

First Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CHIEF, Kevin	Point Douglas	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SELINGER, Greg	St. Boniface	NDP
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 14, 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 4—The Elections Amendment Act

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen), that Bill 4, The Elections Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Stefanson: This bill essentially outlines the length of the writ period for elections.

Madam Speaker: Any further introduction of bills?

Oh, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Bill 5—The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs): Je propose, appuyée par le honorable député de Selkirk, que le projet de loi 5, intitulé Loi sur l'appui à l'épanouissement de la francophonie manitobaine; The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act, soit maintenant lu une première fois.

Translation

I move, seconded by the member for Selkirk (Mr. Lagimodiere), that Bill 5, The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act; Loi sur l'appui à l'épanouissement de la francophonie manitobaine, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Squires: Le projet de loi présente un cadre législatif qui appuiera l'épanouissement de la francophonie manitobaine et définit les mandats du ministre responsable des Affaires francophones, du Secrétariat aux affaires francophones et du Conseil consultatif des affaires francophones.

En plus, la loi exigera que les ministères et des instances gouvernementales soumettent des

plans stratégiques de services en français. Le projet de loi répond aux demandes de la communauté francophone du Manitoba et démontre notre engagement à travailler de près avec ses leaders.

Translation

The bill introduces a legislative framework to support the enhancement of the Francophone community. It also defines the mandate of the Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs, of the Francophone Affairs Secretariat and of the Advisory Council on Francophone Affairs.

The act will require departments and public bodies to prepare French language services strategic plans. The bill responds to the demand of the Francophone community in Manitoba and demonstrates our commitment to work with the community leaders.

Madam Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Bill 6—The Financial Administration Amendment Act

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister for Education, that Bill 6, The Financial Administration Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la gestion des finances publiques, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this legislation that would permit members of this Assembly other than ministers to be appointed to the Treasury Board while maintaining the requirement that the Chair, the Vice-Chair and the majority of the members of the Treasury Board must be ministers.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Committee reports? Ministerial Statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Fire & Water Music Festival

Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Lac du Bonnet): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to address

the House and recognize an extraordinary event coming to Lac du Bonnet this July. From July 29th to July 31st, the 10th annual Fire & Water Music Festival will continue their tradition of showcasing local and international talent that features a wide variety of different acts.

As the winners of the 2016 Festival Madness competition, this year's event is sure to be a remarkable one. I would like to take the time to acknowledge some dedicated individuals here in the gallery today: Sheldon Sveinson, acting president; Sharon Sveinson, artist liaison; Skylor Mitchell, volunteer co-ordinator; Cyndie Mitchell, marketing and promotions director; Keegan Sveinson, treasurer; Dillan Homniuk; Brad Kowalchuk; Danny Mitchell and Nathan Mitchell.

The fire and water festival was founded in 2007 and has grown every year since. It brings local and international talent to a beautiful area of our province each year, giving local musicians an opportunity to perform at home while allowing them to teach and learn from other artists around the world, a tremendous experience for Manitobans. This festival not only has music; it proudly exhibits crafters through their Artisan Square Craft Sale and Trade Show, featuring the Fine Arts Show, which is only open to those who live in North Eastman or the beaches, which encourages local artists to connect, share and express with the community. Demonstrating creativity and talent in a family friendly environment is a great way to spend a long weekend while also enjoying the great Manitoba summer.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the volunteers again. I know this year's Fire & Water Music Festival be—will be a wonderful time for all those attending. Their passion and energy will undoubtedly leave a great memory for all of those in attendance.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Susan Livingston

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I rise today to honour the life of Susan Livingston, who lived in my constituency of Fort Rouge. I'd like to welcome Susan's friends and family who are with us in the gallery today and those who will be watching by video from Fort Frances, Ontario, where Susan was from.

I never had the pleasure of meeting Susan, but the stories from her friends and family illustrate who

she was. On the racquetball court, Susan's opponents hoped to face her early morning, as she was guaranteed to still be asleep on the court. They dreaded facing her late at night when her inner night owl would come out. Her presence on the court has been honoured with the tournament called Peace, Love & Racquetball, as well as the Susan Livingston Award, presented to Canadians who exemplify sportsmanship in racquetball and promote women in sports.

Throughout her battle with cancer, Susan stayed in touch with her hundreds of best friends by email. She told the tale of meeting a Baldwin at the airport; she got a picture, of course. She reported on how much she was allowed to dance and whether she would follow the advice. When Susan was no longer able to write these messages, her friends, Brad Lowes and Barry Pike, kept them coming, because these emails were so important to her friends.

After her passing, hundreds of people attended the celebration of her life, most wearing feather boas, another of Susan's trademarks. With her one-of-a-kind spirit, Susan lives on through all those she touched and in the stories they continue to tell.

Thank you. Miigwech.

Jim and Betty Anne Gaynor

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): We often rise in the House to honour those individuals in our communities that are volunteers who contribute tirelessly of their time to make our communities a success. But there's another group that also needs to be recognized. Today, I would like to honour Selkirk philanthropists Jim and Betty Anne Gaynor.

Jim and Betty Anne are very honest, humble and unimposing individuals. When I approached Mr. Gaynor and told him that I would like to honour them in the House, he said, oh, I'm not sure we deserve that. But I have to share with everyone what they have done for our community.

The Gaynors believe that providing support to our youth and getting them on the right track, you can help the whole community. This is evident in their support for our community projects. The Gaynor family has made the largest contribution from a living donor to our Selkirk Foundation for youth projects. They also contributed to the construction of the Selkirk Skate Park.

* (13:40)

When the library was in need of funding, they generously contributed to the construction of a new library. And most recently, they have contributed what some would consider a lifetime of savings to the shelter for battered and women-children in our community, known as Nova House.

To the Gaynors, this is their way of saying thank you to the community that supported them and their business. To our community, that goes far beyond thank you. Jim and Betty Anne Gaynor are an inspiration to all Manitobans. We would like to thank you, the Selkirk constituency would like to thank you and I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for making Manitoba a better place to live, work and play. You truly are part of the heartbeat of Manitoba.

Thank you.

Judi Code—Citizen of the Year

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations): We all know the importance of volunteers in our communities and that they are heart of many local organizations, clubs and fundraising events. Today, I'd like to pay tribute to one of Gladstone's best: Judi Code. And I'm pleased to have her join us here in the gallery.

On May 24th, 2016, Judi was awarded the Gladstone's Austin Credit Union Citizen of the Year award. This award recognizes individuals who provide excellent service and dedication to the WestLake-Gladstone municipality. Judi is a retired teacher from William Morton Collegiate and is no stranger to dedication and service. And, I have to add, she was my grade 12 business teacher, and I thank her for that.

She has clearly demonstrated these qualities throughout the years not only as a teacher but as a community volunteer, very giving of her time and her talent on various projects. One project was for the golf club, where she tapped into fundraising opportunities and organized a plant sale. It's been a proven success, and this spring was the eighth year for that sale. Judi was also part of—one organizing Gladstone's green spots by creating the theatre courtyard. And during the holiday seasons, she continues to beautify our town and helps fill town planters with Christmas decor.

Judi has spent countless hours assisting local groups and organizations prepare and submit grant applications. Over the years has—Gladstone has benefited from her efforts and has received many

grants that have provided the community with building renovations, accessibility upgrades as well as funding programs for seniors, just to name a few.

Madam Speaker, I am truly pleased today to recognize Judi Code and to 'gratulate' her on her many accomplishments in our community and efforts and dedication to making the municipality of WestLake-Gladstone a better place to live, enjoy and appreciate.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Support for LGBTTQ* Community

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): My first crush was Tom Petty. There was one day he was—there he was one day, singing Refugee on MTV, and I was smitten. I was very young at the time, so I didn't translate it into the fact that I liked boys.

Growing up, my best friend loved playing dolls and dressing up as a princess with me. My young mind didn't think twice about it. He was continuously bullied at school. I stood up for him. Then, one day, he was simply gone. His family had sent him away to live in the city. I didn't even get to say good bye.

During high school, I learned of the two-spirited people, persons who had the physique of one gender and yet capable of handling the full run of emotions of the other. Or, better yet, just as I had liked boys, they liked the same-gendered persons.

I lived my life by my indigenous beliefs of Mino Bimaadiziwin, living the good life, guided by our seven sacred teachings. I also still carry some of the catechism teachings of judge not or you will be judged, condemn not and you will not be condemned.

Many of my best friends have children that are affected by my—disabilities. Many are part of the indigenous community and many are part of the LGBTTQ* community. I am honoured to have been sent these wonderful, diverse people in my life. I used to think they needed me. I now know I needed them.

Diversity in human beings. We are all equally disturbed by the reckless action of one intolerant individual in the Orlando shootings. I can't imagine what the parents of these children are going through. If my child was shot and killed just for being him- or herself, my world would end.

I ask for a prayer for all the brave people who are attending the first Steinbach annual Pride parade on July 9th at 11 a.m.

Thank you.

* * *

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I ask leave to return to tabling of reports, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to return to tabling of reports? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I wish to table the annual report for 2014-2015 for the Manitoba Adult Literacy Strategy and Adult Learning Centres of Manitoba.

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the Supplementary Estimates for Legislative Review for 2016 for the Department of Sustainable Development.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further tabling of reports?

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: If not, prior to oral questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Mrs. Frances Wilson. Frances is 96 years young and has always been interested in politics and wishes the Assembly well. Ms. Wilson is the guest of the honourable Premier.

And on behalf of all members, we welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LGBTQ* Students Promotion of Safe Spaces

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and you're right; Mrs. Wilson is 96 years young. She looks so youthful.

Madam Speaker, we have listened to the LGBTQ* community in Manitoba that say they need a safe space to live and to love whomever and however they choose. What is clear is that, despite real progress, many LGBTQ* Manitobans still feel they do not have that safe place. This is especially the case with young people.

Will the Premier acknowledge that schools have a duty to be a safe space for all young people no matter their sexual orientation?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate the member raising the issue of safety, and the concern that we have of inclusion of all in our province has been highlighted, obviously, by the events of the last number of days in Orlando and elsewhere.

I think it's important to make sure that we take every possible step we can to accommodate those who need to feel included in our society, as we all do. And I am interested in pursuing discussion in respect of how we might advance those things.

In addition to the point the member raised, I think, also, here in the Legislative Assembly as well, where there have been concerns expressed to me as recently as the kickoff to the Pride parade about—from people who were here about washroom facilities in our own building here.

So these are issues that are heartfelt and they're issues that I think we need to further dialogue on and see if we can't do more to accommodate people's individual needs.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: I thank the Premier for the response.

Madam Speaker, one of the most important pieces of legislation that was passed here in Manitoba in recent years was Bill 18. It clearly established the requirement for human diversity policies based on the Human Rights Code and the ability of all students to establish gay-straight alliances.

The Premier and his caucus opposed the bill, saying it interpreted bullying too broadly and should not apply to all schools.

* (13:50)

Will the Premier admit he was wrong on Bill 18 and ensure that his government and school divisions fully implement all of its provisions?

Mr. Pallister: Well, now, Madam Speaker, I think the member has certainly got her facts wrong in her preamble on the rationale we had for working on making the bill better.

We presented a number of very well-reasoned amendments, well researched, developed through consultation and extensive work with people in

various communities of our society, and those amendments were all dismissed out of hand by the government. They never explained why. They didn't allow them to be entered into the bill and they didn't allow them to be fully debated and discussed. And that was too bad, because I think that the opportunity to make the bill work better and to more effectively do the job of protecting children against bullying should have been uppermost in the minds of government members, but, apparently, was not.

That's sad, but that was the way the government chose to handle that bill, by putting their hands over their ears and not listening to constructive comments, suggestions or, in fact, any amendments, none of which were allowed to be debated by the members opposite.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: I was informed that all those amendments were debated fully in the House.

Madam Speaker, without a safe space for all, there is no safe space for anyone. In recent months, a parent who publicly called for the Hanover School Division to ensure same-sex relationships be part of the school's lessons around family diversity received threats instead.

Seventeen-year-old Mika Schellenberg courageously called for a broader recognition of LGBTTTQ* diversity in the school system.

Will the Premier act to ensure that all school divisions, including Hanover, follow the law and respect LGBTTTQ* kids' rights to feel safe in their schools?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I hope we could all agree that that is the goal we're after and it's a question of process.

And, again, I would point out to the members opposite, and it was clear and I'd encourage them, if they'd like to read the interview with their former Justice minister in the Manitoba Law Society's publication, under the Golden Boy, he comments clearly in his interview that as a matter of strategy the government refused to entertain the possibility of any amendments to their bill. And he compared their strategy to that used by the previous government in the debate around the hog moratorium.

Now, these are the kinds of—this is the kind of political narrow-mindedness that doesn't lead to more constructive debate and to better

legislative outcomes, and disappointing, I think, to all concerned with the best interests of our children.

Hanover School Division Compliance with Diversity Policies

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Last week the Education Minister refused to intervene in the Hanover school issue, citing local autonomy. But this is about human rights.

Bill 18 clearly established that school boards must follow the principles of the Manitoba Human Rights Code in establishing school human diversity policies.

Has the minister intervened to ensure that Hanover School Division is following the law?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the member for the question.

As we indicated last week, that we would reach out to Hanover School Division to offer them any assistance that they felt was necessary, and we have done so. They also—Manitoba school trustees association has been kind enough to come forward and offer additional resources that they have available to Hanover School Division to continue the process.

So we certainly are all working and—together and hope that Hanover School Division is in a constructive process that leads them to the right outcome.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: With all sincerity, I do thank the Education Minister for bringing this update forward in the House today.

I also do know that he appreciates the real toll that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia exert on our society.

With that in mind, can the Minister for Education please provide greater detail as to what steps are being undertaken to ensure that the human rights of LGBTTTQ* students are being respected in the Hanover School Division and that the principles of Bill 18 are being followed?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question. I know he honestly believes that it's very important that an inclusive society be constructed here. I think we're just really talking about process in regards to this.

We believe, very strongly, that the local community and the local school board have a place in this process and it is important that we exhaust all opportunities in regards to that before anything else would be done. And we do not believe that that has happened yet. In a community, you want to have a very constructive discussion about what needs to be done and what needs to be accomplished in that community, and I think that process is beginning to happen.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Rouge, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Kinew: I am a bit concerned that all the necessary steps to ensure that the process being exhausted take place in a respectful fashion, in a fashion that respects the human rights of LGBTTQ* people and students in the Hanover School Division. Again, I make reference to some of the comments that we saw in the Steinbach Carillon from some of the school trustees.

Therefore, I would ask the minister: As part of the work that he is undertaking to work with the Hanover School Division, will he commit today to making available LGBTTQ* awareness training to the trustees of the Hanover School Division so that we can be sure that they have the proper grounding in the Manitoba Human Rights Code but also in the contemporary issues lived by that community?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for his question.

Including in our offer to the Hanover School Division was the offer of—offering of making available awareness training, if they so choose—chose. And we are certainly working with them to see whether that will be part of what they need in terms of additional resources.

Media Communications Government Transparency

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): Day after day we are seeing that the Premier not only has a hidden agenda and he is prepared to go to almost any length to cover up his agenda.

In question periods and even in Estimates, he and his ministers refuse to answer even the most basic questions. When it comes to the media, we are seeing far too often, quote, no comment, unquote, or, quote, unavailable, unquote.

We know the Premier was part of the Harper government, and we know Manitobans do not want to see Harper-style communications in Manitoba.

What does the Premier have to hide? What is he afraid of?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, frankly, Madam Speaker, I'm puzzled by the question coming from the interim leader of the party that stayed in shape by running away from media, that refused to go out the west door of this Chamber to do interviews for weeks on end and that had such a record of a hidden agenda that, in fact, it came out with a \$1-billion deficit after promising something about 40 per cent that level.

These are not—this is not the record and this is not the behaviour of anybody committed to openness. On the contrary, we, for the first time in modern Canadian politics, put out a platform, demonstrated exactly where each of our promises would be priced and how they would be priced and, actually, also offered up where we would take low-priority spending, reduce it and pay for each promise.

And that's the exercise we're engaged in right now as the new government of Manitoba: finding savings in low-priority areas instead of just going back to the taxpayers of Manitoba and saying, give us more money, which was the habit of the previous government.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Marcelino: The list the Premier was saying took too long to be put out and not even on the amount that he stated.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, we're already seeing how difficult it is to find out the government's true agenda. It took more than a week and four different versions to find out that their so-called savings was, in fact, an incomplete list of cuts to seniors, infrastructure, education and immigrant services, and it usually only takes four questions before his staff cry, quote, last question, unquote, in media scrums.

* (14:00)

Is the real reason the Premier—this Premier is muzzling his colleagues is that he is not just adopting Harper-style communications, but Harper-style cuts as well?

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, again, here we go again. Seventeen years, and the government—the previous government couldn't come up with a budget before the election.

A year ago, they tabled a budget and said they would have a deficit of about \$400 million. Now we find out it's \$1 billion, Madam Speaker. That's a \$2-million additional expense every single year, every single week, every single working day, actually, if you do the math.

Now, when we—the member uses the phrase hidden agenda. This is the political organization that went to the doors of working families across the province and promised they wouldn't raise their taxes and within weeks jacked up their taxes on their benefits at work, jacked up their taxes by including the PST on their benefits at work, 7 per cent additional bill for everybody, every working man and woman in the province, jacked up their taxes on their home insurance, 7 per cent additional on all their home insurance, and then the year after jacked it up again to eight.

That's a hidden agenda, Madam Speaker. We know what it looks like; we've seen it.

Madam Speaker: The honourable interim Official Opposition Leader, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Marcelino: The Premier was part of the government that said they won't privatize MTS, and they did and also, unfortunately, the vote-rigging scandal of the '95 election.

Madam Speaker, what is also clear is that the Premier has a difficult time in being questioned or accepting any criticism. He often takes great offence to even the most straightforward questions from the press or MLAs. Manitobans expect better from the Premier and from the government.

Why doesn't the Premier respect the fact that Manitobans expect his government to be accountable? When will he and his ministers start giving Manitobans the true story about their real agenda?

Mr. Pallister: Coming from a political organization that launched an historic rebellion inside itself against its own leader, I refuse to be offended by the member's questions. This is a group of people that cannot get along with one another, Madam Speaker, that covered up costs, denied that they were going to raise taxes and then pursued an agenda of high taxes, said they were going to make progress on reducing

our deficit, and instead lost ground, monumentally lost ground: record tax hikes, record spending without getting results, Manitobans tired of paying more and getting less.

We have a new agenda. We will review the spending proposals. We will say yes to those that are of high priority to Manitobans, but we will not do, as the previous government did, and simply say yes to everything and then jack up taxes on working families and seniors all over the province, hurting their chances to find financial security in their own lives. We are on their side, Madam Speaker, and we will make the right decisions to secure Manitoba's financial future.

Changes to Labour Legislation Consultation with Labour Organizations

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Before I ask my question, I'd like to acknowledge some of our union brothers and sisters that are in the gallery from Unifor, ATU, PSAC, MGEU, IBEW, the MFL and the Winnipeg Labour Council.

Madam Speaker: Before the member continues I just have to remind all members in the gallery that applause is not allowed during question period from members in the gallery, and I appreciate your co-operation in that effect. Thank you.

And the honourable member for Flin Flon, to conclude his question.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The abolition of the Department of Labour was an unnecessary provocation against labour, but the minister has assured the House that he has had active communication with the labour movement about this.

Can the minister tell the House which labour organizations he has consulted in preparation for any of his forthcoming labour legislation?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I do appreciate the question from the member opposite. Certainly, on behalf of our new government, we want to offer our welcome to the visitors in the gallery from the various unions and appreciate your support and all the good work that you do across our country.

Madam Speaker, we do have, I think, a pretty positive relationship with the labour organizations across our province. We are a new government but we're certainly open for consultation, and we made a commitment to Manitobans and we're going to bring

forward that commitment for discussion to the Chamber.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a supplementary question.

Leave for Domestic Violence Victims Consultation with Labour Organizations

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I recently asked the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade about the preparation of a regulation under a recent amendment to the employment standards act to permit a worker who's a victim of domestic violence access to employment leave.

That was two weeks ago, and in spite of the fact that he told the House he looked forward to working with the unions across the province and that it will be happening very quickly, Madam Speaker, has he started the consultations on this important issue and developed a plan for public education or is it just talk and no action here?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): Madam Speaker, I do appreciate the question, and I recognize that legislation was brought in at the very last minute in the dying days of a 17-year-old government and there was not proper consultation done at the time because it was brought in at the last moment.

Now, we will consult with Manitobans going forward on that particular legislation, and we will do the proper consultations that this government—the previous government failed to do.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Flin Flon, on a final supplementary.

Dissolution of Labour Ministry Request to Reinstate

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Clearly, it would appear that quickly has a different definition for this government than it does for the rest of us. The Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade, it would appear, is too busy catering to the friends in the business community to bother consulting with workers in the labour community. Manitoba workers deserve the attention and commitment of a full-time minister of labour and a department that serves their needs.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) reconsider his ill-advised decision to abolish the ministry and appoint a minister of labour?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I do appreciate the question from the member.

We made a commitment on this side of the House to reduce the number of portfolios in Manitoba. We think it's a wise decision. We're saving over \$4 million in that process. Also, within this department—this new Department of Growth, Enterprise and Trade, we're bringing labour and business to the table. This is the first time we've had business and labour at the table. We think it's proactive for Manitoba; it's proactive for Manitoba moving forward.

We've had very good discussions with the labour movement. We've been working hand in hand on certain issues in respect to the aerospace industry in Manitoba. We look forward, on this side of the House, to continuing those discussions and we value input from the labour side.

Ministers' Contact Information Removal from Government Website

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): We've already heard from many Manitobans who want to make their views known on a series of bad choices, poor decisions and now broken promises from this government.

Why has this government removed the telephone numbers for ministers' offices from the minister profiles on the official government website?

Madam Speaker: I would just like to caution all members that in this Chamber, when you're referring to a minister, that they be referred to by their proper titles. That is a matter of decorum and respect, and I would expect all members to recognize a minister or other members accordingly and not be putting false names, as I'm hearing, on the record. So I'd appreciate everybody's co-operation. This is about decorum and respect in the Chamber.

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): It's always a pleasure to get up and answer questions from the member opposite.

Clearly, our government has achieved a lot in seven weeks. We've had a Throne Speech which we have debated in this House and voted on.

* (14:10)

We've also had a budget that couldn't be done by members opposite within a year and a half and we got it done within seven weeks, Madam Speaker.

There is more to do, and we are certainly going to endeavour to not just finish the debate on the budget but also bring forward fulsome legislation which was asked for within the last election. And we plan on presenting that legislation and debating it.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Minto, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Swan: Well, Madam Speaker, with answers like that I think we know why these ministers don't want to talk to Manitobans.

This government pretends it's interested in consulting with stakeholders. They pretend they're interested in speaking to Manitobans, yet their actions show they aren't. Since this government came to power, the telephone numbers for ministerial offices and ministerial email addresses have been removed from the department and minister profiles on the official government website.

Will this government commit to changing the website back so Manitobans can easily determine how to let their views be known to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and Cabinet?

Mr. Schuler: Well, it's always a pleasure to answer the questions from the member opposite.

We, as a government, came into government with a plan. We brought forward a Throne Speech, which we know that every member opposite voted against. We then brought forward a budget, which members opposite couldn't get done in the entire year and a half that they had to bring in the budget. We did that within seven weeks of being here, and I'd like to point out to the House that each and every one of them voted against that budget.

We are a government that is on a path, Madam Speaker, that is going to be open and transparent. Certainly, within the last week, we have done more. For instance, I'd like to point out to members opposite, we also produced mandate letters for each and every Cabinet minister—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Minto, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Swan: Well, Madam Speaker, this minister can bluster and fumble on all he wants. The fact is that his government has chosen to make it more difficult for Manitobans using the official government website to find telephone numbers and email addresses for ministers' offices. They used to

see that information on the ministers' pages, and that information has now been removed by the new government. The government's action is the exact opposite of being transparent and accountable.

And I'll ask again: Will the government commit to changing the official government website back so Manitobans can easily determine how to let their views be known to the Premier and the Cabinet?

Mr. Schuler: Well, it's always a pleasure to answer the questions for the member opposite.

I'd like to point out to all members of this House that, on this side, our 40 members have been attending almost all the events that are taking place across the city. In fact, I understand members have participated in events that, before, there weren't MLAs and members attending, and we're very proud of our government the way that we are attending events.

I'd also like to point out to members that there is something on the Internet called the phone book, maybe they could look there for the numbers. They're all in place in the phone book.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Provincial Nominee Program Application Wait Times

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I don't believe the government understands how serious the administration problem is with the Provincial Nominee Program.

There are far too many pending applications that have been filed for well over a year. Both the sponsors and the principal applicants are being asked to wait unreasonable times to find out whether or not they will be issued a Provincial Nominee Certificate.

My question is: How long does the minister believe someone should have to wait for a response once they have submitted their application?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I appreciate the question.

We certainly know that it's very important to people that have applied under the Provincial Nominee Program that things be processed as quickly as possible. I made reference, actually, to a previous question to the very great popularity of

this program, and the fact that many people wish to immigrate to Manitoba.

So we're working very hard. I do have an update in terms of numbers if the member would appreciate it. We have a total inventory of applications at this point of 5,384.

Qualification Review Request

Ms. Lamoureux: I appreciate you—that you acknowledge the importance of the program.

Madam Speaker, at one time the NDP did do a decent job at administrating the Provincial Nominee Program, however, for the past five years they have shown their poor management skills of this critical program.

What is being asked of the Africans right now is unreasonable. Perhaps the former government was trying to make the program more competitive, however, in doing so they diminished the administrative portion of the program and they excluded many eligible applicants because of financial constraints.

My question is: Will the minister commit to fixing the mess that has been made of the Provincial Nominee Program by revisiting the qualifications for applying by the end of this summer?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question. I find I agree with a great deal of what she said about what the previous administration had accomplished in this program.

We are certainly working very hard to try and make this program work more efficiently and get better results. We believe we have about 4,000 applications processed now—sorry, by the end of September we will have about 4,000 applications processed, and hope that we will be able to process all the applications in due course.

I know it's frustrating for families that are waiting to hear on where their applications in the—are in the process, and we are working very diligently to get these done as quickly as possible.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Burrows, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Lamoureux: I would like to thank the minister for his answer.

On Monday, I delivered those questions to the minister, and I truly appreciate you answering them directly today here in the House.

My one follow-up question is: Can you please commit to those 4,000 applications being looked over before September?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question and the fact that she saw fit to make sure that we had the question ahead of time so that we could give her a real honest answer, and we certainly will be online, I believe, to reach that number of applications.

I might like to add, Madam Speaker, that I tried the same thing with the previous government, and it didn't work.

Madam Speaker: I—before we proceed with questions, just a caution to the House again that when you're making your statements, your questions and answers, please direct them through the Chair in third-party comments so that there are no direct comments made to people using the word you.

Thank you very much, and now the member for—the honourable member for St. James.

Air Canada Act—Bill C-10 Impact on Manitoba Economy

Mr. Scott Johnston (St. James): We've seen all members of this House joined together to advocate for Manitoba jobs and to stand up to the federal government's proposed Bill C-10. Today, industry representatives of Manitoba's new government stood together to defend Manitoba once again.

Could the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade inform the House how the federal government's aircraft purchase will harm the Manitoba economy?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): First of all, I would like to acknowledge the unanimous support of the aerospace industry and our recent resolution here in the Chamber.

Today, our new government stood with industry officials in support of the industry, and we called on the federal government to make a commitment of no net loss to Manitoba's economy as a result of Bill C-10.

Further, recent announcements by the federal government on procurement of new fighter jets does not bode well for our industry in Manitoba.

Our new government is standing with industry and our community leaders to send a message to the federal government on this very important issue.

We are asking all members of the Chamber to voice their opinion to the federal government on this very important issue to Manitoba.

* (14:20)

Conference Board Report Manitoba's Economy

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Yesterday, the Conference Board of Canada confirmed what our side of the House has been saying all along, that NDP investments in strategic infrastructure over the last 17 years make us one of the leading economies in the country.

On the same day, Madam Speaker, the members opposite put out a press release saying investments in infrastructure is wasteful government spending.

Madam Speaker, will the Finance Minister please explain to the House and to Manitobans why investments in infrastructure that creates good jobs for Manitobans is wasteful?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, it's good to have a question about our budget. It's—they—the opposition party seems to be out of questions already on the budget, asking questions about the availability of phone numbers that, of course, government's happy to provide. So we're happy to have a question on our budget.

Madam Speaker, we couldn't be more proud of the investments that we are bringing in Budget 2016, investments that will be meaningful for Manitobans, investments that, I will add, will also be measured according to value-for-money considerations to make sure that investments are broad, that are meaningful, that are really making a difference in the lives of Manitobans.

This is the work that we're doing. It is under way. We could not be more proud of it.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Allum: Well, Madam Speaker, I've been asking the Finance Minister questions about the budget every day. He just won't answer them.

But, you know, Madam Speaker, he likes it both ways. First, he says on budget day that he's found \$122 million in savings. Ten days later he says he's found \$108 million in cuts, cuts to infrastructure, cuts to prevention, cuts to seniors and cuts to infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, these are the—Madam Speaker, these are the very kind of investments that has made Manitoba one of the leading economies in the country, according to the Conference Board of Canada.

Will the Finance Minister just admit that he's going to take this province backwards, not forwards?

Mr. Friesen: I appreciate the question because it allows me an opportunity to contrast the records of these two parties: our party that is looking for meaningful ways in which we can make—reduce the size of these deficits against this \$1-billion challenge and that party on that side who failed to do that and instead raised taxes each and every time.

As a matter of fact, the interim Leader of the Opposition went as far as to say that she had talked to low-income earners and they had no problem with tax hikes.

We feel differently. Affordability matters to Manitobans. We'll get there.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, on a final supplementary.

Capital Projects Government Intention

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): The press release put out by the government yesterday clearly characterized investments in infrastructure, in education, for seniors and in prevention to be wasteful government spending.

And yet at the same time they won't provide us a list of what capital projects are on the chopping block.

Will the Finance Minister simply table for the House today what projects, what capital projects, are on his chopping block?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): The member seems to be confused, but I am happy to enlighten him and indicate to him that whereas his government chose to raise taxes because they wouldn't do the real and serious work of government to control expenditure growth, we have brought real savings to Manitobans.

We care about affordability for seniors. We care about affordability for students. We care about affordability for families. And a government that does that is a government that indexes tax brackets, raises the basic personal exemption. That's the work that we are under way to do.

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Future of Capital Funding

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): So far, this government has been patting themselves on the back for slashing \$9 million in education funding to eliminate what they call wasteful government spending and, what we hear today, cuts in low-priority areas.

The Premier has been silent on the future of the \$1 million in capital funding for the national truth and reconciliation centre at the University of Manitoba.

Can the Minister of Education confirm that he considers \$1 million in capital support to the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission centre to be wasteful?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I appreciate the question, but in terms of making things factually correct, I would like to put on the record that we have increased by 2 and a half per cent the amount of money to universities and by 2 per cent to colleges, so I can't imagine how they can possibly manage to construe that as any form of reduction.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: The Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his Cabinet are putting out press releases bragging about finding hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts, but won't explain where they're coming from.

Clearly, the Education Minister doesn't want to admit that the national truth and reconciliation centre is part of their cuts they're trying to hide.

Will this government admit that they consider the national truth and reconciliation centre's \$1 million in funding to be wasteful government spending?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the question from the member. She needs to pay attention to what I answered. We did increase funding, and she certainly should be aware of that.

And as for putting out press releases, from that side of the House, really, Madam Speaker, they have such a history of putting out multiple press releases on anything they could possibly imagine. Even regularly funded departmental announcements would become multiple press releases in their hands.

I really think the member needs to talk to her colleagues about who was the most guilty when it comes to using press releases as political tools.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary.

Ms. Fontaine: The national truth and reconciliation centre builds awareness on the legacy of residential schools and makes records and artifacts accessible to those who want to understand their own and their family's experience more clearly. The centre is an extension of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and is a physical marker of our path to reconciliation with indigenous peoples in this province.

Will the minister admit that he doesn't see the value in the programming offered by the national truth and reconciliation centre?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): The previous administration said yes to everything before the last election because they felt that it was their way to get popular. They said yes to everything, and, as a consequence, the deficit—their deficit projections went from about \$400 million to \$1 billion in one year. And that deficit is just deferred taxes on Manitoba families, and that deficit has to be serviced with interest, and it adds to a debt they've tripled in the province.

So the reality is they raised taxes more than any other Canadian province over the last few years. Then they went to the polls and asked Manitobans to believe that they had solutions just by saying yes to spending. Now, this spending is dangerous, reckless, and it's already resulted in a reduced credit rating for our province, and it may again because of the fact that it was absolutely out of control.

There are lots of worthwhile projects out there, but like all good parents and all small-business owners know, you can't say yes to every single thing or you move your province towards bankruptcy, and that's exactly what that administration did.

Madam Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Legislative Building—Gender Neutral Washroom

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this position:

The Legislative Building is a public building where everyone should be welcomed and feel comfortable.

(2) Washrooms in the Manitoba legislative and other government buildings are labelled as men and women, which do not fit the gender identities of all Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to designate one washroom in the Legislative Building and all other government of Manitoba buildings as a gender neutral washroom.

This has been signed by D. James, P. Harmer, T. Obandoerfer and many other great Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6), when petitions are read, they are deemed to be received by the House.

* (14:30)

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition:

The Legislative Assembly building is a public building where everyone should be welcomed and feel comfortable.

Washrooms in the Manitoba Legislature and other government buildings are labelled men and women, which do not fit the gender identities of all Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to designate one washroom in the Legislative Building and all other government of Manitoba buildings as a gender neutral washroom.

And this petition has been signed by R. Allard, M. Howden and H. Prociw.

Bell's Purchase of MTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of the petition is as follows:

Manitoba telephone system is currently a fourth cellular carrier used by Manitobans along with the big national three carriers: Telus, Rogers and Bell.

In Toronto, with only the big three national companies controlling the market, the average 5G unlimited monthly cellular bill is \$117 as compared to Winnipeg where MTS charges \$66 for the same package.

Losing MTS will mean less competition and will result in higher costs for all cellphone packages in the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to do all that is possible to prevent the Bell takeover of MTS and preserve a more competitive cellphone market so that cellular bills for Manitobans do not increase unnecessarily.

And this petition is signed by many fine Manitobans.

Legislative Building—Gender Neutral Washroom

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The reasons for this petition are as follows:

The Legislative Assembly is a public building where everyone should feel welcomed and—be welcomed and feel comfortable.

Washrooms in the Manitoba legislative and other government buildings are labelled as men and women, which do not fit the gender identities of all Manitobans.

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to designate one washroom in the Legislative Building and all other government of Manitoba buildings as a gender neutral washroom.

This petition is signed by H. Dolenuck, J. Glenat, N. Clement and many, many more fine Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

**ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, before calling government business, on a matter of House business, in accordance with rule 33(7), I'd like to announce that the private member's resolution to be considered on next Tuesday of private members' business will be Recognition of the Importance of Financial Literacy, brought forward by the honourable member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma).

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be Recognition of the Importance of Financial Literacy, brought forward by the honourable member for Radisson.

* * *

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): And now, Madam Speaker, on government business, could you please resolve into Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

* (15:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for Executive Council.

As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): I'd like to begin by asking the First Minister whether any of the questions that have been put as matters under advisement are now in a-ready to be followed-up on,

whether any of those questions can now be returned to?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I thank my colleague for that.

I have a couple of them. I don't have the list ready. The department's still working on that, on the education programs that he raised on Friday, and it is pending.

The—I'm not sure if it was raised by the member for Fort Rouge or the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), and the question was, is a labour contract—and I'm assuming he was referencing the MGEU, or maybe it was the member for Fort Rouge—accounted for in the fiscal update? And the answer was yes, it is.

On the question about any unbooked environmental liabilities, if the member for Fort Rouge can maybe nod at me that was his question. I think it might have been the member for River Heights? *[interjection]* Okay, sorry. I'm answering a question you didn't ask, but I'll just put it out there because I did take it as noted. *[interjection]* Great.

It was—the answer on that one is it's all known environmental liabilities are booked and that the Province's booking of environmental liabilities conforms to established accounting policies on—and I would assure the member that the department has assured me that they are looking at his questions on the—he asked, I think there were the Building Manitoba Fund, school and university reduction. They are working on those. Also on—and if I'm not able to, successor minister or Finance or Education in Estimates would be given the information that's been able to be assembled in that time frame that we have. And also the \$11-million reduction in amortization and interest breakdown is also getting worked on.

And, as well, the breakdown on the number of unincorporated businesses versus not incorporated businesses, which, I think, was raised by the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), if I'm not mistaken—oh, that was—okay, member for Fort Rouge raised that, and I have those numbers for him today.

As of—this is as of 2014 tax year: 50,000 corporations in which the 27,000, that means—sorry. *[interjection]* That's in that 50, right? Yes. So of those 50,000, 27,000 are not non-profits; 65,000 Manitobans claimed business income; 8,500 claimed professional incomes—doctors, lawyers, accountants, that sort of thing;

31,400 claimed farm income—that doesn't mean they made money, that could be they claimed losses that year, too, yes, depends on the year; 1,100 claimed—for the member from Flin Flon who comes from the fishing capital of the province—they claimed fishing income as well—of course, that's more recreational than business up that way. So there was the—there's the breakdown for—in answer to that one.

Mr. Kinew: All right, I'd like to ask the First Minister specifically about the \$9 million in cuts or reduced expenditures that were requested by post-secondaries, whether the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, the \$1-million capital commitment to that, was part of that \$9-million figure that the Province announced last Thursday.

Mr. Pallister: That's—I'm told that's what the department is working on in the context of the earlier question that the member had raised, because if it wasn't on the list, we'll add it to the list and then we'll endeavour to get back to the member with the—an update on the TRC component. I thought it was on the list.

An Honourable Member: It was.

Mr. Pallister: Yes.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, just in response to the First Minister's question, yes, that was part of the list, but, again, I'm asking for, you know, greater clarity or for specificity today because with some other conversations with people in the post-secondary field, we have been able to tell, without confirmation from the government, that some items on that list, including the \$844,000 in additional spending for the joint midwifery program for U of M and UCN, has been removed from a post-secondary. So it leads us to believe that some of the other items on the list are, in fact, probably part of that \$9-million figure.

Again, I listened to the First Minister's comments in the House today in question period, specifically asked about the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. The response wasn't directly to the NCTR, but did talk about—I believe his words were wasteful spending, reckless spending, under the, you know, previous administration. So I would like to ask, you know, directly today about, you know, his commitment to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and whether he understands the vital role that this plays in the future of the education of our province but also in advancing reconciliation.

Mr. Pallister: I think there's tremendous value to be derived from the reading and rereading of the work that was done—TRC. I think it was a tremendous undertaking. I think it was an excellent initiative, but I, more than that, hope that the outcomes that derive from it and from the recommendations and ensuing discussions that'll happen as a consequence of that work will benefit, I think, Manitoba, above all other jurisdictions in the country.

As to the specific issue the member raises, there—it shouldn't be misconstrued, in my remarks in the House in question period, that in any way, shape or form, I'm not—that I am not supportive of the tremendous work of the now-senator and his colleagues. I have tremendous respect for him personally and for the work that was done. Nor should it be misconstrued, in the absence of clarification on the innumerable proposals that the previous government nodded support for, that there was necessarily a very real prospect each would be proceeded with in the coming fiscal year.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I appreciate the First Minister's comments.

Just by way of background, just because I know the First Minister's a very busy man and may not be familiar with the specifics of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, again, so just by way of background, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation is the repository for all of the data collected by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission during its six-year mandate. The centre resides at the University of Manitoba but is actually governed by a consortium of post-secondaries and an advisory group that includes survivors for residential school—residential school survivors, rather, as well as some members of the committee who are descendants of residential school survivors.

Again, I'm pleased to hear the First Minister acknowledge the historic importance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but recognizing that the NCTR is the repository for the work of the TRC and that that will be the mechanism by which the TRC's mission, mandate, evidence is presented to Manitobans and Canadians going forward into the future, will he support, you know, the necessary capital and operating funding to make sure that the NCTR can continue to do its work?

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for the preamble and the question, both of which serve to allow me to say that our commitment is to review these—this proposal and all others meticulously to make sure

that we're pursuing the best possible value for Manitobans in every respect.

* (15:20)

And so I would ask the member's patience and understanding because we are doing this and it is worthwhile work and needs to be undertaken to get the best possible results for Manitobans in terms of not just this year, but in ongoing years. There are innumerable proposals that come to government, and he well knows this, and all of them, I think, with some degree of merit. And I've—or in my earlier comments made it clear that I am very appreciative of the work—of the example he's raising. But I also think it's incumbent on governments to do the necessary work to prioritize their investments in every category, whether education, infrastructure, social services, health care or any other field of government, and that's what the, you know, the Treasury Board process is, that governments utilize in the preparation of their annual budgets are designed to do to get to the point of what is the thing we can do this year and what can we do later or next year or what should we not do.

And so I'm endeavouring to make sure that our government is cognizant that we can't say yes to everything, and it doesn't—should not be taken that on this specific—the issue the member raises, which I've already indicated we're endeavouring to find out where everything is on the food chain or the process here, it shouldn't be taken as a no, but it should be taken as a yes to the question are we going to look to be reasonable in our decision-making process so we're respectful of not just the needs of this year but on an ongoing basis from seven generations and more to come.

Mr. Kinew: Does the First Minister recognize the historic opportunity presented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to make meaningful improvements to the relationship between indigenous people and non-indigenous people?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I do, and I recognize the historical opportunities with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples as well, and read every volume, and I continue to believe that these myriad number of issues—complex, intertwining, some of historical, some of modern significance, each interrelated—are issues we need to address, as people in Manitoba we stand to benefit.

As I said earlier, I think we should be at the lead of addressing many of these issues as a province. I

think we stand to benefit as a province more than virtually every other province in the country. I would continue to believe that the aspirational goals—and I know the member supports them—to have every child in this province have opportunity to make their home here and find their full potential here is what we're all after. And I think it's critical for us, in particular with respect to indigenous people who have for too long, statistically, not had those opportunities that others in our province have had or may take, in too many cases, for granted, but it's important to address them.

So, yes, I recognize the value and I recognize the value to be derived by Manitobans as well of furthering this dialogue and furthering the opportunities for better public policy that address some of these issues.

Mr. Kinew: By way of additional background, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation was a recipient of a gift last year from TD Bank who committed \$10 million over 10 years, I believe it was, as well as other private corporations and private donors.

So I present that as a preamble to the First Minister, you know, seeing as how a \$1-million investment by the Province in this institution would be matched by private money thereby, you know, creating a leverage situation, you know, whether, you know, that is the sort of project where you can use public money to leverage private dollars that fits in with his espoused criteria of smart shopping.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I don't know. I'm not ideological in this stuff, but I think there are practical examples where we can go out to the private sector and get some help, and I've seen it at U of W—so has the member—and there are areas where that would not be beneficial or appropriate.

Certainly, in my work with my old school, Brandon University, on the side of the foundations, we spent a lot of time focusing on partnering with the private sector and going out, cap in hand, and trying to generate money for things like scholarships and bursaries for university students, high school graduates or ongoing support for students who needed that support, in particular, students who came from northern communities, rural communities, where accommodation at home wasn't an option and where cost was an additional factor.

So there would be one example where we're hopeful. And initial response, at least anecdotally, to

our approach to lever more money for scholarships and bursaries from the private sector would be an example of an appropriate way for us to lever capital from the private sector.

I think there's no doubt—and members of all parties know—that Manitoba is blessed with some really powerful, community-minded-like people who are empowered by being part of a community, who want to do things to help the community advance. And many, many examples exist.

I think in terms of—I'm onto scholarships for a second, if the member will indulge me—but I think the work of the Business Council in supporting scholarships for indigenous grads is one example of that type of assistance and, I think, really serves, you know, serves to illustrate, though not exclusive to that group, serves to illustrate that sense of wanting to assist, and not just talk about assisting, but actually assist, in terms of a financial contribution to a cause.

So, yes, it is something that I think certainly in some areas of—like the example I'm giving is, of course, in the scholarship and bursaries side, but there are numerous other examples that the former Premier talked about some last year in our Estimates process, in terms of garnering support on some training initiatives, on some investments that—I believe the one we were talking about was Red River community college. There are some excellent opportunities for us to do perhaps a better job of partnering to generate support for projects like the one he's addressing right now.

Mr. Kinew: Well, I appreciate the First Minister's comments. And it seems to me, that, you know, he does favour situations where public money can be used to leverage additional dollars from the private sector.

I'd submit to you, Mr. Chair, for the benefit of the First Minister, that the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, you know, seems to fulfill a number of criteria that appeals to members on all sides of, you know, the partisan divides; that it is built on the historic work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; that there is partnerships from the private sector emerging to support this work; and that I would, you know, strongly encourage the First Minister to take a personal interest in this file and to ensure that the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation does receive the necessary financial support, both on the capital and the operating side, to ensure that it can

fulfill the continued mission of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission going forward in this province.

So those are the comments that I'll leave on the record and, again, you know, just for the benefit of you, Mr. Chair, to share to the First Minister.

Returning to the broader point of reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their impact on, you know, good public policy, as the First Minister says, you know, when I look at the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I see that a number of them impinge on provincial jurisdiction.

So Calls to Action 1 through 5 deal with child welfare. Calls to Action 6 through 12 deal explicitly with education, and there's further ones that deal with other aspects of education tangentially. We see also health impacted on in Calls to Action 18 through 24. Justice is dealt with in Calls to Action 25 through 42.

* (15:30)

And, of course, there are more general calls to action, such as Call to Action 43, which suggests that all levels of government, including provincial and territorial governments, fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation.

Given the historic nature of the TRC's report being tabled and the fact that these calls to action deal with a number of areas under provincial jurisdiction, I'd like to ask the First Minister why the TRC calls to action were not explicitly referenced in the mandate letters that were given to the ministers in charge of those specific areas, such as Health, such as Education, such as Justice, such as Families?

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for his comments, and the Clerk advises me that following the TRC reports there was an initiative undertaken within the—within government to do, essentially, as he's described, and take the calls to action, break them down by department, of course, with a somewhat restructured nature of the Cabinet—with a smaller Cabinet that would be redefined. But nonetheless the work is the key thing, I think, that people are after.

The Path to Reconciliation Act, of course, we were all part of passing in the prior—or, some of us were part—I guess I shouldn't say we were all part; we've got a record number of new members to

the Legislature, so some of us were part of passing that legislation, which was designed to guide the reconciliation measures, including on-going engagement with indigenous peoples on the development and implementation of a reconciliation strategy, so, I would reference, also—some of this, I know, many of these recommendations are repeats of previous work that has been done over the years, and this is the, I think, the frustrating part for some of us that it seems to—it seems to take a long time for changes to occur, especially when we're very strong proponents of them. I remember in—I think it was 2002, reading a Senate study that was done over years called *A Hard Bed to Lie In*, and it was a study about the circumstances faced by indigenous women on reserve in terms of the—they were caught between a provincial jurisdiction which didn't apply and a federal Indian Act that didn't apply either on property rights.

It wasn't exclusively women who were impacted by that. Of course, it was men as well. It was the absence of the rules, and that report was, I think, shocking to those of us who took the time to read it, and we were amazed and so were indigenous women's groups in particular, who had been fighting for these changes for so long that nothing had happened for the previous 20-25 years.

So I appreciate the member's interventions very much because I think I can share with him when I was working with those groups in Ottawa to the best of my ability to try to garner support, I went to meet with the *Globe and Mail* editorial board and in no uncertain terms, following my little presentation to them, was told that this was an issue that didn't matter to the readers. And I was as offended in—I'm as offended in the recall of that event today, and having to tell that to you, as I was then.

I would say the *Globe and Mail*, as a publication, has come some distance now, and I think it's unfortunate that some of the events that have happened in our province, and the news coverage they've got, have been part of the reason. But all of us need to continue to advocate for improvements and changes in these important areas of public policy, so I welcome the member's sincere interest in this. There are—many of these areas have been talked about and studied at length and it isn't—it hasn't always been evident that many people were reading the reports, so I'm glad that he is.

Mr. Kinew: I appreciate the First Minister's comments, and I do note that in the mandate letter to

the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke), that there is actually a directive to intervene with their federal counterpart to address the issue of underfunding of on-reserve education, and so I think that that's commendable. That's an important objective and one in keeping with the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

However, we know that there are similar funding inequalities—inequities in the area of health, in the area of child welfare, that are mentioned in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action. So my first question to the First Minister would be: Why not address those in the relevant mandate letters to the ministers who have authority over those files? And second part of the same question: Not wanting to rehash what's already been done, would he now commit to issuing directives to those ministers of Health, of Justice, of Education to explicitly follow up on the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Mr. Pallister: My response to the member is that there are—there's an emerging area of academic study around deliverology, around how to get results while working with governments, both within them as government or in between them, as is the case he cites in respect of the federal government's lack of commitment over many years to education on First Nations reserves and First Nations communities. And so the intent of the mandate letters that we released was not to try to spread the focus onto so many issues that we couldn't make a difference on some we had identified as emergent or needing immediate addressing. This is not to say that issues not mentioned in the mandate letters cannot be addressed effectively or will not be addressed effectively, but there is, I think, a growing understanding and—on—of the lack of support on—in First Nations communities, a growing understanding on the education file. There was a very significant dialogue over the last few years; some progress was made, but we didn't get to the point of fruition where the additional hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars flow to the communities so that we could've started to see some significant new investment in those communities. This was why I highlight this particular issue in my instructions to the Indigenous Minister, because I think there is a critical mass that is, if not formed, is forming across Canada to work together at the provincial level and elsewhere, at the indigenous community level as well, to see changes, real changes, realized.

I guess what I'm saying is there's only so much you can do at one time, and I've seen—and I expect the member has too—examples where people try to do too much and end up doing nothing as a consequence. The danger with going after progress in too many areas simultaneously is you may make no progress at all. And so we've highlighted the issue of on-reserve education along with the relevant First Nations organizations nationally, provincially, as an area of key importance that needs to be addressed. It needs to be addressed respectfully as well. Obviously, there are different needs in different communities all over the province. I'd say there's more diversity in the 600-plus First Nations communities probably than there is in the rest of Canada, quite frankly. So there are differences that need to be understood in each of these—each of our provinces and territories. But that being said, for a long time the investment, the global investment, has lagged behind comparable investments in most provinces and territories by a significant amount.

Mr. Kinew: Well, based on the First Minister's comment, which I take to mean that the areas explicitly outlined in the mandate letters are those that he wants to see most urgent attention focused to, I would submit to him that the issues of health for—not just First Nations, but all indigenous people in Manitoba, that the issue of First Nations, but also all indigenous children involved in the child welfare system in Manitoba are very urgent and are amongst the most dire conditions lived by anyone in this province. And it's on that basis that I ask why were they not explicitly included in the mandate letters using the TRC road map as a guide that were issued?

* (15:40)

Mr. Pallister: I think there's always a danger with mandate letters being misinterpreted, in particular by opposition politicians. The danger is that if it's not in there, then it must not be important. That seems to be the conclusion the member's drawing, and that's wrong conclusion. So if someone has a priority, that doesn't mean everything else is set aside. That's not all the reality here. The member seems to be saying that by emphasizing the desire to get the federal government onside with supporting education, we're somehow selling short health care and other services, and I don't agree.

I do know that the federal government has had approaches over many years under various political organizations on all fronts and has resisted change

and initiative all too often and all too successfully, so I think we need to focus.

I use this example even in respect of our aerospace industry. We could start talking here about, don't you care about seven other industries in the province? Well, I—of course I do, but I care about our aerospace industry, and we adopted a motion in the House unanimously last week to say we care about the aerospace industry and we want to see concrete steps taken so the federal government supports our desire to see a continuation and a growth, we hope, of a strong aerospace industry in Manitoba. Surely by adopting a motion like that—and we all supported it—this doesn't mean we don't care about other industries in our province. That would be illogical and wrong to conclude, as is the conclusion the member's drawing in respect of my concerns of First Nation's education.

Mr. Kinew: Just by way of additional background, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled earlier this year that the underfunding of child welfare services on reserve, it was discrimination. It was a very clear decision, and they issued a subsequent clarification in which they said that the same logic applies to all social services on reserve.

So I submit that to you, Mr. Chair, as evidence that the growing consensus that there is a need to act on, you know, the delivery of social services, health, education, things like that on First Nations is urgent and is sorely needed. It's my personal view that provincial attention could move the ball, to use a sports analogy, down the field, and that perhaps provincial intervention is one of the things that has been lacking to date in forcing an additional onus on the federal government to move forward.

But again I would reiterate whether the minister would commit—or First Minister, rather, would commit to providing such a clarification, as he acknowledges that the things that he explicitly directs his ministers to undertake are the priorities of his government, whether he would commit to providing a clarification to the ministers of Health, Justice, Families and others impacted by the calls to action of the TRC, to use those calls to action as a framework to guide their own governance but also the relationship with their federal counterparts.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I've attempted as best I can to address the issues the member's raised in the context of understanding the nature of these problems that he has outlined, and I've also endeavoured to outline that having priorities in one file that you want to see

addressed that are of an urgent nature does not mean that you're absent to other priorities. So I've done my best to address the issues the member's raised.

I think he's quite right in citing the concerns that he has, and they are well understood, though not necessarily have they been well addressed over the last number of years here or elsewhere. And so I would ask for his patience given the eight weeks we've been in government that we will demonstrate with actions rather than mandate letters how we address issues.

Mr. Kinew: Just by way of additional comment, you know, I'd share with you that—just to follow up on the comments made about deliverology, which I think might be neatly summarized as set targets to help facilitate the achievement of goals.

I'd just point out that a number of the calls to action do actually recommend setting targets, specific benchmarks in specific areas, mostly around, you know, social programs, but also some other immeasurables, such as income, for instance. And so, you know, I just leave that on the record, again, for your benefit, Mr. Chair, to be shared with the First Minister, as some of the seeming parallels between the methodology undertaken by the current administration and how it might be well complemented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

I'd like to ask the First Minister about a comment that he made in his message to First Nations which was posted on the PC Party of Manitoba website on June 29th, 2015. I believe it was in the context of a visit to the Peguis First Nation. And he said, and I quote: "It would be disrespectful to buy popularity among First Nations people with money taken from others." End quote.

So I'd like him to explain what was meant by this comment, perhaps in two parts, (1) the characterization of buying popularity among First Nations people; does he mean by this that investments in social programs on reserve or infrastructure investments on First Nations are in some way buying popularity with First Nations?

Mr. Pallister: No, I was referencing specifically allegations that were in the news a few weeks prior concerning the chief at OCN saying that he had been made promises by certain political figures in respect—in exchange for support at the polls. And so I wanted it clear that I wasn't coming there to ask for support by making offers of spending other people's money

in order to get that support. So that was the reason for the clarification. In anticipation of the trip to Peguis and other First Nations I visited, I did not want anyone to misconstrue the purpose and intent of my visits.

Mr. Kinew: And what is meant by the second part of the statement in which the First Minister refers to money taken from others with respect to the money spent on First Nations?

Mr. Pallister: Well, what's meant is what's there. Money that we spend here in our roles as political people is taken from others, and the point being that I would not want any community leader, First Nations or not, to believe that I was trying to buy friends. I have friends and I didn't buy any of them.

Mr. Kinew: Does the minister see the potential for those comments to be interpreted as though the money being spent on First Nations in some way is money that First Nations are not entitled to, and that, you know, such comments might be counterproductive to the establishment of good relations with the First Nations and other indigenous groups?

Mr. Pallister: That wasn't the reaction from the people I met with, so I think they had a pretty clear understanding of what I was saying and we had very good discussions in the meetings that we had following the release of that clarification from me.

Mr. Kinew: And can the First Minister explain for us, you know, what is his strategy around reconciliation for the Province of Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I can tell you what it doesn't involve, Mr. Chairman. It doesn't involve going to First Nations communities and trying to endear myself to them by making big empty promises of jobs that aren't fulfilled.

Mr. Kinew: Could the minister provide greater clarity as to what he's referring to when he talks about big empty promises?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I could cite chapter and verse, at length, concerns of the present chief of OCN in respect of those issues, but I don't know if the member wants me to elaborate on that. I can, but I think it would be less than productive.

Mr. Kinew: I'm merely asking for clarification. Again, my initial question was what is the First Minister's strategy for reconciliation in the province of Manitoba? He brought up an issue. I chose to follow up and ask for clarification. So I'd put it

to him again: What is his strategy to advance reconciliation in Manitoba?

*(15:50)

Mr. Pallister: Well, we can touch on a few things. I think—I mean, why don't I just highlight a couple of the aspects.

I think, first of all, on the duty to consult, we have developed—we need to develop more fully, relationships with First Nations communities that recognize fully, and implement fully, strategies around the duty to consult. There has been inhibitors in place for a long time in terms of things like exploration—mineral exploration, in terms of development, not exclusively in the mining area, and others as well, forestry, where it was not clear or the areas affected were not sufficiently clearly defined so that what we're hearing from industry members is there was a lack of interest in investing in the context of those undefined approaches and undefined areas. I think it's important to understand that this is not unique to Manitoba. The jurisdictions that face these challenges, and other jurisdictions, have moved ahead with clarity on a number of fronts, that have assisted them in advancing, attracting, investment in—and I'm citing mineral exploration as one example, but I suppose on a broader basis there are many others as well in terms of economic approaches.

I know another example might be sections of the Indian Act, which many bands—now, I don't have the recent data; this would be two or three years ago, but I believe over 60 bands have adopted resolutions for their jurisdiction that they will not enforce sections of the act that prohibit the repossession of chattels on their communities. This is something that many First Nations have acted on as best they can in the context of the presence of an Indian Act which is somewhat oppressive and offensive in terms of its abilities to inhibit economic development and growth in First Nations communities. In this example I'm giving, members would need to understand that a, say, a couple living on a First Nations communities who wanted to go and buy a washer-dryer at the hardware store in Flin Flon would not, once they purchased it and took it back to the First Nations community, it could not be repossessed by the seller.

So what that means is, in many communities across Canada, First Nations people have difficulty getting credit; they have difficulty negotiating a purchase the way a non-indigenous person could negotiate a purchase on that item because there are

no prohibitions about repossessing a chattel. Now, this could extend to, even to vehicles, computer equipment, any numbers of possible inputs. So if—so First Nations people are inhibited in respect of the rules that exist under the Indian Act. BCRs in a few dozen bands have been passed to say, you know, don't worry about it; like, we're not going to stop you if you want to come and repossess our computer or whatever. And they did that because they knew that that would assist their people in their community in getting better deal at the store, quite frankly.

This—these barriers, some of these old barriers need to be removed, and I give this as just one example to the member of where I think we need to go to look at—true reconciliation is economic opportunity, and we're allowing barriers to continue to exist in too many parts of the country that get in the way of people who want to start a business or want to make an investment or create a job or just manage their own households. And this is tapping way too much opportunity away from First Nations people all over the country. So I wouldn't want it—I wouldn't want the member to take that the only thing I'm worried about is jobs, but it is a—something that's coming up a lot in discussions I'm having with First Nations leadership, that they are very concerned about the economic opportunities and they would like to see more economic opportunity for their people.

Mr. Kinew: I would tend to agree with the last statement made by the First Minister, and just put on the record that it's been my observation in my home community and others where there are—there is a lack of people working. It's not for lack of a will to work; it is a lack of job opportunities and a lack of available positions for people in the area. So I believe perhaps we're on the same point there.

And now for a gentle correction to his characterization that true reconciliation is a economic opportunity. I know that's, you know, not necessarily what he meant, and I would just underline to him that given the important personal toll that the residential school had on many survivors, that the important work undertaken by many church and faith groups and the important opportunities for personal fulfillment and growth afforded by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggests to me that true reconciliation is actually a spiritual journey as well. So I'd offer that to you, Mr. Chair, again, just as a commentary for the benefit of the First Minister and others to perhaps ponder on.

I'd like to know more about, you know, the First Minister's strategy with respect to the duty to consult. I was pleased to hear the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen) raise in the House the other day a duty to consult framework. I would ask the First Minister, through you Mr. Chair, what is the direction that the Minister for Growth, Enterprise and Trade is operating under in developing this framework and how will the duty to consult be positioned in this framework for industry, for business, for other people who would be the users—the end users of this.

Mr. Pallister: Just let me say, I think the member is raising some excellent questions on topics that I believe could be and have been—I know, in part, federally—have been addressed in a non-partisan way. And I want to really encourage him because I think these are issues that matter deeply to all Manitobans not exclusively in the communities directly affected either, but the whole province.

I was part of the federal government that initiated a prime ministerial apology for the residential schools, and I was glad of that and I think that was a start. I was part of the federal government that established the framework for the TRC, and I'm proud of that too. I am proud mostly of the work that people did, not exclusively the co-ordinators, not exclusively the main people, though I think the main people did tremendous work, but the people who came forward—the people that came forward and spoke about their personal experiences, their hurts, the legacies that they've been living, that their children are living, that—or children who came and spoke about their parents, grandparents, great grandparents and the affect that ill-advised, erroneous practices of years ago have had on their lives.

This was a genuine exercise, I think, in moving towards real healing, and I think moving towards what I call, I guess, an attitude of thankfulness and appreciation among people. As much as—and this I get from my—many of my indigenous friends, but they say apologies are fine, but appreciation's better, mutual appreciation, mutual respect, an attitude of thankfulness. I think what they're saying is that there's more healing in that. So I appreciate the member raising these things.

He's asked me specifically and I'll try to address it in whatever time I have left on that—this piece, but about the issues around duty to consult. I think there's been some efforts made by the previous

administration. The former premier announced approaches on mining with an advisory council in the months prior to the last election in respect of revenue-sharing arrangements. The details of how we implement those things will determine how effective they are at achieving real progress. Duty to consult will have to be part of that.

* (16:00)

The member knows a book I know he's read. I believe, he referenced in a comment he made in the House, *Resource Rulers*, a very interesting take on the history of and the future of resource development in Canada. And I don't wish to do an injustice to the author of the book by trying to paraphrase the book to members of the committee, but I will say that the—I think the thesis of the members, of the author's work is essentially that unless you want to move towards a duty to consult format that's well communicated, well understood within your provincial jurisdiction, you're going to be on the backburner when it comes to resource development in your province.

And in specific terms, he references the progress made in Quebec, in the province of Quebec some years ago in terms, and I think in this context he was talking as much about hydro development as he was about mining and—but the point being that Quebec's economy has benefited tremendously from a genuine step forward in terms of the consultative process between the provincial government and First Nations communities and leaders.

And so first steps have been, I believe, taken here in terms of the resource sharing template that the previous government spoke about. But of course the, as they say, the devil is in the details, of actually, it's fine to talk about sharing, you know, profits from sales that are never made, but that doesn't mean anybody got a job out of it. We need to make sure that the structures that we develop here lead to investment, which will lead to development, which will lead to jobs, real jobs, for, certainly for indigenous people but for all Manitobans.

Mr. Kinew: One of the things that I've observed in the successes and failures of benefits sharing agreements in other jurisdictions is the lack of government investments to ensure that communities are poised to take full advantage of the things that they are afforded to under those agreements.

So, for instance, there is a First Nation in Ontario which has a relatively rich impact benefit

agreement in terms of the dollar amounts of royalty revenues that they're entitled to receive. However, the community continues to languish in part because there's a lack of skilled labour force in the community, there's a lack of high school completion, there's a lack of accreditation, there's a lack of trade certificates in the community. It's further compounded by the fact that though the community is entitled to environmental review and other forms of environmental assurances under their agreement, they lack the managerial capacity at the band level to advocate for themselves and to ensure compliance under the benefits sharing agreement with the company that they've entered into a relationship with.

Contrast that with another community in the same province that has invested wisely in their own human resource development, but has also been the beneficiary of investments from the provincial government and the federal government. They have a benefit sharing, rather a suite of benefit sharing agreements which are less rich in terms of their dollar value, but because the community has been able to mobilize their human resource development, their managerial capacity, the community itself is ISO 9001 certified, they have succeeded in having a greater quality of life for the average community member.

So again highlighting, all this to say that resource sharing agreements, benefit sharing agreements are important, they are a good way to mobilize the duty to consult, mobilize Aboriginal and treaty rights for the purposes of economic development. However, it is still incumbent on a provincial government and a federal government to make the necessary investments in education, in training, in workforce development, in managerial capacity development, in human resource development so that the communities that enter into these benefit sharing agreements are able to take full advantage of all the opportunities, whether that be jobs set aside, whether that be, you know, specific bidding opportunities, whether that be environmental assessments, whether that be traditional ecological knowledge assessments, and so on down the list, all the different provisions that might be undertaken.

So my question to the First Minister is, along with investing in the duty to consult framework and the development of that, which is primarily, as I understand it, geared towards providing greater certainty towards investors and industry, does the First Minister also commit to undertaking the

necessary investments in education and training so that First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities can take full advantage of this duty to consult framework as well—from the other side of the relationship?

Mr. Pallister: The member makes a lot of interesting points, and I would welcome the further discussion outside of this process so we can—we could get into more detail on a number of the topics he raises.

I'll mention a couple of things. He's very—I think, a very justified observation that money doesn't solve the problem. I have some good friends in that Wetaskiwin country, and I'm sorry I don't know the—I don't know the actual name of the community, but it's near Hobbema in Alberta, and they're on a bed of oil and for some years, there have been payouts made to families and individuals on that community that are very, very significant. I don't know if royalties is the right word, but profit-sharing payments have been made.

But, at the same time, the last numbers I saw on that community, there was—there were lots of societal problems. Not the worst in Alberta, but pretty bad. Major gang problem, major drug problem, teen suicide, crime on and outside of the community that was beyond the drug trade, additional crime exposure to the criminal justice system, family breakdown. So I guess what I'm saying is, if money solved the problem, I think the member's quite right, if money alone solved the problem, problem would be solved in Hobbema, because lots of money coming in every year. Lots of nice trucks, and lots of other problems. I think it was—I think the biggest auto dealer in Alberta for a while was Grant Fuhr's auto dealership in Wetaskiwin next door. So lots of people making money, lots of people having money, lots of societal problems.

The hospital's still dealing with far too many of the same problems that have—that poorer communities were addressing in more creative and co-operative ways with leadership from their elders, with leadership from their community people that are elected and unelected people.

So I really agree with, I think, part of what he meant by his observation that it's how you use the money as much as it is having money. The skill development piece is a really important piece obviously. You can have an opportunity—we could have a mining company, they could have raw the material, but if we can't get skilled labour right in

that community, we're going to have to go somewhere else to get it.

And this gets into second-rate employment. Not to suggest there's any job beneath anyone, but it gets into low-skill jobs for people on the community, and high-skill jobs for people coming from someplace else. Too frequently that's been a lament of community leaders I've met with over the years. So skills development, training opportunities, quite rightly, are very important, hence, this is why I say the federal government needs to step up on the education commitment and it needs to be, of course, well managed. It's not enough in any training setting to just—any more than it's enough to say that money solves the problem in First Nations communities, it doesn't. Money doesn't solve the problem in and of itself; it's the management of the funds that matter.

But I agree that the skill development piece is very, very important. I wanted to go back and I hope the member doesn't think it's a digression, but I want to go back to talk about, if I could, the sharing approach on resource management. I've had some—I've done some interesting—to me, interesting reading on other jurisdictions. I've referenced Quebec earlier, that have moved ahead in respect of their resource sharing approaches.

BC has done some major advances in the area of assisting indigenous communities in dealing with interest on resource development. This is a challenge for many of the community leaders. When a company comes in to their community, how do they handle that? The community is very often divided, the uncertainty—divided by the debate about the opportunity. And so, how do you deal with it?

* (16:10)

Many First Nations communities have massive challenges in other areas. The member's alluded to some of them. They're dealing with housing challenges, they're dealing with social service issues, they're dealing with health-care issues, they're dealing with infrastructure issues. And the councils are overburdened with decisions in all these categories, and then they're supposed to deal with a multinational coming into their community saying, well, here, we—have we got an idea for you. So I'll elaborate later because I know I went too long, but I think this is another piece that I think would really assist a number of our First Nations communities if we could advance—if we could help them by adopting practices in other jurisdictions that work for them.

Mr. Kinew: I thank the First Minister for his comments, which, you know, I take seriously. Specifically, the last question was about, you know, a commitment to funding training that would be under provincial jurisdiction. And, again, I would remind the First Minister that there is a jurisdictional squabble with regard to First Nations education. It's one that I do not accept. I think that a provincial government could step in and make more resources available to First Nations schools, and the federal government would not launch a legal challenge to them. So I think that there is a potential for action as long as it's done in a collaborative way with First Nations communities themselves.

But I'd remind the First Minister, again, there are other indigenous groups such as the Metis, such as Inuit peoples, which may not necessarily be under the purview of the federal Indigenous and Northern Affairs Department, who are entitled to the duty to consult. And, therefore, fulfilling the duty to consult and making sure that those groups are able to take full advantage of the things afforded to them under those Aboriginal rights would likely fall under provincial jurisdiction. Make specific reference to the Metis, for instance. So I'll just leave that as comment on the record to you, Mr. Chair, again, for, you know, benefit of whoever is interested, including the First Minister.

Diving deeper into the duty-to-consult framework itself, I know it is often presented, including in the Resource Rulers book, that the duty to consult simply means that there's a requirement for there to be a conversation between industry and—well, between proponents and between indigenous communities itself. However, one of the things that I noted was absent, and it's because it was published before the TRC report, is—from a lot of the conversations, like in the book Resource Rulers, is a recognition of the calls to action made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And I'd make specific reference to call to action 43, which calls on provincial governments, as well as other levels, to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a framework for reconciliation, and call to action No. 92, which calls upon the corporate sector in Canada to also use the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework.

The reason why I bring this up is because I think that in the absence of explicitly including the TRC calls to action in the UN declaration, the duty to consult may merely be presented as a requirement to

have a conversation, which is one standard. However, the standard in the UN declaration and under the TRC calls to action is a higher standard, which is a requirement to obtain consent from indigenous communities. I know sometimes this is cause for consternation amongst, you know, government. It's cause for consternation among industry proponents because there's a fear that the requirement to obtain consent would necessarily mean a veto in practice. I disagree. You know, (1) I think that part of this year of reconciliation is about building relationships, which involves building trust, and proponents and government need to recognize that indigenous groups are savvy and they understand that saying no means that the 10 per cent stake they may have been entitled to is 10 per cent of nothing, right? And so there needs to be recognition there.

And, you know, in conversation with the general counsel of a large multinational oil company in the country who, you know, has major operations here in Canada, you know, I'm paraphrasing here, but essentially, her words were, it doesn't matter to me if indigenous groups don't necessarily have a veto in law because they have one in practice. If I go into a space where I don't have consent to operate, I can have my project mired in legal challenges and court proceedings, potentially for decades. And as a result, it is a best practice for this multinational to use the higher standard of obtaining consent.

And, again, I believe that, you know, there's—in our own lives we can think of many examples where there's our legal requirements in terms of our conduct with respect to one another, but then, presumably we hold ourselves to a higher standard in terms of actually having respectful relationships with other peoples.

So I share that analogy in terms of understanding how the legal requirement may be consultation, but in an era of reconciliation, bearing in mind—I see a yellow card from the—Mr. Chair, so I don't know if that means I'm almost getting a red card, or if that merely means one minute. What I'd like to say, that in an era of reconciliation, the higher standard of consent is one which should be shared with industry, is one which should be shared in government training internally and incidents like that.

So I would ask the First Minister whether he would direct his Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen) to incorporate the TRC calls to

action, the principles of the U.N. declaration in this duty to consult framework.

Mr. Pallister: That is my intention.

And I would say the—I'll go back and say, for further clarification, the promises of duty to consult won't mean much in the absence of the detail around that. And so it's important that that detail be addressed—in—I'll go back to my BC example, because the process, there, I understand as something we could possibly benefit from pieces of it, as is often the case.

The process was developed with First Nations leadership in consultation with resource development companies. And, essentially, and I will—and I'm not simplifying for the member, I'm simplifying because of a lack of memory because this is a year ago I read this report. But, basically, it—what it did—what it was designed to do was assist First Nations communities who are, many of which, not exclusively in BC, are overburdened with dealing with the day-to-day stuff they have to deal with, to come up with some answers—some FAQs, as we call them—frequently asked—answers to frequently asked questions so that a resource company who might be interested in coming to our community might be interested in investing in our community, and we ourselves in that community, who are overburdened with all kinds of other challenges, would both have an understanding of how you go about doing this.

This puts meat to the bones of the general statement about duty to consult, so that—duty to consult about what? What specific criteria aspects does—do we have to address clearly together so that we can have answers these questions? So, for example, in BC, some communities were charging the companies that—a company that was interested in exploring possibilities for, I don't know, timber, we'll say, in the lumber industry—charging them a fee to come on to the First Nations community, to even have a dialogue.

Is that acceptable? Is that an acceptable practice, or—would some bands be—going to do that, and others not? And so each community came together in this process and said, well, let's not do that. Let's encourage people to come in, and not put a barrier in front. So they develop uniform practices within all communities so that there was some sense of certainty, so that potential investors, who would like to partner with First Nations communities, were not discouraged in the effort.

This is just one example, but there were many others. And the point being: capital runs away from uncertainty a lot of the time. And, so, because of the lack of clarification around the way in which the dialogue would be held, what questions would each—in the absence of this exercise, each question having a different answer depending on which community you went to, or changing from week to week or month to month because of a change in, maybe, leadership, because of the overarching challenge that many First Nations communities have with elections every two years in a lot of cases, and—there's another pet peeve of mine, many First Nations leaders', too.

These—the initial progress that seems to be happening in British Columbia is giving substance to the term duty to consult. It's helping communities understand what that means, it's helping investors understand what that means.

* (16:20)

And that's the detail work that I'm sure my predecessor, the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), has had advice on from—I expect he has from Ron Evans and others in his mining advisory committee, if I'm using the right term—I hope I am. That this is the kind of progress we need to make to. We'll never have total certainty, I'm sure, but we can aspire to have greater certainty around how we deal with interested investors, how we deal with exploration initiatives, how we deal with industrial development and First Nations communities. There needs to be a renewed and very focused effort building on—building on the work of my predecessor, I believe, to advance the cause of certainty.

So duty to consult has to mean something, and it needs to be spelled out very clearly what that means, and I'm not sure that we've done that to the satisfaction of industry proponents at this point or communities themselves.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): And I appreciate the opportunity to ask a few questions yet this afternoon, and I certainly appreciate the line of questioning my colleague was on, but if I could, I'm going to switch gears just a little bit and go back to something that I'm sure actually the Premier's put some words on the record in this committee in this process probably already, but it's actually more for my benefit to sort of understand the process and just sort of understand the thinking for some of the decisions that have been made thus far.

And the question that I have is with regards to my portfolio as critic for Seniors as well as Health and Active Living. And, of course, the First Minister knows I've asked a few questions in the House with regards to seniors, and it is true that my phone has been very busy as of late with seniors being in touch with me about a number of issues.

Certainly, first and foremost, I think, on their minds, though, has been the seniors tax rebate, and this is a rebate that seniors were sort of making plans with, you know, on the understanding that they were receiving this tax rebate for this year. And, of course, the government has been quite proud of itself in saying that this is a \$44-million savings. I would contend that it's not—I wouldn't use the word savings, maybe, Mr. Chair, but this is what the government is saying.

So my question is just simply, with regards to the rebate, if the First Minister could maybe explain exactly how the rebate operates in the sense that I know on my property tax and the education portion of my property tax I get that bill, I guess, in May or June, and I pay that. But, if the First Minister could maybe just explain what portion of the year that property tax and the education portion of the property tax bill, what portion of the year does that cover?

Mr. Pallister: First of all, I wanted to congratulate the member on his re-election and on his new portfolio. It's not an easy one; there's lots in it, and I wish him the best with it.

But I'm sorry I'm not—I could talk about the issue, but I'm not just a hundred per cent clear on the question on what the member's asking, so I—rather than use up time, I'll just go back to him and ask him.

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate that, and, again, as I said, I'm learning here, so, you know, I'll try to make it as clear as possible to help you understand what I'm trying to ask, and that is simply, I understand we get our tax bill, our bill in the mail for our education portion of our property tax and our property tax in June, but what I'm asking is is what portion of the year or is it a calendar year, is it the fiscal year, what exactly are we paying when we pay that? Are we paying for the 12 months going forward from that date that it's paid, or are we paying a different portion of that? So that's what I'm trying to get at. And, hopefully, that's clear for the First Minister.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I thank the member for that, raising that. So my understanding is it's a calendar

year and the previous rebate numbers—I should repeat them, and then—there was a rebate—I better not guess; I better get the real numbers here. *[interjection]* Yes.

And—anyway, and then of course the government in the run-up to the last election said we're going to quadruple or quintuple it, and we said we didn't think it was a good idea and we're not doing it and we're going to use the—part of the challenge with the old program was that—I'm told, and we can maybe dig up the numbers on this or undertake to get them back to the member. But a number of seniors either didn't apply, who were eligible, because it was an application-driven process, right? It's—you've got to take the initiative yourself to apply for it. So because a number of seniors were eligible to get it and didn't apply, they didn't get it. Secondarily, a number of people applied who weren't eligible for it, so it was a waste of time for them, I guess.

What we're going to do is have Revenue Canada administer it as part of your tax return. So it'll be the case now that it'll be means tested, meaning that—and I'm going to dig up my numbers for me—but I think it's—if you're under \$46,000—we'll find out—you get the whole thing. If you're over 60—some, you don't get any.

So, basically, the—we didn't feel—don't feel that given the very real challenges that we face as a government and as people here in Manitoba that it made sense to do a blanket-entitlement type of rebate model, as was proposed for whatever reasons by the previous administration. So we are having Revenue Canada administer it; we'll save a considerable amount of money, but I would argue, more importantly, and I think for the member, because as I recall, he has a considerable number of seniors in Concordia, more so than the average riding, and many of those would not have got the previous rebate either just because they simply didn't apply, or in some cases because they'd just come here relatively recently. English is a bit of a challenge for them. This is—we found some anecdotal concerns that people weren't applying because it's got a no—you have to have your language skills to apply. So they were not applying. So there was some anecdote and I don't have science to back that up, but I did get complaints when I was in opposition—perhaps the member did in government—that people missed their rebate because they didn't understand about the process.

What I like about what we're doing is that the rebate is going to go to those who need it most. So

that's going to be the seniors who have lower incomes who—not always, because I've—I was raised by somebody who didn't have a lot of money, and she managed. So some of its management, for sure, but often the correlation is between people who have lower income; they have fiscal challenges. So the rebate goes to those who have lower income. It does not go to those who have higher income.

I hope that's helpful.

Mr. Wiebe: I do appreciate the answer, and I think it touched on a few things that I'm cautious about eating up too much of the clock discussing, but, certainly, the idea that it was an optional tax is probably very unique. I don't think there's any other tax rebate that's optional—has been optional in Manitoba, so that if you felt that you, as many seniors did, that they didn't mind paying a little bit extra. They had a little bit extra; they were able to do that. They didn't apply. And, of course, the First Minister knows that it was also capped on property as well to a certain amount.

But I think the—just getting back to the first part of the answer and—the direct answer to my question, which was that it was for the calendar year. And so I'm understanding this is for—in the year that we're in, this is for 2016, as in it starts in January and the portion that you're paying now is actually—despite it being the middle of the year—is actually from January to December in the calendar year of 2016. Am I understanding that correctly?

* (16:30)

Mr. Pallister: So my understanding is the amount for last year has been paid out. the amount for next year will be paid out subject to—and I'll just read into the record because I didn't—I wouldn't want to lead my approximate numbers on the record, so I want to put the real numbers on the record for the members on—will be paid out as a consequence of filing your tax return.

Again the—one could argue well, what if people don't file their tax return, say, I don't know, the former leader of the Liberal Party wasn't sure if she filed hers. So, of course, she's not a senior, so that wouldn't really be relevant in this case. But sometimes if—people who don't file their tax return aren't going to get this rebate. You have to file your tax return. So there would be that.

I appreciate the member's reference; it reminds me—I'm going to put on the record, because I think he'd deserve it. My grandfather worked, like many

Manitobans, he worked hard all his life, and, when my dad took over on the farm, he and my grandmother—my granddad and grandmother moved from our farm southwest of Portage la Prairie into Portage la Prairie. Long story short: he was 65 that year.

And, a year later, my grandmother phones my dad and says, Bill, you've got to come and talk to your dad. Well, what is it, Ma? He's sending back the Old Age Security cheque. And every month that he got it, he'd just counter sign it and put it back in the mail. And my dad had to go and talk to him.

And this is not an isolated story. There's a number of seniors—I've heard this from other people, that their family members did the same thing. So I appreciate the member referencing this. I think it's an indication of an honourable nature, you know. It isn't that he had much money; they had—I think, their lifetime savings was like \$62,000 okay. They had—and they ended up, my grandmother ended up living to 100 years of age, so she kind of needed the money. I don't know if she was anticipating living that long at that point, but Dad went and explained that this was a program to assist and that he had done his part to earn it.

So I really like the member's observation about the caring—I take it as the caring nature of our constituents, frankly, that they would want to support those who need the help the most.

This—the rebate will remain at \$470 for eligible seniors, so we retain it. The difference is—and it's calculated on net school taxes paid after the property tax credit's taken into account. So the rebates going to be reduced by net family income over \$40,000, by a 2 per cent grid. I—it doesn't say on here, but I think that means that you would not get a rebate—it doesn't say on here, but I think it was 60. It's discounted after 40, so it starts to go down. When you get to 64, or something—I don't see it. It's around 60,000; you wouldn't get it after that. So, if you have an income higher than \$60,000, you don't get it. I'm sorry, \$63,500; it's right on here. It's just bad eyes—\$63,500, beyond that you wouldn't get it. Now, but below 40, you get the full rebate. And so that's how the model will work.

I would argue, given the challenges that we're faced with as a province and the members—and I say this without a hint of partisanship, we have monumental challenges with delivery of health care. We know that our ambulance fees are the highest in Canada, and it's a deterrent to people to use the

ambulance. We know that our wait times—the member's from Concordia, why am I telling him—our wait times for emergent care and for many procedures are very long, oppressively long. These are significant issues.

We have an aging population. We need PCH beds; we need to invest in those. These are major items that are priorities for our senior population. This—I assure the member that—and I know that he knows—seniors are asking about health care. In my experience, they're asking about health care issues more than any other issues frankly. These are key issues for us to address. This—the rebate that—the proposal to multiply it to by four or five times, I forget the exact number, to—the proposal the previous administration to multiply. I don't see it on here, doesn't matter; was—I don't think was well-thought-out and I don't think is logically supportable, frankly, in the best interests of Manitobans, especially when one considers that the government was, at the time it made that promise, projecting a deficit well over \$600 million already and had already been warned with a warning from monitoring agencies and then a credit rating downgrade to get its fiscal management practices strengthened. This was a risky and dangerous proposition to make this promise, not supportable by the reality of the situation.

Mr. Wiebe: So maybe I'll just, to get us back on track here, I'll cut to the chase of what I'm trying to ask here, because I'm, again, I'm starting to understand a little bit more about the way that the tax credit had been administered or had been delivered and how the amount owing, what period that is for. So I think I've got that part understood.

What I'm trying to ask here is, is that, for seniors, you know, starting January 1st, we—there was still—we were still under the previous administration, and under the previous administration there had been an announcement and a deal cut with seniors that they would, for the calendar year of 2016, not pay any property tax whatsoever up to a certain limit. And that was the deal that was struck and was—the message was delivered to seniors. And so for the first six months of this year, that had been the case in Manitoba.

Now, when this government came in and were looking for ways to cut, they—this was certainly one of the programs that they saw as a priority to cut, and I can appreciate that's the First Minister's position.

But what I'm trying to understand is, is that for six months where that money had been accumulated, so now seniors actually hadn't gotten the cheque yet, but for all intents and purposes, the government had been putting aside money for a rebate for six months to be delivered to seniors once they applied and then they would get not only that six months but they would get the additional six months going forward. They would get one year worth of rebate on that tax bill. But for six months that had been the case in Manitoba.

So my question is, how much money had accumulated in that first six months for seniors? And, I guess, as a further to that, what happened to the money? Is that what we're seeing in the budget as the savings, the 44 million? Or is the 44 million the savings that's going to happen going forward because it won't be delivered going forward?

Mr. Pallister: Could I just get the member to clarify, when he says six months, I'm just not clear what the six months refers to?

Mr. Wiebe: So once again, the education portion of your property tax is a bit unique in terms of taxes that you pay. Most taxes, they are for the year. You pay them throughout the year and then at tax time you sort of balance the ledger.

When it comes to property tax and the education portion of your property tax, that's done in July, June-July. People get their tax bill and they pay it and that's the education portion and your property tax. You pay that in the middle of the year.

But what you're doing is you're actually paying for the six months previous and the six months going forward. You're paying for the calendar year 2016 but you just happen to be paying it in the middle of the year.

So, when we're talking about rebates, it's the same thing. You are getting your rebate in the middle of the year but you're actually getting that rebate for the previous six months and the six months going forward.

So my question is: Is that money that had accumulated, how much money had accumulated for seniors? What exactly would they be entitled to? And is that the \$44 million that the government is now claiming as savings in the budget? Or are they talking about an ongoing savings that will begin starting presumably when they brought in their budget?

*(16:40)

Mr. Pallister: It's good, okay, good. Okay, first of all, the answer to how much money was set aside.

Well, you have to understand that the government was put out a statement in March of this year saying they were going to run about a \$666-million deficit. They had projected 400 and some a few months before. They were up to 666. They left out—they included in that 666 over \$200 million of savings that they said they would generate, which represented about 1.7 per cent of total spending. No savings ever—we have no evidence of any savings materializing.

So what you're talking about is an election promise. It's an election promise. It was an election promise. All right? How valid would—the member asked, was money set aside. No, actually. Ten million dollars virtually every working day during the previous fiscal year, more than the government projected to spend was being spent.

We now know that we have a deficit that we'll know the exact, you know, chapter and verse when the Public Accounts come out in September, but our best research from the Treasury Board and Finance officials tells us in the area of a billion dollars.

So the member asks a question about money being set aside by the government. The government was spending money in many other areas well beyond what it budgeted, and making literally dozens of other spending promises in the run up to the election and during the election which were not sustainable, not feasible, not realistic, and this was one of them.

So, when the member talks about seniors not getting something they were promised, this is what his campaign team put together as a promise. This was a promise his government made, like many other promises. Many of them not promises that people believed, quite frankly, and many of them not promises that should have been kept and won't be addressed effectively.

Frankly, in the protection of seniors, I think the key issue that I would like to give the member is this: there's a real benefit to his constituents and seniors all across Manitoba with the new system that we're going to. The benefit not only in terms of the seniors who are in that lower income category getting the full rebate, but also for any of his constituents—any constituent who did not for whatever reason apply

for the rebate in past years. If they file their tax return this year, they will not only be able to get the—should they be eligible based on income—they will not only be able to get their full rebate for this year, as was the program last year, but they will also be able to go back and apply for last year or the year before or the year before that. So they will actually be able—correct?—to get three—go back three years, that the Canada Revenue rules? They will be able to go back and get up to three years of rebate if they—if under the previous tax returns filed they were eligible for the rebate and did not get it. So it increases that possibility which for many, unfortunately—[interjection]

Anyway, for a considerable number of Manitoba seniors this is very relevant because they will be able to apply under the tax—under Revenue Canada's rules they'll be able to collect their rebate for back to three years.

Mr. Wiebe: I mean, just to clarify, I think maybe that's the information the First Minister was getting as well, but that's obviously only going forward, because to this point Revenue Canada hasn't been collecting—this hasn't been a Revenue Canada applied tax. So it actually—they would be able to, in three years, go back three years to this year. But they're not able to go back to a provincially administered and delivered rebate. But just for a clarification, I think he's giving that same information now.

And just to sort of finish off this line of questioning, and I could certainly go on, and I may at another time, but I see time is getting short.

When the Premier (Mr. Pallister) talks about an election commitment, he is right. This was an election commitment. It was an election commitment in 2011, and, you know, the First Minister will know that we knocked on every door as his members like to—or did like to do in the House and remind us of. And we talked to every single senior and we said we were going to eliminate the education portion of your property tax in 2011, and we delivered on that promise. We delivered on that promise in 2016 where the entire amount was removed from the property tax of seniors, up to a certain limit.

So, when he talks about this as an election commitment, it was already an election commitment that was under way and was fulfilled. And so I want to be very clear in his answers; when the First Minister talks about seniors still being eligible for the rebate, they are now only eligible for a portion of

the rebate because in its final year, in 2016, it had been applied in its full amount.

And, when he talks about this being a pressure on the budget, you know, absolutely. This was one of the items that was listed in the budget, but in the budget for 2015-16. And, what we're talking about here, today, is budget 2016-17. So, when I talk about the money that's accumulated, that's because that was up to the end of the fiscal year 2016. And what I'm—or, fiscal year—up to the end of this current fiscal—or, the previous fiscal year.

So what I'm asking the First Minister is is that Manitobans understood they were getting the money. This was part of last year's budget, and the money had, for all intents and purposes—I understand that it doesn't physically accumulate somewhere—but, for all intents and purposes, this was money that seniors were counting on, that if they had written a cheque two months earlier, would have come to their mail box. And it would have been only a portion, but it would have been the portion that they had come to expect. And, now we're seeing that the money is gone retroactively. It is not just a policy going forward that the First Minister has brought in—this government has brought in. It is, in fact, a retroactive tax increase to the beginning of this calendar year.

And so those cheques were taken out of the mailboxes of seniors. And those seniors now don't have that money that, by all accounts, had been accounted for. They don't have that money. So this is money out of their pockets.

My question is simple, I'm asking: Is that the \$44 million in savings that, in a government press release, we saw, or is the \$44 million in savings the money that's going to be saved going forward? And if it is the money that's going forward, what happened to the money from the last fiscal year, from the last budget? And why aren't seniors entitled to that? Why did the Premier see it fit to claw back that money?

Mr. Pallister: Okay, the member is wrong on a number of fronts on his preamble.

First of all, there were no cheques in the mail. Secondly, it isn't—wasn't promised last year; it was promised for this coming year by a government that made a number of promises.

Now, the member is saying: why didn't we keep their promises when they made them? They didn't keep them, either. I'm—I was elected, and my colleagues were elected not on promises to keep

NDP—not on a commitment to keep NDP promises. We never promised to jack up this rebate the way that the desperate government did. We didn't believe that that was necessary or smart. Instead, we ran on a very clearly delineated platform that offered to spend about \$1 for every \$6 that the NDP promised to spend and, actually, outlined where we would find some of the savings to address that. And we have tried to be clear on where those savings are.

The member is talking about seniors planning to get a rebate. He'd have to realize that the degree of trust of Manitoba seniors of the government that made these promises is not very high. The member talks about walking and knocking; seniors know that the previous—the members elected in 2011 from the NDP came to their seniors homes—or their residence—and promised them they wouldn't raise their taxes for five years. They ran on that. Then, within weeks, they raised their taxes. They raised their dividend tax if they were lucky enough to have some savings to be the highest, I'm told by my accountant, in Canada. They raised the taxes on their wine and beer, if they are so inclined, considerably. They introduced a car tax—a fee for every vehicle in the province that had to be paid. Each of these was a new tax, not just on seniors, but it did impact on all the seniors.

* (16:50)

So the member's saying, why didn't we keep the promises the NDP made, because everybody was counting on them keeping their promises. But no one was—I don't know if I talked to too many people who actually took those promises that the former government made with any seriousness. I don't know how much credibility those promises actually had.

I guess the member might like to think that the promises had some weight with people, but too many people had to pay PST on their home insurance after the Province added home insurance to the PST in '13, including a lot of seniors whose doors they knocked on, for them to actually have much credibility that they—when they promised they weren't going to raise their taxes, they went ahead and did it anyway. So the seniors don't—I don't think most Manitobans believed these promises, so I don't know how much credibility they actually have. That'd be a hard thing to measure except maybe if you look at the results of the election. Then you could maybe get an indication.

On the quality of the promises, they lacked integrity, because the government made a lot of promises in the previous election, broke most of

them, and didn't keep those. So, in this election, I don't think that our new government should be held to account for not keeping those promises, because I don't think most Manitobans thought they were serious anyway.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): Sorry, I'm not sure of the process. So I don't know if it's my turn to go, but it is the last couple minutes.

I just had a question. Bell is buying MTS. I'm not sure who the architects of that deal are, but you stated that this will benefit all Manitobans. And I foresee a lot of economic benefit spinoffs in—if we do get the services up North. We could have our own call centres up north as opposed to outsourcing data mining, intellectual knowledge, you know. There's a whole bunch of companies that we can create to develop our North, because the old way of thinking—mines and, you know, going after our resources—haven't proven very valuable to indigenous people. And so I know I can say firmly that until the deals are worked out so that they benefit the indigenous people, the indigenous people are still going to say no to these kinds of economic opportunities that perhaps you guys are looking at.

But—so my question is, I want to know if there are any firm commitments to provide Internet access to residents north of the 52nd parallel and south of the 58th. You know, not specifically just for Highway 75.

Mr. Pallister: I really appreciate the member's questions, and I—there's—I've got a note here. I can read some of it. But I just want to say, first of all, congratulations to her on her election. I know she worked really, really hard. I heard from a lot of my friends in her riding that she was everywhere and most places more than once. So good for her, because it's a big, beautiful riding and it's very, very challenging to get around that riding.

I tried—I've tried and I'm going to continue to try to reach out, because I think people in your riding, through you, Mr. Chair, as is the case with Flin Flon, I think sometimes feel very separate from what goes on here because of the nature of the distances. It's a long way. And it's a long way for members, too, to get back to their constituencies. And I wanted to say also to the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey), my congratulations to him, too, because I know he worked very hard. And it's not easy to represent northern and rural ridings. It's a lot of—it takes a big commitment, and it takes a tremendous amount of time, and it can wear on a family life, too, and the

stresses on friendships and with family. So I encourage the members in their representation of these areas.

I have real optimism about northern Manitoba. I like to say the Golden Boy faces north for a reason. I think there is some real potential for us, in a number of ways, to work together to see better—not just economic opportunities, but that is a big part of it. I think for many, many people in the communities, as the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) said earlier, it's not a lack of will to work; it's a lack of opportunity in too many cases.

Communications infrastructure is really critical. Virtually, every jurisdiction around the world, with the exceptions of possibly Cuba and Saskatchewan, has private sector telecommunications delivery mechanisms in place. Part of that was due to the deregulation that occurred under the federal government in the mid-'90s. That basically meant that if you were trying to run a monopoly telco, you were going to be—well, you were put in a position where you had to take hundreds of millions or billions of dollars and invest in it, in the telco or health care, because there's only so many dollars to go around. Most jurisdictions moved to the private sector model for that type of business, and it's had the effect in most areas of improving service. There are gaps, though, in the service, and what can happen as a result in Manitoba of an improved critical mass where we get a larger firm because MTS is basically one of the smallest telcos in the world.

So there are only so many dollars to invest, only so many dollars to invest in improving northern service quality, for example. With a better critical mass, there's the opportunity for expanded service. I will continue to urge these private sector companies, once merged—and there's a process—assuming that the Competition Bureau, the CRTC say—nod okay, this is good, it goes ahead. It's very important that we see improvements in service. I know that for a lot of our urban dwellers, the service improvements they care most about will be a faster network. The faster network—Bell's network is much faster than MTS. It's—MTS technology is older. Bell broadband home Internet plan is 20 times faster than MTS. So, for an urban dweller or somebody who has access to an existing Bell delivery system, this is something they will benefit from—existing MTS delivery system, I'm sorry—once the merger occurs.

Next generation voice over IP linking Canadian businesses to sites all over the country. If you're into

TV—I'm not too much, but I like reading books instead. But a lot of people are into TV. You can get 400 channels under the Bell system from your smart phone or tablet anywhere in the world. You can while away your hours on TV. You can watch PVR'd shows on your smart phone or your tablet. These are things Manitobans haven't benefited from, Manitoba customers haven't benefited from, some of which I tell my daughters are more a distraction than a benefit nonetheless, so.

He's going to cut me off. I'm just going to say a lot of these things don't matter to too many Manitobans who are outside of those service zones. They're not getting the service now, and I think improved—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable First Minister's time has expired.

The honourable member for Keewatinook has another question?

Ms. Klassen: I think I cut him off. I'm not sure. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable First Minister.

Mr. Pallister: I just want to say I know for the members because of the areas they represent they—for some of their constituents they don't care about the speed. They'd just like to have Internet, okay? And for a lot of them, they don't care about the movies. They'd just like to be able to connect to the world. And so it's—there's extreme disparities in the access to services. This is an issue that, where I come from in an isolated part of rural Manitoba, it's—I'm very sympathetic to, let's just put it that way.

What the—this first initial announcement was about improving access with new towers down 75. You know, that's very important because that is a major transportation route, right? And so for truckers, for people who live in that area, it's a tremendous advantage to them. For people who are—one lady said to me she had an accident and she couldn't get cell reception in the ditch in the middle of winter. This is a—these are safety issues too. I'd like to see better services in the North. It's an area I'll continue to push for.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

JUSTICE

* (14:50)

Madam Chairperson (Colleen Mayer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order?

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume considerations of the Estimates of the Department of Justice. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Does the minister have an idea of how often people are purposefully trying to be incarcerated for reasons such as food and shelter, especially in the winter?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I thank the member for the question. I think it's difficult to know all the reasoning behind why some of the people are taken into custody, but, you know, so I'm not quite sure how to answer that. Or maybe the member could provide a little bit more background information as to what she's referring to.

Ms. Lamoureux: We often hear of stories where, for example, homeless people are freezing at night, so they purposely try and get arrested so they can be incarcerated, even if it's just overnight.

What is—do you have an idea of the percentage of people who are taking advantage of this?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's very difficult to know why people, you know, end up doing the things that they do and breaking the law in these circumstances. Of course, we do know that there's issues with mental health, certainly within the homeless population, and addictions issues. But I don't think we can specifically say, you know, that there's a specific reason that they try and break the law because they're hungry, they're homeless and they're looking for a place to go.

I know that there are some wonderful places to go for those people who are looking for food and shelter; the Siloam Mission, of course, is one. There's many organizations that are there and wonderful organizations that are there to help those people—homeless people—and it's certainly a very serious situation and we take that very seriously, but I think it's difficult to say specifically when people are taken into custody what the—what precipitated them to do—to commit the crime, I guess, in the first place.

Ms. Lamoureux: Do you feel that this is a problem, though, that people are purposefully getting in trouble with the law to have a place?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think what we're talking about here is a much larger issue, which is, you know, the homelessness and also addictions. Mental illness is a big issue; I know it's something that we are undertaking looking into and finding ways to improve the results and improve the lives of individuals who are suffering from those illnesses. But, again, I think it's very difficult to say, at this stage, that those are the reasons why people are—I'm not sure what, you know, I think, you know, why people commit the crimes that they do.

Ms. Lamoureux: Not to linger on it too much—just one final question. Is this government planning on addressing this issue any differently than the previous government has?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think, you know, certainly in the area of homelessness, mental health issues, I know that the minister is looking into that, and we're trying to make some improvements there. We'll be working with stakeholders in the communities to try and develop ways that we can yield better results in this area. So perhaps it's, you know, maybe something that would be better asked in—of the Department of Health, and as well from the poverty-reduction strategy, the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding) may have something further to add in those areas.

But I know, certainly, our government is—takes these issues very seriously, and we are developing some strategies through consultation with people within the communities. And certainly I welcome, you know, the member, if she has some ideas of her own or if she's met with groups and organizations that she thinks we should meet with about this and how we could make—you know, deal with issues of 'poverty' and mental illness and addictions, how we can help and improve those—the results and the lives for those individuals suffering from those illnesses.

Ms. Lamoureux: So you personally do not feel it's necessarily a justice issue; it's more of a homeless and poverty?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. It's an all-of-government issue. I mean, I think that it's—one of the things that we've done within our government is, you know, we down sized the number of ministers, but, you know, and, in doing so, we've tried to break down some of the barriers between government departments. I work

very closely with the Minister of Health on many issues. I work closely with the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding), the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke) as well and other ministers as well. We—you know, we have tried to develop ways to break down those silos and to work together towards a common goal, which is to provide better results in these areas, to provide those programs that are needed to yield the better results to help some of these people through their areas of addictions and mental health issues.

Ms. Lamoureux: Yesterday, you spoke about how you have met with 20-plus organizations and groups pertaining to restorative approaches for both youth and adults. I can certainly appreciate the work that you've been doing, but I would like a clearer answer to what have you been—what you've been hearing from these groups. For example, are there new approaches? What are these organizations hoping to achieve? What seems to be the main priority? Overall, what have you achieved from these meetings?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, and just to clarify as well. I mean, I, myself, have not necessarily met with each and every one of them at this stage, but I know the department has been in discussions with the groups and organizations, and so just to be clear from that perspective. And I know the department works really hard, on an ongoing basis, and certainly through a transition period between the previous government and our government. So I just wanted to clarify that to the member, and perhaps she could ask her question again.

Ms. Lamoureux: I appreciate you clarifying that. I did assume that in all fairness.

My question was: What do you feel that you have achieved, then, from these meetings, even it wasn't you personally attending them, what your staff are bringing back to you, what have you learned thus far?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the member for the question.

And, certainly, we have met, again, with many groups and organizations. We will continue to do so.

There—we have taken a more of a collaborative approach to how we develop solutions to various problems that we face as a society. And, you know, the department has undertaken that as part of our open government initiative and just trying to be more

inclusive of those members of society, those groups and organizations that we have mentioned.

Those are ongoing discussions that we're having. There's constantly—we're trying to develop solutions to problems through a collaborative approach. So that's the type of discussion that's taking place to ensure that we improve results for people.

Ms. Lamoureux: I'm going to go back and talk about youth justice committees a little bit. We spoke about it yesterday.

I submitted a FIPPA a while back and received confirmation that there are 37 active youth justice committees operating here in Manitoba, but not one of them are in the city of Winnipeg.

Why aren't there any in Winnipeg?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, it is an important question, and I thank the member for asking it.

In the city of Winnipeg, things are handled a little differently under the diversion program. So, if a youth comes in with a specific problem, they'll be diverted to a various program that's set up within a various, you know, initiative that they're trying to help, whether it's through arson or what have you.

They—that youth would be diverted to—and there's a whole host of programs that are available, so it's sort of a one-stop shop for someone who is suffering from some problems, needs some help and is diverted through that program, through the diversion program into one of those programs to better help and try and help them through some of their issues.

Ms. Lamoureux: Do you believe that there should be the traditional youth justice committees here in the city of Winnipeg?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think the really important thing is that youth are getting the services that they need. And so I think that this is an effective way of dealing with some of the issues that youth are facing, some of the problems that they're facing within our city.

But I always think that, you know, there could be better—better ways of doing things. And, certainly, we continue to review programs. We continue to try and develop ways that we can better deliver those services to the youth that need it. So we'll continue to do that work.

* (15:00)

Ms. Lamoureux: So the government is still open to opening youth justice committees in the city of Winnipeg?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, again, we're not opposed to any ideas that people want to bring forward in terms of how we can better deliver services to those youth who are needing the services.

Ms. Lamoureux: Are there any Winnipeg youth using the youth justice programs outside of the city?

Mrs. Stefanson: Just to clarify, does the member mean if there—are there youth inside the city using youth justice programs outside the city?

Ms. Lamoureux: I suppose so. If a youth who lives inside of Winnipeg, resides here, commits a crime and is brought out to Selkirk, for example, to go through a youth justice committee.

Mrs. Stefanson: No, typically if they're charged in Winnipeg, they would be dealt with through the diversion programs within the city of Winnipeg.

Ms. Lamoureux: Is there a noticeable difference with youth who are charged outside of the city going through a youth justice committee compared to youth who are charged inside of the city going through a diversion program?

Mrs. Stefanson: We're not aware of any measureable differences.

Ms. Lamoureux: Has this been measured in any way?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, there is a measurement, actually, of—through the diversion programs, the number of diversions that are successfully completed within the diversion programs. So that is measured in that way, and in a similar fashion, matters referred to the youth justice programs outside the city are measured in a similar fashion.

Ms. Lamoureux: At this point, I understand you're still consulting. But you must have an idea as to what this government is going to do differently to ensure that our youth justice committees outside of the city and our diversion programs within the city don't fall through the cracks they—the way they did with the past government.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I think it's a very good question and, again, it—you know, it's been—and not to go back to this and belabour it, but it's been seven weeks. And I know, certainly, we will try and find ways to improve the system in any way we can and through working in a collaborative

approach with various groups and stakeholders within the community—and the communities not just in Winnipeg, but outside Winnipeg and all around Manitoba.

It's important that we're protecting youth, that we're offering them the programs that they need in order to be better citizens and to survive in various communities.

So I want to thank the member for that, and, certainly, that is our approach and that is our plan.

Ms. Lamoureux: This will be my last question, but I'm just looking for more specifics.

It's very—I want more detail as to what the actual plan is.

Mrs. Stefanson: I would say that plan is in development at this stage in terms of how we're going to go about doing things.

I don't believe that I have, you know, all of the answers on how we can best approach this, but I think that, if we get to—if we gather a group of stakeholders within the communities to see, you know—because they know—they're the front lines, they know best how—what is working, what's not working, and how we can make and improve our system. So that's why we need to kind of do that consultation process.

I know the member wants an answer like here's the specifics right now, but I think that those specifics are in development, I think, at this stage. And there is ongoing development and ongoing consultations, but the ultimate goal here, if that's what the member's looking for, is, obviously, to find improvements for those youth that are entering the system.

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I'll retake the floor, but before I do that, I believe that the minister has some items she wants to put on the record from a previous day's Estimates.

Mrs. Stefanson: The member for Minto had asked, in one of our previous sessions, how many of the 734 RCMP positions that the Province currently funds are vacant. The complement for the RCMP Provincial Police Service Agreement will increase by two members to 734 once the budget for 2016 and '17 is approved and passed. So, based on an approved complement of 732 members on June 1st, 2016, there were 57.5 vacancies due to attrition and transfers.

As the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) noted, the total number of RCMP PPSA members on strength on a given day will fluctuate regularly.

The member for Minto also asked for a list of names of those communities involved in the First-in the FNSOP. I will endeavour just to give you a copy of that. I won't read through them all at this stage. But we will just get you a copy of that list.

The member had also asked how many operations the PSIU was involved in for 2015-16. In 2015-16, the Public Safety Investigations unit, or PSIU—I'm getting to know these acronyms—received 362 complaints under The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act, involving 339 operations act. A total of 103 operations were shut down by way of a notice to vacate, warning letter or verbal warning. The majority of these operations were drug related.

Fifty-nine complaints involving 55 operations were carried forward to 2016-2017. The remaining complaints were closed for various reasons, including insufficient evidence, occupant—the occupant moved prior to completion of an investigation, activity seized, or the operation was closed by another agency such as police.

* (15:10)

The member also asked the number of times the PSIU has enforced The Fortified Building Act in 2015-16. In the same year, the Public Safety Investigations unit opened eight files pursuant to The Fortified Buildings Act. Four files were consent inspected and owners voluntarily removed fortifications. One file had fortifications removed prior to inspection. In two files, fortifications were observed, but removal was enforced by another agencies. There is one ongoing investigation for a file opened in 2015-16.

The member also asked how many of the civilian—how many of the—how many civilian monitors there are and how many of the current civilian monitors pool, identify as indigenous people. The Manitoba Police Commission is responsible for co-ordination of the Civilian Monitor Program. The commission has trained six civilian monitors and has assigned civilian monitors to monitor the progress of eight Independent Investigation Unit investigations. One of the civilian monitors has self-declared as First Nations. Given the complement of civilian monitors, that's equal to 17 per cent who are indigenous.

The member also asked for a breakdown of staff vacancies for administration and correctional centres. In the Brandon Correctional Centre vacancies are the full-time—for the full-time equivalent position is 1.5. In the Dauphin Correctional Centre there's zero. In the Women's Correctional Centre, 5.5; in Milner Ridge Correctional Centre, 12.3; The Pas Correctional Centre, 1.3; the Winnipeg Remand Centre, 2.2; Headingley Correctional Centre, 11.4; Manitoba Youth Centre, 7; Agassiz Youth Centre, 11.5—for a total of 52.7.

The member, on Friday, I believe, asked the number of Aboriginal staff working in Community Corrections. Currently the department has 95 staff that work in Community Corrections, 32 per cent of Community Corrections staff that have self-declared as Aboriginal status under employment equity. Of these 95 staff, 28 are males, or 29.5 per cent, and 67 are females, or 70.5 per cent.

The member also asked for the current number of staff vacancies for Community Corrections workers. For the—[interjection]

Winnipeg, adult, there is one vacancy; Fine Option, one vacancy; Westman, two vacancies; Centralized First Nations Unit, 5.4; Interlake, 1; Thompson, 1.5; Gang Response and Suppression Plan, 1; auto theft, 2; intensive support supervision program, 2.6; and for Community Corrections administration, Restorative Resolutions, 10. Midland, Eastman, Parkland, The Pas, Criminal Organization High Risk Offender Unit, Winnipeg region youth and gang prevention youth all have zero vacancies.

The member also asked the bunking details for the Headingley inmates. Currently, the detail is as follows; this is as of June 10th: a single cell, 159 inmates; double bunked, meaning two inmates in a cell is 280; triple bunked, three inmates in a cell, is 24; and the dormitory count is 338.

So—and the member—

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mrs. Stefanson: Oh, sorry. Thank you, Madam Chairperson. The member also asked a question on outstanding inquests and recommendations and the Manitoba Youth Centre related to two female suicides. There is one recommendation outstanding. In Headingley Correctional Centre, the Donald inquest, there is one outstanding recommendation. Brandon Correctional Centre, the Roberta Daniels

inquest, there's six out of 38 recommendations are outstanding.

The member also asked for some information about reports for Block by Block as well. And so I'm pleased to table that information for the member today.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister and, of course, thank her staff for pulling information together. That is helpful to keep us moving along.

Last day, when we broke, I believe the minister's staff were working with her to answer a question about federal funding to assist the victims of sexual exploitation. And the question was whether—how much of the \$20 million promised by the federal government was finding its way to Manitoba and whether any of that money was coming through the provincial government.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. We're not positive how much of the federal money is coming to Manitoba, but it won't come through the Department of Justice. It'll go directly to the organizations.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that.

One other item before we leave the area of community justice. I see that Protective Services has now moved into the Justice portfolio. And, as I understand, that's primarily providing security within the Legislative Building and also security to Cabinet ministers, other members of government, dignitaries and others that come into Manitoba. So the minister—you just confirm there's no increase, no major changes, in the way that's being funded this fiscal year as opposed to last fiscal year.

Mrs. Stefanson: No, there's no changes in funding.

Mr. Swan: Now, I understand from the minister's—the mandate letter she received from the Premier (Mr. Pallister) that one of the tasks she's supposed to take on is transferring control of the Legislative Building but also the Legislative grounds from what was the Department of Infrastructure to the Speaker's Office.

Could the minister kind of walk through how she sees that working, and is that something she expects will happen in this fiscal year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I want to thank the member for the question, and, again, we're sort of working through our mandate letters as to how we're going to—and developing a plan as to how we'll tackle each one of those parts of it. So that is something I will

undertake to bring forward and have discussions with my staff about how we do that and beyond, just to get ideas from other members as well as to how we can go about doing that in the most efficient and effective way.

* (15:20)

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that.

And I'm prepared to move on to Criminal Law, and I would like to ask a few questions about Crown attorneys in Manitoba through the Manitoba Prosecution Service, and I'm looking at page 29 of the Estimates book. I see that there is a footnote to the appropriations for Manitoba Prosecution Service saying that the increases are largely due to the annualization of 17 full-time equivalent positions previously approved during 2015-16 and 14 full-time positions approved during 2014-15.

The minister may be aware—or may be aware very soon—that there was an initiative to increase the number of Crown attorneys to deal with workload. Is it the minister's position that all increases in the Prosecution Service called for have now been completed and taken care of?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, that has all been completed.

Mr. Swan: I see from the Estimates the minister doesn't intend to increase the number of FTEs within the Prosecution Service in this fiscal year.

Mrs. Stefanson: Not at this time.

Mr. Swan: I'm not sure if the minister was able to attend the Call to the Bar ceremony just a couple of weeks ago.

I'd like to ask the minister: How many articling students did the Prosecution Service have in the year that would have just graduated, and how many articling students is Prosecution Service taking on for the upcoming year?

Mrs. Stefanson: So I, unfortunately, was not able to attend that ceremony, and I was, yes, I was called for other duties at the time, but I look forward to attending those ceremonies in the future, and I just want to congratulate all those who got their Call to the Bar; it's a big day for people. And so, just to answer the member's question, seven were called to the bar and six were offered positions.

Mr. Swan: And has the—has Prosecution Service—is it taking on another seven articling students in the year upcoming?

Mrs. Stefanson: There's actually eight for this year.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that.

I see there's 312.3 FTEs within the Prosecution Service. I'd like the minister to speak to her department and obtain the number of vacancies in the Prosecution Service, and I ask that be broken down by location. Of course, most Crown attorneys are in Winnipeg but I know there's also Crown attorneys in Portage, Brandon, Dauphin, The Pas, Thompson and anywhere else they may happen to be.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, we'll endeavour to get that information to the minister—I mean to the member; sorry, get used to this.

Mr. Swan: We have to eventually, I guess.

In the past, attracting and retaining Crown attorneys in some of the regional centres, particularly Thompson, has been a challenge.

Does the minister have any particular plan to deal with trying to retain counsel and build up more seniority in the Crown's office in the city of Thompson?

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member for asking that. My plan is—actually I do have a trip planned to Thompson very shortly to meet with the groups and organizations up there and see what, you know, and speak with them and try and understand some of the concerns there. So at this stage—I'm just reaching out at this stage and I want to try and understand what some of the issues and concerns are there.

Mr. Swan: If you can find a couple of lawyers who want to work there and pack them on the plane, you'd be very popular in the North.

I understand that as part of the restorative justice initiative, which we'll be discussing in more detail, there is a new unit that's been created within Prosecution Service to review incoming files, to see if there are additional cases that can be diverted.

I'd like to ask the minister how many Crown attorneys are presently involved in this initiative and how many Crown attorneys do we hope will be part of this initiative once it's running at full speed.

Mrs. Stefanson: The minister is—oh, sorry—the member is referring to the ICAP program, the intensive case assessment process, and currently there are 12 Crowns, including two community prosecutors. Right now there has been an expansion

into the areas for precharge with respect to breaches of court orders, and then expansion overall is—beyond that is under review just to see where the resources are most needed.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that. In an answer to a question from the member for Burrows (Ms. Lamoureux), the minister did say that there are statistics kept of how many cases have been diverted to a youth justice committee or an adult justice committee, or whatever we want to call the various committees around the province that are doing this work.

Maybe to get a baseline I'd like to ask the minister: For the last fiscal year, how many cases does the Prosecution Service say were diverted to alternative measures?

* (15:30)

Mrs. Stefanson: So, just to clarify, like, how many were diverted, or how many went through the whole system?

Mr. Swan: Really what's useful is how many cases in this system were diverted to a justice committee or some restorative process, because we know there's no guarantees the restorative processes is successful. I'd like to know at least how many cases were tried.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, we do have those numbers, but unfortunately, we don't have them today. So I can certainly endeavour to get those to you—or to the member. Sorry.

Mr. Swan: I appreciate that. And I am hopeful that with this unit within prosecution service and hopefully with more support for restorative justice, that we can talk about a bit later, we will see an increase in the amount of cases that are diverted.

Does the minister plan to make any public reporting of how many additional cases are set for diversion, or will we have to have this conversation once a year, or maybe in other ways?

Mrs. Stefanson: We're just in discussions about that, and we'll come up with some sort of a policy moving forward.

Mr. Swan: That's fine. With respect to the 12 Crown attorneys working in this unit, does this unit—are they able to divert cases—it may be proceeding in provincial court in First Nations across Manitoba, or is it only in the larger centres?

Mrs. Stefanson: Right now it's just in Winnipeg, but we're looking at ways of expanding that into other communities.

Mr. Swan: All right. Is there anything in the Estimates that I appreciate the Manitoba Prosecution Service. Is there anything in the Estimates that include additional money for expanding restorative justice?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I want to thank the member for the question that—just at this stage we're in—for the consultation stage about how we're going to go about moving forward. So the only monies that have been expanded at this stage, and I'll refer to the—member to page 35—and we had discussions about this previously.

But the—if you look at the total sum appropriation—the increase from 2 million 545 to 2 million 807—and that is for the John Howard society and the Manitoba Metis Federation expansion, and restorative justice initiatives.

Mr. Swan: I know we talked about the John Howard Society. I don't think we talked about the Manitoba Metis Federation.

Can the minister just give some explanation as to the increase in support for that organization, and does it deal with the North or is it the entire province?

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mrs. Stefanson: The increase for the Manitoba Metis Federation to expand—is to expand reintegrative programming in Thompson and in Winnipeg, and those are primarily domestic violence for in Thompson.

Mr. Swan: All right, I thank the minister for that.

So the increase in funding to the John Howard Society and then this increase in funding to the MMF is the only additional expenditure of this government on restorative justice for this fiscal year, is that fair?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Swan: Within Prosecution Services, I know there are a number of different units that have been set up to give prosecutors more expertise. There's the Criminal Organization, High Risk Offender Unit, COHROU; there's the Gang Prosecutions Unit.

Does the minister plan any change in this fiscal year to how those units are staffed or operated?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, there's no plan at this stage to make any changes there.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that answer.

Victim Services chairs the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, which, as I know the minister is aware, was created a couple of years ago to bring together people with some expertise to review domestic violence deaths.

Are there any outstanding items from past domestic violence death reviews that are yet to be implemented? And will they be implemented in this fiscal year?

Mrs. Stefanson: There have been steps taken to implement all of the recommendations.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister.

So is the minister saying that that work is now complete for the past committee reports? Or is there still work to be done?

Mrs. Stefanson: The work is ongoing. There's still some work that needs to be done. But there are steps that have been taken to implement all the recommendations.

Mr. Swan: Could the minister, through the department, provide me with a list of the work that the department says is still ongoing to implement reports of those past death review committees?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, we can undertake to get that information to the member.

Mr. Swan: And the practice has been for the committee to issue one report per year.

Does the minister plan any changes in that or any changes in the way that the committee does its work?

* (15:40)

Mrs. Stefanson: No changes are contemplated at this stage, no.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that.

The subappropriation numbers on page 31 in the Estimates book talk about an increase to be recovered from the Victims Assistance Fund to convert some previous extended FTEs and to fund 2.5 regular FTEs. Am I correct, does that Victims Assistance Fund money coming from surcharges on fines in our criminal courts?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Swan: I thank the member for that—the minister for that.

In this current year, does Victim Services plan to expand the coverage they provide to Manitobans for any new criminal offences that may have occurred? And what I mean by this is, in the past, there have been changes to legislation that have included new crimes for the purpose of giving victims benefits. From time to time, by way of policy, Victim Services has gotten ahead of the legislation and has begun offering services to victims.

Is there any plan to expand the type of crimes for which coverage is available for victims in this fiscal year?

Mrs. Stefanson: As a result of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, the scope of the services being offered has changed to reflect the expanded scope of, you know, from the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights.

Mr. Swan: I appreciate that.

And when did those changes come into effect?

Mrs. Stefanson: It was actually July of 2015.

Mr. Swan: Does the department yet have any evidence as to how much their workload will increase because of the new federal law having an impact on Victim Services in Manitoba?

Is there a breakdown from the number of cases before July 2015 and after, or what? I'd like to see what the department has pulled together to try to see the increase in workload.

Mrs. Stefanson: Since the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights came into force, Victim Services has seen a steady increase in additional requests for service that relate specifically to the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights matters, for example, 110 in the last quarter alone.

Mr. Swan: I see no increase in FTEs other than those that were converted but were already in the division. Does the minister have concerns about that heavier workload without any increase in the number of employees within Victim Services doing the work?

Mrs. Stefanson: We'll continue to monitor that. As it stands right now, it's been managed appropriately, and—but we'll continue to watch that.

Mr. Swan: I had mentioned several times that there wasn't a lot about Justice in the budget speech or the budget papers. One of the things that—one of the few

things that was listed was increased resources to support services for victims of crime. When I look at the grants to Victims Assistance, is that increase what's meant in the budget speech? And I'm looking at page 31 of the Justice Estimates.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think the net increase of—there is a net increase of \$232,000 for Victim Services grants. That is the information that is detailed in the budget.

Mr. Swan: And which organizations are receiving the additional Victims Assistance grants?

Mrs. Stefanson: Additional funding has been provided to Ka Ni Kanichihk; also the Klinik Community Health Centre; the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, C3P; Eyaa-Keen and Family Dynamics.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that. I think my colleague from The Pas would like to ask a few questions about restorative justice.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): While in university, I took course that specifically focused on Aboriginal people in the Canadian justice system. Quite interesting, and we specifically studied a book by Rupert Ross on restorative justice. *[interjection]* Yes, Rupert Ross. And—so, from there it, basically, focuses on why we have such a high Aboriginal population incarcerated into our institutions and, basically, from my family as well, you know, from residential school, you know, we went from one system and—graduating into another system, you know, the 'criminal' system.

* (15:50)

So, if he can just correct me, I just joined this committee here, today, about funding towards the restorative justice program. And you had mentioned page 35 regarding an increase, slightly only to John Howard Society. Can you just explain to me, again, as to that increase the—regarding restorative justice program? Is that provincial-wide? Is that the only increase regarding that specific program?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I just want to thank the member for her question, and—it's an important one and I want to welcome her to committee. I know that this is her first question here at this committee, so welcome and thank you for the very good question that you brought.

There has been an increase in funding for the John Howard Society. It's a restorative justice pilot project that's taking place right now in the Westman and Parkland regions. So that's, primarily, where the

funding is going in terms of the increase for this pilot project to take place.

Ms. Lathlin: I've had the privilege of meeting a representative who worked for the provincial government who came to The Pas and invited me to our restorative justice committee within Opaskwayak Cree Nation. And they're under MKO. I believe they're funding various committees within our-northern Manitoba.

And I'm just curious as to what are the plans ahead for this particular position, which is Aboriginal justice issues. As to further expand that role, and how can that role be expanded when there's no—if, yes, just—if there's no really monies allotted to that program, so—and my other question is: without expanding monies for this particular program, how would you address in reducing the incarceration rates of our Aboriginal people in our justice system and in our jails, prisons? That's what my two questions are.

Mrs. Stefanson: And I want to thank the member for the question. It is a good one, and obviously, a very important part of moving forward.

Some of the additional funds that were being earmarked for this pilot project, that's completely separate and apart. There is a funding agreement with the federal government and the Manitoba government and MKO to fund programming that exists right now, and that will continue. And that programming is specific to restorative justice initiatives. So that will continue. That's not being taken away.

Ms. Lathlin: I'm currently—I've had the opportunity to review the 94 recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action. In fact, 18 of those 94 specifically focus on Justice, and, in fact, nine of that 18 specifically focus on provincial participation.

So one of them, I just have a couple of questions as to how will the government honour—go ahead to honour these calls to action in regards to, for example, "governments to provide sufficient and stable funding to implement and evaluate community sanctions that will provide realistic alternatives to imprisonment for Aboriginal offenders and respond to the underlying causes of offending."

So that's just one recommendation that I'm, you know, interested to see how our government here

will honour those calls to action in regards to justice and our Aboriginal people.

Mrs. Stefanson: It's a good question, and just so—the member is aware, Truth and Reconciliation is something that is being dealt with across all government departments to deal with the various issues. As the member has rightly said, there are some of those calls to action that fall specifically within the Justice area, but, of course, I'm working with my colleagues across the board to address some of the issues presented.

* (16:00)

As part of the reconciliation process, consultation has been ongoing and will continue with the southern chiefs as well as MKO to develop a strategy and consultation with those communities in order to move restorative justice issues forward and to address the calls for action within the report.

Ms. Lathlin: In regards to collaboration, if the government can share with us as to the commitments how will—what will your commitments look like working with federal, provincial and Aboriginal governments in regards to eliminating overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in custody over the next two years?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I want to thank the member for the question.

Obviously, it is our goal to try and reduce in any way we can the number of indigenous people within and specifically youth within the justice system. That is the goal, and how we're going about doing it is through restorative justice initiatives that continue to be funded. But we work together with the federal government. There is funding from the federal and provincial governments there.

We are working together in consultation with the federal government, with MKO, with the southern authorities to try and develop ways to best manage this and—with the end goal of trying to reduce the number of Aboriginal youth in—within the justice system. So that is ongoing work that is taking place.

Ms. Lathlin: What about with our grassroots? Like, is there going to be consultations, like in-community visits, sharing circles, if you will, you know, in order to—after all, you know, it is the parents, the grandparents, families, who truly do need these conversations rather than just our government representatives. I find that that would be a much more better healing process.

So I just—one more question after this, but what is your commitment to actually involving our grassroots-level communities to have them involved, direct say, into this process, especially regarding their children?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think the member brings up a very good point, and I, you know, certainly I'm open to meeting with Elders, with any groups, organizations that you may suggest and how we could, you know, better the system that we have currently and obviously in the end goal of reducing the number of indigenous youth in our justice system.

So I think that's a very good approach, and I welcome the opportunity to meet with some of the people that the member opposite is mentioned.

Ms. Lathlin: Thank you for your answer.

One more question: In regards to The Path to Reconciliation Act that was passed unanimously, which is great news for all of us here, I want to know—you had mentioned that reconciliation theme is in every department that you're working with.

But I want to know the true commitment and how it will be demonstrated such as out of the 94 recommendations, 18 of them are directly calls to action regards to Justice, and I want to know: How would your government commit in honouring these calls to action? Would you be doing annual reports specifically just from your department or from each department, and how would that be tracked and progress shared so we can honour this Canada-wide initiative?

And also too, I would share with you many times I'm directly affected, you know. Three generations of women went to residential school and so that's very important to me too, and I'm speaking on behalf of my great-grandmother, grandmother and mother. And I would like for you to share as to how you're going to honour that. Whether it's going to be through annual reports or any other—and that's the end of my question.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I want to thank the member for the question. It is something—and it is an important one, and something that we are working on across government departments to see how we're going to approach this in terms of 'measurables'.

But you know, I certainly have a tremendous amount of respect for the member and where she comes from and her family and the history. And I'm

certainly open to any ideas that she may have with respect to better reporting practices and so on that she may have.

So I'll leave it at that, but I certainly—I appreciate the member being here and the questions that she's asked today.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I'd like to just get a little bit more information in respect to the victims assistance grants. If we can maybe just dissect those a little bit more for me.

Mrs. Stefanson: Does the member mean all of them, or just with respect to the five? *[interjection]* Oh, sorry—just with respect to the five increases, sorry.

Ms. Fontaine: To the five right now.

* (16:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, the Ka Ni Kanichihk received an extra 30–\$30,000, the Klinik Community Health Centre received an extra \$22,000, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection received an extra \$175,000 and the Eyaa-Keen received an extra \$30,000, and the Family Dynamics, which was previously the Family Centre, received an extra \$30,000.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

Can you specifically advise me what the \$30,000 is for Ka Ni Kanichihk please?

Mrs. Stefanson: It's specifically for the medicine bear counselling program.

Ms. Fontaine: I'll get back to Ka Ni Kanichihk, but I just want to kind of go down the line. Can you tell me exactly what the funds are for Klinik?

Mrs. Stefanson: For the Klinik Community Health Centre, it will go to the traffic person's hotline.

For the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, the money will go—the C3P will establish a child safety and family advocacy division that provides specialized support and referrals to victimized youth. A public awareness campaign will be created to increase awareness about Manitoba's anticipated non-consensual distribution of intimate images legislation. Bill C-13 and the services offered by C3P in partnership with Manitoba Justice Victim Services, C3P will deliver a continuum of services to individuals impacted by the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. For the Eyaa-Keen, the Eyaa-Keen provides culturally appropriate trauma treatment and support to Aboriginal women

and men who have been impacted by crime. For the Family Dynamics, previously the Family Centre, Family Dynamics fast-tracks referrals from domestic violence support services and Manitoba Justice so that families with children who have experienced domestic abuse receive direct access to appropriate counselling services in a timely way.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

I guess I'm just wondering—I'm fully aware of the work that Ka Ni Kanichihk does. I've been working with them for many years, and they do phenomenal work in a myriad of different capacities working with families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, children of families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. I've worked with Eyaa-Keen for many years. Eyaa-Keen is an extraordinary organization that also offers that—trauma and all kinds of services to some of the most traumatized and victimized people of our society. And, of course, most of us know Klinik.

And I'm just wondering why there is such a discrepancy in the dollars that are allocated, you know, if we look at Ka Ni only receiving \$30,000 and Klinik, 22, and Eyaa-Keen, 30, and family, 30, in respect of the \$175,000 that went to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. Now, and I recognize the things that you noted. But I'm just wondering why there's such a huge discrepancy in the dollars that are disseminated there.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, it has to do with the costs associated with the act that was passed by the previous government in terms of dealing with the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. And so that's, you know, that's where the bulk of that is going. And, obviously, a very important aspect of this, but that's sort of the reality of what the costs are of implementing the previous—the legislation passed by the previous government.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech. Are you able to advise whether or not these—is ongoing annualized funding or whether or not these are just one-time grants?

* (16:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, under the—and I'm sure the member is aware of this, having worked within the industry, that under the Victims Assistance Fund, each organization applies each year for the grants. And so it just depends on what the—what they apply for next year. So this is there for this year, but these are—this is done on an annual basis.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

I mean, I would imagine that the minister probably understands that a lot of these organizations really struggle year to year in respect of executing the vast enormity of the jobs that they have in respect of working with victims of crime.

Does the minister have any plans to annualize any additional dollars to these organizations?

Mrs. Stefanson: The Victims Assistance Fund itself will fluctuate and vary from year to year, so it's very difficult to provide, you know, an ongoing, you know, for the—that's why it's done on an annual basis, because it depends on the size of the fund in that individual year. So it would be very difficult to look at something more ongoing when it's hard to say what the size of the fund would be.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech for that.

I recognize that. I'm just wondering if maybe the department would be looking at supporting these organizations in a more—

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. No, I thank the member for the question.

I think, I mean, this is just as a result of the Victims Assistance Fund itself. So I think, and I'm not sure if those organizations are regularly funded from another government department, so I think, you know, maybe it might be something that is looked at in other areas.

But certainly from a Justice standpoint, you know, these are the funds that are provided through the victims assistant fund for this year.

But I thank the member for the question.

Ms. Fontaine: I just have a couple more questions.

So there was a certain ceremonial fund proposal that was submitted to Justice, and it was just in the process of getting finalized, and then, unfortunately the writ had fall. It was a certain ceremonial fund for Medicine Bear out of Ka Ni Kanichihk and it's specifically designed to be able to help families when a loved one goes missing or when a loved one is continuously missing to help support some of those costs: gas, hotel, whatever, water, food, to be able to execute searches or make posters, whatever it may be.

And part of those dollars were also identified for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women

and girls to participate in ceremony. It does cost money for ceremony. And, you know, the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, on top of dealing with that trauma, deal with just a myriad of different traumas, including literally having no money to eat, right?

So the vision came from families that wanted to be able to, and in partnership with Medicine Bear and Ka Ni Kanichihk, was to look at a deeper level of healing to deal with the trauma. And so that was to be able to participate in ceremony. And so those dollars were identified.

And I think the amount, the last amount was about \$50,000. That was supposed to be an annualized pot of dollars that would flow to Ka Ni Kanichihk through Medicine Bear, which has a direct linkage to families.

I'm just wondering if that's something you're going to consider funding.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just for clarification, was that application done through the Victims Assistance Fund?

Ms. Fontaine: It was through civil forfeitures, I believe, or criminal forfeitures—one of them.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think there is no—at this point in time, there is no indication that we are going to move forward on an annualized funding at this stage, but it's certainly up to the organization to submit an application to do so.

Ms. Fontaine: So, literally, just a couple more questions. I know I keep saying that.

I do want to follow up in respect of your comments, I believe, on our first day of Estimates in respect of the national inquiry on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. And so I just want to get some greater clarity in respect of what your commitment is as we move forward with a national inquiry, because, as I'm sure you must be aware, there is discussion that the federal government will release the national inquiry's mandate structure and commissioners sometime in June, hopefully. So I want to follow up on that, and I ask you what your commitment is to the national inquiry.

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member for the question, and I know that this is a very important issue to her and to all of us in how this is dealt—we are also of the same information that something will be forthcoming from the federal government, and

we're having discussions about—once we receive that information, we'll have discussions about how we move forward from there. It depends on what their guidelines are and so on. Until we see that, it's very difficult to say at this stage what the next steps will be.

Ms. Fontaine: So I just want to give you—or, I just want to give the minister, in this very intimate setting, one-on-one setting, in some respects, I just want to advise that, you know, for Manitoba, Manitoba has taken a lead on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls on a myriad of different fronts. But, in particular, one of the things that Manitoba is known across the country is in respect of our commitment of working with families. And what that means on the ground is that we have supported families' participation in a variety of different summits, round tables, meetings, families' gatherings, all kinds of things in a very tangible way.

In order for Manitoba's participation in the national inquiry to be successful and to be committed, it requires that families are fundamentally a part of everything that Manitoba does in moving forward on the national inquiry, more importantly, that they're supported. And what that looks like on the ground is bus tickets or food or accommodations or paying for people's travel. The national inquiry will support families' participation, but we don't know to what extent. I would hate to see, and we saw it during the preconsultations, and I will, you know, I won't go into great details on some of the things that were missing in the preconsultation stages with families. What that left me with was a great worry that not all families are going to be supported in participating in the national inquiry. And what I can share with you, with the minister, is that our families will expect that they will be a part of that national inquiry in a very tangible way.

* (16:30)

And so my hope is, and I'm going to ask for this commitment, that the department, under your leadership, puts up policy and strategy in place so that families are not left out of the national inquiry in whatever needs they need to be able to fully participate. Which also I would include includes having those elders and councillor supports as well because any time families are asked to again retraumatize themselves by sharing their stories, they get triggered for weeks and weeks. We have to

ensure that we have those supports. And so my question is, are you going to be committing to that?

Mrs. Stefanson: I first of all want to thank the member for some of the background. I know that she's very passionate about this and I know that she's worked extensively in this field as well, and I—so I thank her for bringing some of the background to this for me. So I'm continuously learning in this job from various things and so I appreciate your knowledge and advice.

We are in the process right now of still waiting for the federal government to come forward with the various guidelines for us, and then once we do, we will develop our policy and strategy moving forward. And I, you know, I thank the member for her advice on that, and, of course, we're considering advice from all Manitobans with respect to this. So I appreciate that very much.

Madam Chairperson: Does the—

Mr. Swan: I believe the minister wanted to take a five minute recess—

Madam Chairperson: Correct.

Does the committee agree to take a five minute break? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 4:32 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:39 p.m.

Madam Chairperson: This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Justice.

The floor is now open for questions.

* (16:40)

Mr. Swan: I'd like to turn to Criminal Property Forfeiture, which is at page 49 in the Estimates book.

Last year—last fiscal year, there were five positions and this year again there's five positions. Are there any other—is there any other changes or enhancements to support this unit?

Mrs. Stefanson: There is no planned change for the employees at this time.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that.

So again for those of us who are hanging on the budget speech for every word that it would contain about justice, when the Minister of Finance

(Mr. Friesen) said there'd be increased resources to support the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit, do we know what the Minister of Finance meant?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, that's correct. There was additional funding, as the member can see, in the appropriation, But there was no increase in the staff—the full-time equivalent staff complement.

Mr. Swan: Just—I'm just trying to understand, it was pretty—the minister, I'm sure, will agree with me, there was not a lot about public safety and about crime prevention in the budget.

So, just to swim clear, one of the two things that were mentioned was the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit, and the minister is talking about an increase of \$2,000 for supplies and services, \$10,000 for other operating expenditures, \$70,000 in employee benefits, and then the negotiated increase for employees in that unit. That's what the Minister of Finance was talking about, we think?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I—again, I'm not sure what—you may want to ask the Minister of Finance what he was referring to, but certainly what this is for clearly is for salary and benefits for the employees, and an increase of—in expenditures there to make sure that they're covered off for their benefits and increases in salaries for the MGEU staff.

And as well as—yes, an increase in general operating funds for the increase in the forfeiture files.

Mr. Swan: I thank the member. The Minister of Finance doesn't like it when I ask him questions, but we'll—maybe we'll give that a try.

The—is the Criminal Property Forfeiture Unit fully staffed at the present time?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, there's no vacancies.

Mr. Swan: And could the minister let me know, for the last fiscal year, what was the total value of property that was forfeited to the Province, and also a breakdown of where the money was disbursed?

We know that a portion of the money that is received is used to fund the additional costs of the seizure, of court action. We know that some of the money goes to specific victims where a victim is identifiable. We know some of it goes to victim services agencies and some of it goes to the police.

So I'd just like a breakdown of the money coming and the money going out.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just for clarification, is the member referring to the 2015-16 year?

Mr. Swan: Yes.

Mrs. Stefanson: We can undertake to get that information to the member, subject to any, obviously, privacy issues that may arise.

Mr. Swan: I agree. I'm not asking for the name of any particular victim or any identifying information. Now, just to clarify, the money coming out of the proceeds received by the Criminal Property Forfeiture unit, those are not included in the Victim Assistance grants that we talked about in Victim Services.

Can the minister just confirm that?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Swan: With respect to Legal Services on page 51, there are 88 FTEs, including 58 professional and technical positions, most of which are lawyers working for the provincial government.

Can the minister just let me know if there are any vacancies right now and how many vacancies there are?

Mrs. Stefanson: We'll just endeavour to confirm that number to the member.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that.

And similar to the question I asked about articling students on the criminal side, I'd like to know how many articling students have just completed their articles with Legal Services, how many of those have now been hired on with Legal Services, and how many articling students Legal Services is now taking on for the upcoming year.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, two students went—from—for the previous year, none were hired, and there are two students currently in the program.

Mr. Swan: And now I want to turn to Legal Aid, which I expect will take up a lot of the minister's time, especially if she does go to the provincial and federal and territorial ministers' meeting.

I just want to walk through the appropriation for Legal Aid Manitoba. I just want to confirm that this includes any federal contribution. Put another way, there's no separate fund of money that's used to hire more legal aid lawyers or pay more fees for private lawyers who take on legal aid certificates.

Mrs. Stefanson: This is just the provincial portion. It does not include the federal portion.

Mr. Swan: I'm sorry, when we talk about the federal portion, are we talking about individuals who are charged with federal crimes, or what additional federal expenditures is the minister meaning?

Mrs. Stefanson: There's an additional \$4.76 million that's provided for criminal legal aid by the federal government.

* (16:50)

Mr. Swan: And as the minister will be aware when she meets her counterparts from across the country, that is an amount that has not changed in a very long time. And I wish her success in trying to get more money. The minister may know that the new federal Minister of Justice announced there would be an additional \$30 million for provinces and territories, but that amount would not flow until 2021.

It has been a matter of great frustration for provincial and territorial attorneys general of all political stripes for over a decade, and I'm hoping that with a new government in Ottawa there will be some success in attracting more money for something which is—it's not a frill. It's not a choice for the provincial government to provide; it's actually a constitutional requirement.

When I look at the Estimates of expenditure, even though we don't know the number of individual lawyers employed by Legal Aid, I'm presuming from the numbers that there is no increase in the number of Legal Aid lawyers anticipated in this current fiscal year.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, there's no increase anticipated at this time.

Mr. Swan: As the minister will learn, the Legal Aid system works really as a hybrid, with some services being provided by staff lawyers who are paid by Legal Aid Manitoba, and private lawyers who take individual certificates from Legal Aid Manitoba.

Does the minister anticipate in this fiscal year there being any change in the way that that division of labour takes place?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, we don't anticipate any changes there.

Mr. Swan: And the estimated—the budgeted fees for private lawyers taking on certificates is budgeted at \$12,002,000 for the current fiscal year, which is exactly the same as the previous year.

Does the minister think that that is realistic given what private lawyers tell us is the increasing complexity of the types of cases that they're called upon to do?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think the—I want to thank the member for the question.

And, certainly, we know that Legal Aid runs an efficient and an effective system and we don't anticipate that anything is going to change there. And that's the reason why the same has been budgeted since last year as well.

Mr. Swan: Does the minister anticipate increasing the tariff paid to private lawyers in this fiscal year?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's an ongoing process, as I'm sure the minister—or the member is aware from the past. We have not—part of that process is that there's a request that comes back to us, and we have not received any request as a result of that process to date for the 2016-17 budgeted year.

Mr. Swan: In—the last time there was a Progressive Conservative government in Manitoba there was a hold back that was imposed on private lawyers, meaning that they did the work at the agreed tariff but the former administration chose to hold back a chunk of money from lawyers.

Can the minister give lawyers in Manitoba some confidence that in this fiscal year that will not be something that she imposes?

Mrs. Stefanson: We don't anticipate any changes at this time for this fiscal year.

Mr. Swan: And again I'll sort of leave this area again with best wishes for the minister trying to get the federal government back to the table. I did write to my own MP who proudly told us all that he was on the finance committee, I did tell him how important it was to have legal aid properly funded, both on the criminal side—which is a constitutional requirement—and on the family side, and he was unsuccessful.

But I hope that together—or all of us can raise our voices and keep up the pressure to get the federal government stepping back to the plate and in increasing our funding for legal aid, not just in dollar terms but in terms of a percentage.

So I do mean this sincerely, if the—if I can do anything to assist the minister on this front, I will not be shy about raising my voice.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just to that, I want to thank the member for that and I have appreciated his advice so far in this committee and the questioning so far. I've learned a lot in this process and I certainly welcome the input from all members in how we can make the system better. So I want to thank the member for that.

Mr. Swan: I would like to talk about a few family law issues. At the outset of Estimates the minister talked about some new investments in family law. I think the amount was \$201,000. And am I correct that the minister said this is additional federal money on the family side that's being used for some specific projects, and if so could she just explain what they are?

Mrs. Stefanson: I want to thank the member for the question. This \$201,000 is going towards the Supporting Families Initiative.

SFI is focused on supporting separating and divorcing families through contributions to provincial and territory government family justice programs, as well as to non-governmental organizations, public, legal, education and information activities. The emphasis is on access to the family justice system and the continued development of child custody and access in family support compliance and enforcement initiatives.

The objectives of SFI are to facilitate access to the family justice system for families experiencing separation and divorce through various services, programs, and information resources, particularly those that promote compliance with financial support and custody access obligations.

Madam Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee will rise.

GROWTH, ENTERPRISE AND TRADE

*(14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of department for Growth, Enterprise and Trade. We have one last item on this department.

Resolution 10.1: RESOLVED that there will be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,185,000 for Growth, Enterprise and Trade,

Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2017.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department for Growth, Enterprise and Trade. The next step is to—Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is the Department of Finance.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the ministers and critics the opportunity to prepare for commencement of the next department or should we proceed?

Okay, we'll proceed.

FINANCE

Mr. Chairperson: This section of the Committee of Supply is now resume considering of the Estimates of the Department of Finance. At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

We ask that members introduce their staff in attendance.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I have with me, in the Chamber, this afternoon, the deputy minister, Mr. Hrichishen. I have the deputy minister—secretary of treasury board, Lynn Zapshala-Kelln. I have Giselle Martel from Treasury Board, assistant deputy minister. And I have Chester Wojciechowski, and I'm doing a much better job today with the pronunciation of that name.

I welcome all my staff members to the Chamber this afternoon.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I have the outstanding, the brilliant Kelsey Hutton with me today.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

As previously agreed, questioning of this department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Allum: Yesterday, I was—our time ended before I had a chance to summarize the day's events, and so let me try to do it for you, catch you up to speed as we were in a different room that day.

But we put a series of questions to the Finance Minister related to what was at first announced as \$122 million in savings and then, over the course

of 10 days, became \$108 million in cuts—quite a magic act performed by the Minister of Finance at the time. In trying to get to the bottom of how that story changed over the course of the 10 days—and I'm sorry to report to you, Sir, that no answers were forthcoming from the Finance Minister.

Then we proceeded to talk about some of the cuts in the \$108 million, and we asked him very specific questions related to the \$4 million for—in Cabinet savings, asked him very specific questions about the \$9 million related to Education and, in particular, we asked very specific questions about the contents of that \$9 million in cuts and what was involved there. We asked if it had to do with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. We asked if it had something to do with the midwifery program jointly shared between UCN and the U of M, and I'm sorry to report to you, again, that the Finance Minister was not forthcoming with answers in that regard. I'm hopeful that he'll do a little bit better today.

I do want to return to one question that we asked yesterday just briefly and for a point of clarification.

We had asked how many in the public service were drawing deputy minister salaries or equivalent to deputy minister salaries. I believe the Finance Minister articulated 15. I want to be sure, after he's had some time to think about it, whether he's still at the 15 number or whether that number has grown since.

Mr. Friesen: I will endeavour to answer the member's question; however, I do take note of the fact that yesterday, time elapsed before I could give an answer to the member's last question of the day, and when the gavel fell, I didn't have a chance to answer. And so I wanted to make sure that the first thing I did this afternoon was respond to the member's last segment from yesterday when we were in the Committee of Supply for Finance.

And the member made a number of erroneous statements in that—in his preamble to that question. But I believe that perhaps the most important one I should address is when he indicated that what Manitoba got was a budget that was marginal in its impact. And that is simply not a statement that I can let stand without rebuttal. And so I want to indicate to the member that while he may feel that the budget is marginal in its impact, I believe that Manitobans would hold a different view.

And that whereby we are increasing funding in areas like education, where I believe funding is going up 1.6 per cent comprehensively and more than that, I think, when it comes to K-to-12 schools; I think that number could be 3.6 per cent. My officials will correct me if I'm wrong on that calculation. We did discuss it yesterday.

These are not insignificant investments. These are very significant in its—in their investments. Had we held spending, the member would have taken exception to that. He would have said it was an approach of harsh austerity. We've increased spending, and the member takes exception to that, and he says that now it's not enough. But it is consistent with, and actually exceeds, previous years in some cases.

So I want to be clear with the member that Manitobans, in my view, would not share his view that somehow the effect of this budget is marginal. We've increased spending in health care; we've increased spending in the area of families. We've committed to \$1 billion in infrastructure expenditure that is going on. But in addition to that, we have brought relief to Manitoba taxpayers. We have continued to hold the view, and the evidence supports it, that Manitobans are among the most highly taxed income earners in all of Canada, certainly the most highly taxed west of Ontario, and among the most highly taxed if you include the Maritime provinces as well.

And so we've brought tax relief where our predecessors brought none. We have done so by acting on principle and indexing the tax brackets in Manitoba. And I would refer him in—well, I won't refer him to the pages in the budget because this is the consideration of the Estimates, but I can assure him that in the budget documents itself, there is a chart where it indicates the rates of income taxation for the Province of Manitoba at 10.8 per cent, the 12.75 per cent and the third, 17.4 per cent rate applied at those increments. And you can see there the savings that will accrue to Manitobans as a result. On the previous page, of course, in the fiscal summary of tax measures, he will notice as well that by indexing personal tax brackets to inflation and by indexing the basic personal amount to inflation, that Manitobans save immediately \$25 million this year.

But that is not the total savings that Manitobans will have as a result of these steps because we must understand that in every year that the previous government failed to index their tax brackets,

Manitobans paid more. It's the worst kind of taxation, whereby we've set a fixed bracket amount, and it does not reflect the real effect of inflation, it does not affect cost-of-living adjustments. It does not affect changes to the consumer price index. It's flat.

* (15:00)

And so, invariably, as the price of milk goes up and as wage earnings are adjusted upward, that same earner is taxed additionally because the bracket hasn't adjusted to change. So I would suggest to this member that this change goes on helping Manitobans and, immediately, what it does is, at the outset, it arrests the expanse between Manitoba and other—

Mr. Chairperson: Speaker's time has expired.

Mr. Allum: I think the question had been about a point of clarification around salaries related to deputy ministers, and we would invite the Finance Minister to work really hard to answer questions that is put to him directly, but that's fair game; we'll have a chance to explore those areas with him too.

What I heard him say is that he was bragging about investments, I think, in Education. He was bragging about investments in Education. And yet, when asked about our investments in Education last—not so long ago in a article in *The Manitoban*, when talking about our investments in Education, the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), the member from Lac du Bonnet said: This is absolute vote buying. That's a quote. They're vote buying, and they're desperate. That's another quote.

So I wonder, Mr. Chair, how it is that the Finance Minister can reconcile his over-the-top assertion that he's made significant investments which were merely investments our government has made which he is now duplicating, and then which the member from Lac du Bonnet had formerly called vote buying.

So it's difficult to follow the Finance Minister and the members opposite on what they actually believe in and what they don't believe in. I'm sure the Finance Minister's going to provide me the information I asked for. In the meantime, and I don't believe he needs to consult with staff on this particular question, could the Finance Minister please offer his own view of the current state of the Manitoba economy?

Mr. Friesen: I didn't see the warning in my previous question that time was about to expire, so I endeavour to do better on that and so I will also

finish my response before and indicate to the member on his previous question that my officials do not have with us today in the Chamber the information about deputy-minister-equivalent salaries. This is information that we could provide to you, and we'd be happy to do that. I just want to make sure we didn't leave that unaddressed.

Also I wanted to just correct, I was going by memory but my memory seems to be failing me, so I will just shore up the numbers I provided before. When it came to the year-over-year increases inside Education, the total increase was 1.6 per cent, but it did include an advanced and adult learning increase of 3.4 per cent and a support to schools increase of 2.5 per cent. I wanted to get those numbers clearly on the record.

And also make quick reference then to the fact, like I mentioned in my previous answer, that we believe that the changes we have brought in the budget are not insignificant. They are significant, but changes that will keep on helping Manitobans.

The contrast is this: whereby we asked members in this Chamber to vote on a budget that actually reduced the tax burden on Manitobans, they voted every time for budgets that increased the tax burden every time when I was first elected in this Chamber and served—I was elected in 2011 and so was the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum)—and in 2012 the government first widened the retail sales tax to include a whole new area of—whole new areas of—making whole new areas, I should say, subject to retail sales tax, areas like haircuts over \$50, and home insurance policies, and group insurance policies, and benefits at work and other services as well.

Remember as well, that previous to this, the government had increased the—or expanded the retail sales tax to include everything from legal fees and accounting fees and other areas. And then, of course, in 2014 they raised the PST to 8 per cent, and all the areas that had been drawn in to be subject to retail sales tax, now it was a hike.

And, whereas the members of the opposition used to refer to this as just a single-point increase, it was clearly not. A 7 per cent to 8 per cent increase is a 14 per cent increase in tax, but for areas that had been outside, had not been subject to that taxation, that was a very, very significant increase because it had never been taxed before at 7 per cent.

So we say we continue to be focused on affordability. And we are trying to keep more money in the pockets of Manitobans.

On this question about the economy, I want to indicate to him that while we are doing better than most provinces, we are still cautious. I'll look forward in my next answer to be able to provide additional detail on this answer, but I think my time is expiring.

Oh, I'm sorry, my time is not expiring. I see there is a light flashing. Okay, now I'm getting the hang of this.

All right, so, then let me add to that note about the economy. We are cautious because we understand that while Manitoba has not faced some of the pressures of other jurisdictions—certainly, we've seen deterioration in other regions of Canada for various reasons, including a fall in Canadian dollar and depressed commodity prices. This has created real challenge for places like Newfoundland and Alberta and other jurisdictions—we're—we have been historically a more balanced economy. This creates some opportunities for us.

But understand that there's still—there are still challenges in the global economy, and some of those go to us. We need to progress with caution, but we need to progress. And part of the solution, of course, will be creating a framework in which there can be additional focus on private investment in our province. This has to be part of the solution. It has been an underutilized option and one that we will proceed on.

* (15:10)

Mr. Allum: It's interesting that the Finance Minister would say that he's focused on affordability, and yet the affordability section of the budget is nowhere to be found. So he says one thing but then does another, and that's concerning for us, Mr. Chair. We don't want the Finance Minister to be doing that.

I'm having a hard time understanding what—I asked him a very simple question about how he would characterize the state of the Manitoba economy. He provided some generalities, but he will know that yesterday the Conference Board of Canada, in fact, came out very strongly in support of the—of Manitoba's economy, and not only that, in support of the very kind of investments that our government has made over many, many years in order to provide not only the programs and services that Manitobans rely on, but the very important

capital infrastructure that make our communities stronger, safer and more sustainable.

My question for the Finance Minister is: Has he read the Conference Board of Canada report that was published yesterday and will he admit that the fundamentals of the Manitoba economy, as we sit here today in June of 2016, is very strong? Will he admit that?

Mr. Friesen: First of all, I want to address the statement that the member made about the fiscal management strategy inside the budget. As the member knows from my last response, Manitoba is one of the most highly taxed jurisdictions in all of Canada, and one of the first lines in the fiscal management strategy addresses it, says that Budget 2016 sets a new course for Manitoba toward lower taxes, better services and a stronger economy. I would suggest to the member that all three of these indicate our desire and our intent through strategies and measurement and results to make Manitoba a more affordable jurisdiction for people to live in.

I would additionally point to the—the member in a direction later in the same budget document, where there is comparisons of taxes in basic household costs, and those comparisons are in the budget each and every year, and the member will note there that compared to other jurisdictions, the provincial tax, it shows there under income tax and other taxes, that Manitoba is a high-tax jurisdiction. The member will certainly understand that money that Manitobans pay in taxes is money that cannot be held in their households to address the real and considerable costs of running a household in Manitoba.

You know, I know that he understands this as a father and a community member and a homeowner, that, you know, costs pertaining to mortgages and costs pertaining to vehicle licensing and costs pertaining to groceries—and grocery costs are on the rise—and costs pertaining to, you know, children's activities and children's shoes aren't cheap. And all of these costs provide, well, impact on a household income.

So, certainly, I think the member needs to recognize that the fiscal management strategy is 'choked' full of references to spending smarter in government; it's 'choked' full of our references to restoring fiscal discipline. The member understands that the additional \$15 million that we will spend this year alone on debt-service costs is \$15 million, that cannot be spent on strengthening front-line services

or decreasing the burden on Manitoba families when it comes to taxation. So that's where I would start.

Specific to the member's comments on the economy, I'm pleased to continue my answer there and indicate to him, as I was saying before in my previous answer, that in Manitoba, while we are doing better than in some jurisdictions, there's still a need to progress. We need to provide incentive and opportunity for the private sector to participate in the economy and, for too long, our predecessors took the view that it was only government's role to grow the economy. And we know what the effect of that kind of thinking, that silo mentality that does not fully attract partnerships in the private sector is. The effect of that kind of approach is more and more money and more and more debt taken on by the province of Manitoba. And, on page B6, in the Supplementary Financial Information in the budget, he will note that the Borrowing Requirements there make it clear that, in this year alone, "Manitoba's borrowing requirements with respect to both general and self-sustaining borrowings is estimated to total \$6.5 billion," 2.2 per cent—\$2.2 billion of that is for refinancing, and the new requirement is for both core government and for Manitoba Hydro.

So I would indicate to him that this is a tremendous cost. I believe I'm correct in saying that Manitoba has never undertaken borrowings in excess of \$6.5 billion in a—in an operating year. This is not sustainable. This is a real cost that is pushed forward but does need to be addressed and will be addressed over years. And the member understands how this works, with bonds being issued and—on various scales, some pushed out long, some to the medium term, some issued short term, some held in cash. These are significant burdens for our economy on a go-forward basis. It's important that we draw on the private sector to assist us with the work that needs to be done.

Mr. Allum: Well, I think I heard the Finance Minister say that Manitoba was doing better than some jurisdictions, but he, obviously, doesn't want to put the full story on the record. Conference Board of Canada says, quite clearly, that Manitoba's 'economy' will be advancing at a good pace. It goes on to say, with real GT—GDP set to expand above the national average this year, Manitoba will continue to be a reliable source of growth in Canada. It goes on to say, services will see healthy increases as Manitobans are on a spending spree due to strong employment and wage gains from recent years.

In fact, Mr. Chair, I'm going to make the case again that the fundamentals of the Manitoba economy are very strong. And yet the Finance Minister, members of the government's side, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) himself have gone out and tried to create a crisis, tried to suggest that the Manitoba economy was faltering, when, in fact, experts, not this side of the House, but experts associated with the Conference Board of Canada are suggesting quite strongly to him that the fundamentals of the Manitoba economy are very strong, and we are well positioned, not only to do well next year, but to be leaders in Canada.

*(15:20)

And so I would say he does a disservice to the people of Manitoba when he suggests to them—as he did on the campaign trail, as the Premier did on the campaign trail—that somehow the Manitoba economy was faltering, when expert evidence suggests strongly that Manitoba is doing very, very well in Canada. And, in fact, in many areas, we're leaders.

After leading the country—the report says, after leading the country in employment growth, Manitoba's retail sales will increase faster than every other province in 2016. Nearly 10,000 new jobs were created in Manitoba in 2015. The record is clear, Mr. Chair. The Manitoba economy is doing very well indeed. And it's doing very, very well because of the investments made by our government over 17 years, I'm sure much to the displeasure of the Finance Minister.

Will he at least concede—will he at least concede—that investments in Manitoba Hydro that we're—that we made have had a real and significant impact on improving the conditions and quality of life for Manitobans by creating reliable electricity and good jobs, not only for Manitobans but for indigenous Manitobans as well?

Mr. Friesen: I welcome this conversation about Manitoba's economy because it's important and, as we've indicated, it's important to get this right.

The member seems to want to have a conversation on one side of this issue without acknowledging the other side of the issue, and that's not a fair way to proceed, and the member understands that. And he made no reference in—after my response to the fact that our province has just taken on \$6.5 billion—or is in the process in this fiscal year of taking on \$6.5 billion in new debt—in

borrowings in order to finance both a comprehensive infrastructure investment inside of Manitoba Hydro as well as core government, and, of course, renewing portions of our debt that have become—have come full term.

But, in addition to that, the member must also understand that when it comes to our summary net debt, basically our debt to GDP, we continue, in this province, to go in the wrong direction.

I would refer him to page 17 on Budget 2016, where he can see that in Manitoba right now the projection in this year is that debt to GDP is approaching just under 34 per cent. Now the context of this is that we have seen no pressure on borrowing rates. Bank of Canada rate has not risen, been flat and yet, even in this context the government's debt to GDP continues to ascend and that has caught the attention of many groups, economists here in the province of Manitoba, certainly caught the attention of our party when we were in the opposition, but it's also caught the attention of bond-rating agencies.

And I can assure the member that in the recent trip that the Premier and I undertook with departmental people as well to Toronto to meet with our lenders and our partners in Toronto, this concern was addressed. And I could surmise in every meeting the issue of Manitoba's debt to GDP came up. And what our partners referred to is the significant increase in a relatively short period of time in favourable economic conditions.

Manitoba, as the member knows, weathered the global economic downturn far better than other jurisdictions, and there's practical reasons for that. The member understands that we have quite a diversified economy, we have quite a—our agricultural sector has performed quite well in recent years, and I would also acknowledge that we've had challenges there, of course, in respect of some of the flooding that has taken place in the west part of the province and—but by and large commodity prices have been favourable for agricultural producers that has been a benefit to our economy.

Beyond that we know that manufacturing has been strong and, in Manitoba, approximately half of our manufacturing exports go to the United States. A large part of our manufacturing remains here in Canada, we trade with our neighbours and internally. And even in this context, debt to GDP has continued to go up. This is a challenge, whether or not the member wishes to acknowledge it, whether or not he wishes to address it.

Now he will, in turn, say that he's going to make some comment perhaps about the fact that it is less of a burden on every dollar. But what, of course, he doesn't acknowledge is that in 20 years borrowing rates have fallen significantly. So he needs to keep that in mind as well for context.

So we have opportunities in our economy to be sure, but the opportunities we have need to include the private sector.

Mr. Allum: Well, I'm pleased to hear the Finance Minister acknowledge that many elements of the Manitoba economy are in a strong position. In fact, if you read the budget and budget papers, part of the budget you will see that it's chock full of good information about the good news that around Manitoba's economy here in June 2016.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister) was asked, I think on the very first day of question period, about the fact that Manitoba leads the country as—with the lowest unemployment rate in the country, and the Premier didn't answer, he talked about some failings of Statistics Canada's measurements. But the fact of the matter is that the way in which unemployment rates are measured here in Canada, Manitoba leads the country. Again, another significant indicator of the strength of the Manitoba economy brought on by our government's investment in the programs, services and infrastructure that Manitoba has today over many, many years.

And yet the Finance Minister has made it part of his budget tour to go out and say, well, the economy's failing, when in fact it's not failing. There is no crisis in the economy, nor is there a crisis with the deficit. And I will point him to a article posted on the CBC News website by David Camfield, and David is an associate professor in the labour studies program in the department of sociology at the University of Manitoba, so an esteemed academic who has a strong appreciation for that. And he says quite clearly that the deficit that the Finance Minister is talking about is, frankly, a myth that's utilized by right-wing governments in order to severely damage public services.

* (15:30)

And, in fact, Mr. Camfield—probably Dr. Camfield—says the real issue, he says in his article, and I'm quoting: The real issue for any government is not the size of its deficit but how much it costs to service its accumulated debt. When governments spend more than they take

in in revenue, they sell bonds to raise funds. A government's credit rating affects the rate of interest it has to offer in order to attract buyers for its bonds. Manitoba's debt-servicing costs are eminently manageable. Interest rates are low and all three of the main credit agencies that assess provincial governments give Manitoba a good score. Only a minority of provinces are ranked better, unquote.

So the reality is is that academics, think tanks, experts, including—and, in fact, the Finance Minister's own budget papers indicate that the fundamentals of the Manitoba economy are very strong, are very solid, and that's reflected in any of the numbers that we've seen, including job creation, including the unemployment rate, 'including'—including projected growth rates going forward. And yet the minister has made it his business to travel around and scare the people of Manitoba around the deficit, scare his own caucus around the deficit. And why did they do that? Why is there such a hue and cry, as Dr. Camfield says, over the deficit? He says, quote, "Such fearmongering is useful for politicians and lobbyists who want to justify cuts to public services."

And that's exactly the path that the Finance Minister is on. He didn't include projections for year 2, year 3 and year 4 in the budget because he has a hidden agenda to get on the path toward austerity in the years to come. And the result of which will hurt Manitobans who are working, hurt Manitobans' economy and hurt the programs and services that Manitobans rely on every day so that their families are strong.

So I want to ask him now if he will tell us, what is he hiding, why doesn't he come clear on the kind of cuts he's going to make next year, the year after and the year after that? Will he just be clear about that?

Mr. Friesen: I want to begin my response by, of course, moving first to correct the statements—some statements that the member puts on the record. I feel like it will always be important in this context to first of all address the erroneous statements that the member makes, because he makes a number. He suggests somehow that I said that the economy was failing. Nothing could be more untrue. That is not what I said at all.

Mr. Scott Johnston, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

I said that we are cautiously optimistic that Manitoba has been historically a stable place to do business. But what I'm inviting the member to also acknowledge is that the economy is more than stimulus of the central government. And the member must acknowledge that in the Manitoba economy, three quarters of our economy is the private sector. The member must acknowledge that there are real risks out there right now. Even recently in my discussions with various jurisdictions, there's a lot of apprehension about what the UK leaving the EU could mean for other parts of the world and for western economies and for developing economies. These are real pressures that all of us who are paying attention to these things must face.

The member must acknowledge that he does not exist in a vacuum somehow in Manitoba. The member has made no attempt to address the fact that I just referenced that the province will issue new borrowings of \$6.5 billion this year. This is a level of borrowing that the province has never taken on. The member cannot purport to have a conversation about some ways in which government has tried to induce or even, I could say, puff up, the job numbers without acknowledging that the private sector has a role in all of this, and a role that has been underutilized.

So we are committed to partnerships as Budget 2016 clearly says. We are committed to creating the conditions in this province which will give signals to our partners in the private sector that this is a place they want to live and a place they want to grow their business. I could tell the minister that I'm excited; I'm very optimistic about the opportunities that we will have as a province on a go-forward basis.

Yes, the challenge right now is very, very great in respect of a billion-dollar deficit, but I'm optimistic that we will make progress, not just by hopefulness. This budget contains real measures that produce real results that drive down the deficit. I've referred to those numbers in our previous days' discussions, but I would reflect on this: That the member used the term hidden agenda, so on one hand he's suggesting—he's trying to be careful not to acknowledge the increases to appropriations that this government has brought, and then on the other hand he suggests but, yes, but it's all good now, but it won't be good later.

So he's still trying to go down the same path of fear that he tried unsuccessfully to go down in the

past, and, indeed, they spent a lot of their time in this Chamber trying to promote that agenda of fear and apprehension, scaring teachers, scaring nurses, scaring public sector workers.

But I would say that a real hidden agenda might be one like it's contained in the economic and fiscal outlook that his government brought in March of 2016, where Manitobans had been led to believe that the deficit was going to come in at \$421 million. They knew it wouldn't end up there—they knew. But they waited and waited and waited and finally updated, in one of the last days they were in office, and dropped a document on the desk that said now the core government deficit had increased more than \$200 million. They gave Manitobans no hint of what was coming.

And then, after winning the election when our government took power, we were able to open those books, study the full impact of their overspending and realize that that deficit was really a billion dollars. That's a hidden agenda, Mr. Chair, and so the member should be careful before he uses that kind of language.

The Acting Chairperson (Scott Johnston): The honourable member from Riverview-Fort Garry-Fort Garry-Riverview—apologies.

Mr. Allum: No worries. Either way is good by me, Mr. Chair.

You know, it's an interesting answer that the Finance Minister gives because he spent the past four years in opposition claiming that the international economy, the global economy, wasn't fragile. Now he's appropriating that very language, that very reality for his own purposes for when it suits his purposes, and for that I find his lack of consistency, in fact, his stellar inconsistency to be quite troubling, because what he's gone out and done during the election campaign and what he's done in his first budget is to provide a misdirection to Manitobans that somehow our economy wasn't doing very well.

Now he's having to concede, in fact, he concedes it in his own budget papers, that the fact of the matter is that the Manitoba economy is doing very, very well and it did very, very well because our government invested in the economy and we invested in the clear knowledge that this was a good time to invest.

I remind him that the International Monetary Fund—and we're not talking about a friendly labour socialist organization here; we're talking about the

kings of capitalism. The International Monetary Fund has already been on record in June of 2016 in the issue of International—in their publication known as Finance and Development, to say that austerity policies hurt demand. That's a direct quote from that particular thing.

* (15:40)

The IMF has said this is the very time to invest, and the Conference Board of Canada has reiterated that very position because, in fact, our debt-to-GDP ratio is very, very good. In fact, because what we pay on the debt now is 5 cents on the dollar, whereas the Finance Minister, when his government was in power in the late '90s, it was 13 cents on the dollar.

So, in fact, there's every reason to believe that the Manitoba economy is strong, that this is the time to invest, and that we need to do the kind of investment that will help Manitoba families live strong lives, good lives, good quality of life.

And it's remarkable to see the transformation in the way in which the now-Finance Minister is speaking, compared to the way in which he spoke as Finance critic when the—when he was Chicken Little, the sky was falling and things were really bad, and then he was out on the campaign trail and all of his MLAs were out there with him knocking on the doors, scaring the bejeebers out of Manitobans, that somehow the sky was falling because the debt was so large, when in fact the deficit is the very tool that every single reputable economic organization in the country and in the world says it's time to invest. That's the program that we had for Manitobans, and that's, in fact, the one that he's adapted from us with a little bit of his own marginal policies on the side.

But, if he's so confident that he's not going to enter into a period of austerity in years 2, 3 and 4, will he tell us—will he tell the committee right now, without conferring with anybody, out wasting a lot of time, will he tell us why there were not multiple-year projections in the budget?

Mr. Friesen: I wanted to start by indicating, with reference to the same Conference Board of Canada report that the member had cited, when I said that it was important to take a cautiously optimistic approach, the report actually backs up this claim. Because what the member neglected to include in his summary of that report is that forecasts, even for Manitoba's growth, have been revised downward. And while that—while Manitoba is still expected to grow, I would remind the member that the forecast

for Manitoba in the Conference Board of Canada spring 2016 report revised from growth projections of 2.3 per cent down to 2.1 per cent and revised downward from 3.1 per cent for 2017 to the new figure of 2.6 per cent.

I reference these numbers in order to once again convey to the member that there is real challenge out there whether he, in fact, chooses to acknowledge that or not. He made some reference to every economist out there, and I would suggest to him that as we look at analysis and as we seek to understand global trends and conditions, it would be imprudent for us not to look at these kind of downward adjustments. So it's important to proceed cautiously, but it's important to not take an ideological approach, as our predecessors have taken.

I would interject, also, to say that I did indicate that the member would respond and refer to old and tired analysis that's not actually accurate. He mentions this, of course, that, now, government borrows five cents on the dollar, as compared to, I think he said twenty years ago, at 13 cents on the dollar. That's a kind of a junky approach to stating—to providing data, because the member clearly understands that borrowing rates 20 years ago were three, four times what they were—what they are now.

I spoke to a gentleman just last week who had taken his first mortgage in 1981, and I believe, at that time, he had indicated he had gone five years. And I think he had stated that his interest rate was locked in at—it could have been 17.5 per cent, which at the time would have been a pretty good deal. I mean, that was a completely different era when it came to borrowing whether you were a private individual, whether you were in business, or whether you are—were government taking on debt. So the member must recognize that, if he truly wanted to state a statistic that would hold its water, then he would have to provide that calculation, but he would have to calculate to standardize the level of interest charged on that. So, without addressing that variable, he doesn't present any real evidence.

But I wanted to indicate, in my response, as well, because the member had indicated that the government is investing, and now is the time to invest. And, certainly, there is a place and a time for government to invest, but the record of our predecessors would indicate that they choose to go it alone and that, somehow, they think that this is a sustainable path. But the evidence suggests

otherwise, or—the evidence actually, strongly, reports otherwise.

And I would refer him, in Budget 2016, to that financial management strategy that he referenced earlier where he can clearly see on page 11, under stabilizing the net debt to GDP ratio section. I know that the member understands the principle of compounding interest. He understands the, you know, compounding effect. And he can look out there and see that, by pushing investment forward 20 years, 40 years, beyond that, that in Manitoba right now it has become unsustainable in terms of the amount of debt the government continues to take on. This is not—

The Acting Chairperson (Scott Johnston): The minister's time has expired.

Mr. Allum: It's interesting to hear the Finance Minister now, after being out on the campaign trail, and then in the lead up to his budget, and then the delivery of his budget, talk about the terrible state of the Manitoba economy.

Now, suddenly, as Finance Minister, having become conversant with actually the numbers and how they work, is now cautiously optimistic about the Manitoba economy. And we were quite cognizant of the challenges out there. That's why we made the decisions—in many ways the very courageous decisions we made, while he sat on the sidelines and complained and gawked about him. He wanted to say that, you know, the budget was too high or the deficit was too high; he blew by the deficit—the deficit out by \$200 million. He created the \$1-billion deficit.

If you look on the budget papers, any one of the budget books, it's his name at the bottom of it, not ours. It's his name. He—there's only one person responsible for the \$1-billion deficit here, and that's the Minister of Finance who blew through the deficit from last year without the blink of an eye because he probably didn't have the discipline and the understanding to do what was necessary.

*(15:50)

Not only that, he says he's cautiously optimistic about the economy now. It's interesting that, in January—only January, six short months ago, he said the Selinger NDP's mismanagement of the economy—this is a direct quote—is costing Manitobans their jobs. Well, that's quite interesting, considering that we have the lowest unemployment rate in the country. I wonder how he gets to that particular

calculation. Or is it, in fact, Mr. Chair, just the reality that the minister—the Finance Minister's own politics, his own ideology, takes him to a position—an untenable position at that, I might add—where he wants to suggest that the fundamentals of the—Manitoba's economy aren't strong when he's in opposition; now he's cautiously optimistic now that he's in government. He's going to have to explain that inconsistency to Manitobans in the future, and we're going to force him to have to do that.

But I asked him about investments in Hydro because—and he didn't answer it, but I asked him because the Conference Board of Canada in their report yesterday said, and I quote: "And, as more capital is invested in the Keeyask Dam and the Bipole III Transmission Reliability Project, construction will be a strong contributor to bottom-line growth in 2017."

I think the Finance Minister, Mr. Chair, ought to concede that he found the Manitoba economy in a very, very, very strong position and that he's the one who's created a crisis about it and, in fact, has misled Manitobans on that very score.

But I want to now move a little bit to ask him about the minimum wage, because one of the most glaring omissions of the budget concerned the fact that those who earn the least in Manitoba through the minimum wage—and it's established fact, Mr. Chair, that close to 100,000 or probably more than 100,000 Manitobans earn either the minimum wage or close to it, somewhere around 20 per cent of those. So we're talking about 100,000 Manitobans who were looking at the Finance Minister this year for a raise, and yet he didn't increase the minimum wage by one single red cent.

So could the Finance Minister tell the committee today why he chose not to raise the minimum wage this year?

The Acting Chairperson (Scott Johnston): The honourable minister—order, please.

Mr. Friesen: So the member seems to want to have a conversation about perceived inconsistencies in messaging, and I'm happy to have that conversation with him. I'm referring to page 5 of the member's own March 8th budget outlook, the update that the NDP provided to Manitobans. Now, keep in mind that this was only a number of weeks ago in the province.

Now, today the member is bringing a version that is very, very different than the one that his own government provided just weeks ago in the province of Manitoba. And I would remind him—because I'm sure he read that document, as brief and abbreviated as it was—but on page 5, in the overview, his own government reflected on the state of the world economy, talking about an ongoing deceleration of economic growth. They cited that in emerging markets, they cited low commodity prices, they cited slower economic growth in North America in the first half of 2015.

They reflected that there had been several downgrades to the short-term economic outlook for many jurisdictions around the world, and then they went on to cite that the Canadian real GDP was slowing as well. In 2015, they cited different statistics, and then they even cited what they indicated as a revision to Manitoba's outlook. It goes on to state that the nominal GDP forecast is revised down, and finally this overview abstract area of the document includes language like reflecting slower growth in some of Manitoba's markets. It identifies oil extraction. It uses words like moderating growth. And then it ends by saying elevating concerns for future downward revisions.

So I'm struggling to understand when the member talks about what he thinks is a lack of consistency. I would suggest that he seems to be off message in terms of numbers and information that his own government produced and tabled in this House only a number of weeks earlier.

In addition to that, the member invited a conversation around fiscal discipline. He actually used the term fiscal discipline, and I would like to have that conversation in the time that is still remaining to me. This is a government that outspent its planned budget every single year for the last 10 years. If the member would take the time, and I can provide him with the analysis year over year, he would add up those numbers and find out that the total overspend from planned budget over a period of 10 years is \$2.87 billion. This is a government—well, when they were a government, they said prior to the 2011 election that they would balance the budget. By 2014 they broke that promise. They revised their target outward. They pushed it back and said it will happen in 2016. At various points, Finance—NDP Finance minister stated that they were ahead of schedule and that they were confident in hitting their targets. And then, in 2014, the government had changed its mind again and indicated that it was

going to push that date back again to 2018. And in the final document they brought before their defeat from government, then they even declined to provide a path back to balance, simply conveying to Manitobans that they had lost all hope or they had lost all credibility when it came to hitting their targets.

So, for the member to invite a conversation around fiscal discipline knowing the record that his government had, overspending every year, and somehow try to convey in these proceedings that somehow there's risk associated, I'd pull that member back. I would indicate it to him in the strongest terms it was exactly the risk of overspending that was accompanied by not hitting his budgetary targets that makes it now difficult for Manitoba to respond. This is less money available for front-line service investment, more money going to service Manitoba's rising debt, and I indicated those numbers to him just yesterday about just recent increases to Manitoba's debt-servicing charges.

Mr. Allum: Well, it's been a remarkable aspect of our Estimates dialogue, Mr. Chair, that the Finance Minister is always one question behind what I'm asking him, in some cases two questions behind. I asked a question about Manitoba Hydro in relation to the Conference Board of Canada's report yesterday. Get an answer? No. I just asked him about the minimum wage. Did I get an answer? Well, no.

In fact, the Finance Minister is spending a lot of time trying to deflect the very issues that we're trying to discuss here, and I find that quite unfortunate. He says something about targets, and yet you'll look long and hard in these budget papers, Mr. Chair, and you will not find any targets for the Finance Minister about what his deficit reduction plan except that he's going to go the extraordinary length to do it over eight years.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

He doesn't have any targets, but he has told the people of Manitoba and he told the bond 'agencies'—bond rating agencies, which gave them considerable indigestion, that this is the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) retirement plan. It's going to be eight years, and, maybe or maybe not, they might retire the deficit by then. Nobody really knows, because there's nowhere in the budget will you find any targets, any projections that would be satisfactory for us to have a conversation about.

* (16:00)

So, when he wants to suggest to me that I don't want to have the conversation, I do want to have the conversation, Mr. Chair, but the sad reality is that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), in his very own budget, didn't put the data on the table not only for the opposition to analyze but for the people of Manitoba to analyze as well.

Now, by agreement, we had agreed that we would have the Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Schuler) in for the remaining hour. So I'm not sure what needs to happen at that point, but we will defer to this process. I want to make it crystal clear, Mr. Chair, that we are not releasing the Finance Minister. We are going to have longer, more detailed conversations about his budget in the days ahead, but because the Minister of Crown Services somehow finds himself as the junior minister of Finance, we want to spend some time exploring that with him as well today.

Mr. Chairperson: The comment made by the junior minister—about the junior minister was out of order, okay?

Mr. Allum: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I withdraw that comment and apologize for any implication that it may have.

Mr. Friesen: I just want to respond to the member and the statements he's put on the record.

We were having a conversation about discipline, and I would remind him when it came to the record of the previous government, that I believe it was Moody's Investors Service that characterized the failure of the previous government to move towards balance and to reconcile spending with revenue sources as adjustment fatigue. Now, I could be wrong, that could have been DBRS, but I think it was Moody's. Adjustment fatigue is the term they used to describe the NDP's failed record on meeting budgetary projections, their failed record on bending the spending curve, their failed record on moving toward balance.

And, as I mentioned to the member, the real context for Manitobans, of course, then, is that there is less money available to spend for front-line services, less ability of a government to respond agilely—with agility to pressures in our system. And, indeed, as the member knows, there are pressures in this province. We know that there are real pressures when it comes to service delivery. We have among the longest wait times for ERs in all of Canada. As a matter of fact, in the list of the top five ER wait

times, two Winnipeg hospitals are in that unfortunate group.

When it comes to education, the member and I have spoken about the pressures on education and results showing that our students are not leading the pack when it comes to literacy, science and math, but rather trailing all the other provinces with the exception of one. We know that we have over 12,000 kids in the care of child and family service agencies, and we know that we have some of the highest instances of child poverty in all of Canada.

These are real challenges, and a government that does not bend the spending curve and match expenditure to revenue growth will additionally run out of space, will not have the ability to respond to these real and considerable challenges. We are still ascertaining, as a new government, how deep this hole is, but I will just address one more issue and that is, when the member suggests that somehow we aren't interested in accountability and meeting our targets, he could not be more wrong. That is—those are both statements that we have made about our intent to hit our targets, but he can be assured that as we go forward in this process, and of course this is a government that's only been in place for a number of weeks now, we have succeeded to bring a budget in six weeks' time after becoming government. That's never been done, in our knowledge, in Canada.

And the member can be sure that when we sit in these Estimates in less than a year from now and deliver budget 2017, he will be able to look at budget and projections he will be able to see years out, and this is what we were able to bring to Manitobans at this time, but it was not work that we were going to delay. It was work that we headed straight into because we felt it was important for Manitobans to understand the size of the challenge that faces not just this new government, but indeed that faces all Manitobans.

A billion-dollar deficit left by the legacy of a government that could not match its expenditures to its revenues; a government that continually misled Manitobans, not giving them the real figures, but holding on to that information; a government that the Auditor General said spent too much time—too little time making sure it got its updates out on time. These are all areas in which we will improve and, indeed, in our budget speech, we indicated that when it comes to timely reporting of government progress, we will provide it. And the measure—the member can hold us accountable for that. We plan to be

accountable where they were not accountable. We plan to be accountable to all Manitobans on these things.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

We'll just take a moment until the Minister of Crown Services could be able to take the seat.

Does the honourable Minister for Crown Services have any opening statements?

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. We—okay, go ahead.

Mr. Schuler: A great pleasure to be here this afternoon and go through the Estimates of the Crown corporations department. After 17 years, it is a pleasure to be here on this side of the House for once, and instead of being the one posing the questions, it's going to be a very interesting process being the one who answers the questions.

So, I'd like to start off with saying we have a department that may not be large in size or in number, but does have a large degree of responsibility in that we have the responsibility of the essential Crown services that so many Manitobans rely on. The Crown corporations are owned by all Manitobans and our government is committed to ensuring that these essential services are provided effectively and at a reasonable price.

In keeping with our new government's commitment to open and transparent government, we have restructured our relationship and interactions with the Crown corporations to depoliticize their operations. Depoliticizing our Crown corporations and their operations is in the best interests of all Manitobans and serves the best interests of all ratepayers. Our Crown corporations are staffed and operated by experienced professionals whose job it is to work to provide exceptional service and products to Manitobans.

*(16:10)

The professionals of our Crown corporations are the experts in their fields, whether it is the engineer at Manitoba Hydro, the actuary at MPI or the analyst at Liquor & Lotteries. Our new government is committed to utilising their experience and decision making in order to provide the best service for all Manitobans.

Political interference will no longer dictate the operations of our Crown corporations. But, as a

representative of their shareholders, I will be responsible for ensuring that they conduct their business in the best interest of all Manitobans and continue to provide these essential services to the ratepayers.

That would conclude my opening comments.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Before we start with the opposition critic, do you want to introduce your guests first? The staff. *[interjection]*

Oh, the member from Tyndall Park.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): Thank you. We have Dan Lumber *[phonetic]*, who will assist me.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Marcelino: No, I just want to get on with the questions fast to make it a little bit more efficient.

Mr. Chairperson: We'll continue with the questions, then.

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Allum: We are having a hard time understanding exactly what the Minister of Crown Services does.

We've got the Estimates book in front of us and we can't find much in there by way of Estimates for him. He doesn't seem to have a book, no;, there appears to be no particular staff. And he has said that, in his opening remarks, he's a disinterested minister who will not be engaged with the Crown corporations in any manner.

At the same time he is one of the chosen 12 who received, on top of a salary, an enormous wage at the very time that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) refused to give those who earned the least in Manitoba—that is, those who are making the minimum wage, largely 100,000 people here in Manitoba—wouldn't get a raise at all, yet he's got a raise within a few weeks of becoming a minister of something that we can't exactly understand what it is.

So maybe we could just ask—start today by asking the minister exactly what's his job.

Mr. Schuler: I forgot, or neglected to mention, I do have the deputy minister of Crown Services, Deputy

Minister Jim Hrichishen here, as well as the executive financial officer for Manitoba Crown Services, Chester Wojciechowski. And I'm very pleased to have both of these individuals here, and they provide great services to Crown Services.

I—comes as no surprise to this minister, or to our government, that members opposite are confused when it comes to Crown corporations because they know no other model other than political interference. In fact, when we took over as government, we found out that every Crown corporation paid for a political staffer in the minister's office. So let me be very clear about this: every Crown corporation—the ratepayers of every one of the Crown corporations paid for NDP political staff to sit in ministers' offices to, I guess, run interference in the Crown corporation. And we have found out that there was a lot of confusion, not just in NDP benches, which we, from question period today, understand that confusion runs rampant. But there was also confusion—it bled into the Crown corporations because they were never quite sure if it was political staff that they were supposed to listen to, if it was the minister they were supposed to listen to, if it was premier staff they should listen to—they weren't entirely sure who it was that was running the Crown corporations.

And what does that give us? That gives us the kind of poor management that we have had for 17 years. It gives us the kind of rate increases, the unbelievable—the historic—rate increases that we've had at Manitoba Hydro, to the point where the NDP has, basically, stolen our advantage. They have stolen our advantage that we had in low hydro rates. And that's because of political interference.

And I know the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway), who is also very confused, ran in the last election, you couldn't find the NDP anywhere on one of his signs. And people drove by and looked at the sign and it looked like an NDP sign, it smelled like an NDP sign, it quacked like an NDP sign. But nowhere, nowhere could you find the word NDP on it. In fact, what he did is he would take Louise Bridge stickers and put it over top of the NDP. And so I—we're under the assumption he was running for the Louise Bridge party.

So, you know, confusion on the NDP ranks is not something new, nor is it something that we haven't known for a lot of years. Fact, it was a party that was very confused on who their leader was or who their leader was supposed to be. And we

appreciate that there was a lot of confusion on the other side.

And one of the first things our Premier (Mr. Pallister) did is issue mandate letters to each one of the ministers. And I would suggest to the critic responsible that he avail himself of it. It's on the website. It's been made public. He has access to it. If he'd like to, we could get a photocopy for him and read through the mandate letter because it lays out very clearly what my duties and responsibilities are.

And I would suggest that members opposite take the hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars that's allocated to them for research and they get one of their researchers to print off the mandate letter and then it would all be clear, what it is that we do in Crown Services. It's all in front of them, if they want, in black and white.

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you for the answer, my dear minister.

Can the minister give us a brief rundown of the privileges that go with being a minister? Does he drive a government minister's car?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I would like to tell the member opposite, the critic, that there are a lot of privileges that come with this job, starting with the fact that I had the privilege of starting out with a mandate given to me by the Premier that we would no longer have political interference. I was given the privilege of starting a very arduous process of depoliticizing the Crown corporations. [*interjection*]

And, you know, I would pause here for a moment and suggest, you know, the member for Elmwood, I know he was in the House of Commons and was the self-appointed most talker in the entire session that he was there. In fact, he spoke more words than almost any two members of Parliament combined. But, you know, when he's sitting here in Estimates, and the critic for Crown Services asks a question, maybe for—the member for Elmwood would like to allow the critic to actually hear the answers, and it would probably be easier if he wasn't always chirping from his seat, because, you—it's difficult, I think, for the member for Elmwood at the best of times to be chirping and hearing the answers at the same time. So maybe he would like to listen to the answers.

So the question was what kind of privileges do I have. And I have the privilege of working with the Crown corporation boards, with the chair

of the board, which I do. They do work for the minister. We give them direction. We ask for recommendations. We've made that very clear in this House. We gave them access to the minister's mandate letter, which clearly directs where this government's going to go.

And the first thing is, if the member read the mandate letter it was very clear that one of my main responsibilities is to keep Manitoba Hydro as a public corporation. I know that we've suffered under an NDP party great lie for many, many years that somehow there was going to be a selling of Manitoba Hydro. And yet it's very clearly stated in the mandate letter that that would not be the case, that it is going to stay not just as it is, it's going to stay strengthened after it's been depoliticized.

* (16:20)

And that's important for Manitobans to know that we are there to protect one of the greatest assets ever created.

And I'd like to point out for the—my critic, it was actually Duff Roblin in this Chamber—and, in fact, I got the Hansard and I read through it, and I would recommend to all members of this House to read through that Hansard, very interesting the way the debate went. And at that time there was an opposition that was quite interested in what was going on and didn't just sit in their seat and chirp, they actually participated in debate, and it was interesting the introduction of the concept of a Manitoba Hydro and its creation. And I would recommend to members if you really want to understand the history of Manitoba Hydro, go back and start there.

And it was a Progressive Conservative government under Duff Roblin who started Manitoba Hydro, and we are very proud as a Progressive Conservative government to continue to strengthen it, to build it, to really wrest the corporation away from NDP political operatives and make it a corporation that will serve all Manitobans and not the best interests of the NDP party.

And the—strange enough, and I'd say to the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) who is—just can't help himself, and, you know, maybe we should avail him the opportunity that he could actually ask some questions as well instead of chirping. But often what the NDP party thought was best for them in most cases wasn't what was best for the ratepayers and for Manitobans.

So, we are pleased with the Crown corporations and we are looking forward with the depoliticization of them, to them becoming the shining corporations that they should be and will continue to be in this province.

Mr. Marcelino: I repeat the question then: Does the minister drive a government minister's car?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to say that the member opposite need only lean over a couple of benches and speak to the member from Point Douglas who was a minister in the previous government, and he could point out to him exactly what kind of a government vehicle that he drove.

And I would like to point out to the member, my critic, that all ministers, all deputy ministers, the Speaker, and the Leader of the Opposition—in fact, the chair he occupies—or the one next to him, the person who occupies that chair, the Leader of the Opposition gets a government car and makes avail of it, or—and there is a combination thereof. I can remember when Nancy Allen was minister in this House. She chose to have a different combination of an allowance, but either you can take a vehicle or you can take an allowance, or there's other ways of doing it.

But, if the member wants to save time in Estimates, he could always just lean over and the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief) I'm sure could fill him in how that operates and what kind of a vehicle, and I believe I'm driving the vehicle—could maybe be the member for Point Douglas' former vehicle, I think that's the one that I'm driving.

Mr. Marcelino: It's now 4:25, and that was my third question, and I got an answer at last.

Now, the next question, which is something that really is easy, is the minister availing himself of the services of a special assistant?

Mr. Schuler: Well, and I appreciate that the critic is having some challenges with hearing the answers, and maybe if the member for Elmwood would stop chirping, he would hear all the answers.

And I've answered every one of his questions and will continue to do so, and I would like to point out the House that it—this is an important process. When I was here in—I got elected in 1999 and we went into Estimates in 2000, I sat with then one Labour minister by the name of Becky Barrett, a

great parliamentarian, and she and I were in Estimates in Labour for 100 hours.

And we sat in committee all summer long. We started sitting a little bit longer than—a little later than we are right now, and there were no screens on any of the committee windows at that time. All the windows were open, and all the mosquitoes, and flies, and moths all flew in and visited with the committee. And we would sit in committee and at that time there were more than 240 hours of Estimates, and we sat in committee and I ended up securing 100 hours.

So I understand the asking of questions and waiting for an answer. I appreciate that the member has a lot of questions he'd like to ask, and I would suggest to him that he should have suggested to his colleagues that maybe we should have started this at two-thirty or maybe at three o'clock. Because I'm more than prepared to answer all of his questions. I know they're important.

This is an important process in our democracy, it's an important process in a free country, and as an individual who went to Ukraine twice to be an election observer, I came back and learned to respect what we do here far more. And often people will say, well, why do we do this? What is the value of it? You know, the Speaker gets up and maybe admonishes somebody for using someone's name, you know, why does that matter, or how we dress in this Chamber?

And those things all matter because it's about respect for this Chamber; it's respect for democracy. And troubles me a little bit to see Ukraine sliding back into some of the difficulties they're having right now, and that's very unfortunate. So, appreciate the Estimates process, it gives—opposition critic the opportunity to sit down across from the minister and ask questions and bring up issues that are important.

And I appreciate that the member across the way has a lot of questions so just on whether or not I have a special assistant, the answer is yes.

Mr. Marcelino: And can you please ask the honourable minister to tell us, what is the name of the special assistant?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member for that question. I've gotten to know the member for the many years that he's been here as well. I understand this is now his—I think his second term here. It's his second term here and I know that he is interested in knowing who my special assistant is.

I am very fortunate and I'd—I'm pleased to tell the House that my special assistant is a individual who served in the military. He served with honour and distinction. I would like to say that the individual's name is Cameron Bell and he was in active duty in Afghanistan. He served there with distinction and was unfortunately wounded, severely wounded and is now on a permanent disability leave from the Canadian Armed Forces.

And to have an individual of that calibre working for us, he's an outstanding individual, his wife is still in active duty and they and their family reside here in Winnipeg, and to have someone who cares so much about what goes on, and participates, I'm convinced he shows up every morning so early that he probably turns the lights on on the Golden Boy. Like, he's just here very bright and early and he turns all the lights on in the Legislature, and makes coffee for everybody.

* (16:30)

And he just is an amazing individual, and I probably shouldn't be suggesting this to everybody because he probably doesn't have that much time, but, you know, if you every get a chance to meet him, you know, first of all, please thank him for what he did for our country and please thank him for the service that he gave and what he did for Canada, and standing up for the values and the traditions. And he's one of those Canadian heroes.

And, you know, ask him a little bit about his time, and he's always very passionate and very forthright and open about his service, so I am very pleased that Cameron Bell has decided to take on this position. And I am honoured to have an individual of his stature working for me in the department—*[interjection]* He does very well, not just working for myself, he also works in conjunction with my deputy minister. Deputy Minister Hrichishen and he work very closely together.

We have a lot of issues that come in the department, and, just for members opposite, now that we no longer have that ratepayer subsidized NDP political staffer in the department, we now have chosen a different system whereby issues that come in, they go from our office, and, for the information of all MLAs, they come through my office, they go through the deputy minister's office and then they go to the Crown corporation. There's no favouritism on any issue. The deputy minister ensures that they go right into the Crown corporation and they are dealt with there.

And one of the things that, of course, I really appreciate is the fact that Cameron Bell, who's my SA, has helped work out the kinds of systems in how this works best. We don't want favouritism shown by one or others of the 57 of us. We—when issues and concerns come in, they should come in on behalf of all Manitobans, and every Manitoban's concern should be treated equally, as equally as the next, and we are very, very pleased with the way the system is going. We know that the feedback has been very good and we are really pleased with the way the system is working, and a lot of that is attributed to the work put in by Cameron Bell.

Mr. Marcelino: Going to my fourth question, in a previous statement the honourable minister said that the chairs of the board of those Crown corporations work for him.

My question is how many times does the honourable minister spend meeting with the chairs of any of those boards?

Mr. Schuler: If the member would have listened to the opening statement, I think he will have caught the sentence that we feel that the government represents the shareholders or the ratepayers, and we expect that the board chair, the boards, the CEO and everybody who works for the Crown understands that they work for ratepayers of their respective corporation for Manitobans.

And that's who they actually work for. We—through the mandate letter that was given to myself and shared with the Crown corporations, they understand what the mandate is for the Crowns, for the Minister of Crown Services, and the board chairs and the boards take what they do very seriously. And I just know from having spoken to each of the board chairs that they feel very excited about the kinds of tasks and jobs that they've got in hand.

I think one of the things that's probably most appreciated is the fact that they don't have paid NDP political organizers and staff coming in and telling them what they should be doing, and I think they appreciate that very much because that undermines what a corporation is all about. And they appreciate the fact that they've been given clear direction. They, like all Manitobans, first time in the history of this province were mandate letters made public willingly. They were made public by a government for all Manitobans to see.

Now we are under the impression that some mandate letter may have been given to Cabinet

ministers in the past. We don't know. We know that the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) would know; if that was the case, he could tell us. Maybe he could speak up and tell us if they got a mandate letter, but never before was a mandate letter released; and, by doing so, it made it very clear that the board chairs and the corporations and everybody within the corporation and all Manitobans where this government stands on 'openes'—openness and transparency, where we stand on representing what's in the best interest of Manitobans, and we feel the best thing that we can do for Manitobans is keep NDP political operatives out of the Crown corporations. And, insofar as my meetings I have met with each one of the board chairs one time, and in the case of Manitoba Hydro, I've met with the chair of the board twice.

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you for the answer.

And the next question, a corollary to that, would be what were the instructions given to the chair of Manitoba Hydro?

Mr. Schuler: It was an interesting process when I was appointed Crown Services because, as the members in this Chamber now know, the mandate letter was very clear that we were going to depoliticize the process, and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) tasked me with how that was going to be the parameters of the way we were going to deal with the Crown corporations.

So one of the first things we found is, I guess, in times past, paid by ratepayer, NDP political staffers would run interference in the corporation, and anybody and everybody spoke to anybody and everybody. And we made it very clear from the beginning that the chief executive officers do not work for the minister; they actually work for the board. And that was a very, very big step, unlike under members opposite who everybody and anybody worked for anybody and everybody in NDP offices. And so we made it very clear from the start that it would be the minister would deal—*[interjection]*

I would suggest to the critic that if you want us to hear the answers he's going to have to ask the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) to maybe go to the loge and take advantage of going to the loge and having his discussions or stop chirping. But I don't know if the critic can hear the answers because we're trying to answer the question for the critic. I know he's trying to block out the member for Elmwood and I know they spent like 10 months in

Ottawa trying to block out the member from Elmwood.

And, but I—this is a serious discussion, and I hope the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) takes it serious because the first thing we did is made it very clear that the CEOs report to the board. And that's the way it is in corporations, and that's the way it should be.

* (16:40)

In fact, we've looked at other models, and I'd like to thank the department for having researched some of those models and we have looked at some of the models and we think there are some very good models in Canada that we can look at in the way that Crown corporations should be dealt with in such a fashion that we don't get into the kind of crass politicization that we saw the last 17 years.

So, when I did meet with the board chairs, I asked if I could meet with the board chair and I could at some point in time, during that meeting, have the chief executive officer there, in which we showed them the mandate letter, and we made it very clear to them that the structure would be that the board chairs and I would be the ones who would be discussing if anything needed to be discussed, but it would not come from the CEO to the minister's office. It—there's a proper structure that has to be put into place. And we feel that that protects not just the CEO; it protects the minister as well.

In fact, someone was mentioning that the entire sponsorship scandal that took place in Ottawa—and, in fact, I almost think it was in the time that the member for Elmwood was an MP—and during that sponsorship scandal, it was when ministers went around their departmental officials and started to work directly in their departments, started to work directly into Crown corporations. And, when politicians start to go around their senior officials, that's when you start to get yourself into a position where you can get into great difficulty. And I know the member for Elmwood would remember it. It was a catastrophic scandal involving over \$200 million.

And we feel that the best way to mitigate any of that—I'd point out to the member for Elmwood the whole Tiger Dams situation, which I know they—the NDP has yet to explain what all went on there. And that's when politicians go around their officials, and their officials are there to make sure that they don't get into that kind of trouble. And we feel the best way to do this is that the minister deals with the

board chair and not directly with the Crown corporation.

Mr. Marcelino: I don't think I want to thank the minister for the answer, but I'll go on to my next question. I now realize the frustration of anybody who asks questions and get no answers.

But, publicly, the honourable Minister for Crown Services said that he wanted to speak and meet with the chair of the Manitoba lotteries and liquor about the construction plans. And there were some concerns that it refers to the project downtown wherein the lotteries and liquor corporation will be transferring their head offices to the old—or the current Medical Arts Building.

Can the honourable minister tell us what the meat of the conversation was, if it really happened?

Mr. Schuler: First of all, I want to be very careful that we not get into issues that are best asked at Crown Services committee. And specific questions about a Crown corporation, to a Crown corporation, should be coming to a Crown Corporations Committee.

Insofar as what kind of discussions took place with the board chairs, I would point out to members in this Chamber that it was boards that made all kinds of decisions. And we know, unfortunately, that there was political direction given by NDP operatives, maybe the critic across the way, I don't know, maybe the member for Elmwood. Somebody was giving them political direction and making things difficult. But the boards made the decisions.

Our suggestion is that we have duly constituted boards, and they have read the mandate letter that was given to me by the Premier (Mr. Pallister). They know what's in the letter. And they are to run the corporation as they think is best—in the best interests of the ratepayers. I did not talk to them or give them direction on any specific project. That would be going back to the same kind of political interference that we had for 17 years, where paid for by ratepayers, paid by ratepayers, NDP staffers were running interference in the Crown corporations.

The Crown corporations and—the Crown corporations are to run the corporations in the best interests of the ratepayers, and that we were very clear on. That's where we feel is the best place is to leave it. We appreciate that, although with a lot of political interference from the members sitting opposite, decisions were made; we are now going to take the political interference out and allow the

Crown corporations to continue to run their corporations in the best interests of ratepayers. And we fundamentally believe, and I made a comment in my opening statement, and I know the critic was listening—I'm not too sure about other members opposite, but I know the critic was listening—where I said, you know, we believe that the engineer at Hydro or the actuary at MPI or the individual who's working at Liquor & Lotteries doing their work, that the corporations have hired the best people for the position, and thus the corporation and the boards are getting the best advice possible, and we're going to respect those individuals.

We're going to respect the corporations, and we're going to respect the process. And I understand why the member opposite is frustrated, because he is used to getting political answers when it comes to Crown corporations. He is used to political interference. He is used to being able to speak and that voice would shout its way right into the Crown corporation. That is not the case anymore. And it is a very difficult inertia to get away from, that—the kind of political interference we had over the last 17 years. We just feel that it is best that we gave the Crowns the mandate letter that was given to the Minister of Crown Services, that they know what the mandate is and they do what's best, and they should listen to their professionals within their departments.

If that would have been done, the fiasco, the disaster that we face right now in a lot of our Crown corporations wouldn't have been if they—if the NDP would've listened to the professionals. We wouldn't have a bipole line that was estimated to be \$1.2 billion, now running at \$4 billion. That's what political interference gets you. That's what NDP political interference will get a Crown corporation. You go from \$1.2 billion all the way to \$4 billion. And I would suggest members reflect on that and think long and hard about the mess that the NDP political operatives, including members opposite, got us into with the Crown corporations with their political interference.

Mr. Marcelino: That's a big sigh of relief.

Will the minister tell us if he has made up his mind regarding the downtown transfer of the head office?

Mr. Schuler: You know, I'm almost ready to ask for a sound check. Is this microphone working? Check, check, check because I've answered that question for almost an hour. The microphones are—the member can hear me? Can you hear me now? Because I've

made it very clear. That is not a decision to be made by the minister. That is not a decision to be made by government.

First of all, those were decisions made by the board of Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, and decisions should be made by the corporation. The board should ask for information. They should make decisions, and it should be free from the kind of NDP political staff that were running interference in the Crown corporations. And I take it ministers and MLAs—*[interjection]*

* (16:50)

Maybe the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) was one of those operatives that was in the Crown corporations trying to direct them what they should or shouldn't do. And I'd like to make it very clear to this House and to this Chamber and to the critic, and I know he gives a big sigh; it's a big sigh of relief that he finally sees the shackles of political operatives being in the Crowns and interfering with the way the Crown corporations are being managed.

I—you know what—and I appreciate—and that sigh of relief by the member, it echoed through this entire Chamber, because finally—finally—we set the Crown corporations free to do what they should be doing, and that is serving the people of Manitoba and not serving the best interests of a political party. They should not be there to be an arm of a political party or another wing of the NDP. They are there to be the representatives who look out for the best interest of the ratepayers, and that's what the mandate letter says. In fact, I will endeavour that tomorrow, and I'll ask, perhaps the deputy minister could get me some extra copies and we will get a copy of the mandate letter that I received from the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and I'll make sure that I get it to the member tomorrow. I understand that the research staff on the NDP benches doesn't know how to go on the website and run it off. We'll get a copy for the member and we'll make sure that he gets it, and he should read it with interest.

And I would suggest to the member for Elmwood that maybe we'll get him a copy as well, and he should read it because it's a very important document which lays out very clearly that the kind of shenanigans that the member for Elmwood and the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) and my critic and all the others, and the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Chief)—the kinds of shenanigans that were going on in the Crown corporations come to an

end, and that's it. Now we are going to allow the professionals to do what is best for the Crown corporations, and I would suggest to the critic that our opinions should have no weight in the decisions by the Crown corporations. What we think is not important. What's important is what's best for the ratepayers of the Crown corporations, the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Marcelino: Somewhere, in the history of this Chamber, there was a statement made by the honourable minister that he will issue mandate letters to the board of directors of the Crown corporations. Is he willing to table those mandate letters?

Mr. Schuler: Well, I'd like to thank the member for the question, and what we've heard is a question unheard of in 17 years. Because in the last 17 years, there was no such thing as a mandate letter for a minister. If there was, it was never tabled, and the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), perhaps he would like to chime up and tell us, did he get a mandate letter? It was never, ever made public.

They were never made public, and if the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) would give his critic the respect and allow his critic to actually listen to the answer. Because I think if the critic realizes, the whole time he asks his questions, nobody's heckling him, because, on our side, we respect the critic and we would like to hear what he's asking. It's important that we get the question right, and I think it's also important that we get the answer right. And I know that the—that my critic is not hearing the answer because the member for Elmwood just keeps chirping in his ear. And that is not respectful of his colleague. I would suggest that the member for Elmwood should show more respect to his colleague, who he's sitting right next to, and that's what we want. We want to show respect to each other and we want to show that respect to the Crown corporations.

So, again, the mandate letter that was given to the minister is a very clear mandate, and I would suggest members read it and look at it very closely, because it sends a clear mandate not just to the minister, but to the Crown corporations and, frankly, to all Manitobans. It sends a clear message to all ratepayers in the way that we're going to conduct ourselves as a government. And we're going to conduct ourselves in accordance to the way—in the case of Crown Services, the way we're going to deal with the Crown corporations; Minister of Health, the way that we're going to deal with issues there, and so on, so forth.

And those letters—and I know for members opposite, first of all, we've never known that any NDP Cabinet minister ever got a mandate letter, never mind the fact that they would never have tabled them. And then, when we find—we actually said we got them, we tabled them and then the NDP pooh-poohed them and, somehow, don't think that they—there's enough in them. Well, we, actually, would like to see what the NDP ministers got. We'd be interested in doing a compare and contrast. We'd love to see what kind of mandates because I would suggest to my critic, nowhere, nowhere in the former Finance minister's mandate letter was it written that he should raise the PST. I would almost guarantee the member, and maybe he's seen it and he can correct that, but I very much doubt that ever in Stan Struthers's mandate letter, if he was even given one, did it ever state, after the 2011 election, that he was supposed to raise the PST. In fact, if that would have been in the mandate letter, I doubt there would have been the kind of rebellion that took place afterwards.

So I would suggest to the member that he go back to the mandate letter that was provided to the Minister of Crown Services. And we'll get a copy for him and we'll make sure we'll make one available for the member for Elmwood, so he can have a look at it as well. Because it lays out very clearly, not just for the minister, it lays out for the department, it lays it out for the Crown corporations, it lays it out for all Manitobans, the ratepayers, that they know exactly where the government is going. And that is a sign of an open and transparent government. The most open and transparent government we've had, and we achieved benchmarks that have never been achieved, certainly, benchmarks we've never seen in the last 17 years of NDP rule.

And I would suggest that there are some times in an opposition's life cycle that, on one of these, they should just say absolutely right. It's something that its time has come and that it was the right thing to do, not just to issue the letters but also to make them public. And I know that the critic will appreciate—and then I—we'll make sure he gets a copy, that he gets to read through it and see the mandate that's been given.

Mr. Marcelino: The honourable minister, I think, misunderstood my question.

He referred to the mandate letter that was issued by the Premier (Mr. Pallister), but I'm referring to the mandate letter that he himself, meaning the honourable minister himself, said that he will give to the board of directors of the Crown corporations.

Now, that question is still the same. Will he table that mandate letter that he said he will issue to the board of the Crown corporations?

Mr. Schuler: Well, we're not—thank you, Mr. Chair—and when I had the opportunity to meet with each of the board chairs, we spent time going over the mandate letters given to me by the Premier (Mr. Pallister), and we feel that those are very important because they set a tone of the way the Crown corporations are supposed to be run.

It's very clear in the mandate letter, and there's a reason why those were made public because, clearly, our government wants to show Manitobans not just are we a most open and transparent

government, but we also wanted to show that there would be a completely different relationship between the Crown corporations and the politicians. And, more importantly, it's very clear in there that one of my duties and responsibilities—

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., the committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

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