

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

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

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, Hon.	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, October 25, 2016

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I wish to table the Manitoba Children and Youth Opportunities Annual Report.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with section 52.6.1 of The Legislative Assembly Act, I am pleased to table the Members' Allowances Compliance Report For The Period April 1st, 2011 to March 31st, 2016. Copies are placed on members' desks.

Mr. Wishart: I wish to table the Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning Annual Report for '15-16.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The required 90-minutes' notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable Minister of Health please proceed with his statement.

Pharmacists Manitoba Day

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Good afternoon, Madam Speaker.

It's with pleasure that I rise to recognize Pharmacists Manitoba Day at the Legislature and the work of all pharmacists practising in Manitoba. Pharmacists Manitoba Day included an on-site demonstration of some of the services provided by pharmacists, including comprehensive medication reviews, point-of-care testing and assessing and prescribing minor ailments.

Pharmacists Manitoba Day is intended to inform MLAs about the professional services that pharmacists provide to support better care, better health and better value for the health-care system.

I'd like to recognize two individuals who are with us here to celebrate Pharmacists Manitoba day,

Sharon Smith, who is the president of Pharmacists Manitoba, and Dr. Brenna Shearer, who is the CEO of Pharmacists Manitoba.

Welcome Sharon and Brenna to the Manitoba Legislature and thank you for the work that you do on behalf of pharmacists in Manitoba. And thank you not only to those who have joined us here today, but also to all those pharmacists practising in Manitoba who are important pillars of the continuum of the health-care services provided in Manitoba.

Colleagues, please join me with a round of applause to recognize Pharmacists Manitoba Day.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, October 25th is pharmacists day in Manitoba, a day for us to recognize the impact these professionals have on health care in our province and to continue to support the work that they do.

Locally, pharmacists play a vital role in ensuring the health of our communities. They are able to do much more than dispense medication. In Manitoba, they are able to renew or extend prescriptions, prescribe medications for minor ailments and administer drugs by injection.

However, the funding to perform these other duties is sometimes severely limited. The only publicly funded pharmacy service here in Manitoba is immunization, while provinces like Alberta and Ontario publicly fund additional programs, like medication review and assessment and smoking cessation services. Pharmacists can take much of the pressure off of physicians and other areas of the health-care system. In order for them to continue their work, we must provide the critical public funds to support them. We can't expect these services to increase or improve if they don't have the money to do so.

Madam Speaker, today is a significant—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I ask for leave to speak in response to the ministerial statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to speak in response to the ministerial statement?
[Agreed]

Ms. Lamoureux: Today, many of us had the opportunity to meet with members of Pharmacists Manitoba, who have also joined us up in the gallery today.

Nowadays, pharmacists are the most accessible of all health-care providers. Pharmacies have extended hours and some even practise 24 hours a day. They can often provide services and consultations without the need and wait for a doctor's appointment or a long wait time in a walk-in clinic.

Today's pharmacists are highly respected as the medication-management experts of the health-care team. They ensure safe and effective medication use and share those skills with patients, other health-care professionals and the community. Their expertise is part of the important delivery of quality health care to all Manitobans.

Manitoba's 1,500 pharmacists help over 50,000 people every day. The impact pharmacists have on Manitobans' access to front-line health care today—and will have in the future—is tremendous.

Please join me in acknowledging the invaluable contributions that pharmacists make to patient care and hospitals, ambulatory-care clinics—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Disability Employment Awareness Month

Mr. Jeff Wharton (Gimli): Madam Speaker, today, I would like to take a moment to recognize that in the province of Manitoba, October is Disability Employment Awareness Month. This month was created to bring awareness to and celebrate the achievements of persons with disabilities in the workplace.

Individuals living with disabilities are an important part of our province and are valued members of our workforce. Disability Employment Awareness Month is an excellent opportunity to promote and increase employment opportunities for Manitobans with disabilities in order to create a more inclusive Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, we are joined today in the gallery by Justin Styck. Justin has been working at Chudd's Esso in Gimli for 12 years, starting as a gas pumper and working his way up to full-time cashier.

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting Justin in his workplace, where I learned that he maintains

many aspects of the store, from working till—working the till to stocking shelves.

This job has meant a lot to him, as it's helped him give him the ability to support himself without relying on income assistance. It's a work environment that makes him feel happy to go to every day.

Justin's story shows that everyone benefits when we break down accessibility barriers in our world. When the focus shifts from disabilities to abilities, our society becomes more inclusive and welcoming.

I believe that continuing celebrating the contributions of persons with disabilities, especially within the workforce, will promote us to take the steps necessary to become a better province.

I ask my fellow members to please join me in congratulating Justin for his contribution to our great province.

Thank you.

La P'tite France

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Friday, we will be saying a sad farewell to La P'tite France.

For five years, La P'tite France has been running the legislative cafeteria downstairs. They have served countless meals in this building, fuelling MLAs, legislative staff and Manitobans visiting the Legislature.

I know many of us look forward to seeing what delicious daily specials they come up with for breakfast and lunch every day. I'm certainly going to miss Justin, Denise, Darcell and Brian with their incredible and delicious culinary creations.

My hips and I want to say miigwech for always making my french fries extra crispy. Your french fries will be missed.

La P'tite France is a Manitoba business that uses locally grown food, and we're often lucky to have freshly picked vegetables in our meals.

Local businesses like La P'tite France are great for our province. They create a distinctive character in the community, reduce environmental impacts and contribute to economic growth by building jobs here in Manitoba.

Justin has said that their time here—they have met so many people and have had opportunities to cook for—in the past for prime ministers, premiers

and chiefs, an experience that has been an honour for him.

Please join me in thanking Justin, Denise, Darcell and Brian for all that they have done for us during their time at the Legislature.

* (13:40)

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): Madam Speaker, October is Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or SIDS Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness of sudden infant death and to promote safe sleep for babies.

The sudden loss of an infant's life is the most devastating event for any parent and a truly heartbreaking situation. While the number of SIDS cases are decreasing thanks to awareness campaigns such as this, sadly, every year approximately 100 babies will be lost to SIDS in Canada.

SIDS is the leading cause of death for infants age 1 to 12 months, and nearly 90 per cent of SIDS cases occur in babies under six months old. The exact causes of SIDS are unknown; however, research shows that parents can follow these steps to promote a safe sleep: Always place the infant on their backs when sleeping; use a firm sleep surface such as safety-approved crib covered by a fitted sheet; share your room with your baby, not your bed; keep soft objects such as pillows and loose bedding out of your infant's sleep area; not smoking during pregnancy or around your child.

It is important to note that even with all of these precautions, some babies will still fall asleep, never to wake up. My hope in bringing awareness to this House is that we can help reduce the number of tragedies that result from SIDS and support the families who are facing an unimaginable grief.

This month, I encourage all health practitioners, parents, their families and friends, and all caregivers to learn more about the safe sleep practices and help reduce the risk of SIDS.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Gary Smart

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about the sudden passing of one of my constituents. On Sunday, October 16th, Gary Smart passed away

at the age of 40. He leaves to cherish his memory his wife, Janine, and two children, Dylan and Kristin.

Gary lived in Miami and was well-respected in the community as an agricultural professional, a volunteer firefighter and a volunteer in the local minor hockey program. Gary was a great team player and a dedicated employee with Manitoba Agriculture for the past nine years as part of the Farm Management Team. He was admired by all who worked with him. His work on such projects as the Boundary Trail rail company serves as a testament to his work ethic.

Gary was respected by farm families and businesses in his professional life and was known as a team player. My colleague, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler), can attest people were drawn to Gary because of his outgoing personality and his ease in communication. Gary has left his mark on the agricultural community and will be missed by all who came into contact with him.

Madam Speaker, rural communities such as Miami are better places to live with people like Gary, those who are committed to community and public service. Out of respect for the Smart family, the annual Miami foundation banquet has been postponed to mid-December.

We will miss Gary greatly. Our condolences to his family, wife, Janine, and children, Dylan and Kristin, as well as the many friends whose life he has touched.

Thank you.

Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Children In Care Model

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I want to thank all MLAs for the support of the MLA for Kewatinook's resolution this morning. The Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation has seen a remarkable turnaround. Sixteen years ago, Chief Jerry Primrose and council decided to bring various services together under one roof, one executive director and one budget, as part of the NCN Family and Community Wellness Centre.

Other changes were made. On occasion, parents were temporarily removed from a home rather than removing the children, telling the parents that they were the ones who needed to seek help and telling the children that it was the parents who were in difficulty, not them.

The model also included a family retreat centre on an isolated lake where families were exposed to

traditional cultural experiences and could focus on working together and overcoming problems. Families were also supported with items like diapers and with housing issues. Housing, in fact, should never alone be a reason to remove a child from its parents. We need to better support housing.

The NCN model has been effective. It's reduced the number of children in care in Nelson House by 43 per cent. Youth crime has decreased dramatically. Remarkably, the number of addictions has dropped by almost half, and the number of children with FASD has fallen.

Now we must also support a change in the funding model. The old model of providing support based on the number of children in care must go. It's causing a huge difficulty in Nelson House today because as the community improves, funding drops dramatically, and this risks reducing the support available to families to keep families together.

I hope all will see the need for change. Unless the funding model is changed, agencies may be very resistant to move to integrated services delivery because they will see it as reducing their funding and laying off staff, and in the long run, being able to deliver less help to families.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce you to.

We have seated in the public gallery from Al-Hijra Islamic School 60 grade 7 to 9 students under the direction of Karlynn Thiessen, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway).

Also seated in the public gallery are Jill, Hugh, Megan and Sarah Harley visiting here from Calgary, and they are the guests of the honourable Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson).

On behalf of all of us here, we'd like to welcome all of you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Standing Committees Rules and Practices

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Free Press reports today that the Premier is seeking changes to the rules to thwart

our right to hold the government to account at committees.

Madam Speaker, this is right out of the Stephen Harper playbook. When the Premier was in Ottawa, the Harper government tried to manipulate committee rules to limit debate. Then, Ralph Goodale, now Canada's Minister of Public Safety, called it part of a deliberate plan to cause a dysfunctional, chaotic Parliament.

Will the Premier abandon his disrespectful plan and give up his Harper-style approach to this institution?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Note that the smear tactics are lessening in effectiveness already, Madam Speaker. The member opposite was only able to get the name of the former Prime Minister in five times in her preamble this time.

I would reference the fact that I have a long record of supporting committee work, federally and provincially. I've engaged in it; I've engaged in it in a non-partisan way, and I am encouraging now all members of this House to engage in it in that same spirit.

Madam Speaker, we have a new situation in this province where it is no longer fair or right to have one quarter of the MLAs ask 100 per cent of the questions at committee. Needs to be changed.

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

Ms. Marcelino: If government MLAs want to find out information, they can pick up the phone or call a briefing or they can release yet another politically motivated press release.

But accountability to the public requires opposition questioning. It's a feature of our democracy that has been in place for generations, yet the Premier shuts down a debate—right out of the Harper playbook—to frustrate, obstruct and shut down the democratic process.

Will the Premier abandon this wrong-headed approach?

Mr. Pallister: I have tremendous respect for all members of this House who put their name on a ballot, were elected and chosen by the people of Manitoba, so much respect, in fact, Madam Speaker, that I think it would be disrespectful to the three quarters of the members of this Chamber to not have

the opportunity to participate in questioning at committee, including members of the Liberal caucus and members of the government caucus as well.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: What I'm in pursuit of is quite simply an opportunity for all members to participate in meaningful committee work.

This is why, Madam Speaker, we've opened up the prebudget consultation process to members from all parties and why I'm very thankful that the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin) crossed her party's self-imposed picket line and chose to participate in that caucus process. Congratulations.

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

Ms. Marcelino: Manitobans are seeing with clarity, now, the Premier's approach, adapting the most cynical of tactics from the Harper's regime: limiting opposition questions and shutting down debate. He claims he wants openness and transparency, but adopts the worst of the Harper-style tactics and, worse still, he knows this place should function.

For 17 years his MLAs took full advantage of the right of opposition at committees. Now they shut down debate in the middle of the afternoon while the rest of the province keeps working.

Will the Premier end his partisan gamesmanship and respect our long-standing parliamentary traditions and practices?

* (13:50)

Mr. Pallister: I want to particularly thank Steve Ashton for writing that question, Madam Speaker, because it—quite frankly, the members of the—on the opposite side of the House engaged in practices while in government that were the most undemocratic in modern Canadian political history.

They forced Manitobans away from having the opportunity to vote on a tax hike which they themselves promised they wouldn't even invoke. They took away the rights of Manitobans to participate in meaningful processes at committee when they suspended that right to vote, and now they're trumpeting the fact that they don't want Manitoba men and women working on the front lines in labour unions to have the chance to have a secret vote.

So, Madam Speaker, I would urge the member to understand that our traditions, parliamentary traditions, are adopted by us as members and I'm simply proposing an idea which I encourage the members to think about.

Truth and Reconciliation Report Intent to Implement Call to Action 43

Mr. Wab Kinew (Fort Rouge): Madam Speaker, as-sālam 'alaykum.

Translation

Peace be unto you.

English

The Secret Path has highlighted the story of Chanie Wenjack and countless children like him because of the courage of survivors and the allyship of Gord Downie. The issue is top of mind, and we need to make sure the TRC is not ignored but implemented. The centre of implementation is building a new relationship. TRC Call to Action 43 calls on provincial governments to use the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People as a framework for reconciliation.

Will the Premier commit to using UNDRIP as his framework for reconciliation?

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

We are certainly aware of the impact of the story that Chanie Wenjack has had on Manitobans and, I think, Canadians as a whole. I think it was a very good educational process to have that on TV the other night, and I think that many of our teachers will take advantage of that as a resource material. We've already made that available for them, and I think that we will find a different attitude from those that have experienced it.

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

Mr. Kinew: I am pleased to witness on an ongoing basis the commitment of educators towards the process of reconciliation. But this question has to do with the willingness of our elected officials to engage in the process of reconciliation.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People talks about building a relationship and making sure that there is agreement before new projects, new developments, are pursued.

So I would ask again: Will the Premier commit to using the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People as his framework for reconciliation?

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

I am certainly aware that we are all responsible for getting engagement with First Nations regarding truth and reconciliation. I know that many of our members on this side of the House, including the minister responsible for Aboriginal and municipal affairs, have made a very special effort to reach out and get the type of engagement that is real, that will yield results, and we are all working very hard to make sure that everyone feels like they're part of Manitoba.

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

Timeline for Implementing Call to Action 57

Mr. Kinew: One of the strengths of Secret Path is that it teaches the history of residential schools to people who went to school in an era where this wasn't spoken about. That knowledge is also needed by our public servants so that they can serve all of our people in this era of reconciliation.

TRC Call to Action 57 calls on the provincial government to provide education to all public servants on indigenous issues.

Will the minister responsible for the Civil Service Commission tell us when this professional development on indigenous issues will be provided to public servants?

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

I am certainly well aware, as are all our members on this side of the House, that this is not just the responsibility of one department or the other. This is something all Manitobans need to get engaged in. This was a very good example and, perhaps, opening of a door for many people to ask further questions.

I know that there are certainly people out there who in their upbringing were not exposed to some of the truths that involved the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and residential schools. I think everyone is increasingly aware of it. I know that that process is ongoing, and we will certainly make every effort to not cease until everyone is aware.

Child-Care Spaces Need for Increase

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Under our NDP administration, child-care funding more than tripled and the number of funded child-care spots nearly doubled. Despite these gains, Manitoba is experiencing the biggest population growth in modern Manitoba history. This government will have to work hard and make substantial new investments if it is to stay in one spot, let alone bring down the wait-list. Instead, this government looks like it's frozen in time with a supposed plan that no one has seen yet for home child care.

Will the minister drop the partisan rhetoric and get to work on creating more child-care spaces to address this urgent need?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): I very much enjoy always talking about issues that have benefited myself in so many ways and so many families that are out there. We have three children that worked—that were—went through the child-care system, which is extremely important, right, for Manitobans.

The best way to learn about the future is to understand the past. And what we know from the NDP government is they left over 14,000 people on wait-lists in terms of child care. I've talked to parents today that are still waiting on that child-care list that's there. This government has committed over \$163 million, the most amount of money dedicated towards child care in this province's history.

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

Ms. Fontaine: So let me just repeat, because clearly the minister didn't hear me: Funding for child care more than tripled since 1999, yet this government's approach, or lack thereof, is simply unacceptable. And Manitobans agree. A new poll today shows that 75 per cent of Manitobans support a system where every child who needs a space gets one. The list of Manitobans looking for child care are growing every day, and this minister has no plan to address the growing demand.

Will he come to the table today with the child-care providers and commit to addressing this urgent need?

Mr. Fielding: We enjoy hearing from what the Manitoba Child Care Association has to speak to. I've toured child care, whether it be—or whether it be

community-based child care as well as the public child care.

I can tell you that the history of the NDP having over 14,000 people on wait-lists is unacceptable. I can also tell you that the NDP don't want to talk about a home-based child care because they're—under their administration, the number of spots for home-based child care dropped by over 27 per cent, Madam Speaker, or 1,000 spots. So they have dismal record when it looks—when it talks about a balanced approach to child care that we have and we will present to Manitobans.

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

Ms. Fontaine: I know that the minister keeps parroting the 14,000 spaces, but, actually, in the last six months, 3,000 more spots have been added to that wait-list under this administration. And, according to a recent study of the government's plan on child care, the report urges the government to rethink its reliance on the current family-home child-care model, calling it a shrinking and troubled sector.

Here is an easy question for whoever wants to answer it: How many new public spaces will be funded?

Mr. Fielding: I do appreciate the question.

That's why we're putting more money towards child care than any time in this province's history. The 14,000 people that are on waiting lists chronicles what the NDP's done—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable minister.

Mr. Fielding: The 14,000 people on our wait-list chronicles the fact that NDP have—are poor planners and cannot plan anything in terms of child care that's *[inaudible]*. The home-based something is also supported by a lot of members of their caucus. I know the member from Point Douglas was in the paper last year, talking—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: —about a program, Family Dynamics, that looks at home-based child care and was very supportive of that. In fact, the NDP had a news release that talked about the importance of home-based child care last year.

So we know there's a lot of divisions in the NDP caucus, but we didn't know there's a child-care division, as well, with them.

* (14:00)

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to proceeding with oral questions, we have a guest in the loge to my left, and I'd like to introduce you to Jerry Storie, who's the former MLA for Flin Flon.

And on behalf of all of us here, we'd like to welcome you here.

Fentanyl Crisis

Request to Declare Public Health Emergency

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, the fentanyl crisis that is sweeping this country and province is deepening. It will not wait for this government to respond, and that is why we've been calling on this government to take action now. Our hearts break when we hear of situations like the nine-month-old child who was potentially exposed by simply being near the drug.

We've heard from health officials who recognize the gravity of the situation, and so we continue to ask the government to immediately declare this a public health emergency.

Can the minister inform the House if he met with the chief medical officer of Manitoba to ask to declare the fentanyl crisis a public health emergency?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, I am encouraged, Madam Speaker, that the member seems to be understanding more each and every day that, in fact, it is the chief medical officer who calls a public health emergency, not the Minister of Health, and so I'm glad that he's come to that understanding.

I'm also glad that there was some legal movement on the case that we heard about in the last couple of days. I think that all Manitobans were particularly concerned to hear that issue, and I'm glad that there is some legal action happening in that regard.

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

Naloxone Kit Availability

Mr. Wiebe: I heard no answer there, and as we continue to hear from health-care workers who

recognize the scope of this problem, I'd like to ask the minister again.

When we welcomed the pharmacists here to the Legislature on a day like this today, we thanked them for bringing the attention to the important work that they do. They are on the front lines, Madam Speaker, of health-care delivery in this province, and they're willing to step up and be a part of this fight against opioid abuse.

Will the minister recognize the expanded scope of these pharmacists and that—what they are able to perform and designate them as the primary point of distribution for naloxone kits, as has been done in other provinces?

Mr. Goertzen: As we have already indicated, we will be extending and expanding the distribution of naloxone on a province-wide basis. That wasn't done previously under the previous government, but we recognize this is an emerging issue, Madam Speaker, and so we are taking action to match the concern that is happening.

We also are going to be having good dialogue, I believe, with our federal counterparts to look for a national strategy. I spoke yesterday about the need to look for restriction on pill presses. I'll be bringing that to the federal table when we meet in Ottawa in a couple weeks, and I think there are other things that can be done on a national strategy. We're working locally, but also looking nationally at this serious problem, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, while we support a co-ordinated action between the provinces on this issue of national importance, it is no reason to wait. We can take concrete action in Manitoba today to combat this crisis. If there's a way to fight it, then we should do it. We should not wait for a national meeting in Ottawa in a couple of weeks, as the minister proposes.

Will the minister simply commit to using the purchasing power of the provincial drug plan to bring costs down and to fully funding the kits so the burden doesn't fall to families for the important naloxone kits?

Mr. Goertzen: Of course, there are a number of things that we believe have to happen to lessen the burden on the issue of fentanyl and carfentanil, sadly, in Manitoba and across Canada, and certainly

part of that will be about an education process and trying to ensure that individuals know the dangerous results of these drugs. Some of that will be a national co-ordinated 'strategy.'

Sadly, Madam Speaker, we know that those who are dealing drugs or that are using them in an inappropriate way aren't constricted by borders. They don't stop at the Manitoba-Ontario border. They don't stop at the Manitoba and Saskatchewan border, and that's why there needs to be a co-ordinated approach which is supported by Health ministers across Canada of all political stripes.

Labour Union Consultation Pension Regulations

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): This government pretends to love union members, but workers, through their unions, have negotiated pensions in good faith and they expect employers to live up to those obligations as they should live up to any other contractual obligations.

Will this government commit to ensuring that employers live up to their obligations that they've made?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): I know yesterday the member raised the same issue. And he was asking for a short question, and I'll be short and concise with the member today.

Clearly, there's a difference. The opposition clearly answers to union leaders. We as government answer to all workers in Manitoba.

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

Mr. Lindsey: The government has made an unprecedented attack on labour, the hallmark of its first six months in office. It refuses to name labour to the economic advisory committees, refuses to even return phone calls to labour leaders.

Will this government commit to ensuring that labour is represented if and when pension rules are reviewed?

Mr. Cullen: I do appreciate the member's questions in regard to pensions and review.

Obviously, there's going to be a point in time in the very near future when pension rules will be reviewed. We as a new, open and transparent government will welcome input from all members across Manitoba, including union.

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

Mr. Lindsey: When a company does not live up to its obligations to workers, it hurts the workers, it hurts the communities. As the Premier (Mr. Pallister) himself once said, pensions are the employees' money.

When a company cannot or will not meet its pension obligations, will this government step up and guarantee those workers their pensions?

Mr. Cullen: Obviously, a hypothetical question there, and we'll have to deal with that if the situation does arise.

But we do know the history of this particular opposition. They went out and made promises to Manitobans that they weren't going to raise the provincial sales tax. They turned around, they expanded the provincial sales tax, they increased the provincial sales tax. We know what happens when obligations are not met. That happened last April, Madam Speaker.

Prebudget Consultations Community VLT Revenue Sharing

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Premier for his invitation to the Liberal caucus to participate in the budget consultations.

Yesterday I was at the consultations in Thompson, and it went very well. I would—there we were told that many millions of dollars which are collected in Thompson, perhaps as much as \$50 million a year, as a result of VLT revenues, are then received provincially and then used to subsidize people in Steinbach because they have no VLT revenues.

And I would ask the Premier: Does the Premier plan to continue the existing approach to take money from—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I want to thank the member for River Heights for also being at the budget consultation in the city of Brandon. Certainly, we have appreciated all of the Manitobans so far who have had their say, and as the Premier stated, as well, we also thank the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin) for being present yesterday, for representing her constituents and

bringing important issues to the table as well—appreciated her involvement in those proceedings.

We heard from many Manitobans, including some of the people yesterday in Thompson, community groups, business groups, municipal leaders, who are helping us, contributing to this process. And I know that out of this work, important information will emerge.

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

Children in Care Integrated Service Delivery

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, another budget item was mentioned in the debate on the resolution this morning, a resolution put forward by the MLA for Kewatinook. Her resolution, which the government responded to positively, called for the support of an integrated delivery model for services for children and families that has reduced the number of children coming into CFS care.

* (14:10)

Will the government be providing budgetary support for the development of integrated service delivery models at the community level in a way that reduces child apprehensions, reduces crime, reduces addictions and reduces FASD?

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question.

And, again, the information he raises is important. It underscores the type of idea that is emerging in this context. It is a context that we continue to invite members of the NDP to that table if they would understand the good work being done there, if they would understand the excellent presentations being made. Certainly this member raises an important issue where innovation, where new approaches are being undertaken.

What's emerging at these meetings is Manitobans saying you will not get there through their thinking of the past. New methods, new approaches are needed to fix the finances and get this province back on track.

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

Children in Care Change of Funding Model

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I table evidence of a decrease of—in addictions in Nelson House by about 50 per cent, a

dramatic difference from the rest of Manitoba where addictions actually went up by 5 per cent.

Yet I understand the Minister of Families may dramatically reduce funding to the successful Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation agency because the government funds agencies based on the number of children in care.

When will the government end the old funding model based on the number of children in care, which provides an incentive to put more kids in care, and when will the government replace this old model with a funding model which provides an incentive to keep children with their families?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): The member raises some important information.

I know our minister was just up visiting at NCN. He's aware of issues that are arising there. At the same consultation meeting, we heard individuals and the groups saying we're very interested in new approaches, including social impact bonds, to bring changes. But I should mention it's not just in the public consultations, also online and intranet-based where civil servants—and thousands of them already have availed themselves of the opportunity to tell this government how to go forward. That good advice is coming forward. We're receiving it from Manitobans.

We invite the NDP party to get on board and get to these public consultations while there's still time.

East Side Road Authority Auditor General's Report

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Madam Speaker, the Auditor General has recently released a scathing report on the mismanagement of the East Side Road Authority under the former NDP government. The Auditor General supported four out of the five allegations raised by a whistleblower regarding financial and other reported irregularities.

Can the minister comment on the Auditor General's findings and the work the minister is doing to address the legacy of duplication, mismanagement and waste of the previous government?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): I would certainly urge all members of this Chamber to read this report.

The Auditor General's report was a harsh condemnation of the NDP waste and mismanagement of taxpayers' money. In the report,

if you were to read it, it outlines the lack of transparency, a lack of due diligence on the ESRA operations that were run by the NDP. The East Side Road Authority is the ultimate in the NDP legacy of debt, decay and decline.

I look forward to this afternoon's debate on Bill 16 where the East Side Road Authority repeal act.

Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Head Office Cancellation of Relocation

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries chose the Medical Arts Building for its new corporate head office after they completed a comprehensive evaluation and due diligence process.

They concluded that 233 Kennedy represented the best value for money and would save \$23.6 million over the next 20 years; that's over and above the \$36 million that was already saved as a result of the merger of Manitoba Lotteries and the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission.

Well, Madam Speaker, the minister should've had all that information, but if he doesn't, I'm going to table it for him today.

Can the Minister for Crown Services present us with any evidence, any evidence at all, that was used to support why they cancelled—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Crown Services): I'd like to say for this House that under the decade of debt and decay, we had the NDP take Manitoba Hydro from a \$12-billion debt to \$25 billion in debt.

When members opposite were in government, what did they say to their government, and I'm going to quote from the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino). He said, on Friday: When we were government we kept our questions to ourselves.

On behalf of all Manitobans, perhaps they shouldn't have.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

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

Mr. Allum: We'll call that strike one.

It appears only one board member was given the task of looking into the downtown relocation project,

and so far the government has been unwilling or unable to produce any of evidence of due diligence to support the cancellation of an important project.

Can the Minister for Crown Services, here, today, present the House with even a list of the people that that board member consulted before they killed that project?

Mr. Schuler: Under this NDP government they went from \$12 billion to \$25 billion in debt. That, Madam Speaker, is strike \$12 billion.

And I'd like to suggest to this House that the member for Tyndall Park (Mr. Marcelino), when he said, when were government we kept our questions to ourselves, I would like to point out to this House that is one of the reasons why we face a decade of debt and decay that our government was elected to undo. We were elected to fix the finances of this province, and that is exactly what we're going to do.

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

Mr. Allum: Well, Madam Speaker, when I moved to Manitoba in 1996, downtown Winnipeg was like a doughnut: there was a hole in the middle of our city. Today there's 16,000 people living downtown, new businesses, the MTS Centre and a whole bunch more going on downtown, and the minister only wants to talk about—make glib answers to important public policy questions.

So we want to know from him today: Can he provide us one shred of evidence why he cancelled that project? We want the answer now.

Madam Speaker: I would ask all members for some courtesy here. There are questions being asked and answers being given, and I would expect a higher level of decorum from this House, and I would certainly appreciate it.

The honourable member—the honourable Minister of Crown Services.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, Madam Speaker, I would like to give him some evidence: it's called April the 19th; it was the last provincial election.

Synergy Inmates Phones Inc. Publication of Correction Facility Contract

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, we learned yesterday that this Minister of Justice has nothing to say and no plan regarding the safety of inmates in light of deaths in our correctional centres.

Today, Madam Speaker, we've learned more about the impact that a new Texas-based phone provider will have on safety by denying inmates contact with their families.

We know that in Saskatchewan this same Texas-based company hired by this minister provides phone services at several times greater than actual cost, which makes this service unattainable for many prisoners. We learned about a couple in Saskatchewan having to sell off assets just to have a daily phone call.

Will this minister make this contract public so Manitobans can see details of what awaits families in our province?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'm surprised that the member opposite is asking for this, considering it's his government that originally awarded the contract in the first place.

* (14:20)

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Swan: Well, this minister knows very well, Madam Speaker, that it is she that entered into a contract with a Texas-based phone company and these phone rates come into effect next week. We know that a single telephone call up to 15 minutes in Manitoba will cost \$3 and a similar collect call will cost \$4.50. We know that inmates and their families will have to pay fees just to deposit money to pay these telephone rates.

I ask the Minister of Justice again, and maybe it's the kind of easy question the Premier says he wants to answer: Will this government put its words into action and have accountability and openness and make this contract public? Will she do it today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Member's quite right; it is an easy question to answer, Madam Speaker. His government awarded the contract. He may have missed that because he was out organizing a rebellion against the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) sitting in front of him.

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

Mr. Swan: What a disappointing answer from the Premier of this province. I've asked repeatedly for the Minister of Justice to table a copy of the contract. If what she says is the case, then table the contract

and we'll see what it says. She should be aware that jail telephone services across the United States and now in Canada have a terrible reputation. They've often been a subject of lawsuits and, in some cases, states have passed legislation to cap costs.

If this minister is so certain and if she believes she's on the right track, why wouldn't she table the contract? What does this minister have to hide?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, we have nothing to hide from members opposite, who entered into the contract with these people in the first place, Madam Speaker. But I think it's important to note here that there are differences between the system here and in Saskatchewan. In fact, Manitoba does not charge connection fees as they do in Saskatchewan, and, in fact, Saskatchewan has higher long distance fees.

But, Madam Speaker, I think it's important also to note that we inherited some of the most significant challenges that we face in our correctional facilities and in our justice system from members opposite. And the member opposite was the former Attorney General of Manitoba, the former Justice minister. He and his colleagues are the ones that put him—us into the situation that we're in today. Where they failed, we will deliver.

Proposed Federal Carbon Tax Minister of Sustainable Development's Position

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Yesterday, I gave the Minister for Sustainable Development the opportunity to describe for all of us what position she took at the national meeting of environment ministers recently. Someone else felt it was more important for them to answer the question, so I'll give the minister a chance to answer it again if she's able.

Can she tell us what position she took at the national meeting of environment ministers on the federal government's carbon tax?

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sustainable Development): I'd like to thank the member opposite for that question.

Over three weeks ago, I actually did attend that meeting, and I'm proud to say that this government did say at that meeting. And, based on that, we received clarity from the federal government. We plan to develop a made-in-Manitoba climate action plan, one that's good for Manitoba and also for Canada.

We'll get it right, minister. We're going to take our—or, Madam Speaker—we're going to take our time and make sure that we get it right.

Thank you.

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

Use of Federal-Provincial Transfers

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, I thank the minister for that answer, such as it was. Not a whole lot of detail in that. Let me give her a chance to go one step further. The federal government is planning to apply a \$10 per carbon—per ton of carbon tax on all provinces across the country.

Could the minister inform all Manitobans how much new money will be coming to her department when that tax is implemented?

Mrs. Cox: I'd like to thank the member opposite.

You know, we are consulting with Manitobans, and I know the minister—the member opposite doesn't like to hear the word consultation, but that's what we're about. We're open and transparent. We do plan to consult with all Manitobans and stakeholders. We've started that process, Madam Speaker. We met with the Keystone Ag Producers, with the Home Builders' Association, with the assembly of—or the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the City of Winnipeg, the Climate Change Connection, Green Action Centre, ISD, just to name a few.

So we are consulting. We started that process, and we are going to get it right.

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

Mr. Altemeyer: Unbeknownst to me, that was a tougher question than I thought, Madam Speaker, I'll give her the answer. At \$10 a ton, this government will receive over \$200 million in the first year alone in additional revenue. Five years later, at \$50 a ton, under the federal plan, they will be receiving over \$1 billion in additional revenue.

What is the government's plan for that money?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, this easy question illustrates why the government previous had such a problem not with revenue, but with spending.

This is the exact reason right here. We should be concerning ourselves—and we are on this side of the House—with addressing climate change in a real way, concerning ourselves with what works effectively to

reduce our carbon footprint, and all the member cares about is how many more tax dollars are going to come in. Typical of the previous administration, Madam Speaker. Sad but true.

East Side Road Authority Auditor General's Report

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): The former NDP government made a lot of claims and promises regarding the value provided by the NDP East Side Road Authority.

Can the minister tell this House the findings of the Auditor General and the comments from local communities regarding these claims and promises made by the former NDP government?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): The Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen), the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke) and myself met with all the east-side councils, band councils, elders, chiefs, councils, and it was an amazing story that they had to tell us about the—just the brutality that this former government dealt those east-side residents was absolutely shameful: the bullying, the intimidation, the coercion that went on by this former government against those residents, all in the name of trying to build their own public popularity. It was disgusting, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Petitions. The honourable member for—oh. Order, oh. Order. Order.

Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Madam Speaker: Now, petitions.

Bell's Purchase of MTS

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

The background of the petition is as follows:

The 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 five-gigabyte unlimited monthly cellular package is \$117 as compared to Winnipeg where MTS charges \$66 for the same package.

Losing MTS will mean less competition, 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 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 was signed by many fine Manitobans.

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

Union Certification

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitobans have benefited greatly from a fair and balanced approach to labour relations that has led to a long period of labour peace in this province.

Under current legislation, if 65 per cent of workers in a workplace vote to join a union by signing a union card, then a union can qualify to become automatically certified as the official bargaining agent for the workers.

These signed union cards are submitted to the Labour Board and an independent review by the Labour Board is held to ensure that the law has been followed.

Provincial threshold to achieve automatic certification of a union is the highest in the country; at 65 per cent, the democratic will and decision of the workers to vote to join the union is absolutely clear.

* (14:30)

During the recent provincial election, the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party announced, without any consultation, that it was his intention to change this fair and balanced legislation by requiring a second vote conducted on a matter where the democratic will of the workers has already been expressed.

This plan opens up the process to potential employer interference and takes the same misguided approach as the federal Conservatives under the Harper administration took in Bill C-525, which was nothing more than a solution looking for a problem.

The recent introduction of Bill 7 by the provincial government confirmed this possibility by removing automatic certification and the safeguards in The Labour Relations Act to protect workers from the employer intimidation during certification process.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge that the provincial government maintain the current legislation for union certification which reflects balance and fairness, rather than adopting the intention to make it harder for workers to organize.

And this petition has been signed by many hard-working Manitobans.

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, pursuant to rule 33(7), I'm announcing that the private members' resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable member for the Interlake. The title of the resolution is Supporting Government Amalgamation Decision of East Side Road Authority.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that the private members' resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable member for the Interlake. The title of the resolution is Supporting Government Amalgamation Decision of East Side Road Authority.

* * *

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, for this afternoon, we would like to call, for second reading, Bill 16, The Manitoba East Side Road Authority Repeal Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader, that Bill 16 will be considered this afternoon.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 16—The Manitoba East Side

Road Authority Repeal Act

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler), that Bill 16, The Manitoba East Side Road Authority Repeal Act, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Pedersen: It gives me great pleasure to bring this bill forward to this House. On April 19th, Manitobans decided rather forcefully that we needed a new government, a new direction in this province. And one of the election promises that this government made was to repeal the east-side authority. And we're making good on that promise.

And not only are we making good on that promise, we're making good on that promise because it needed to be done very badly.

The Auditor General released their report. That was probably one of the most critical reports that I've ever seen from an Auditor General, and I've been on Public Accounts committees for a number of years and seen a number of reports, but the findings within the Auditor General's report were really quite damning to this—the former government. And I can just—a few of the highlights from this, because I'm sure that a number of the members opposite have still not read this despite my pleas to them to read the report. I have extra copies and it does make very fascinating reading, but, you know, just to highlight a few of the findings from the Auditor General was—there was supposedly an Aboriginal Engagement Strategy put in place by the East Side Road Authority.

And, first of all, I would just like to emphasize that whenever you say East Side Road Authority, or ESRA as we tend to refer it to, that should be NDP ESRA, because the NDP ran ESRA and they decided what should happen and what wouldn't happen within ESRA. So this is really a report on the NDP party.

So one of the things—one of the—just the first findings of the Auditor General that—in his

report—that there was supposedly an Aboriginal engagement strategy, but this—the Auditor General says it's missing measurable objectives. So if it didn't have objectives, why was it even there?

They go on to say that ESRA didn't—does not have a defined risk management process. In other words, it was one of the worst run outfits going because it didn't have any risk management process. There was no defined risk management process in place, and the Auditor General goes on in great length to explain why their office has reported this. There was things like capacity building allowances; these were slush funds. The Auditor General's very polite in not calling them slush funds, but that's what they were.

ESRA did not split out capacity building allowance from the remaining contract items. ESRA put out contracts; there was supposed these capacity building allowances built in there, but there was no way of tracking them. They have no way of knowing what happened to this money. They're talking about approximately 22 per cent of a contract was a capacity building allowance, but they did not track where that money went, to who it went to, and what it was ever used for. They didn't—ESRA did not even have a policy in place to define, to figure out how to calculate the capacity building allowance.

Under the Auditor General's Report we know that 51 per cent of the profits were to be distributed to the community corporation, and this was another one of these shell companies that ESRA forced the communities to make, to set up, and we—there is—there was no tracking of the money. They had capacity building allowances built into these contracts and then there was—when the First Nations formed these shell companies at the request of ESRA there was no tracking of where the money went of the supposed profit that was supposed to be in there. So there's a lot of money that disappeared.

There was no mentoring management plan within ESRA to mentor these First Nations as to how—and I can understand why ESRA didn't have a management—mentoring management plan, because they couldn't even manage themselves, so how would they ever expect to manage another company? So there was—community corporations were required to provide management mentoring plans. No plans were obtained from contracts in their sample.

It goes on: ESRA did not periodically verify the accuracy and the number of hours provided on time

sheets or the resident status of the employees because they were supposed to hire a certain amount of—certain number of local employees.

They were—ESRA was not monitoring the local procurement of any of the tendered construction contracts. This report just goes on and on and on about this.

And as I have cited in question period, the community benefit agreements that was sort of the hallmark of the East Side Road Authority, the NDP ESRA—how ironic that they call it community benefit agreements because there was no sense of community in these. The community was not involved in setting up. ESRA came in and told them what to do. There was no benefits going back to the communities; we know that. We know that from talking to the communities that there was no benefits going back to them and there was no agreement, because we heard first hand from the First Nations communities that came in to see us that there was no agreement. They were told what to do and when they didn't—when they weren't quite obliging to being told what to do, they were then bullied and intimidated into doing what the NDP ESRA wanted them to do and we heard that first-hand from the communities that came to see us.

* (14:40)

And I have to say, when those communities came in and, as I mentioned, the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations (Ms. Clarke), the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen), we met with these communities in my office, and those communities came in, really, with a sense of unease because they had—there had been no respect given to them, there had been no relationship built with them, and so we had to start—we really did start from less than zero on this in trying to build a relationship built on respect.

We had tremendous conversations with these communities, because as they—as we talked, as we listened to the elders, as we listened the chiefs, as we listened to the councillors, they told their stories and we were very upfront from the start. We wanted to build a relationship built on respect and mutual respect for each other, because that's how you build a relationship. You don't build it by going in and demanding of residents—whether they're east-side residents or whether they're anywhere in Manitoba or anywhere in the world, you don't build a relationship built on respect when you try to bully and intimidate people.

So this was a useful first start for this government to start building that relationship. Now, it goes far more—it goes far more—than just the first meeting with them. You can't have one meeting and move on from there. My department is meeting right now, very shortly, with the First Nations. They've been in contact all along as we've tried to untangle the mess within ESRA, and reaching out to these communities, and our department is currently in conversation with these communities because that's how you continue to build a relationship, it's—and we will work very hard to continue to do that.

And we were very upfront with the communities. We told them right upfront that we won't always agree on everything, because if you always agree that means that someone's not thinking. So it depends very much on having open and honest dialogue with each of these communities, with all of these communities.

Speaking of the CBAs, the community benefits agreements, there was 27 different CBAs out there. Each one of them is different, in different stages of completion, some—a bunch of them were signed in the blackout period just prior to the election. Their—this government had—what do you expect from the NDP when they have no scruples at all and no business acumen at all, that they would go out and try to buy votes, and that's the unfortunate part is that they used these community benefits agreements to coerce and to bully the east-side residents, all at the same time trying to convince other Manitobans that they were actually had any intention to build roads.

And, when you look at the NDP ESRA's plan, by their own admission, they were talking about in some of the more remote communities—these are all remote communities, but there's a number of them that are even more remote than others—they went out to the most remote communities. By ESRA—NDP ESRA's own admission, it'd be 30 years before they ever build a road out there, and yet they put out contracts to clear brush, to do environmental studies, and they said at the same time we wouldn't be building a road for 30 years. Well, the brush will be all grown back by then; the environmental study won't mean anything.

But this is how they tried to placate communities and silence communities into submission to the NDP, by throwing out work piecemeal everywhere across the east side rather than a co-ordinated approach. And that's how the NDP operated when the—when communities pushed back on this, they

were bullied and intimidated and threatened that work would be totally withdrawn if—unless they agreed or at least silenced their criticism of the NDP ESRA.

So this is the atmosphere that this government comes into and how we have to start to building a relationship back with these communities and with—and to help all Manitobans understand what this NDP was up to over there.

They spent \$500 million and got 88 kilometres of road built—\$500 million and 88 kilometres of road built—and that is why Manitoba Infrastructure, the department, is taking over—taking back control of this. This is what Manitoba Infrastructure does. They build roads. They build bridges. They build—and the winter roads will need to be maintained. This is an important access for many of these communities is to help there. But we can work with the communities to help build these winter roads in the meantime while we—the work proceeds to build a permanent road system throughout the east side.

And this is—these communities do face challenges and we heard it first-hand. I'm sure most members in this Chamber have heard first-hand the challenges of the isolation that many of these communities face. We look at the Shoal Lake road, we have a commitment to build the Shoal Lake road. We will build the Shoal Lake road. And, unlike the previous government who looked at the problem for the last 17 years and then put up steady growth signs and that was their definition of doing infrastructure, so they are—it—there are ongoing work happening behind the scenes to get this.

Anybody who's familiar with infrastructure knows that you have to have the proper engineering and the proper, first of all, consultation with indigenous groups. And I should mention that in our meetings with the other two ministers of that—and I met with—we also met with the Manitoba Metis Federation. And the Metis Federation is more than a little upset with the NDP ESRA because many of the—much of the work that was done on the east side totally ignored the Manitoba Metis Federation and through some of their traditional lands. It's the same thing with the Shoal Lake roads; there's traditional lands there for them also. So we will involve the Manitoba Metis Federation and the other Aboriginal groups as we move forward. It's about developing a working Aboriginal engagement strategy, unlike what the NDP ESRA did before.

So there's a lot of work to do in this. The very first step was to introduce this bill, and we're now into second reading on this. I would look for support from all members of this House to move this bill into committee so that we can do this. The work continues ongoing within the Infrastructure Department to untangle the web of the CBAs that are out there, to work on a capital plan moving forward, to work with the communities on the east side—and Shoal Lake I'll add in there too—as—on a capital plan moving forward so that they—they're able to ramp up.

We had an excellent meeting yesterday with the training group that looks at training indigenous groups so that they—and it's more—there is so much more than just having a job when that project is in your community. It's about training people so that they're able, capable of working on other projects outside of their own community, because to only have employment during that short period while they're in their area only helps temporarily. What we're looking for is long-term solutions to helping lift people out of poverty, to give them that standard of living which all Manitobans strive for.

So, Madam Speaker, I just want to wrap up by saying that all of us, whether individuals or community groups or political parties always want, strive to have a legacy and most of us strive to have a positive legacy.

But the legacy of the NDP amongst many—and my colleagues on this side of the government are seeing many of the unfortunate legacies of the NDP. But this ESRA, East Side Road Authority, as the ultimate in mismanagement of funds, of Manitoba taxpayers' funds, the mismanagement of an entity set up to solely buy political favour and not to accomplish anything, this East Side Road Authority is—will be the NDP's legacy of failure going forward.

*(14:50)

So, Madam Speaker, I just want—I again, ask all members to certainly bring forward their comments on the East Side Road Authority, but in the end I hope that we can all agree that the East Side Road Authority was a failed NDP project that cost Manitobans dearly and this government will fix it and we will build roads like Manitoba Infrastructure always has.

Thank you.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 15 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the minister by any member in the following sequence: first question by the official opposition critic or designate, subsequent questions asked by critics or designates from other recognized opposition parties, subsequent questions asked by each independent member, remaining questions asked by any opposition members, and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I'd like to ask the minister a number of questions, but the first one has to deal with how many jobs have been lost since the East Side Road Authority was shuttered.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Infrastructure): I thank the member for that question. There was layoff notices given back in beginning of September, I believe it was, and, to date, there have been a number of—they were given the option of either working 'til November 25th or some of them have been offered positions within the department, and others have already left because they found employment elsewhere.

So, while there was layoff notices given because that's what we had to do in order to wind down the operations, there are—the department is continuing to work with those employees.

Mr. Maloway: Well, then, could the minister tell this House how many of these former ESRA workers have been hired by the government up to today?

Mr. Pedersen: The department is continuing to work with the employees for those who wish to remain 'til I believe it's November 25th. There have been a number of offers made to existing ESRA employees in order to continue projects that are currently under way and for new projects going forward. And so we continue to work with all the ESRA employees.

Mr. Maloway: That was clearly a non-answer because I specifically asked him, the minister, how many former ESRA workers have been hired by the government as of today—specifically, how many of them.

Mr. Pedersen: There's offers been—has been put out to a number of employees, and this work is continuing, and it needs to be in place before November 25th.

Mr. Maloway: Well, since we will be speaking about this bill for some time now, perhaps the minister would endeavour to get that actual number for this House. Could he contact his staff this afternoon and find out how many former ESRA workers have been hired by the government? Surely, somebody over there knows an answer to this question.

Mr. Pedersen: Actually, I answered his question, but I'll try to answer it again and maybe in simpler language, so he'll understand. There has been offers put out to former employ-to current-because they're all still current-ESRA employees. The employment period lasts 'til November 25th. There have been offers put out to a number of employees, and those have not been completed yet. They're in the midst of being completed. So, to date, is-there would be-in process of hiring employees. So it-when it's in process, you haven't hired them, but you haven't finished it. I don't know how much clearer I can be with the member.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): My question is how many east-side First Nation members have lost their jobs. Thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: None to date. They're-if they're currently employed with the East Side Road Authority, their employment remains until November 25th. There are a number of active contracts, road construction contracts that will be honoured. There-will be going forward both for this coming construction-well, the construction season during the winter and next summer. So there are still employees working there. Those contracts are still being-or will be honoured by the Infrastructure Department, so those jobs continue.

Mr. Maloway: So I'm going to make an assumption here that the answer to my previous question about how many former ESRA workers have been hired by the government is currently zero. He claims there is a process going on, but the true answer here as of this date, which is what my specific question was two or three times already, the answer would be zero.

I'd like to also ask him: Where the-were the workers at ESRA considered front-line workers?

Mr. Pedersen: Members should never assume anything, because we all know what happens when you assume something.

The-in trying to answer his question on here, you can't-unlike the NDP who like to hire people for various jobs and double up, you can't have two

employers at one time. They're still hired by the East Side Road Authority. We're in the process of moving some of those employees into the Infrastructure Department.

Mr. Maloway: The question, and I'll just repeat it for the minister. The question was: Were the workers at the East Side Road Authority, were they considered front-line workers by this minister and his government?

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, one of the tangled webs that we continue to unfold out of East Side Road Authority besides the community benefit agreements where there was 27 different agreements is the positions held by the East Side Road Authority employees. So this work continues as to actually define what they were actually doing, what their job description was. And like so many other things in the NDP East Side Road Authority it's going to take a while to unravel this. So when he's looking for-we're also looking for these descriptions also.

Mr. Maloway: This is actually very simple question. All I'm trying to find out, does the minister consider that the workers at East Side Road Authority, did he consider them front-line workers, yes or no?

Mr. Pedersen: We continue to work with the East Side Road Authority trying to untangle the mess that the NDP created there. There is nothing definite within the East Side Road Authority because there's people that we-we're still trying to define what their jobs actually were-other than Ernie Gilroy who was hired by the NDP. We knew what his job was, and if you want to hear some nasty comments, talk to the east-side residents about what they have to say about the NDP's Ernie Gilroy.

Mr. Maloway: The minister's clearly hiding from the question. The question's very simple. Does he consider the workers at ESRA front-line workers? This government promised during the election that it was not going to fire front-line workers, and I fail to see how he could consider these employees not front-line workers. If they're not front-line workers, then what are they?

Mr. Pedersen: They're, actually, still employed by the East Side Road Authority.

Mr. Maloway: Clearly, then, these road-or these workers would be considered front-line workers. And these are the workers that this government, this minister, this government has promised not to fire, and that is exactly what's going to happen. At the end of the day, these people are not going to be working

for the government and, therefore, on that basis, this minister and this government has broken their promise not to fire front-line workers. I'd like the minister to confirm that.

* (15:00)

Mr. Pedersen: I hate to burst the members' bubble, but ESRA employees are not considered government employees. That has been defined by the Civil Service Commission. The NDP set up ESRA as a non-government entity; they are not considered civil servants.

Mr. Maloway: Clearly, I would think that these workers are—would be considered by any objective source as front-line workers, that's what I would suggest they would be.

And I'd like to ask the minister how many—whether this government will uphold its commitment to build Freedom Road.

Mr. Pedersen: I just want to reiterate that the member needs to be corrected on that, that the East Side Road Authority were not considered civil servants by the Civil Service Commission. So that one's there.

And, as far as the Shoal Lake road, they had 17 years; the NDP had 17 years to build this road. All of a sudden now we see the crocodile tears by the members opposite saying how they want this road built. We will build the road.

Mr. Maloway: The fact of the matter is that the previous government had in effect fast-tracked Freedom Road, and it's this government that seems to be backing off as time goes by. They are looking at procedural roadblocks and arguments with the federal government to justify either pulling back partially or completely from this project, that is clearly what appears to be happening with this government and its relationship with Freedom Road.

And what I'm trying to find out from this minister is when is this road going to be built, give me a date.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, if 17 years is fast-tracking, I'd sure hate to see what slow-tracking is.

The best news about the Shoal Lake road is that ESRA will not be involved in doing it. This government will get it built.

Mr. Maloway: I don't think that members on this side of the House have any thought that somehow this government is greatly committed

to this particular road, and they seem to be backpedalling and trying to get out of the project, and that's the indication we have right now. And the fact that this minister can't give us any firm dates by which this project will be completed, basically, tells us that story.

What is the projected completion date of this road?

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, the fast-tracked NDP, their idea of fast-tracking was to get Ernie Gilroy out there, and the East Side Road Authority, and to bully and intimidate First Nations and Metis people across the province. And that is not how this government operates. We are in consultations with all indigenous groups for the Shoal Lake.

Anyone who's been involved in this knows it takes a bit of time, there's engineering going on, there's contracts that will be let. And I would love to give the member a date, but after 17 years of doing nothing why should I be pinned down to giving him a date today or tomorrow?

Ms. Klassen: My question is: When will the east-side road be built?

Mr. Pedersen: The capital plan is being developed right now. We are in consultations with the First Nations on the east side. There are a number of active contracts that are happening now and we are about to embark on another round of consultations with the First Nations to share with them what our capital plan is. So we will—we're very inclusive. We want to—we know we have to include the First Nations with our plans because we are not going to operate like the NDP did.

Madam Speaker: The time for these questions has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: The floor is now open for further debate.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): The East Side Road Authority had a mandate to build a road, but it was more than that. It was a mandate to really involve people in the communities on the east side. Was it successful at that? Was it as successful as it should have been at that? I guess those are questions that can be answered. But why was the decision made, really, to do away with the East Side Road Authority? I guess that's the more important question that we need to ask ourselves, and what really was the government's agenda?

And make no mistake, Madam Speaker, they clearly have had an agenda, as they've had with a lot of other things that they've—well, not a lot of other things because they haven't really introduced a lot of other things other than a couple of attacks to pay back some of their friends who needed payback for supporting them. And so one of the benefits of the East Side Road Authority was the community benefit agreements that were going to and did help communities on the east side get some workers education and get some training so that those communities could participate on a more equal footing going forward.

So I was interested to read in the construction association, the Heavy News Weekly, that the president of that organization, one Chris Lorenc, had to say that the CCA is opposed to using public procurement to advance—let me get this straight—to advance unrelated community benefits where they jeopardize the integrity of the bid system. So, really, I guess, that's what this government is about, is payback to their friends in the construction industry to make sure that they get the work that's awarded for building roads, because their friends in the heavy construction industry don't really believe it's fair that we help people out of poverty, that those contracts have local procurement, have local training, have the ability to help local people in those east-side communities better themselves. So we start to see a little bit behind the curtain, if you will, to see, well, it's not where the magic happens, that's for sure, because it certainly isn't magic that's happening; it's something quite a bit less spectacular than that. It's really about paying back friends for their support.

I mean, I thought it was quite interesting to read that article in the Heavy News Weekly that they really are coming out against the benefit agreements because it might affect their ability to bid. And this government clearly has listened to the heavy construction industry in their budget presentations and their planning.

* (15:10)

And we begin to see—I guess they've talked a lot about consultation and we begin to see who they've actually consulted with when the two game plans clearly line up so carefully and so exactly that—you know, and the two parties, the government and the construction association, talk about how to work with the indigenous communities while at the same time making sure that the indigenous communities can't participate on an equal footing. And really, I

guess, from my understanding, that's what ESRA was really all about, was starting to make it more fair. It certainly didn't change the world overnight, and I guess some of the things that we learned at the very hastily called briefing on this, which my understanding is—and again, I'm new to this process, but I understand that the briefings are normally done somewhat in advance of the legislation being introduced so that the opposition members have the opportunity to ask questions and have a better understanding of the legislation.

So that briefing was hastily called at lunchtime today, and—

An Honourable Member: Maloway stood me up three times.

Mr. Lindsey: Shame on him.

So what did we learn? Well, what we did learn is thank heavens for some of the community benefits agreements that we—that the East Side Road Authority had already signed with some of those communities on the east side, because at the very least this government has to live up to those agreements.

Now, the downside is once ESRA is rolled up and done away with and all the workers from ESRA—call them civil servants, call them whatever—once those front-line workers have lost their jobs, this government then has no interest in following up on those kind of community benefits agreements that really help those communities get started.

So, you know, we've talked about the Freedom Road and the East Side Road Authority, and the questions get asked, well, when's the road going to get built, when's this road going to get built? And, you know, whether it's this road, that road or another road, I can recall rising in the House very early in my tenure here asking about Highway 280, when something's going to be done about that, and we still have never got an answer from this government on that road.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

I can remember talking about—with the minister and in the House about some other roads in the Snow Lake area that needed attention. No answers ever came out of that. Put a little bit of gravel down and I guess they thought their job was done.

So I guess we're left not really feeling all that confident that the east-side road is going to get the attention it needs to actually get started—

well, it actually is started already, I'm sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're just so very concerned that the wheels are going to come off that system the same as, apparently, the wheels have come off Freedom Road, that the government is waffling, if you will, on its commitment. They won't give an answer as to when that road's going to get built; they dance around with their pat answers to questions. We're going to do it; they just won't tell us when.

And I guess it—the whole East Side Road Authority and the government's plans for the North get called into question in this process, you know. When they first came to power they had this great vision it was going to be—well, I can't even remember the name now; it was some great plan they had for the North—

An Honourable Member: Yes! North.

Mr. Lindsey: Yes! North—there you go. Thank you, the member, for reminding me of a plan that stalled and went nowhere.

If you ask them today about their Yes! North plan, you'll find out that they didn't have a plan then and they don't have a plan today; that we've watched jobs disappearing left, right, and centre in the North, and the government remains somewhat silent on what the plan is. Whereas building this road, building infrastructure—and it's not just this road, it was the commitments that the previous government made to infrastructure investments—investments in the future of Manitoba—investments in the future of Manitoba—that would lead and were, in fact, leading Manitoba to be one of the greatest provinces and fastest growing in job creation and all the rest of that stuff that now this government has completely stalled those opportunities.

And, you know, they like to knock on their desks and pretend that they're knocking on the voters' door. Well, I did the same thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, prior to the election, and I talked to people in Flin Flon that were in economically depressed conditions. And they were so thankful, so very thankful that they had an opportunity to not just have a job working on highway construction, but to actually be learning so that their future would be brighter because of those infrastructure investments. And they were so thankful for that opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty and to move ahead in the world.

And, again, now we see, with them repealing the East Side Road Authority act and their lack of

commitment to actually building infrastructure to moving the province forward, that it leaves so many Manitobans falling further behind.

So why is it important that this east-side road gets built? Well, I had the same conversation with my counterpart, the MLA on the Saskatchewan side, because as, no doubt, everyone's aware Flin Flon is a border town that borders with Saskatchewan. And my counterpart had really the same concerns, that with global warming winter roads are open for shorter periods of time and are less available and really going to lead to increased costs for so many of those northern communities that are already disadvantaged to be able to access goods and services, to access medical, to access everything, to enjoy, really, the same things that everybody else in Manitoba—well, everybody else in southern Manitoba enjoys.

So them really wrapping the East Side Road Authority into the overall ministry of transportation budget, it'll get lost in the whole process of that department that will no longer have the focus on particularly building that road in the North or particularly building roads in the North. And, certainly, we'll no longer have the mandate, the authority, the desire to create something, to create something for people in the North, to create, whether it's the infrastructure that they so sorely need or whether it's to create the employment opportunities that they also so sorely need. It also will no longer create the educational opportunities that people in the North, people on the east side so sorely need, because they no longer have that mandate anywhere in their planning—excuse me for saying that, because if there really—there is no planning. They don't have a plan for much of anything in the North that we've seen so far. That's certainly been—

An Honourable Member: Tom, you're so kind.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I try to be. I try to be kind, but you make it so difficult for me to be kind. You know, contrary to—

An Honourable Member: You know what, I think we should have a secret ballot on how kind you are.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, there you go. I don't think we need to have a secret ballot on that.

But let's get back on. I mean, it's all well and good to have a few laughs along the way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but this is very serious business that, really, the longer they stall and the less commitment this government has to building roads in

the North, the tougher it's going to be for people in the North to compete in the 21st century. Because, as I've pointed out, that the winter road system falls apart sooner, takes longer for it to get into shape, and I don't know how many of the members opposite have availed themselves of the opportunity to drive over some of those winter roads. I, as part of the campaign last year, was up in Pukatawagan and we came out the last day the winter road was open. It probably should have been closed a few days sooner, but people depended on it to get goods and services.

Now, Puk is a little further ahead than a lot of the other communities in the North because they actually have a railroad that runs there so they do have the ability to get goods and services. It becomes more expensive, of course, but other communities, particularly those on the east side, don't have that opportunity. They have no means to get goods and services, medical care and all the rest of it.

* (15:20)

So, while the NDP was in power, as much as the members opposite don't like to admit it, there was steady progress made on investing in infrastructure, investing in that infrastructure that was going to allow people to have a better future. And we don't see that now. That better future, particularly for so many people in those northern communities, is falling by the wayside.

You know, the talk—and I guess that's one of the things this government is good at, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is picking out the little words—and we've talked about that in previous bills that are before this House—that capture everyone's imagination. But really, it becomes doublespeak for what their true intentions are. They talk about so many things that don't really mean what they say they mean. And, really, that's the sad part about what I've seen from this government is the lack of commitment for things taking place in the North. You know, we've seen jobs disappear in The Pas, and the only commitment this government came up with was to allow the company to renege on their pension contributions. The government itself didn't really commit to anything because they didn't have a plan—didn't have a plan for workers in the North, didn't have a plan for people that live in the North. And the wrapping up of the East Side Road Authority is just really one more glaring example of that. And certainly, we can give any number of examples.

Ask the question, I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker: What's the plan for Churchill? Haven't really seen a

plan there either. No commitment to the people that live in those communities, not just the town of Churchill but all those northern communities that are along the rail line that are suffering and really in the same boat as everybody on that east side that was depending on that road being built, was how do they participate? Certainly not equally.

There's always going to be challenges in the North. I mean, I come from Flin Flon, and we have road access, much better road access now, thanks to the previous NDP government. And hopefully next year, the minister will finish paving that road because it never got done this year. But, having said that, the people of Flin Flon, Snow Lake, Thompson, while they have road access, the goods and services, again, become that much more expensive. Now imagine what it's like for the people that don't have road access, and that really captures so many people on the east side of the province that are waiting. The people—Shoal Lake, waiting—waiting for this government's commitment to when they're going to build a road. And it doesn't seem to matter how many times we ask the question. We get a bunch of rhetoric that says nothing and answers nothing and never get a date, never get a true commitment as to what they're going to do.

They're always looking at it and going to get best value for money, which is—really gets back to one of the first things I brought up is the value for money that they don't believe they were getting out of the East Side Road Authority, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is—I guess it's a different value for money. What value do you place on someone's ability to participate in the future of the province? It's pretty hard to put a number figure on that. So, if you go strictly with the accounting sense of the value for money, you put X number of dollars in and get X number of dollars out, and that justifies what you do.

And that's really, I guess, what this government appears to have for their value-for-money idea is money in, money out. As long as the money out goes to their friends, then life will be good, and—but there's more to a value for money. There's value for human lives. There's value for the human beings.

And that's really, I guess, what this government fails to capture in most of the things it does, whether it's denying people a decent wage with holding the minimum wage back, whether it's refusing to commit to actually building a road, whether it's their early-on stated desire to get out of community benefit agreements, because they didn't see the value for

money in that. It was costing too much—too little return.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would be a tough sell to go up to one of those workers that has learned how to operate heavy equipment, that's learned how to really grasp his future—his/her future so that they can participate in bettering their life and their family's life. What's the number value that we should put on that? And I'm pretty sure, from an accountant's point of view or the Conservatives' point of view, you'd—you couldn't come up with that number, because it's not a thing that you can put a number on. So, really, that's what the East Side Road Authority was all about, was building a road but building a future, building an opportunity for a future.

And now that's been taken away from people, and certainly, again, when I get back to looking at what the Manitoba heavy have to say, that, really, that's been the game plan all along. And I don't know how this government or private companies plan to engage Aboriginal people on their land with their future when they rip down the very opportunities that those people have to participate, when they come out with statements like I read earlier, that, really, it's only about their competitive ability to bid on a contract—never mind the huge, huge social impacts that are involved going forward for all those people that get training, get a future.

So, I mean, that's really what the East Side Road Authority was about. It was about something much bigger than just building a road, and I guess that's really where this government starts to fall down on the job of—yes, maybe they will build a road someday. What will be the opportunity for the people on the east side to participate in building that road, in building their future, in building their future beyond that road so that they can become the contractors of choice, that are able to competitively bid on jobs going forward so that they don't have to depend on charity, that they are able to compete.

And, really, that's what's missing from this value for money, is the value of people's lives that you can't put a number on. You know, we've—we—I wasn't part of the government then, but the NDP government spent money on infrastructure, and they had plans for the next phase of this particular phase of the east-side road with \$3 billion being committed to build 1,000 kilometres. They'd already moved over 600 kilometres of road from on top of lakes and rivers to land to increase the safety, which is

something—we haven't talked a whole lot about the safety of people using those roads. So, while they did that, it allowed more trucks travelling for a longer period of time.

Well, why is that significant, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because it's lowering the cost of supplies getting to those northern communities, because the longer the trucks can run, the less they have to rely on air freight, which becomes so prohibitively expensive.

* (15:30)

We've—we had long-term, sustainable growth plans for areas on the east side, long-term sustainable growth not just to build the road but long-term sustainable growth to build the communities, to build people up. And, really, what better claim can a government make than they've helped people get ahead. That that's something that anybody should be proud of. Was it perfect? Probably not. There's always room for improvement in things. I mean, somebody can read an auditor's report and rail at the findings that, really, when you stop and think about it, there could have been things done better, but there was things that were good that came out of it, that people's lives were made better, that the future of those people's lives were going to get better the more road that got built. The more kilometres of road that were built, the more chance those people had to participate in the building the road, the more chance they had in really coming out ahead at the end of the game. So there were results being seen.

So it would be nice to think that everything the former government did was perfect. Clearly, that's not the case. But the concept was right. The concept was the right concept to allow that East Side Road Authority the flexibility to award contracts on something other than just the company that bid the cheapest. It was really about allowing people the opportunity to bid on those contracts and bid on their futures, if you will. And that's really the change that's come about, is the value for money that the government, present government, talks about will really limit people's future.

So many things came out of that East Side Road Authority that had the start of something good and could have been grown into something great. When we look at the Bloodvein First Nation, they had a good experience with ESRA. The community won tendered contracts to do work on their own land. Over 60 people were employed from that community; 18 people were trained as heavy

equipment operators as part of that East Side Road Authority in that community. That's 18 people that not only have the ability to work on that project, but now have the ability to work on any project, because they've got the training, they've got the skills, they've got the knowledge of how to participate in the future, how to participate in their future.

Along with that, there's something near and dear to my own heart, that at least one person was trained as an environmental safety officer, which, really, when you look around at some of the things that are taking place in the country with oil spills and pipeline spills, having more people trained in how to do things environmentally safely and soundly and sustainably, that's another benefit that is good for the whole community, it's good for the whole country, it's good for the whole province. So those are the kind of things that were growing out of the East Side Road Authority that should be allowed to continue to grow and flourish and find new ways to grow and help the people in those communities.

You know, there's a lot of talk about debt and how the government has to get the debt under control. And everybody agrees that debt is a concern. But when you look at the equity that came out of that debt: better roads, better schools—roads, period—then the debt becomes much more of a human, not just a number in a book. It's the human element that's missing from the current lack of planning, absence of plans, whether it's the east-side road, or Freedom Road, or a road going to Lynn Lake, you know, that needs attention, that people travel over those roads, where there are roads, which most people have never dreamed of having to travel. And in today's day and age, travel in the complete absence of any kind of communication for hours and hours and hours, the East Side Road Authority had the ability to help lift those people on the east side out of poverty and provide them with that future.

And really, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I start to wrap up my very brief comments on this, it's—that's what it's about. It's about the people's future in those communities. It's about the people's ability to better themselves that's been taken away from them by wrapping up the East Side Road Authority and shutting it down and doing away with the funding and wrapping it up into the ministry of transport which has a lot of issues that will need to be dealt with with infrastructure and the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Agriculture): It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to talk about Bill 16. And my colleague, the member from Midland, and certainly very pleased to have seconded this bill here this afternoon.

And I don't want to follow up a little bit on what the member from Flin Flon was referring to, and that's the agenda. Very clearly we're more than happy to talk about our agenda—[interjection]—and I know the member from Point Douglas will be happy to get up and say a few words here in just a little bit too. I'm sure he has a lot to say and we'll certainly be pleased to take notes. In fact, I know he's been very supportive of our daycare operations, moving them forward. I know he's put out several press releases. Of course, he loves to go on social media and talk about it as well. So we're certainly pleased about that.

But I went with my colleague from La Verendrye and the member from Emerson—I know the member from Brandon West, I know the member from Lac du Bonnet have all been up on the east-side road—and I can tell you that it was quite the experience for me as I went that 50 miles of road of which cost us about 10 million per mile. That's from here to Teulon. We could have built an awful lot of roads between here and Teulon for that kind of money.

And I know the member from Flin Flon loves to talk about value for return on investment. You know, this is a very important road, that's why we're going to make sure we get it right. This legislation makes it very clear—very clear about the path that this government wants to take. We don't need extra administration; we know that, and I know the member from Flin Flon knows that as well. This is about value for return on investment. How do we get there? What's the best route? What's the best way to manage it?

Of course, also, I know part of this is—a large part of it, of which I've talked about a lot—and it's about consultation. And the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Pedersen), the member from Midland, has made it very clear that consultation is of utmost importance, and I know that he has reached out to all those communities on the east side. I know I've met with a number of them myself when I was a critic of Infrastructure, and I can tell you that they were raising red flags back when this government was still in power. And they made it very clear—very, very clear that they wanted to make

sure that they were included in those consultations. But, really, they were not included in those conversations.

What we found—and I know the member from Elmwood would support me, probably, in this comment—that when we look at value for return on investments, how does that really look? Do you have people at the table to talk about that with you, or do you just dictate policy? I would say not. I would say that the best story, the best news that come out of any consultation is working collaboratively with those communities.

And I know during the election and just prior to the election I met with a number of the First Nations in that area and farther north, and it was very clear, very evident of the fact that we want make sure we got to get it right, and having them at the table, certainly, is a large part of that.

Now, when I was referring to this 50 miles of road that I was able to tour along with the member from La Verendrye, it's a good thing we packed a lunch, because I can tell you that the road's a little rough but it's also very wide. And I don't know how many people have actually taken advantage of the opportunity to go on the east-side road, but it's twice the size, twice the width of the Trans-Canada Highway—

An Honourable Member: Three hundred metres.

* (15:40)

Mr. Eichler: —300 metres, the member from La Verendrye shares with me, and I'm sure he's going to be able to get up and talk about this issue as well. I know all members of this House want to talk about it, and I know the member from Elmwood just can't wait. He's asked the real hard questions there on the bill and the impact it may have, and I'm sure he's going to be able to want to be able to talk about that.

But, also, there's a hydro line running right down beside that east-side road. Now, what were they thinking about? What were they thinking about? Maybe they thought they might have made a bad decision. They might have made a bad decision on Bipole III and, really, I mean, the reality we know that this government previously negotiated all the property rights in order to bring Bipole III right down alongside that east-side road. There's more than enough room, more than enough room. But, actually, it's interesting when you go up that east-side road and you get up to the First Nations there, and it

stops—it stops. Where there was supposed to be a bridge, there was no bridge.

Now, what was the thinking about that? What was the outcome they were really trying to focus on? About whether or not they really wanted to help the First Nations, or did they want to keep them in isolation? Those are questions that this government should have been talking about.

When we talk about the key infrastructure that this government is moving forward on, we're already working with the federal government to work out details on a new winter road, to work on this 'partichur' project as well, and we know that it's very important that—make sure that we get it right. We have the qualified professionals that work in infrastructure, that are able to absorb the East Side Road Authority. So therefore it makes it more efficient.

When we talk about the dollars that have been invested by the previous government, is that a good return on investment, or is it more bureaucracy, or is it more red tape that's being brought forward by this government?

We also had the opportunity to build on those relationships with those First Nations. Now, they're proud to be able to come to the table and share with us, and I know the member from Kewatinook is very much in favour of making sure her community is part of those discussions. I'm pleased that she has brought to light the impact that this has on, not only her community but all northern communities. And, when we talk about the East Side Road Authority, what does that look like as we roll it out for the benefit, for the economic growth, for bread, for milk, for food, for staples that are so key to each of those communities? Whenever we have that opportunity, we ought to make sure we seize it with them so that they're also part of that discussion.

And that comes back to the relationship that I started talking about earlier, so that we're able to see real measurable results in terms of what this government really wants to do. Keeping a promise to the people of Manitoba, in 2014, our Premier reached out and was told very clearly that this was a mismanaged file.

So what did he do? What did—he reacted. He made a pledge to all Manitobans in 2014. We would review the East Side Road Authority. And what does that mean? Exactly what this government has done: we took immediate action upon forming government,

in April, to ensure that we would get this right. And part of that is this piece of legislation that's been brought forward by the member from Midland, is a way of dealing with that particular issue.

And I know I've talked with Infrastructure and others that are—been involved in the construction aspect of this. They're very pleased to be able to see more money go towards building that east-side road in a way that they're going to be able to get meaningful results.

When you think about \$10 million per mile—for building a road, now this is not a paved road; this is a gravel road—a gravel road—let's make—very clear about that. But, also, what is it going to look like by having more money to be able to throw at this when you get rid of the administration and the extra paper work?

But, when this government was in power, the Auditor General went and had a look at it. What did they say? The Auditor General found that "ESRA was not monitoring local procurement on any of these tendered construction contracts"—on page 18, for those that want to go and look at it. I know that members opposite are intent on reading this report, and if they haven't, I certainly encourage them to.

What do they also say? Several ESRA staff members told us there was no specific training for employees in contract administration. Again, another red flag.

They went on to say: "Untendered construction contracts with community corporations include a capacity building allowance." Another such allowance is not part of a normal road construction project, is essentially a grant over and above an estimated market value of contract services. ESRA was not tracking the amount of capacity-building allowances it paid out. That was on page 3. It goes on to say: ESRA did not have a policy on how to calculate the amount of the capacity-building allowance or how the allowance was to be reduced over time. That's again on page 3. In addition, ESRA did not track how community corporations actually benefited from the allowance—again, on page 3. Because the capacity-building allowance is not disclosed separately—it is considered a profit element—49 per cent of the capacity-building allowance paid by ESRA is going to the private sector contractor and not the community corporation. That's on page 17.

So, when we think about the mismanagement by the previous administration on ESRA, one would only wonder why we wanted to bring forward Bill 16. And I think they would like to see Bill 16 called to committee as well and bring it forward. And also part of that outreach that we talked about earlier, the 'consultation' and working in collaboration with those First Nations communities and making sure that Manitobans do, in fact, get value for money when it goods—looks at this particular piece of legislation. And I can assure all members on that side of the House and this side of the House that this is part of what we really want to get down and start talking about.

When we also talk about what we might want to do from the First Nations' perspective, what we heard was that they were told by the previous administration that they were creating employment opportunities and creating a sense of pride. Did that really happen? Not really. Unfortunately, also in the Auditor General report, they point out that they never got the training that they needed. They did not reach those goals that which they were trying to create. In fact, I know in September, the Winnipeg Free Press reported formerly Berens River chief, George Kemp, said none of that money has helped his community. None of the First Nations on the east side saw any benefits, said Kemp, a point echoed by current Chief Hartley Everett, who also attended the meeting. It goes on to say that CBC reported in September of 2016, First Nation leaders at Thursday meeting said they received no respect and few training and mentoring opportunities from the East Side Road Authority while it existed. We were treated like little kids right from day one; there was no trust there; they had total control of everything, which was very demeaning, said George Kemp, an elder and former chief of Berens River First Nation.

And I want to commend the member from Kewatinook because she's brought this forward as well. And, when we think about consultation and collaboration with the First Nations communities, it gives us that opportunity to actually reach out, understand what their needs are, understand what they want to achieve not only in their communities but also working with other communities. I know that we have a large First Nation population in the city of Winnipeg, and we honour that. We're proud of the fact that we're able to reach out and work in collaboration with our First Nation partners. And, whenever we look at this final result when we get to that stage as we move forward, I know the Minister

of Infrastructure (Mr. Pedersen) will certainly make sure that not only the member from Kewatinook but the First Nations communities are involved in those consultations in order to make sure that we get it right.

So, just in closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we want to make sure that part of our process—and we still are one of the few in this country that have committees that focus on listening to those folks within not only the First Nations but all Manitobans in order to ensure that we do, in fact, get it right. So I look forward to calling this bill to committee and listening to those Manitobans that elected us to do the hard work which we're more than prepared to do.

So thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): I rise to speak on the bill that repeals the Manitoba east side authority act and transfers the authority's property, rights and liabilities to the government.

* (15:50)

Our NDP team is focused on families, creating opportunities for our kids here in Manitoba. We share the concern of First Nations and rural northern Manitobans that climate change is shortening the driving season on our winter roads and making them more dangerous.

Manitoba's remote communities deserve reliable, all-year access to the rest of Manitoba, and by building them a year-round economic corridor, we helped them add to the Manitoba labour force and economy, creating new job opportunities in Manitoba's North.

We made steady progress. We were investing in our core infrastructure to create jobs and grow the economy, including \$1 billion last year.

We need to take advantage of our location in the heart of the continent. Our province has an opportunity to become a trade and transportation hub.

ESRA's mandate was to involve indigenous communities directly to make substantial investments. We are concerned about this new government's lack of commitment to investing in the North or working with indigenous communities through community benefits agreements. We don't believe in trying to find so-called savings on the back of indigenous Manitobans. This is not how reconciliation is done.

So far we have a Conservative government is more interested in halting growth in this province and failing to come clean on where his cuts to infrastructure will be.

We had announced the next phase of our \$3-billion, 1,000-kilometre road. We already moved over 600 kilometres of road from on top of lakes and rivers to land in order to increase safety and save lives while allowing more trucks to travel over a longer period of time.

We signed community benefits agreements with all of the local First Nations to ensure they are able to take advantage of the good construction jobs that come from this project.

We installed a bridge over Red Sucker River and we have begun installing bridges over Mainland River and Stevenson River. The bridges will keep the winter road system open longer and fit into the all-weather road when it is ready.

The east-side First Nations were seeing the results. Chief Roland Hamilton of Bloodvein First Nation had a good experience with ESRA. The community won a tendered contract to do work on their own land. Over 60 people were employed from his community: 18 were trained as heavy equipment operators, one was trained as an environmental safety officer. Many participated in introduction to construction classes and received CPR and first aid training. The community gained equipment and knowledge.

We have weathered two major floods and a global recession. Our NDP's \$10-billion infrastructure plan included extending CentrePort Canada Way to increase trade with Saskatchewan and grow our transportation industry; protecting Highway 75 from Winnipeg to the United States border to interstate flood protection standards; rebuilding the intersection of the Lagimodiere and the Perimeter Highway into a modern interchange with no traffic lights and building an active transportation corridor so that cyclists can travel to Birds Hill park without crossing the Perimeter Highway; rebuilding the Trans-Canada Highway from Ontario to Saskatchewan to higher standards; upgrading Westman's major US trade, PTH 10, to help increase trade and tourism in Brandon; reconstructing the south Perimeter Highway, including new diamond interchanges to replace traffic lights; upgrading PTH 9 from Winnipeg to Winnipeg Beach; rebuilding Highway 6, Winnipeg's connection to the North; continuing our work on

the east-side road network to connect remote communities.

Our infrastructure plan would have created 58,900 jobs and boosted the economy by \$6.3 billion, a plan the Conservatives don't support and won't implement. Investing in core infrastructure creates good jobs and grows the economy.

The infrastructure mess left by—behind by the present Premier (Mr. Pallister) when he was a minister and the Filmon government has taken a long time to fix. During the election, the Premier announced he will cut infrastructure spending by \$1.95 billion between now and '21-22, killing good jobs and putting people out of work. Now that he is Premier, he is making good on that promise. We will cancel—he will cancel our plans for smart, strategic infrastructure investments in critical flood protection projects, roads, bridges and highways.

We created the First Peoples Economic Growth Fund to support Manitoba First Nation business proposals that are economically viable. This provides opportunities for new entrepreneurs to create good jobs across Manitoba.

We started a Winnipeg Regeneration Strategy to help key indigenous organizations in Winnipeg focused on indigenous capacity building that help train the next generation of workers for the good jobs of tomorrow; downtown renewal and inner-city resiliency that ensures downtown Winnipeg grows with economic opportunities for everyone; student mentorship and indigenous role model tutorship, which uses the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre to help keep our young people focused on teams and sports and out of gangs, getting them ready for good jobs in our growing economy.

The 200-megawatt Wuskwatim Generating Station was the first generating station to be built in Manitoba in nearly two decades. It's the first generating station to be built in North America in partnership with First Nations people, making Hydro a world leader in sustainable community economic development.

*(16:00)

We ensured that indigenous communities and people benefit from our hydro projects. Hydro has increased the Aboriginal employment rates to 18 per cent corporate-wide, and 46 per cent in the North.

Our NDP team had a vision for the North: smart, strategic investments in infrastructure, health care and education to create good jobs and make the North an even better place to live and raise a family. We made steady progress. Growing tourism, mineral exploration, hydro development and thriving industry are contributing to good jobs so that young people can stay, work and raise families in the North. We want northern Manitobans to have access to training to get the skills they need to take advantage of those economic opportunities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, last year I had opportunity to visit the northern communities. And we were planning to, even in the Housing Department, use people, local people, so they can get training and then they could be employed there. Sure, we have contractors, they will hire only so many people, so I suggested that at that time that Housing Department should create a kind of environment where those people who are not working and living on those government housing places, they should be given basic training, and after basic training they should be allowed to work on those projects, provided the Housing Department pay their minimum wages maybe for two months, three months, four months, whatever we could have decided. We were on the way to do that.

Because, similarly, a similar suggestion I given to the education minister, both of—either people who are not employed or who are entering the employment are people coming from the foreign countries. They should be immediately introduced to their respective skills, respective trades, so that they don't lose and they won't go to the other projects. Like, they might start driving cabs, they might start driving trucks.

But another interesting point I was bringing at that time, I hope instill this government can—minister can keep up to encourage people from the North or the underemployed people, they can give them simple training for truck driving. Help them to get their first-class licence, and once they got first-class licence they will be making good money. We will need lots of truck drivers because we are in the centre of this continental, and by CentrePort we will be bringing loads of stuff from other countries which will be distributed to the—all over Canada and all over America. So I think that's one incentive. It won't cost that much to the government.

And Housing minister there, Families Minister, I hope he keep—continue that what we started. We

started—people are living in government housing, affordable housing. If they're willing to get training, say somebody say, I want to become a mechanic, other body say, I want to become a welder, give them basic training for 40 hours, instructions, then send them somewhere where they can get experience. But don't put pressure on the—burden on the employer. We should be helping them provide minimum wages, do something about that. In that way, we will be taking those people away from the Rent Assist, or at least we will reduce the Rent Assist. In that way, we will be gaining both ways. Those people, the morale will be higher, and those people also will not use Rent Assist as much. Otherwise, they will use. So we have to think in those terms.

Similarly, the other day, I was talking about minimum wages. If we increase minimum wages, these people will get more money. Again, we don't have to provide them Rent Assist that much as compared to we have to provide. So we are benefiting. Also consider minimum wages in the other provinces. People either come as immigrants or people who are new entrants in the workforce, they will move to those provinces. So we are spending quite a bit of money on the Provincial Nominee Program. Why we let people go? We should keep people here by this incentive, with minimum wage, with proper training because this proper training will keep them over here to help our economy.

We hear quite bad about how much debt we are. But we never hear about how much we developed the economy, from \$30 billion to now it's about \$64 billion.

An Honourable Member: Sixty-four billion dollars.

Mr. Saran: Yes. And we built the schools.

And let me give one example. If I'm a new person, either I can rent apartment—I don't have any debt at all—but, when later on, I will need for my family, I won't have—I have to spend a lot more than that, because of that, I'm ahead of the game, sure. I can show that I don't have any debt. I can boast about that. But having debt in such a low-interest time is not a bad idea. This is the time to build the economy. I think this government is ignoring that point.

An Honourable Member: Low interest rates. This is the time.

Mr. Saran: Yes. Low interest rates. Then there was about—I believe the debt—this interest rate—we've got now low interest rate. It won't be for two years,

three; it will be 25 years, 30 years, sometimes it's like that. So why don't we get advantage of that? We can build more schools. We can build more hospitals. We can build more CancerCare places. Those are important. If we build now, we won't—it won't cost us little—that much as compared to otherwise it will cost.

* (16:10)

Similarly, I think—the other thing I'm looking at that—this government's attitude: privatize everything, privatize everything. They let run down MTS; then they privatize it because they made worth of the private people to buy it and also have the good friends to have shares. I think the same attitude I'm seeing over here, Manitoba Hydro. They will let run it down and also they will increase the rates, so it will be attractive to the buyer. So that's their plan, is that—actually, that's an asset. It's just like Alberta. They have has *[inaudible]*. We had this in hydro and clean energy. And this helps government do more—many projects. Why we let it go? We passed the law that electricity and car insurance and—there are three items. What's the third item?

An Honourable Member: Hydro.

Mr. Saran: Hydro.

An Honourable Member: Phone rates. Phone. Phone rates.

Mr. Saran: No, not phone rates. But I think they will find out what is that. So those three items, it will be the lowest expense as compared to the other province. So that we passed, and these guys are ignoring that. People want to stay over here, because we have lower car insurance. I was talking to somebody wanted—came to my office, and he said I want to go to Ontario. I said, okay, sure, you can go to Ontario. You will be paying three times more car insurance.

An Honourable Member: Exactly, for less coverage.

Mr. Saran: And less coverage, because, if your wife, she also has to have different coverage. Over here, we have one car, and any member can drive it. Over there, you cannot do that.

An Honourable Member: If you're a teenager.

Mr. Saran: Yes. So I think those kinds of facilities—but the way this government is going, I think they will make such an expensive place, this Manitoba,

too expensive place to live over here. People will be moving other places.

An Honourable Member: Exactly. Moving to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Saran: Yes. That's what they did when they were last time in the government, and we had Filmon Friday. People were moving to the other provinces. And the same thing; they are going to do it. They are just going down that road. *[interjection]* So I cannot say that when I'm speaking—I think I'm not allowed to say that. But we will—they will put his name. So this way, I think, they will run down the economy, and they are trying to illusion—give illusion to the people: We are going to bring down debt. We are doing—they will bring down the assets too, because, if we have that headquarters, and that—those headquarters of Manitoba liquor and control—yes, those headquarters—if we had bought those—we developed those headquarters, that could have our assets. That's not our own assets; that will be whole Manitoba's—Manitobans' assets.

And, later on, we can—that can serve us both ways. Either we can sell it or we can still use it. But this government is only—

An Honourable Member: Gonna sell it.

Mr. Saran: —only is going to sell it to their only—just emphasizing—similarly, that's what they're doing. East side—that road authority, they are removing it, and they won't provide any kind of training to people of the North. They won't provide any kind of help to those people.

An Honourable Member: Yes, they're just going to walk away.

Mr. Saran: So they will walk away.

What happens—I think I—when I went in the North, I've seen how those people need that help. They need training to raise their morale. They need facilities where they can go and get together and talk to each other. I brought the idea, and it was in the Throne Speech, we should have drop-in centres. And those could be in those communities, but those communities are not able to afford them, to build their own drop-in centres.

So we should create an environment where we should help them. Similarly, new immigrants, when they come over here, they don't have that money—that much money and they can't build their own. And I said last time, one community wants to build their drop-in centre, and this family minister cancelled it.

So they are cancelling everything which were—we were developing. We were building up communities; we were building up capacities. They are running down. Leave the people as their own, either they die or they survive. There's the—because these people belong to the party which has been made up of rich people, and they care about their pocket, how much money they can put in their pocket. They don't care about the ordinary people—*[interjection]* Yes, they want to keep the rich richer, and they want to make other people who are poor poorer.

So I don't know. Now, they boast up about their—the other day, when I was speaking, I said, well, once a while in 12 years ruri is hard, and I explained what the ruri means. When animal waste is put in the—one place, then it's prepared for manure; then, after a certain time, it's put in the farm. So that's a—what—called ruri.

So, yes, we got a ruri, but it's not—we don't have that letter over here. But—exactly spell it.

I think that's what is going to happen with this government. They are gloating so much, but people are seeing what they are going to do.

So it will be just four years and I think they should enjoy it, but they are trying to destroy democracy. Possibly they try to live it down. Plus, they try to—democracy in the committees. They also previously, they tried to kidnap democracy. When they wanted to take it, they call it vote tax *[inaudible]* democracy advancement fund. They moved the democracy advancement fund. Later on, people with deep pocket will be able to run in the election. Ordinary people won't be. So democracy will be limited.

So I don't know what they are going to gain out of that because people fought all over the world about—for democracy. They are dying in other countries to establish democracy, and we have really got a great democracy. Anybody can have—we have a great democracy. Anybody could have a chance. If I had been in India, I would not have that chance at all. I was not a rich person, but there—I'm here, and other members also from the—who, born in foreign countries, are sons and daughters of *[inaudible]* immigrants. They are having that chance because we have a democracy, but these people are now eroding that democracy. They are kidnapping democracy and that will take away that opportunity, people who die to come over here because they love democracy so much and it's available for everybody.

But they don't want that happen. They want to keep in their own pocket.

So it will be really bad, bad situation if we lose that opportunity, if we lose the chance to give everybody that chance. Everybody should have a chance to get elected—not because of his or her pocket; because of ideas, because of policies, and that kind of a situation is really a sad situation, slowly, slowly, we see what the PCs are going to do.

So people have to understand people have to have that chance to see their real colour. At this time, they don't know their real colour, but slowly, slowly, they will find out what kind of quality they brought and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Dennis Smook (La Verendrye): I would like to put a few words on record regarding Bill 16. I'd like to start by thanking the member for Midland (Mr. Pedersen), the Minister for Infrastructure, for bringing Bill 16 forward.

* (16:20)

Bill 16 repeals The Manitoba East Side Road Authority Act and transfers the authority's property rights and liabilities to the government. Under the NDP decade of debt, decay and decline, taxpayer dollars were spent to create an appearance of action with little or no regard to actual value to local communities throughout Manitoba and in the North. On April 19th, Manitobans elected a new Progressive Conservative government that would be focused on fixing our economy, fixing our finances, repairing our services and rebuilding our economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the last 35 years, I've travelled on what is now the east-side road when it was a logging road and a winter road many, many times. I even had the opportunity to take a number of my colleagues on a couple different trips touring the east-side road to show them how things were being managed. I was not impressed with the progress on the road: bridges built before there were roads to them, roads built where there were no roads. And I know one of the issues that was mentioned was, well, these bridges were built to extend the life of the winter roads and let them go longer. Well, the bridge over the Bloodvein River never had any kind of a winter road coming to it or leaving it; the winter road went alongside of it. So there's a good example of mismanagement.

The NDP completed only 88 kilometres of road for communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg at a cost of \$400 million. When I first became an MLA, I attended an event at the Fort Garry Hotel where a speaker from the east-side-road government, an engineer, was talking about this east-side road. And I believe at that time he was talking about \$1 million a kilometre to build this road. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$1 million a kilometre, to me, at that time, seemed like a lot of money. But, I guess, with, you know, the swamp and the rocks and everything else up there today, and today's economy, maybe it wasn't so much; maybe the number was close to reality. But \$400 million should have got us 400 kilometres of road, not 88. And to me, that—it's a disgrace to have that kind of money spent on that little of a road.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the previous government was always willing to spend money, but they were never concerned about achieving results. The NDP's favourite pastime was increasing this province's deficit and debt, forgetting about how they would affect our future generations. I mean, it's our kids that are going to—that had to pay for—are going to have to pay for this mismanagement by our NDP government.

The Auditor General brought forward a scathing report on the East Side Road Authority. This report was critical of how the NDP were handling the east-side road. The Auditor General's report provided a stark contrast between what the previous NDP government told Manitobans and what the Auditor General actually found.

The Auditor General found that ESRA was not monitoring local procurement on any of the tendered construction contracts. Several ESRA staff were told that there was no specific training for employees in contract administration. Untendered construction contracts with community corporations included a capacity-building allowance. There are a number of issues that the Auditor General found wrong with the East Side Road Authority.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we talk about the East Side Road Authority, one of the issues was that it was supposed to be training First Nations people how to run heavy equipment and do things like that. Well, from what the Auditor General spoke, a lot of that stuff did not occur. And I don't know why we would need an East Side Road Authority to do something that was done many, many years ago.

Madam Speaker in the Chair

In the early '70s, I was working on a project in The Pas, building the road from Cormorant Lake to Vickery Lodge. And part of that—it was in co-operation with community, Assiniboine Community College at that time; I believe it's not that now. But it was about training First Nations how to run heavy equipment: trucks, graders, scrapers, and that is something that's extremely important. And there were a number—I've worked over many years and I've worked alongside some of the greatest operators around in northern Manitoba, and many of them were First Nations people.

But the problem is, this East Side Road Authority took that availability—ability to be trained away from them. I mean, the Auditor General said that a lot of the things that were supposed to happen did not happen. And the NDP told Manitobans they were creating employment opportunities, creating a sense of pride. The NDP told Manitobans: giving people an opportunity to learn trades and apprenticeship programs. Well, I ask, where did all this go? It's not there.

When you talk to the people from there, like the former Berens River chief, George Kemp—I've talked to him personally on several occasions. And their concern was that none of the things that were promised were ever done. For example, they accused the authority of not offering meaningful skill trades beyond first-aid courses and certification on how to run, operate a chainsaw. All that people were given were shovels to dig holes. We know how to dig holes. We've been doing that all of our lives, said Steve Berens, a band councillor with Berens River First Nation. Dollars were never really given to First Nations to provide proper training.

I would ask the member from Flin Flon, he did a lot of talking about the training that was supposed to happen, but did it really happen? Like, we have a lot of First Nations people that need that training so they can better himself—themselves, and that was one of the issues that you talked about. But that training did not happen according to many of the people from up North, so I don't know how you can stand up there and say that this is all that's been happening, when things really never did happen. We know that—we understand that this agreement was to create a lot of jobs for people up North, but did it really do that?

We talk about the east-side road. Our highways department, what is wrong with our highways department? They've always done the road construction in Manitoba. What was wrong with

them being allowed to do the highways on the east-side road? I mean, we understand that they have all the expertise and ability to do that.

So what I'd like to talk about also is, I feel that the NDP members opposite should support this bill. This bill will eliminate wasteful spending created by the previous NDP government. During question period, the members opposite keep asking for us to spend more money, but I guess old habits are hard to break. So many years of spend and tax. All the members opposite asked about employment of the workers, and that is important. We need to train our First Nations people so they'll be able to look after themselves. But when we have a project that's not doing what it's supposed to do, that project should be scrapped.

Anyways, I would like to encourage all the members opposite to vote for Bill 16, because it's a bill that is going to help Manitobans, not hinder them.

Thank you.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): I want to put on record that those interviews the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) mentioned actually took place in my office, and I was very disheartened to see—I was there, I saw the chiefs talk about what had happened to them, how they were neglected and how taken aback they were, assets sitting useless on first—on their First Nations communities trying to come up with ways to regain monies that they had lost in purchasing those assets that were now rotting on their First Nations.

* (16:30)

Recent revelations regarding the mismanagement of the operations on the—in respect of the East Side Road Authority, there's so many issues that came out in those consultations with my First Nation chiefs in those areas, and it's—it was really sickening, to be truthful, because the licensing that they did get, you know, one chief pulled it out, chain saw certificate. I found that hard to believe until I saw it myself. The jobs that were supposed to have been created, and I was asking specifically in—to the minister to reference how many communities benefited, how many First Nations people would remain. The answer is actually zero, because there was no benefits to the communities in accordance with what they were saying in consultations and meetings with them.

So I appreciate them having the courage to come to me and tell me heart-to-heart conversation in regards to what—as the authority's specifically, you know, the CEO of the authority mentioned, it was heartbreaking. We see listed on some of their reports that all the businesses that received monies for contracts received tendered contracts. There's only one First Nation listed, and that is the Bloodvein First Nation. But, in speaking with Chief Hamilton, you know, these workers today are back on social assistance. They can't form a business and go onto the road business because they're continuously underbid. The reserve barely broke even and, in some of the—our—financial statements they accrued—oh, they have a loss that needs to be recaptured somehow and that First Nation is struggling because of that.

They can't compete today with the established companies that did get all those contracts awarded to them. So ESRA had its problems. The construction of the road still must continue. I have said before, we need the roads regardless of which authority takes it into their fold. I appreciate that it is going into the Minister of Infrastructure's (Mr. Pedersen) portfolio. As a business person, I am an 'entrepreneur'—an entrepreneur at heart. There will be economic development on the east side because I—that is one of my goals. The—we keep hearing that it's the children—our children that are going to pay for these roads, and that's all well, like, financially, but when you're looking at the people of the east-side communities, they're paying with their lives, because of not having adequate access to medical services and any number of goods that the urban areas have for our Manitobans. You know, right now we're paying—the taxpayers are paying \$1,200 on a flight for a parent to bring their child out for an X-ray. That doesn't include costs to house these two people overnight, so \$1,200. And sometimes we're sending kids out, adults out, maybe 30 patients a day are coming from these collective communities to come and get that X-ray because there's no X-rays on these First Nations.

So the cost to the system is enormous. I've actually been on the bridge that the member for—sorry, he referenced a bridge near Red Sucker Lake. I've actually travelled on that bridge. It's—if you can even call that a bridge; I would call them railroad ties. While my SUV could go over that bridge, you know, I saw four semis on the one side of that bridge not wanting to take a chance to go on that bridge, another four semis on the other side not wanting to

destroy that bridge and allowing for us small and light vehicles to go through. That mismanagement needs to stop. It would be nice if we had an actual bridge there rather than those railroad ties.

Again, I'm going to state the opinion of my constituents. They don't care who, which organizations see the construction of the road. They just want the roads. My constituents also want to be at the table as soon as any discussions start.

There was—prior to everything, when they were mapping out the road structure for one particular First Nation, they paid millions of dollars for the study. They went to the band office to present this out—this layout of where the roads were going to be. The chief took one look at it and said, you just wasted a whole bunch of money because when you actually go down that road, that's all swamp and muskeg. You can't build a road there, and no matter how many times you repack it or try and make it firm, it will forever be—it's right beside Lake Winnipeg and it's always prone to flooding.

And, you know, that kind of knowledge is what they want to make sure that the money is spent well, and that they're brought to the table in regards to adequately consulting these groups. That way, we're not wasting millions, because we don't want wasted millions. They want those millions to be further invested into the communities. The member was right. With \$400 million spent, we should have had 400 kilometres of roads. And so, I—our caucus is definitely going to support the repeal of this act, because it saw no benefits to our people. But we do want to reiterate that our people still need those roads. It's for the betterment of our children, not paying these kinds of fees in the future, and it's for the betterment of those constituents in the—along the east side.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations): I'd like to acknowledge the member from Kewatinook for her comments in regards to Bill 16. I'd like to also extend our appreciation for taking the time to meet with the First Nation leaders and those involved on the east-side road, just as we did. And I know that they appreciate the opportunity to have those meetings with their MLA and to express their concerns, and they certainly do have a lot of concerns. And it's interesting that your messages from your people are very much the same messages that we have received.

I've been in municipal politics some time, and although the east-side road is a new issue for me as a new member in this government, problem solving is something I've done for quite a while, whether it be in business or in municipal government.

But I have to say this particular issue is—goes far beyond the realms of anything that I've ever witnessed or had to stand and sit and listen to. I agree with the member opposite. It's overwhelming; it's frustrating; and the process is quite unbelievable, not to mention the amount of money that has been wasted when there's so much need in our province not just for the infrastructure on east-side road but well beyond that.

And I'd like to just share a few of the reactions. I was able to sit in the meetings with the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Pedersen) and the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Cullen). There was three separate meetings, and we invited them in, which seemed to be like many of the other meetings I've had with First Nations leaders in the past six months. For them to come to the Legislature and sit at our table and be treated like the respectful leaders they are seems to be something very new for them, and I think that's very sad that for many of them, this is their first visit to the Manitoba Legislature.

* (16:40)

It was actually kind of sad, and I think I heard her use this word too. When they came in, they were very quiet. Their heads were hanging down. They looked defeated. They looked frustrated as we were, I'm sure, but they were almost afraid, and the attitude throughout—and these were large groups that came, and we certainly accommodated them all. We gave them all the opportunity to speak. Each and every one that attended had the opportunity to speak. And it was amazing, after one hour, realizing that we were listening and that what they were saying actually was being listened to.

And I guess the thing that I had most difficult dealing with after the three meetings was the fact that the stories were consistent. And I guess that's the good situation that arose from this. We didn't listen to one group and they were kind of feeding off of each other. We had three separate groups, and it was a consistent message. And it wasn't a good message. We realized that there's certainly difficulties—and far beyond what they should have ever come to—with the East Side Road Authority.

And—but their messages were very heartfelt. And when we had to sit and to listen to the comments about the serious lack of consultation in this process—a process where it was deemed in public that they were consulted and so on and so forth—their message was quite different. They said when there was a meeting—and these are their quotes—everyone was butting heads at the meetings. They could've done a lot better for them. There was a serious lack of consultation.

When we talked about mentoring, they were told that there would be mentoring. They—their indication was that what deemed to be micromanaging was called mentoring. They certainly didn't feel that it was mentoring.

They had government officials, including the minister of Aboriginal affairs at the time, came in when they were offering the community benefits agreements. The message was simple: sign on the spot; take it or leave it. And there was no consultation about that.

Communities were met individually, and they were literally pitted against each other. And even the people within the group, each community was met individually and they were pitted against each other so that there was a no win situation at any point. And they were frustrated by that, and they very much felt defeated.

In their words, East Side Road Authority, from the perspective of the indigenous people, was never a relationship. They feel as chief in council they're there to serve their communities and they were trying to do the best for their communities. The elders were involved, but there, too, the process never worked.

They want—and this was the interesting part—as they were able to speak and tell us what their concerns were, first message was accessibility is urgent. And the member opposite made it very clear, in regards to health-care needs, they gave us one incident where there's a heart attack in the middle of the night and it's storming, and they're trying to get this person across the lake to land in a boat where it's really not even safe for the people that are in the boat, but they're trying to save a life and they're actually putting three or four others at risk. And it's not right, and you certainly can't blame their frustration in regards to that.

Accessibility to them is a lifeline. And, I mean, this government is committed to getting that done because we agree accessibility is a high priority and

it needs to be done. Consultation is required, and we agree they need to be at the table, we need to be listening, and we have indicated that that will happen.

Timelines, they indicated, also very important; they need timelines, they need to know what's happening. And we speak of jobs that were expected, and so on and so forth. And we want to work with them on procurement for jobs, that's extremely important.

Transparent dialogue—we indicated, we committed to transparent dialogue. And as these discussions took place, it was clear towards the end of the meeting a burden had been lifted from them because they had to go back to their people, they have to explain to their people what's happening, just as we have to explain to the people of Manitoba; when there's funds that are misused, we are accountable as a government to do that. They also have to go back to their people and explain why this road isn't happening right now and when is it going to happen and when are there going to be jobs? They had all these questions, and it was about the community benefits funds—or benefits agreements, what's going to happen?

Well, these benefit agreements never went to the communities; they didn't go to the bands. They went to the bureaucrats and, you know, the general public. It was—the money was going to the indigenous communities and that's the understanding, and then they are kind of discriminated against because they got this money for nothing done. That wasn't the case. They didn't get the money.

As I indicated, they never considered the East Side Road Authority a working relationship. They asked questions. What's the future of this community benefit agreements? One comment that they brought forward that didn't surprise me a bit, they don't want confrontation; they don't like confrontation. These are a gentle people for the most part. They were quiet; they're soft-spoken. They're so soft-spoken that the room was absolutely quiet because they are a gentle people, but they get frustrated. And what do you do when you get frustrated? You lash out and you get angry. And, but this isn't what they want and it was so, I don't know, so demeaning, I just feel that they felt so demeaned through the whole process.

But they'd also like a five-year plan. They just want to know, not just about today and this week and this month, but they need a plan going forward. Well, all of our municipalities in this province have a

five-year plan, a 10-year plan. Why is that not in place for our First Nations and our indigenous people? They also want to plan their future. They want to grow; they want to be economically viable, and they're looking for a government that is going to work with them, not for them but work with them. They've indicated very clearly they want a good working partnership, whether it's the East Side Road Authority or other projects in the province of Manitoba, whether it's in this part of Manitoba, northern Manitoba—our First Nations want good partnerships. They want to grow and they want to be viable.

Another comment that came from—no surprises, like, we don't know how to handle surprises. Don't all of a sudden, you know, this is announced, that's announced and they're not aware of it. They don't like surprises. Well, we as a government and people in a governance position, we don't want surprises either. How do you not get surprises? You have good planning. There needs to be good planning. And that clearly was not happening.

Moving forward, they would like honesty—honesty, 'transparence'; they want trust. They want trust in a government, and in order for them to gain that trust, we have to prove ourselves, and we certainly intend on doing that, Madam Speaker.

Going forward, we're looking forward to positive relationships with our indigenous communities so that they can go to their people and also instill that in their communities that they can trust this government, that, as the ministers' instructors indicated, we are going to build this road, and it's taking time to turn things around just as it does, but we will get this road built.

Our communities in the First Nations indigenous communities, they want shared services, and if we can do these projects right, they will thrive. Our province will thrive, and they want to be part of that. They've indicated that very clearly. I've had such good, positive meetings with indigenous communities from across the whole province. They want to be part of a success story and I think we have a very good opportunity here moving forward to do that.

What they also are looking for, you know, they've been through some bad processes, whether it's murdered, missing indigenous women and girls, truth and reconciliation, road projects that have gone badly, lack of economic development in the North, they want to move forward. They will not forget the

past, clearly, and they will learn to deal with it. They want a healing process. They've indicated they want to, you know, really encourage their youth, their younger people, their children, to go back to the ceremonies, the ceremonies of the past to help with the healing. They realize in order to move forward, there has to be healing, and they are certainly looking towards that, and they want mentoring for their young people so that they have a better opportunity going forward in their lives.

* (16:50)

They want to—they do not want to forget the past. They want to learn from the past and they want to—they have been so good at educating us and teaching us and I've had such a wonderful opportunity listening to their stories. Some of them are just great, very amazing. I am overwhelmed by how they treat their elders, and the information that the elders can share, not just with their families but with our government to help understand the past and help understand where they want to be, where they want to go, what their plans are, what kind of a future they want—extremely important for our government.

And, at the end of the day, what do they want? They want exactly what we want as a government. They want healthy, sustainable communities that take care of their elders and keep their children safe, healthy, and protected. That's what we all want. That's where we're all looking towards, but it comes from honesty, transparency, and moving forward in respectful partnerships throughout this province.

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 16, and I hope that our members opposite will support this going forward. In the long run, making positive decisions will benefit the whole province.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): It's always a pleasure to speak to a project that was ambition to improve the lot of most northern communities.

The East Side Road Authority involved the construction of a 30-year—it's a 30-year construction project that's worth about \$3 billion, and it would have helped out in the uplifting of most of the northern communities that are involved or who were affected by it directly.

The east-side road was designed to extend from—and the minister is looking at me—PR 304 to the Berens River First Nation, and it is a 30-year project.

Now, why was it a 30-year project? Because the construction—because it was—*[interjection]* I'm answering it, so allow me. It is a—it was a 30-year project because there was that sense of improving that side of the lake, and from the Hollow Water First Nation to the Bloodvein First Nation, and up to the Berens River First Nation it would have supplied some access to the Pauingassi and the Little Grand Rapids first nations.

The design and the dream that I think has been scuttled by this government was to allow that portion of our province to at least have a chance, a chance at the economic opportunities that are offered by mining development and access to more economic opportunities as in, well, some more tourism opportunities.

And the way that it was being done, and I know that they are panning it; the opposition—I mean the government is panning the plan because there were problems, and there were problems because most projects usually have problems, and it's part of the—what we call the normal allowances for adjustments. There is no such thing—*[interjection]* Well, I was involved in some projects of some magnitude, too, that there were always some technical problems that occur.

When the east-side road was dreamed of, it was more of a dream that most of those First Nations peoples who live on that side of the lake are given a chance to improve themselves. *[interjection]* And don't worry about how fast or how slow I speak, because I'm taking my time. I have 25 minutes.

The—on the remote chance that the east-side road will still be built, which I doubt very much during my lifetime—

An Honourable Member: We'll be back in four years. We'll be back in four years.

Mr. Marcelino: —and I'll still be around for 30 more years. I'll be 70 soon. So, in 30 years, it would have helped a lot in proving that what we have is a province that needs to put more of our resources towards improving the North.

Now, this is part of what some, on this side of the House, dreamt when this side of the House went on—was on that side of the House. And it is amazing that in the promises of the honourable

Premier (Mr. Pallister) during the election, he said that he will cut a precise number, which is \$1.95 billion in infrastructure. That's what he said. And, if this is part of that, then he only has to cut about—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order. Order. Order.

I'm having some difficulty hearing the member. There's a lot of conversations going on around the member and elsewhere in the House, so, if people could please give him his due and show him some respect so that he can continue with his comments, please, and so that we can all hear it. Thank you.

Mr. Marcelino: The way that I see this and the way that I read the action of the Infrastructure Minister in cancelling this, is this is in fulfillment of the attempt to save money, which is a good thing. To save money on the backs of the indigenous people—and it's not right nor is it laughable, because it shows and it betrays how much commitment the other side, the government side, has for the indigenous community. It is not laughable. It's not funny anymore.

And the way that it is said is that, oh, there's a lot of wastage, there's a lot of waste. Every time that money is spent on the indigenous communities, some folks from the government side call it squander. Squander is a term that's used in order to denote that funds are being wasted. And it's true. It's true that it

is being wasted when it's spent on indigenous communities. The intent is always there, to have some cash flow for those northern communities.

It's not as simple as putting in a plan, constructing the road, and there should have been \$400 million, therefore there should have been 400 kilometres. And it's not as simple as that.

I want to think simply, too, that if possible—I know that, you know, when you're a Conservative, you only are concerned about money, not about the people. And that's not fair. It's not fair, and it's never fair for us to ignore the needs and the wants of our indigenous communities. They are the same people who welcomed this immigrant to this country. This was their land and this is Treaty 1 territory.

And my belief is that we have to hear some kind of a plan from the Infrastructure Minister or from the Premier about what they are going to do about the east-side road—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Order. Order.

When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member will have 22 minutes remaining.

The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 25, 2016

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Tabling of Reports		East Side Road Authority	
Wishart	2357	Helwer	2366
		Pedersen	2366
Ministerial Statements		Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries Head Office	
Pharmacists Manitoba Day		Allum	2366
Goertzen	2357	Schuler	2366
Wiebe	2357	Synergy Inmates Phones Inc.	
Lamoureux	2357	Swan	2367
Members' Statements		Stefanson	2367
Disability Employment Awareness Month		Pallister	2367
Wharton	2358	Proposed Federal Carbon Tax	
La P'tite France		Altemeyer	2368
Fontaine	2358	Cox	2368
Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month		Pallister	2368
Guillemard	2359	East Side Road Authority	
Gary Smart		Helwer	2369
Pedersen	2359	Pedersen	2369
Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Children In Care Model		Petitions	
Gerrard	2359	Bell's Purchase of MTS	
Oral Questions		Maloway	2369
Standing Committees		Union Certification	
F. Marcelino	2360	Lindsey	2369
Pallister	2360		
Truth and Reconciliation Report		ORDERS OF THE DAY	
Kinew	2361	<i>(Continued)</i>	
Wishart	2361	GOVERNMENT BUSINESS	
Child-Care Spaces		Second Readings	
Fontaine	2362	Bill 16—The Manitoba East Side Road Authority	
Fielding	2362	Repeal Act	
Fentanyl Crisis		Pedersen	2370
Wiebe	2363	Questions	
Goertzen	2363	Maloway	2373
Labour Union Consultation		Pedersen	2373
Lindsey	2364	Klassen	2374
Cullen	2364	Debate	
Prebudget Consultations		Lindsey	2375
Gerrard	2365	Eichler	2380
Friesen	2365	Saran	2383
Children in Care		Smook	2387
Gerrard	2365	Klassen	2388
Friesen	2366	Clarke	2389
		T. Marcelino	2392

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