

Gimli MLA cabinet newcomer; Indigenous affairs split into separate portfolio

Premier adds new face to Tory inner circle

LARRY KUSCH AND NICK MARTIN

PREMIER Brian Pallister shuffled his cabinet modestly on Thursday, adding one new face to his inner circle, assigning new roles to a half-dozen ministers and keeping key players in place.

Signalling an increased attention to Indigenous issues, Pallister split the Indigenous and Municipal Relations portfolio in two.

Eileen Clarke, who headed the previously combined portfolio, becomes the minister of Indigenous and northern affairs, while cabinet newcomer Jeff Wharton (Gimli) takes over municipal relations.

Following a swearing-in ceremony at the Legislative Building, Pallister said his government has an ambitious agenda "on the Indigenous aspect of things."

"We want to move forward on a number of aspects of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) recommendations. We've got some resource things that we're needing to develop with First Nations' partnership," he said, adding Clarke had been carrying an "incredible workload."

Another significant move was to shift Rochelle Squires, the former minister of sports, culture and heritage, to sustainable development, where she will be the point person in the development of what the premier has called a "made in Manitoba" plan on carbon pricing.

As with health care and marijuana, Pallister has butted heads with Ottawa over carbon pricing, and is awaiting a legal opinion on the constitutionality of the federal government's ability to impose a carbon-pricing scheme in Manitoba.

Pallister praised Wharton's work ethic, "enterprising approach," and "team skills" in elevating the businessman and former councillor for the Town of Winnipeg Beach to cabinet.

"He's demonstrated a great skill set and I think there's no doubt (he's) well-respected and well-liked by his colleagues," the premier said.

Facing immediate questions from the media about when the City of Winnipeg would be notified about the size of its grant next year and other issues, Wharton begged off on a response, saying, "I've been sworn in for about 30 minutes."

Pallister dropped government house leader Andrew Micklefield from cabinet. The Rossmore MLA held no portfolio. His duties will be picked up by Cliff Cullen, who leaves growth, enterprise and trade to take on the Crown services portfolio.

Cathy Cox leaves sustainable development to become the new minister of sports, culture and heritage. Meanwhile, Ron Schuler becomes the new infrastructure minister and Blaine Pedersen moves to growth, enterprise and trade.

"I don't think it's accurate to describe these changes as promotions and demotions," Pallister said, when pressed by the media on why he shifted the responsibilities of some ministers.

Meanwhile, key ministers, including Health Minister Kelvin Goertzen, Finance Minister Cameron Friesen, and Justice Minister Heather Stefanson, stayed put. So did the agriculture, education and families ministers.

Arlen Dumas, grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, said he was pleased that Pallister had created a separate Indigenous and northern relations portfolio and expressed satisfaction that Clarke was staying on to run it.

"I am pleased she's where she's at, and that we're going to continue that relationship that we've been building over the past year," he said.

Shortly after her swearing in, Clarke gave Dumas a hug and said they would be speaking shortly.

Dumas told reporters he had been impressed with small gestures made by Clarke over the past 15 months that signified a change in tone from Broadway.

"Just sending a letter of acknowledgement was something significant. I had been a chief (Mathias Colomb First

Nation) for 10 years prior to becoming grand chief, and I can tell you that that was a very rare thing," he said.

NDP MLA Andrew Swan said splitting the Indigenous and municipal relations portfolio in two was the only good news from Thursday's shuffle.

Swan said New Democrats had always felt Indigenous and northern relations merited the sole attention of a cabinet minister. "It took him (Pallister) over a year to figure it out," he remarked.

Kicked out of the Tory caucus this summer, maverick MLA Steven Fletcher was not impressed by Thursday's shuffle — though he praised Goertzen and Stefanson as the strongest ministers. "Sometimes, not changing portfolios is good," Fletcher said in an interview.

There were also changes among top bureaucrats Thursday, with several deputy ministers taking on new roles and the addition of some new blood. Pallister reached into a provincial organization of hunters, fishers, and trappers for his new sustainable development deputy minister. That job goes to Rob Olson, who has been the managing director of the Manitoba Wildlife Federation (MWF). He takes on his new role on Sept. 5.

"It tells us they believe in wildlife, and want to work to sustain wildlife populations," said MWF past president Brian Strauman. He said Olson's work at MWF has concentrated on ways to sustain the dwindling moose and elk populations, and to try to achieve a ban on night hunting. He could not say how well-versed Olson is in climate change and carbon-pricing policies.

With Indigenous education a government priority, Jamie Wilson, one of Manitoba's leading Indigenous educators, is the new deputy minister of education and training. He is a former treaty commissioner and the former education director for Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

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Riel MLA Rochelle Squires moves from sports, culture and heritage to sustainable development.

Changes at the legislature

THURSDAY'S cabinet shuffle adds one new minister, removes one minister and reassigns six others. Six members of cabinet retain their old jobs.

New

- Jeff Wharton, minister of municipal affairs

Dropped

- Andrew Micklefield, former government house leader



Andrew Micklefield was dropped as government house leader

Reassigned

- Eileen Clarke, minister of Indigenous and northern affairs
- Ron Schuler, minister of infrastructure
- Cliff Cullen, minister of Crown services and government house leader
- Blaine Pedersen, minister of growth, enterprise and trade
- Cathy Cox, minister of sport, culture and heritage
- Rochelle Squires, minister of sustainable development and minister responsible for francophone affairs and status of women.



Eileen Clarke will take on Indigenous and northern affairs

Staying put

- Brian Pallister, premier, minister of inter-governmental affairs and international relations;
- Heather Stefanson, minister of justice and attorney general; Keeper of the Great Seal of the Province of Manitoba; deputy premier
- Kelvin Goertzen, minister of health, seniors and active living
- Ralph Eichler, minister of agriculture;
- Cameron Friesen, minister of finance; minister responsible for the civil service
- Ian Wishart, minister of education and training
- Scott Fielding, minister of families



Cathy Cox will concentrate on the sport, culture and heritage portfolio