like, I see that there's quite a large number here for purchased services in the last financial year and much reduced. Is that for, like, PP and E, or what's that actually for, and how would that work getting carried forward when we're looking at trying to manage COVID as an endemic? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Yes, thank you. I think for this level of detail, I would appreciate it if you'd call on Mr. Neudorf. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Mr. Neudorf.

**MR. NEUDORF:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So specifically the purchase services line item for 2022-2023, the budget was -- there's a -- some demobilization costs and scaling down of operations is the main expenditure there. Most of that expenditure would be further to boarder camps that we have established for the past year and a half or so, one at the Alberta border, Highway 1, and the other one at the Highway 8, Yukon border, on the Dempster Highway.

In terms of the budget moving forward, it's -- you know, we do expect some realignment of the various line items here to match up with the proposed GNWT response to the endemic as we move past the end of the public health emergency and the GNWT continues with its kinds of continuous readiness approach and the ability to deal with outbreaks in a surge capacity. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Member for Frame Lake.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Very quickly, I wasn't really quite -- kind of looking at the right line item. I meant to ask about fees and payments down from 12.7 million to 4.2. What's happening there? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Minister of Health and Social Services.

**HON. JULIE GREEN:** Thank you. What I see on this page is that most of this budget in the last -- in the fiscal year that's just ending had to do with isolation centres, which of course, we're not anticipating to need as much of. But there will still be some lease space that we will require. But once again, for the detail, I'll ask Mr. Neudorf through you to answer. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Mr. Neudorf.

**MR. NEUDORF:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Minister was right that the majority of the cost here is isolation centres, and that's why the number's been high kind of 2021 when we had a significant demand due to travelers and isolation centres. At the end of 2020, we brought in the isolation payment policy that significantly reduced the usage of isolation centres. So even though there's more months of usage for, yeah, the 2021-2022 fiscal year, the total of dollar amount did not go up that much and in fact, our expenditures will be significantly less than the line item that's here because we've been able to control the use of isolation centres. And then the amount for 2023 was the notional amount that we had when we originally set up the COVID Secretariat, we set aside for isolation centres and obviously that money would be used to -- as part of the response to the endemic phase that the government will be moving into. Thank you, Madam Chair.