

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
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	Ind.
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
<i>Vacant</i>	Point Douglas	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 25, 2017

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 36—The Budget Implementation and
Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017**

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice, that Bill 36, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017; Loi d'exécution du budget de 2017 et modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Friesen: The budget—the BITSA bill will provide the legislative authority for the implementation of the tax, financial and other measures that were announced in Budget 2017. It also contains amendments to various tax acts.

Madam Speaker, in making these changes, our government is committed to ensuring an affordable and competitive tax environment that increases productivity and encourages economic growth and job creation, while working to restore the fiscal integrity of our Province and responsibly move Manitoba along the road to recovery.

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

**Bill 226—The Manitoba Conservation Officers
Recognition Day Act**

Mr. Alan Lagimodiere (Selkirk): I move, seconded by the honourable member from Swan River, that Bill 226, The Manitoba Conservation Officers Recognition Day Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lagimodiere: The purpose of this bill is to recognize the conservation officers' importance in Manitoba as to who they are, which type of training they go through, acknowledges the sacrifices they make in their daily lives, and to have time to recognize the importance that—of what conservation officers do for the province of Manitoba.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I am pleased to table the Manitoba Justice, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2017-18 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Madam Speaker: Ministerial statements?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Pembina Trails Celebrates Canada 150

Mr. Jon Reyes (St. Norbert): I rise today to take this opportunity to proudly acknowledge the Pembina Trails School Division. Their motto is Accomplish Anything, and yesterday, under a beautiful blue sky, more than 15,000 students and faculty packed the Winnipeg's Investors Group Field for a massive Canada 150 celebration.

Yesterday's event may well be the largest school-based celebration of its kind in the country. I, as well as my colleague from Fort Richmond, had the pleasure to celebrate with the students and share what it means to be Canadian.

Marking the 150th anniversary of Confederation, students throughout the school division have been focusing their studies on the topics of diversity, inclusion, truth and reconciliation, and sustainability.

With the theme of celebrating our heritage, students recognized that Canada is a great country and made pledges to honour and continue to support our province and our nation.

At this time, it is my pleasure to acknowledge Elaine Egan, assistant superintendent; Kathleen McMillan, David Johnson, trustees; and thank each and every member of the board of trustees, the superintendent and the senior admin team, the teachers, staff and volunteers who made yesterday's event both historic and meaningful.

A special recognition must be given to Iain Riffel and Connie Brezden for what can only be called military precision in the co-ordinating of such

a memorable celebration. Your service and efforts are valued and make a difference.

And I know our Premier (Mr. Pallister), the honourable First Minister, said it best in his remarks at yesterday's event: the only thing better than today is indeed—in Manitoba, is tomorrow in Manitoba.

Thank you for all making that happen.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for St. Norbert.

Mr. Reyes: Madam Speaker, I ask the names of the board of trustees and the senior admin team be recorded to Hansard as well.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to include those names in Hansard? [*Agreed*]

Pembina Trails School Division, Board of Trustees, Ward 1: Jaime Glenat, vice-chair of the board; Gerry Melnyk; Dianne Zuk; Ward 2: Sheila Billinghamurst; David Johnson; Tim Johnson; Ward 3: Julie Fisher, chair of the board; Laureen Goodridge; Kathleen McMillan

Senior Administration Team: Ted Fransen, superintendent of education; Elaine Egan, assistant superintendent, human resources and policy; John Karras, assistant superintendent, divisional support services; Iain Riffel, assistant superintendent, program; Susan Schmidt, assistant superintendent, student services; Craig Stahlke, secretary-treasurer; Patty Antoniak, associate secretary-treasurer

Aboriginal Awareness Week

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas): Aboriginal Awareness Week was established across Canada in 1992, held on the four days following Victoria Day. This week is designed to increase awareness of indigenous peoples within the public service and within Canada as a whole. It has evolved into a week honouring the many indigenous cultures in Canada, including Metis, Inuit and First Nations.

Last week, Manitobans got the chance to take part in the Manito Ahbee Festival where they learned about and shared the richness of indigenous cultures, histories and traditions.

However, this awareness week alone is not enough. This government must take steps to courageously resolve issues that continue today. Past policies, rooted in racism and ignorance, still perpetuate the horrendous consequences of 'conolysim' and the residential school system. Festivals are great, but we need real, concrete action.

Madam Speaker, our NDP team is working hard to repair Manitoba's relationship with indigenous groups across the province. From implementing the findings of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry to investing heavily in education for indigenous youth, we are committed to righting the wrongs of the past.

My hope, Madam Speaker, is that future generations don't have to face systematic racism, discrimination or gender violence. I hope hurtful stereotypes demeaning our cultures and values will be a thing of the past.

Tomorrow marks the end of Aboriginal Awareness Week, but it's never too late to implement change through government action or through personal commitment.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Bug Chucker Cup

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, the community of Roblin is indeed the jewel of Manitoba's Parkland. Roblin is a modern region with a diverse agricultural base and has some of the most scenic landscapes in Manitoba, making it a popular year-round destination for a wide range of outdoor activities. Within minutes of Roblin are some of Manitoba's most spectacular parks and some of the best fishing around.

Madam Speaker, on May 26th and 27th this year, Roblin's is host to the Bug Chucker Cup, Manitoba's premier still-water fly-fishing tournament. This competition is dedicated to advancing fly-fishing sport development and promoting Roblin's incredible still-water trout lakes. Competitors will fish a total of four lakes in two days including east and west Goose Lake, North Twin Lake and Percy Lake.

The Bug Chucker Cup is a great opportunity to join other fly fishers for some good-natured competition while matching your wits and skills against rainbow, brown, speckle and tiger trout.

And if that doesn't get you going, Madam Speaker, from May 28th to June 3rd, right after the Bug Chucker Cup, the Parkland communities of Roblin, Russell and Roblin—or Rossburn partner up to host the 15th National Fly Fishing Championship and Conservation Symposium.

Madam Speaker, through the great work of many local volunteers, stakeholders, local and provincial government partners, Manitoba's Parkland visionaries have developed a world-class fish-trout

fishery as one method of facilitating economic and recreational activities.

Information regarding other Parkland activities can be found in the annual Parkland Explorer Guide, or by visiting parklandtourism.com.

Madam Speaker, I want to wish good chucking to all the bug chuckers headed out to Roblin.

Heart and Stroke Foundation

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Every seven minutes in Canada, someone dies from heart disease or a stroke. It's a frightening reality, a reality that the Heart and Stroke Foundation is dedicated to fight against.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation invests in life-saving research, they empower and support Canadians to take control of their health, and they advocate to governments to invest in programs and awareness campaigns.

A couple days ago, the foundation hosted a lunch and presentation here at the Legislative Building. The foundation shared with us the latest in research breakthroughs and the need for increased attention from all levels of government.

*(13:40)

Madam Speaker, the presentation reminded us of the need to eat healthy, and I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about the signs of a stroke or the acronym FAST: F stands for face, is it drooping?; A stands for arms, can you raise both above your head?; S stands for speech, is it slurred or jumbled?; and T stands for time, meaning call 911 immediately.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation is a health charity active in communities all across the country. A great way this government could help is by investing in a dedicated stroke unit here in Manitoba to help lower the loss of life related to heart disease and stroke.

Another way we can show support is by riding the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Big Bike. Our Liberal caucus has already entered a team.

In closing, I would like to thank the Heart and Stroke Foundation for the important research and data they provide, and I encourage my colleagues here in the House to get involved and be sure to memorize the acronym, FAST.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

International Peace Gardens

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk (Arthur-Virden): Madam Speaker, I rise here today inspired by the vision of Henry J. Moore, the concept of an International Peace Garden. In 1929, at the heart of this continent, a vision of an international gardens association, they turned his plans and sketches of a garden that would tell a story of peace between two great countries into reality.

In 1932, the unveiling of a cairn built by fieldstones by students from both Canada and the United States of America was situated right on the 49th parallel. This marked the creation of an International Peace Garden. The cairn located at the site reads: To God in his glory, we two nations dedicate this garden and pledge ourselves that as long as we shall live, we shall not take up arms against one another. This is a reminder of how we all must work together for peace for all our citizens. At the opening a crowd of 50,000 people came to celebrate this momentous occasion.

The International Peace Garden is located at the heart of the Turtle Mountains in my constituency of Arthur-Virden. It's a perfect place to gather, meet and experience and promise of peace created more than 80 years ago.

With more than 100,000 visitors each year to enjoy the 2,300 acres of exploring, adventure and history, the peace garden plants over 150,000 flowers each summer. Guests are invited to enjoy the ever-changing display.

Each year the International Peace Garden hosts many events, including the International Music Camp, the international sports camp, square dancing, Envirothon and horticulture programs, to name a few.

This gem on the map also features a peace chapel, a 9/11 memorial site and many different water gardens that make up the relaxing surroundings; they have a fully—their fully stocked gift shop for all your souvenir needs and a restaurant to sit and dine. For more information on their website, visit www.peacegarden.com.

The International Peace Garden is a must-stop for all ages. Special thanks goes out to Garry Enns, his staff and many volunteers for continuing to make the international tourist attraction an amazing place to visit.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Introduction of Guests

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

We have seated in the public gallery, from Woodlawn School, 103 grade 4 students under the direction of Simmy Gandhi, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

And also in the public gallery we have visiting us Gerald, Elliott and Ava Olin, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Justice (Mrs. Stefanson).

And on behalf of all of us, we welcome all of you here to the Manitoba Legislature.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: Today we begin the bittersweet tradition of saying farewell to this year's pages as they each have their last shift in this House.

We will begin with Karsen Lee Winters.

Karsen will be graduating from West Kildonan Collegiate in June and plans to go to the University of Manitoba to study science. He will graduate with marks in the high 90s, and his favourite subjects have been math and science.

His long-term future plans include going to medical school to become a researcher, and his short-term summer plans include job hunting.

Karsen would like to thank everybody at the Legislature for providing an enjoyable and friendly work environment.

Nell Perry will be graduating from Kelvin High School next month with the class of 2017 and with an average of 92 per cent. Other than calling votes, Nell's interests include yoga, improv, choir and volunteering for community projects at Kelvin.

Nell will particularly miss her days doing high school improv at Kelvin, but she plans to continue her love for it in the future.

Nell will be moving to Montreal, Quebec, next year to attend Concordia University in the department of sociology. At university she hopes to pursue a BA in sociology with the hope of pursuing graduate studies later on with a scholarship from Concordia University.

Nell wanted us to know how thankful she is for her experiences here as a page this year.

So from all of us to the two pages, thank you very much for all you've done for all of us this year, and good luck.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Transparency and Accountability Premier's Performance Record

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): The Premier preaches a message he does not practise. He claims he is transparent, but his government refuses to release reports for baseless reasons. He claims he is accountable, but refuses to do the most of basic—the most basic of items to show Manitobans his work. He claims he wants to negotiate, but makes threats to workers with heavy-handed legislation. The Premier has clearly broken his word.

Now we've seen that he's turning on a member of his own caucus.

Will the Premier today commit to being accountable for his actions? Will he actually listen to all Manitobans?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, I appreciate the member's sage advice in terms of how to build a unified caucus. I appreciate also—I also appreciate her concerns—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —about protecting the best interests of workers.

The previous administration proceeded in a manner that was a threat to families—working families—and seniors across the province by raising taxes in innumerable categories. When they promised, of course, they would not, they did anyway. But this was hardly evidence of their ability to listen, Madam Speaker.

We, on the other hand, are very much engaged in the honest exercise of consulting with Manitobans. We did so prior to—as an opposition in the last election. We will continue to do so.

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

Ms. Marcelino: The Premier refuses to listen to regular Manitobans. He refuses to listen to front-line workers. He refuses to listen to members of his own caucus. He claims to be part of a team, but refuses to even listen to one of his most experienced members.

He claims to want to bring people in, but offers vague threats instead.

The Premier has the opportunity to actually listen to all the different voices on the important subject of hydro. The voices of workers and rate-payers and the voices of MLAs who have been elected—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Marcelino: —to voice the concerns of their constituents.

Mr. Pallister: Well, Madam Speaker, actually, we were elected by Manitobans because we demonstrated the sincerity of our desire to listen, didn't just speak about listening but actually did. We put together a very reasonable and moderate vision for the future of the province that involves, after a decade of debt, fixing the finances of our province; after a decade of decay, repairing the services of our province; after a decade of decline, rebuilding the economy of our province. And, Madam Speaker, we are unified in the pursuit of achieving those goals.

Manitobans saw what a non-team looked like and now they have the wonderful opportunity to see what a team can do.

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

* (13:50)

Efficiency Manitoba Act Request to Withdraw

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): It is no secret that the Premier's aggressive style is one that pushes people away rather than bringing them together. It has pushed away the federal government, preventing an agreement on climate change and health. It has pushed away labour, who cannot see a partner in the Premier when he won't even meet with them. It has pushed away workers, who were left languishing for two years before the Premier would even consider looking at the minimum wage.

The Premier always notes it's the tone on the top which sets the direction for an organization.

Will the Premier change his tone, stop pushing people away, actually listen to the concerns of all Manitobans and withdraw Bill 19?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, quite frankly, that's nonsense. I mean, it's ridiculous.

The previous government pushed each other away. They staged a rebellion for all to see. They made their own government the laughing stock of the country and, Madam Speaker, they have demonstrated no expertise whatsoever in doing what we are actually doing.

I've had the glorious opportunity in my life to be part of building winning teams in sports, in business and, now, in government. And I am proud of my teammates on this side of the House, who are working together for the good of their constituents and also for the good of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, our focus is on what is in the best interest of Manitobans. The previous administration was caught up in looking—navel-gazing and looking at what was best for their party and they couldn't figure that out, Madam Speaker.

We figured out where our focus lies and it's on building a stronger Manitoba in partnership with Manitobans.

Point Douglas Community Funding Cut for Women's Centres

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Well, we learned the North Point Douglas Women's Centre and the North End women's resource centre have been advised the funding they receive through Neighbourhoods Alive! has been cut significantly. These are only the two women centres in Point Douglas. For the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, the \$120,000 cut represents all of their provincial government funding. This is a massive hit to a small organization, their staff and the thousands of women that they serve.

Why did the Premier cut off all funding for only one of two women's organizations serving Point Douglas women?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, you see, Madam Speaker, the member from St. Johns is at a bit of a disadvantage. She's been making false assertions throughout this session on a number of fronts. They aren't backed up. When the investigative journalists we have in our province investigate her preambles, they find that they are based on false information and misinformation.

So, as she has done that repeatedly, Madam Speaker, in regard to women's issues, in regard to fiscal issues, in regard to false assertions concerning decisions that we may or may not have made on this side of the House, she's weakened her credibility in making such allegations today.

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

Ms. Fontaine: These cut dollars go towards programming that help the most vulnerable women and children, including those escaping violence and those that are sexually exploited.

The centre will lose four positions: an advocacy and peer support co-ordinator; a basic needs co-ordinator; an education and training co-ordinator; and a drop-in co-ordinator. The people who staff these positions were born and raised in Point Douglas and had worked their way up as volunteers with the centre.

How can this Premier show such disdain and such disrespect for these workers and for Point Douglas women?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): I appreciate the member raising the North Point Douglas Women's Centre in the House today because it does give me the opportunity to express my deepest gratitude for the work and the services that all the people do at the North Point Douglas Women's Centre.

I recently visited the centre about a month and a half back and attended a healing circle at their—at the resource centre, and was told that for 17 years they tried to get a minister to come and sit around the table with them, to no avail.

So, Madam Speaker, we're standing up for the North Point Douglas Women's Centre—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —and the resources there—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —and we'll take no lessons from members opposite. Thanks.

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

Ms. Fontaine: So the minister goes and visits it and then decides to cut \$120,000 from its budget, the only money that they give towards this organization?

This morning we sat in this House and we all voted unanimously on Bill 221. Does the Premier or the ministers—whoever—actually see the connection between trying to honour MMIWG on the one hand and then pull funding on the other, which intrinsically sets the conditions in which women and children's lives are put at risk in this province, in Point Douglas?

How many more women's organizations is this Premier going to cut the funding for?

Ms. Squires: Again, the member's assertions are full of false allegations and misinformation.

We're standing up for women in the province of Manitoba. And we know that women in the province were unduly affected by the previous administration's tax regime and the oppressive measures that they did that hurt people that were living below the poverty level and women, it disproportionately affected them.

We are building a stronger economy and a better province for all Manitobans and, in particular, women in the province of Manitoba.

Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation Duty to Consult with Indigenous Communities

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I'm wondering if anyone from the government side of the House, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) or the minister, could stand here today and confirm that they feel they have met their constitutional obligations under section 35, the duty to consult with indigenous people, over their dismantling of the single desk of the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.

Will they give that assertion here in the House today: they have met section 35, duty to consult?

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

We have been out consulting and talking to Manitoba commercial fishermen. As a matter of fact, the envoy has talked to, I think, almost 300 commercial fishermen just within the last few months. So we have gone out, talked to them. I have personally talked to them at the Lake Winnipeg co-management foundation board just last December, and we know that they really appreciate

having that opportunity to provide us with their feedback.

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

Mr. Altemeyer: As has been pointed out to this minister in writing from First Nations communities themselves, the Crown cannot delegate its duty to consult to a third party—namely, the very same envoy that she refers to.

But let's stick with the envoy for a moment. They've had some meetings, true.

Where's their final report? Has the government received it and, if so, why isn't it public yet?

Mrs. Cox: Thanks to the member opposite.

I've actually had many discussions with Minister LeBlanc, who's the federal fisheries minister, and had those discussions with regard to us moving towards a single desk. So those discussions and consultations have taken place, and we are moving forward with providing commercial fishermen the opportunity to keep more money in their pockets, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, Madam Speaker, that answer is going to continue to concern many fishers who are wondering what the future of their industry holds.

The minister refused to answer a very simple question: Has she received—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altemeyer: —the final report—has she received the final report from the envoys? What does it say? And when is that public—when is that report going to be made public so everyone can see what their conclusions were?

Granted, they were told what the conclusions were supposed to be, before they even started consulting, by this very same government.

Mrs. Cox: Thanks to the member opposite.

I don't know why he will not get on board and support commercial fishermen and the opportunity for them to keep more money in their pocket. I think that it's something that all Manitobans deserve. We know that competition is important and it provides

them to keep more money into their pocketbook and more money on the table.

He should read the auditor report that was prepared by the auditor, and it slams the federal fish agency for their mismanagement. So I don't know why he supports the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, but he should get on board and support commercial fishermen.

* (14:00)

Efficiency Manitoba Act Member for Assiniboia's Position

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): The member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher) believes that it makes no sense to rip apart Manitoba Hydro. And when the people of Assiniboia marked their ballots, they marked it for that member, yet the Premier chooses to disrespect the people of Assiniboia, claiming that partisanship should come before service to the people.

Why is the Premier putting his party before Manitobans?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Madam Speaker, another false assertion from the member opposite.

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

Mr. Marcelino: I thank the Premier for the answer.

The Premier asks everyone to get on board with him, but if you disagree, you get cast overboard.

The member for Assiniboia raises very important concerns. The voters of Assiniboia voted for him to do just that, yet the Premier suggests he has disciplined the member and is keeping his eye on him.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: I don't believe I heard a question, Madam Speaker.

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

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Marcelino: The question is: Why is the Premier muzzling voices that raise important questions?

Madam Speaker, the Premier's promise of openness and transparency, turns out that the statement appears to and—applies if you agree with everything he says.

Will the Premier allow his members to freely vote on Bill 19 and allow the member from Assiniboia to express his concerns about this legislation? There is a question.

Mr. Pallister: Well, members opposite are no stranger to internal caucus discussions, and they've had variances of view on things wide-ranging, including whether they should maintain a premier who got the largest plurality of any NDP leader in the history of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, these kinds of discussions occur within parties. Our discussions are productive ones aimed at achieving a better future for the people of Manitoba; their discussions centre on polls.

Family Law Reform Act Passage to Committee

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): This morning we ran short of time to debate Bill 224, the bill to modernize family law in Manitoba.

I was pleased that the Liberal caucus joins our NDP caucus in supporting the bill moving to committee.

I listened carefully to the speeches of the member for Southdale (Mr. Smith) and the member for St. Vital (Mrs. Mayer) and heard no criticisms with the content of the bill. The Government House Leader (Mr. Micklefield) stated some questions, which I'd be happy to answer at committee or before the briefing, if preferred.

Will the Minister of Justice recommend the bill move on to committee in a timely way?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Well, Madam Speaker, the member opposite has been here for a number of years. I think he understands the rules of the House and how they work, and we abide by those rules.

And, Madam Speaker, I would remind the member opposite that he was part of a Cabinet that—of a NDP government that was in for 17 years. They had the opportunity to bring forward such legislation at that time. In fact, he was the minister for five years himself. He had the opportunity to bring that forward at the time.

Clearly, it was not a priority for that government in the past, and, in fact, it was a bill that ended up dying in the dark days of the end of the NDP era. And they had the choice to make it a priority; they chose not to. Shame on them.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

The honourable member for Minto, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the minister for her reasons, if I can call them that, to oppose a bill to help Manitoba children.

Bill 224 would support more family law disputes being settled in ways that are less expensive, less confrontational and less harmful to children. The bill would start a framework for dealing with cases when one parent wishes to relocate outside Manitoba. The bill would reflect the reality of reproductive technologies and the diversity of Manitoba families, including same-sex couples who face the expense of court just to be named as parents.

I would hope the best interests of Manitoba children would be taken into account and the bill could proceed to committee.

Will the Minister of Justice get on board?

Mrs. Stefanson: If the member opposite truly cared about putting children first and about this type of reform, he had the opportunity to do it in—when he was in government. He chose not to. They made—they didn't make this a priority when they had the opportunity to do so.

Again, I say to the member opposite, he should have taken that opportunity when he had the chance.

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

Mr. Swan: Resolving more family disputes outside of the courtroom will free up more court resources, not only judges, but also court staff and courtrooms and ease the pressure on Legal Aid family law services. Resolving more family disputes outside of the courtroom may reduce family violence, lead to better outcomes in education and health and even reduce the number of children coming into care.

I can give the minister contact information for lawyers, child-development experts and even the people in her own department, if that'll help move the bill forward.

Will this minister put aside the partisan rhetoric, support Manitoba children and recommend that Bill 224 move on to committee?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, perhaps if the member opposite wasn't occupying his time while he was a minister of Justice building a rebellion against his leader at the time and spending that time and his energy on that, rather than being focused on what he should have been doing, maybe he could have gotten this bill passed then.

Misericordia Health Centre Support for Facility

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, almost every day the Minister of Health gets up and says that the system that he is responsible for is broken.

Madam Speaker, the minister should spend less time bashing the system and more time recognizing the incredible things that people are trying to do within the system in spite of his bashing. I speak of incredible things like operating the best eye-care centre in western Canada, together with the best operating urgent-care centre at Misericordia.

Will the minister start respecting and standing up for the Misericordia centre of excellence and the health professionals who work there, instead of trying to break it up?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Every day that I get up I consider to be a good day, and I'm glad and happy to be able to get up out of bed each day and to come to work and do the good work that we have.

We have many good people in the health-care system in Manitoba who are out there doing great things. I'm always amazed at the doctors and the nurses, the many aides who are in our health-care system, who every day are saving lives.

We often hear about the difficult situations, the things that don't go as well, but for every one of those there are thousands of things that go particularly well in the health-care system, and that is the result of nurses, doctors, our very skilled medical professions—professionals. I'm glad the member's given me the opportunity to stand up and give them credit, because they deserve the credit for all that goes well in the health-care system, Madam Speaker.

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

Health-Care Services Physical Size Discrimination

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, speaking of respect, currently the health-care system the minister is responsible for is not adequately looking after individuals with large bodies. I wrote weeks ago to the minister about a man who's been stuck in his bed for 14 weeks because the system doesn't have the lifts and the wheelchairs to accommodate him, let alone the exercise facility he needs.

Madam Speaker, 51 days ago the minister's staff replied; 28 days ago the minister said that the concerns were being addressed, but many weeks later the gentleman remains stuck in his bed 24 hours a day because there has been no action.

When will the minister ensure that those who have large bodies are treated with respect—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, the member raises a particular constituent concern. Certainly, I will take that information back and I will look into it.

* (14:10)

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

Mr. Gerrard: The minister's had 51 days, but there's been nothing.

Madam Speaker, our province and our health-care system need to accommodate and respect people, whatever their body size or shape, and that includes little people.

Later today, the Little People of Manitoba will be in the private dining room at 5 o' clock to meet with all MLAs who can drop by so that they can share their concerns that need to be addressed so that discrimination of bias—and bias against them and others, based on physical size and weight, can end in Manitoba.

I ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister): Will he be encouraging members of his caucus to drop by to meet with the Little People of Manitoba between 5 and 6 today in the Legislature's private dining room?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Madam Speaker, members of our caucus meet with individual Manitobans each

and every day to hear their concerns, to hear their ideas and to hear their suggestions. That is something that this caucus and this government and our Premier (Mr. Pallister) is proud of. It is something he encourages, and we will always continue to reach out and speak to Manitobans to hear their concerns and ideas.

Vale Mine Closure Northern Economic Strategy

Mr. Kelly Bindle (Thompson): Madam Speaker, there are plenty of opportunities in the North, and our government has made a clear commitment to growing our northern economy. There have been investments in tourism and we're looking at other initiatives to expand the northern economy.

But, like any resource-based economy, global market forces can have a large impact, as we have seen in my hometown of Thompson, with the Vale announcing the coming suspension of mining operations at Birchtree Mine in October—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bindle: In light of the Vale announcement, can the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade please tell the House where this government is looking to facilitate opportunities for business in the North?

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

Certainly, the member from Thompson represented our team last week. He met with Vale. He met with the union leaders. He met with the City, and we're certainly excited about having the mayor and council in tomorrow, and certainly union leaders will be in the building tomorrow and we look forward to that discussion.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, I want to acknowledge the Minister of Education, in partnership with the City of Thompson, Vale and the federal government, will help fund a project manager position to support the work of Thompson 2020 task force. This task force has been established with the community and labour to address the economic impacts and certainly in regard to the refinery closure.

We look forward to working with the community in the best interests—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Health-Care Services Federal Funding Agreement

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Yesterday in Estimates, we heard from the Health Minister that he can't give a specific timeline for a deal on federal health funding. In fact, the Premier and the Health Minister have spent months bickering with the federal government, using the health care of Manitoba seniors and families as a chip in their game.

But the world doesn't stop for a minister to pick political fights, and both the federal and the provincial governments have now written their budgets with millions of dollars in placeholder funding.

When will the Health Minister stop the games and get back to the table and get the best deal he can for the people of Manitoba?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, this member raises an important point, but he doesn't raise it in the right way. The point is that we need the federal government to be a real partner when it comes to health care. We've seen over the last number of years that there has been a declining amount of support on a percentage basis when it comes to support from the federal government to the health-care needs of Manitobans.

Now, the member wants to stand up and he wants to bluster in the House about that, but I wish he would've stood up with us when we were speaking to Ottawa and continue to speak to Ottawa about being a real partner. It's not too late. We still need all Manitobans to be able to stand up to Ottawa and say, you need to be a real partner. It's not too late for him. I hope he joins with us today in that fight, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the Premier yesterday said that it was pointless for anyone to monitor the national Health Accord negotiations, but Manitobans are, in fact, paying close attention. They're paying attention because that funding is crucial to maintaining the front-line services that this Premier said he wanted to protect.

Families want assurances that their health care is going to be stable, reliable and protected against negotiations that have gone awry at the top level.

Instead, negotiations become an arena for this Premier and this Health Minister to play political games. The Premier's antics are adding more uncertainty to our health system that has already been thrown into turmoil.

Can the minister commit to this House that there'll be no last-minute changes to the funding promised which will put families' health care at risk?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, I had encouragement on that first question that maybe the member was coming around, and that encouragement has turned to discouragement because now he feels that it is playing political games to try to get a fair share for Manitoba. He feels that it's political games to ensure that there is sustainability in the health-care system, to ensure that the federal government fulfills its rightful role in being a fair funder when it comes to health care in Manitoba. He doesn't feel that that is important; he wants to diminish that. That is not how Manitobans feel.

Manitobans rightfully feel that we should be standing up for them when it comes to talking to Ottawa, because we know that their health-care needs and their health-care outcomes are related to having a real partner in Ottawa. I don't know why this member doesn't want to join with us in that, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: These negotiations have now dragged on for months and Manitoba's the last province without an agreement with the federal government. Every other province was able to put the health of their residents first, but this Premier's actions have actually spoiled the relationships with the federal government so bad, and is now putting the health care of Manitobans at risk.

The Premier's bickering has forced the Department of Health to budget for money that isn't—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —even confirmed and putting us further behind in receiving important funding for indigenous health, mental health and home care.

Will the Premier commit today to actually picking up the phone, talking with the federal government and finally negotiate a health-care deal for all Manitobans?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I appreciate the irony, and I hope the members opposite do, of any advice that emanates from that side of the House on building strong relationships with anyone, Madam Speaker, because their relationship-building skills were put on display for the people of Manitoba and the people Canada as they dysfunctioned their party in a virtual nonexistent position, and now we are receiving advice from them on how to build stronger relationships with others.

Madam Speaker, we are standing up for better health care for all Canadians. We are supported by every research report that has been done on the proposals by the federal government. Each report, as recently as a week ago, that has discussed this issue, has supported Manitoba's position that it is not sustainable to support health care across this country, with an aging population, with evolving technology, at 3 per cent.

And so, we stand up for Manitobans' health care while the members opposite applaud what, Madam Speaker? They applaud a disintegration of the support for the very thing Manitobans and Canadians deserve most: a partnership between Ottawa and all the provinces. Ten provinces are united in saying this is a bad deal. We are standing up for Manitobans and Canadians for better health care.

Federal-Provincial Relations Government Negotiation Strategy

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Thank you, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]* Yes, I haven't even started my question yet and already they're heckling.

We're already into June, Madam Speaker, and the Health Minister has failed to get a deal on health care with the federal government, and then the Premier had the brilliant idea of tying the health-care accord to signing the climate-change accord, and now we have neither.

Can the Premier tell us: Why does he insist on being the bad boy of Confederation and get on with the job of building this province and building this country?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Finally, a question on something the member has expertise in: being a bad boy.

We had the opportunity, and we gave everyone in this House the opportunity, to stand up for Manitoba seniors and Canadian seniors for a better Canada Pension Plan. Members opposite chose to sit on their hands or clap their hands and applaud Ottawa on a bad proposal. We stood up for a better proposal to make Canada's pension plan work better for all seniors, not just to be bigger but to be better for all seniors. We won, Madam Speaker.

We had the chance to stand up against a federal government threat to remove a \$60-million commitment for Manitoba in the terms of—in terms of Factory of the Future.

* (14:20)

Other members were given the opportunity to join with us, to stand up for Manitoba's best interests, to stand up for the aerospace and innovation sectors in our province. They chose not to; we chose to, and we won again, Madam Speaker.

And on this, by standing up for what's right in health-care funding and support and making it sustainable across the country, we have the support of over half the federal Liberal government's caucus, who have demonstrated previously that they support our position, not the position now espoused by their government, and we will win on that too.

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

Mr. Allum: Well, Madam Speaker, only a fool and the member from Steinbach would get behind a failed—colossally—failure federal-provincial relations strategy. That's not a good idea.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

I would just urge some caution with the comments that the member has put forward. They do tend to be inflammatory comments and are coming pretty close to being unparliamentary. And I would urge caution in the member making any accusations, as he was doing.

I wonder if he would care to withdraw his comments.

Mr. Allum: Madam Speaker, I appreciate your position that—what—the point I was trying to make is that no one would—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

I would just make a comment that, in the comments that the member was making, he was pretty close to challenging the Speaker. I would ask him to just straight out withdraw the words he made and then we'll go from there.

Mr. Allum: I didn't quite understand what—the direction you were giving me. Of course, I would withdraw those comments. All—

Madam Speaker: Thank you. The honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview, to continue with his question.

Mr. Allum: Thank you. The simple gist of the question was this: is that the Premier has engaged in a federal-provincial-relations strategy that has proven to be a colossal failure, a disaster by any standard and yet, he's—the Premier stands up in this House and claims victory.

My God, Madam Speaker, that's not victory. That's a total loss and it's a total loss for the people of Manitoba.

So I want to ask the Premier today: Will he just admit that his federal-provincial-relations strategy has been an abject failure?

Mr. Pallister: Well the member's entitled to his opinion, Madam Speaker, but not to his own facts.

Here are some facts for him. We now have what I call dictatorial federalism—Bob Rae, former Liberal interim leader: that's in respect of the Liberals' current proposal which the members opposite clearly support to reduce transfer increases by half. Ralph Goodale said, Mr. Harper announced a new funding formula. It was arbitrary, unilateral, non-negotiable. He'll keep commitments Liberals put in place, but then cut back. It's dictatorial federalism by brute force. Well, this is what the members are choosing to support, Madam Speaker. Judy Foote, former minister, said it's not right that throughout our country we're seeing reduced health-care funding to the provinces by nearly \$36 billion in the name of financial prudence and austerity.

Madam Speaker, Stéphane Dion, many other Liberal members—Scott Brison, Joyce Murray, Geoff Regan, Hedy Fry—they're all on side with our position, or at least they were. Now, it appears the NDP supports the new, cut position of the federal Liberals. But we don't. We support Manitobans.

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

Mr. Allum: Well, what we on this side of the House support is more funding for mental health, more funding to fight addictions, more funding to fight climate change and on all three of those points he's a failure, not a winner.

So I want to just make a plea to the Premier today to set aside his usual style. *[interjection]* That's right, not to be able to get along with anyone. To have to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: —stand alone, to have to be the centre of attention. We know nine provinces have a deal on the health accord—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Allum: —eight provinces have a deal on climate change.

Why can't he be on board and be a nation builder in this country instead of tearing this country apart day after day after day?

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, really, I'm amazed the member has any hair left on the top of his head.

The fact is we've set—we've negotiated successful deals with Ottawa on a number of fronts, Madam Speaker, from social housing to the Shoal Lake road, which the members opposite could never get done—they just talked about, the outlet in the north end of Lake Manitoba and the progress and partnerships is very real, training, many, many—agriculture and many, many other files.

But when the member says he's for more funding and at the same time supports less funding, he puts himself in an indefensible position, Madam Speaker. We're for more funding and we're also for better health care for Manitobans.

Infrastructure Budget 2017 Long-Term Investment Strategy

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Madam Speaker, we all know when it comes to infrastructure funding the former NDP government was focused on their own political benefit. They liked to build projects where votes were needed instead of where a road was needed, and they were notorious for pre-election spending sprees, short-term thinking and rushed political funding decisions.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lagassé: Can the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations please update the House on how this government is investing in strategic infrastructure for the long-term benefit of Manitobans? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations): I thank my colleague for that question.

This year's budget delivers an investment of \$1.7 billion for infrastructure, amongst the highest levels of investment in Manitoba's history, and we are making sure that our investments in roads, bridges and core infrastructure are strategic through a new return-on-investment test and by working together with municipalities on long-term investment strategies that focus on their priorities.

Madam Speaker, we promised no less than \$1 billion annually for infrastructure, to give municipalities a fair say on provincial funding and to investing strategically while putting Manitoba back on track to a balanced budget. Our infrastructure plan delivers on every single one of these commitments.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: And I have another statement for the House. I'm going to make some comments about another one of our pages who—this is her last day.

Lily is graduating from Stonewall Collegiate this year, class of 2017. She has been accepted to the faculty of agriculture at University of Manitoba for the upcoming year, but plans to take some time to travel first. She has an interest in performing, singing and playing guitar and looks forward to many upcoming local shows.

She is so grateful for her time as a page and will miss ghost hunting and visiting this beautiful building so often and will look back on this year as a wonderful learning experience. She can't wait to share the stories she's taken part in here, and we wish her well in her future endeavours.

PETITIONS

Neighbourhoods Alive! Funding

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Since 2001, the Neighbourhoods Alive! program has supported stronger neighbourhoods and communities in Manitoba.

(2) Neighbourhoods Alive! uses a community-led development model that partners with neighbourhood renewal corporations on projects that aim to revitalize communities.

(3) Neighbourhoods Alive! and the neighbourhood renewal corporations it supports have played a vital and important role in revitalizing many neighbourhoods in Manitoba through community-driven solutions, including: employment and training, education and recreation, safety and crime prevention, and housing and physical improvements.

(4) Neighbourhoods Alive! now serves 13 neighbourhood renewal corporations across Manitoba which have developed expertise in engaging with their local residents and determining the priorities of their communities.

(5) The provincial government's previous investments into Neighbourhoods Alive! have been bolstered by community and corporate donations as well as essential support from community volunteers, small businesses and local agencies.

(6) Late in 2016, the minister responsible for the Neighbourhoods Alive! program said new funding for initiatives was paused and that the future of the Neighbourhoods Alive! program was being reviewed, bringing hundreds of community projects to a standstill.

(7) Neighbourhood renewal corporations and their communities are concerned this funding freeze is the first step in a slow phase-out of the Neighbourhoods Alive! grant program, which would have severe negative impacts on families and communities.

* (14:30)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba be urged to support the Neighbourhoods Alive! program and the communities served by neighbourhood

renewal corporations by continuing to provide consistent core funding for existing neighbourhood renewal corporations and enhancing the public funding available for specific initiatives.

Madam Speaker, this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

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

Taxi Industry Regulation

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, I couldn't hear you with all this noise over there.

I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of the petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure that there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risk in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) The regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as—such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

This petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in the so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultations with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as the livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdictions, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plans to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by many, many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The taxi industry in Winnipeg provides an important service to all Manitobans.

(2) The taxi industry is regulated to ensure there are both the provision of taxi service and a fair and affordable fare structure.

(3) Regulations have been put in place that has made Winnipeg a leader in protecting the safety of taxi drivers through the installation of shields and cameras.

(4) The regulated taxi system also has significant measures in place to protect passengers, including a stringent complaint system.

(5) The provincial government has moved to bring in legislation through Bill 30 that will transfer jurisdiction to the City of Winnipeg in order to bring in so-called ride-sharing services like Uber.

(6) There were no consultation with the taxi industry prior to the introduction of this bill.

(7) The introduction of this bill jeopardizes safety, taxi service and also puts consumers at risk, as well as livelihood of hundreds of Manitobans, many of whom have invested their life savings into the industry.

(8) The proposed legislation also puts the regulated framework at risk and could lead to issues such as what has been seen in other jurisdiction, including differential pricing, not providing service to some areas of the city and significant risks in terms of taxi driver and passenger safety.

* (14:40)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to withdraw its plan to deregulate the taxi industry, including withdrawing Bill 30.

Signed by Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

The honourable member for The Maples?

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Yes, Madam, a point of order.

Point of Order

Madam Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. Saran: Yes, Madam.

In the morning today during voting, with the intention of sitting neutral, I did not stand to vote neither in favour nor against. And the Deputy Speaker asked me, either I have to stand in favour or against and I cannot stay neutral; if I want to stay neutral, I will have to leave the chair. That's what I did.

I request the honourable Speaker, for the benefit of all the members, to educate the House why a member cannot stay in his or her chair if that member wants to stay neutral for voting on particular issues.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: I thank the minister for that. I would—or, the member for that.

I would point out that our rules do not allow abstentions, that if you are in your chair you do have to vote one way or another. There are no options to that and those are long-standing rules of this Legislature.

So the member does not have a point of order.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Mr. Jim Maloway (Official Opposition House Leader): On House business, pursuant to rule 33(8), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on next Thursday of private members' business will be put forward by the honourable member for Elmwood. The title of the resolution is Committing to an East-West Power Grid for Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway). The title of the resolution is Committing to an East-West Power Grid for Manitoba.

Hon. Andrew Micklefield (Government House Leader): This afternoon we would like to proceed with Estimates.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Executive Council. The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Miigwech, Mr. Chair—Deputy Chair?

An Honourable Member: Mr. Chair.

Ms. Fontaine: Chair. Chair. Mr. Chair.

So I would just like to ask—we're going to explore, obviously, some of the Neighbourhoods Alive! funding that we've all come to learn about in the last little bit.

So I'm curious, when did the Neighbourhoods Alive! send notice letters to organizations that—advising them that their funding was under review?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I'd encourage the member—the ministers available to answer any of those questions in the other room, as we speak. So I'd encourage the member, if she had any questions relating to details of that program, they'd be best directed to the minister of that department, who I'm sure'd be able to edify her on any additional facts that I might have to, by the nature of my once-removal from that position, only be able to give her general comment on.

Ms. Fontaine: I can appreciate that the minister has—should, in theory, have most of the details, but I am asking questions, as is my right as a member of this committee to do.

So, if the Premier doesn't have that specific information, I would like to explore when the direction to put all of the Neighbourhoods Alive! funding under review, then. When was—when did that occur?

Mr. Pallister: That direction was given by the people of Manitoba, I believe, last April—about the third week, if I'm not mistaken—in a provincial

election. It was given by the people of Manitoba when they gave the Progressive Conservative team a mandate to govern. It was given following an election in which a clear platform was outlined.

The—one of the key components of that platform was a commitment to review government spending, to make sure that we moved away from a direction of growing deficits and growing debt, which was identified as dangerous not only by international bond rating agencies with two very harsh and critical reviews of the previous government's money management ability, but also recognized by the previous government itself in repeated throne speeches, year after year, as being a key concern that they shared.

And the commitment was made by the previous administration in several throne speeches to review and address government spending, but the unfortunate truth was that the previous government wasn't able to get those reviews done, act on the commitments they made, both in the throne speeches and in budget speeches. And so as a consequence, we saw growing—not only growing tax burden on families in the province, but in addition, of course, a growing—in combination it seems a contradiction, but there was growing revenue flowing in from higher increases in transfers from other provinces, via Ottawa, for health care and social services. Those were escalating rather rapidly.

So you had a combination that's hard to—it's hard to dispute, wasn't—the government didn't have the ability to take advantage of. Because you had declining interest rates and lower debt service charges as a result of declining interest rates. Add to that higher transfer payments coming in, shooting up 6 per cent year over year on the health file along. So greater revenues from the interest savings, greater revenues from the transfers. You had these things happening at the same time as you had greater revenues from record tax increases. So all these additional revenues were flowing into the previous government, yet they were having larger deficits as well. So their spending growth was exceeding almost unprecedented revenue growth. Out-of-control spending was the way Stan Struthers described it at various times and said that he and his government were committed to getting it under control.

* (15:20)

They just—but it was—it just seemed that they were unable to fight that addiction, spending more and more year after year. And so we actually ran on

a commitment to do what the previous government had committed to do but failed to do. We ran on a commitment to do a review of government spending, to move towards more sustainability in fiscal management because, fundamentally, like most Manitobans understand, we understand that being able to sustain services today is important, but it is also important to be able to sustain them going forward.

And that seven-generations concept that I've learned from many of my indigenous friends is ingrained in many of them and the values they've learned over their lives, is very real, I think. A very real opportunity for us to learn that we have to manage with a view not only to this generation and these challenges today, but also to the challenges we'll face tomorrow. And so long story short, we ran on that commitment, we said we'd do our best to fix the finances and we committed to reviewing government expenditure.

That direction was given by the people of Manitoba in April of 2016.

Ms. Fontaine: When I went to go vote, I don't remember ever seeing on the ballot that the direction was to cut funding to vital and critical programs in the Neighbourhoods Alive! programming. I don't remember that. I don't specifically remember Manitobans so-called giving directions in April to actually put women's lives and children's lives at risk.

So, I mean, I think it's really disingenuous for the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to sit here and make light of the—you know, the direction that clearly came from the top, which is him, in respect of reviewing successful critical needed programs under the Neighbourhoods Alive! and several other programs—but we're just talking about Neighbourhoods Alive! so—and then to kind of—I find it, as an indigenous person, just so wholly offensive that the Premier then kind of, in his rambling on, you know, chooses to talk about seven generations. That's actually a teaching that we're taught and we live day in and day out, and it actually doesn't mean what you're saying. It doesn't mean that the—you know, your austerity—the Premier's austerity measures are actually borne off the backs of vulnerable and at-risk women and children. It certainly doesn't mean that. And, if it does, then I should go back for teachings, because clearly I missed those teachings from our elders.

So, you know, I do want to put on the record that, you know, the direction that this government

takes comes from the Premier. It's in his mandate letters, it's in the spirit of how he wants to govern and in the spirit of his vision for Manitoba. And in the Premier's spirit of how he kind of—he wants to see things transpire in Manitoba, he is creating a regime that is seeing cuts off of the backs of vulnerable and at-risk women. And if they're not vulnerable and at-risk and simply just need some supports, he's certainly putting the conditions by reviewing all of these programs and cutting and not renewing them—or, reviewing them and not renewing them. He's certainly putting the conditions in which Manitoba women and children are going to be more at-risk.

So, you know, I would ask the Premier, like, how does this—how does austerity off of the backs of women and children fit into his overall vision of—for Manitobans?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I—let me encourage the member in her understanding of the word austerity. The word austerity means bitter and bleak. And what could be more bitter and bleak than handing future generations a massive burden, a \$35-billion debt? Double the debt of nine years ago; that would be bitter and bleak. On whose shoulders would that debt fall? Well, children yet to be born, young people who haven't enjoyed the benefits of having a chance to find a job or work in our society. That's bitter. That's bleak.

So the member needs to understand austerity, true austerity is bitterness, and there would be a great deal of bitterness justifiable on the parts of future generations if they were handed, as they have been, accelerated debt obligations for things they haven't benefited from at all.

That's recognized by political leaders from all stripes. It's not a partisan observation. Jack Layton, rest his soul, supported balanced budgets and said so many times. Thomas Mulcair, the federal NDP former leader—discarded by his party, I think, rather prematurely; but the member may have different views on that and I respect her views—but those people, NDP members, didn't see this as an ideological thing, they saw it as a practical thing and they stood for balanced budgets. And frankly, I think most Manitobans understand they have to balance their books or they'll create austerity for their children and grandchildren, and that wouldn't be right.

You know, real austerity is what the previous government was creating, and they acknowledged

that. In fact, NDP Finance ministers acknowledged that repeatedly. They said that it wasn't right to run massive deficits and to keep them getting larger and larger was dangerous. They said that—members of the party the member chose to run for.

So here's a quote from the—for example, here's the 2012 budget address delivered on April 17th of that year, and it says restoring balance is a key. That's what it says. So you know, unless the member is not committed to moving to balance—and maybe that is implicit in what she's saying, but she needs to be clear about that—she must understand that the position of her party has been frequently articulated as moving towards balance. In fact, she ran for a political organization that claimed it was moving towards balance itself and said that in the election campaign.

In fact, in Gord Mackintosh's new treatise that he published recently, he says that the previous administration had talking points which claimed that they were moving towards balance by 2016, even when all of them knew they weren't. And they stuck to those talking points. Now, why would they stick to talking points about moving to balance if they didn't think moving to balance was the right thing to do? Surely, those wouldn't be very good talking points. Why would the previous administration have said it wanted to move to balance if that wasn't what they really wanted to do? I mean, so the member is harsh in her condemnation, as is all too often the custom, but she's condemning her own party in the process, not me.

Restoring balance is what they said in 2012, and I'll quote from that speech. It says: governments around the world confront the need to contain spending while providing important services. So we've actually run on that commitment. We said that's exactly what we would do.

The member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) shouldn't run away from the reality that her position is extremely at odds with the position articulated by her own party, again and again and again. In fact, it's at odds with the position she ran on, because her party said in the election campaign that they were going to move towards balance. They said they had a plan to move towards balance. They said they were moving towards balance when they did the budget speech—well, it wasn't really a speech about the budget, because there was no budget, but it was a sort of a financial forecast. And they forecasted, in their financial forecast, they said that they would be

at about \$300-million deficit. And then they ended up being over \$900 million. Wow—missed it by that much.

So integrity is doing what you say you'll do. Previous administration demonstrated lack of integrity on fiscal issues, certainly; where it said it was going to accomplish things like move towards balance and sustainability, failed to do so year after year after year. We ran on a promise to restore the financial security of this province and its future, and that is exactly what we're working towards doing.

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Leader of the Official Opposition): I would like to follow up the question of my colleague.

Cutting services—or cutting funding for social programs that are being delivered by community organizations such as the Point Douglas women's centre, these are the programs that we could certainly put in the categories of prevention programs.

Would the Premier (Mr. Pallister) prefer spending millions on health-care costs, or even cost to jails, cost to social peace and justice issues, rather than a few hundred dollars for prevention programs like housing and education for the less—for the marginalized members of our society.

*(15:30)

Mr. Pallister: Well, I would emphasize to the member that sustainability of providing services is an important thing to consider. It is a common sense thing to consider for most Manitobans, and I would ask the member to understand that borrowing \$900 million more this year than we're bringing in with some of the country's highest taxes is hardly a way to assure the ability, future ability, to deliver meaningful programs to support Manitoba's most vulnerable people.

And so, as a government, we're undertaking to ascertain how we can move to a position of strength and away from a position of weakness as personified by the previous government. For example, we know that the debt service costs in our country and in the world, currently, are the lowest they've ever been in the history of humanity. Interest rates have gone down for borrowing costs rather consistently over the last number of years, and yet, when the previous administration came to power—the premier, previous premier, came to power in 2009-10 fiscal—for example, the debt service—summary debt service costs for the Province of Manitoba were \$756 million, a pretty significant amount of money.

This year, the forecast amount is \$235 million higher than that. It's \$235 million higher, \$991 million and getting up very close to \$1 billion a year, with the lowest interest rates in the history of humankind. We're approaching \$1 billion a year that can't go—not \$1 of it—can't go to support programs like the member describes, can't support vulnerable people, not a bit—close to \$1 billion gone. Just before the year begins, we predict that this will be the amount. That's \$235 million more than it was in 2009-10 fiscal.

So, just taking the performance of the previous government, they're responsible for almost a quarter of a billion dollars of additional debt service cost through that time frame, one of the most profitable times in the history of Manitoba, when revenues flowing into the government were increasing at rates unprecedented, when transfers from Ottawa were growing year over year over year over year over year, accelerating, when the interest rates to service the pre-existing debt were the lowest that they'd been up to that point in time and have since lowered.

This is a missed opportunity. This defines a missed opportunity to strengthen the Province's fiscal situation so that you can strengthen the ability to care for vulnerable people.

So the member's preamble fails to demonstrate an understanding that having \$1 billion of debt servicing costs is hardly a way to provide better services to vulnerable people. More than that, there's the absence of any plan whatsoever, when the previous government was in power, to take on the challenge of moving to sustainable management practices so that we could deliver these kinds of services next year and the year after and the year after that.

So what you have is a recipe for vulnerability that will grow. What we have now, instead, with a new direction, is a demonstrated willingness to tackle the challenges of doing exactly what Manitobans must do in their own homes with their own budgets or in their own small businesses, which is to make the necessary decisions to move towards balance, something that was articulated by the previous government and by NDP leaders throughout the country, including Rachel Notley and Jack Layton and Thomas Mulcair. In fact, it's been articulated by Chisholm in Nova Scotia as well.

So NDPers across the country believe that we should move towards balance, and they speak a lot about it, and some of them are actually succeeding in

moving in that direction when—rarely, but on occasion—when they have the chance to do something about it.

But we know from the words of the budget speech in 2012, the previous administration talked a good game about—well, here's a quote again: We're balancing expenditure reductions with modest, fair measures to increase revenues without raising any major tax rates.

This is the same budget—that speech, that quote, was in the same budget where the PST was broadened to include items never previously included, and over \$200 million of new revenue was taken off the kitchen tables of Manitobans and put into the coffers of the government while their deficit was growing and their ability to look after vulnerable people was being eroded.

So that's not a record that speaks to genuine compassion. It speaks to a willingness to spend more than one can afford, and it speaks very much to a lack of understanding what foresight really means. It created an austere environment—a bleak and bitter feeling among Manitobans.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I mean, I always—it's always interesting listening to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) try to spin what is really just egregious decisions that he's making under—or that he's giving direction to do.

And I think it's particularly entertaining when he starts to rattle off different NDP leaders, like Jack Layton, who actually, I'm pretty sure, would be rolling around in his grave if he knew that the Premier is actually utilizing his good name and the good work that he did in the discussion of not renewing \$120,000 for the North Point Douglas Women's Centre. I'm pretty sure that he would be rolling around in his grave.

And it's also, you know, adorable when the Premier talks about compassion in the same discussion that we're having about cutting \$120,000 from the North Point Douglas Women's Centre that services thousands of women, currently employs, you know, 4.5 positions from that dollar, which I do want to say that, in respect of everything that the Premier's talking about, about budgeting and balancing books and all of this, I would say that \$120,000 for 4.5 positions is pretty good to get that many positions and to do that much programming with \$120,000.

So, again, I think it's adorable and I—you know, it's great to listen to the Premier talk about, you

know, my colleagues across the country who I'm pretty, pretty sure wouldn't appreciate that—him dropping their names when he's just dropped really what is a bomb of information on the North Point Douglas Women's Centre and certainly in the lives of the four staff that they now have to fire.

So, you know—and I know that the Premier, you know, rattles off all of these different things, like the international bond agencies and da da da, so I do want to ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister): Did the international bond agencies that he's, you know, met with or referring to, did they deem the Neighbourhoods Alive! programming as very dangerous to the Manitoba economy?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I appreciate that the member's trying to run the Point Douglas by-election here today at Estimates, and that's pretty self-evident.

But I knew Jack Layton and I knew his attitude towards balancing budgets, and I can assure the member that I represent quite accurately what his approach was in respect of that and what his commitment was. If she has other ideas about that, she might like to reference some legitimate research or some empirical research that she's done.

But I know the member's very defensive about these issues, because she understands, as all Manitobans do, that accelerated debt service costs place at risk worthwhile programs, and that is the nature of mismanagement and overspending by governments that does that very thing. It makes more vulnerable those who need protection, not less vulnerable. And so the member was trying to defend the indefensible. She's trying to defend something even previous Finance ministers found indefensible and said so in their budget speeches. So the commitment of the previous administration year after year after year to get their spending in order was—it's on record. She can review any of the budget speeches; she'll see it there.

So, while she may try to make this a partisan issue, I think it's less partisan than she might realize. It is actually a point of agreement, I think, by many, including people in all political parties, that you can't prosper in the long run and support the people who need support in the long run if you overspend today, because you'll make their—your ability to help them tomorrow a less realistic, less likely proposition.

Of course, we saw that in the last provincial election. We saw a lack of understanding; we saw desperation. We saw the NDP go out and double

down, triple down, quadruple down on their promise campaign, saying they were going to run a \$300-million deficit, and we knew it actually at the end of the year turned out to be triple that.

* (15:40)

That's not the worst of it. The actual fact is that that actual deficit in the summary accounts of the Province, which is real, which places us on risk of losing our credit rating or having it reduced even further—tens of millions of dollars gone from the projects she likes to cite, because of the fact that the government—previous government—couldn't get their spending under control.

The worst problem is they actually went out and tried to promise their way to re-election. They promised funding for, among other things, well, \$600 million of additional spending on a wide array of things all across the spectrum of public policy. So they targeted commitments in a wide array of various things like saying they would spend more money on the North Interlake Training Centre, the Keystone Centre, that they'd combat gender-based violence, that they'd invest in capital funding and build greenhouses, QuickCare clinics, school capital funds, student loans to grants, the Lorette multiplex because they really wanted to win that riding, recreational facilities all over the province to the tune of \$25 million. Went out to targeted ridings all over the province, all over the city, promised they'd build new facilities. They—just an amazing, amazing display of a lack of integrity.

So you know, they talk in the budget speech about strengthening our credit rating on the one hand while on the other hand, promising to spend \$600 million more. And this leaves out things like the St. Norbert bypass. I mean, we're talking about hundreds of millions in addition to this. These are specific projects listed. So, you know, this—these are the kinds of things that—these are the kinds of projects that are all worthwhile, and so naturally the members want to run on doing them. They promised to do them all in the same year. You know, it doesn't demonstrate an understanding of sustainable management practices.

So the member expresses—in a rather petulant manner, she expresses concern about one program she claims it doesn't have support. That's easy to do. What's hard to do is what Manitobans do every year, balance their books. And what we're aiming to do is get the fiscal mess we inherited under control, and that's what we're dedicated to doing. I know the

member won't be part of doing that because she was part of making the mess, and she wants to deny there is a mess, but decrying internationally respected lending agencies and criticizing former NDP budget speeches by former NDP finance ministers is hardly a credible way to make her case.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I always love when the Premier (Mr. Pallister), you know, tells me that I don't know what I'm talking about and I don't know—you know, my preamble is not right, when clearly we saw today that it was. And I mean, I think that the Premier has to explain why he very publicly in question period said that I wasn't right when clearly I was. So it's—I mean, I—you know, of course a woman always enjoys being told by a man that she doesn't know what she's talking about. So I mean, I hear that all the time in question period. I thought that we would've left it out of these sessions.

But I do want to put on the record because, actually, I know that some media had asked me—and the Premier just said it, that I'm trying to—what did you say? Influence the by-election in Point Douglas here? Let me be explicitly clear that that in no way, shape, or form is what I'm trying to do. And the members opposite can laugh all they want, but the reality is is that the funding that was cut from the North Point Douglas Women's Centre is a significant amount of money that will actually have a significant impact on the lives of women.

And, while the member from Emerson thinks that it's so funny that Manitoba women's lives are put at risk, and I'll be sure to put that in one of my notes because I'm—it's just hilarious, and here's the Premier not even directing his caucus to show some respect to Manitoba women who now are going to be put at risk from the very policy that this government put in place.

This is not a joke.

Like, I don't know why members think that this is funny and why members opposite would support a leader who thinks that this is funny, to put women's lives at risk by cutting what is a significant amount of dollars to the organization, but certainly not a significant amount of money for the government of Manitoba.

Surely, the Premier could've maybe, I don't know, negotiated better price in respect of some of the reports that they got and actually kept the \$120,000 for the North Point Douglas Women's Centre and negotiated a better price for some of the

reports that they did. That would've been great. I would've been standing up in the House and applauding the Premier for that. But, no—but, no—the Premier decides to actually cut \$120,000 from the North Point Douglas woman's centre, and members opposite—not all of them but certainly the member from Emerson—thinks it's hilarious, thinks it's absolutely hilarious. And it is, regardless of the Point Douglas by-election, it is so egregious and so offensive.

And when you ask the Premier questions, he can't even answer the questions. He dances around; he reads off something. I'm talking about right now the direction that he's given his minister to do a total review of the Neighbourhoods Alive! and then cut and slash and burn really good critical programs.

How can the Premier who I've said in the House time and time again has such a sacred responsibility. It is an absolute privilege to be sitting where you're sitting, and what do you do? What does the Premier do? He cuts \$120,000 from already an organization that doesn't get a lot of dollars, but does phenomenal work. How can you sit here and justify that?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member speaks about a number of things there in that little rant that she just launched. She invokes womanhood in her preamble.

I encouraged her, in response to her first question, if she wanted additional details from a minister to ask the minister. The minister is a female, and so I've demonstrated nothing but respect for women in my decisions around our team and the responsibilities that women have in our caucus.

The NDP elected one new female member to the Legislature, and it's the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine). We elected six. We had a record number of women run for our party. I'm proud of that, and I have been a long-time advocate for working to include more women in political activities. So I encourage the member in her activities politically, but I encourage her to use truth whenever possible and not depart into rhetoric.

She spoke about getting a better deal on reports. The previous government commissioned a number of reports. For example, they commissioned a Dr. Peachey to do a report on an issue that matters deeply to all Manitobans, not, of course, solely women, but not exclusively women either, and that was wait times. And the wait-times issue is a scandal.

Under the previous administration, the wait times grew and grew and grew to be the longest in Canada, and so people were waiting excessively long periods of time. The previous government recognized this as a problem. Because they recognized it as a problem didn't mean they were going to solve it though. They commissioned a report, paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for that report, and shelved the report and did nothing about it. They got the advice that they needed. They were given advice; they just wouldn't take it.

So the member speaks about value for reports. How is commissioning a report at massive expense from experts and then not listening to it getting value for that report?

The previous administration also commissioned reports in respect of the Public Utilities Board examination of Hydro, a number of issues around Hydro, and a gentleman named Philippe Dunsky who was an international—a renowned international expert on the management of utilities and hydro utilities among them, was commissioned to do a report. That report was covered up too. That report recommended things which the government said it supported too, but it still covered up the report. Taxpayers paid for the report; hundreds and thousands of dollars was spent.

The member speaks about getting value from reports. I'm quite interested in her explaining how the covering up of reports is getting value for reports. We asked for information. So did members of the media on the tendering of—or non-tendering of contracts for what are called Tiger Dams. They're orange plastic bags that are supposed to stop flooding from damaging as much as it would have if they didn't have the plastic bags in place. Now, the previous Infrastructure minister was asked numerous questions about these—the purchases of these. They were never disclosed. They were untendered, as it turns out, and they should've been disclosed by law. They were not; they were covered up.

A report was done internally by the department. We asked for it. We used the freedom of information act, as did many members of the media, to try to get information on the report on the evaluation of those Tiger Dams. It was paid for by taxpayers, but it was covered up too.

*(15:50)

So the member talks about getting value for money. I'm very interested in her ideas on how we do

that. But I don't know how credible her argument would be that she's going to—her government's going to—her former government did anything other than not get value for money when it commissioned reports, which it covered up, refused to make available.

This non-disclosure of information doesn't stand as a very credible example. I mean, the member was even part of a plan to try to make the previous NDP government look better on kids in care by changing the way they were counted. Okay?

So I encourage the member not to be anything but humble and modest in her evaluation of the previous government's ability to do those things which are necessary. Even the previous minister, Kerri Irvin-Ross, said of that plan, which I expect as an adviser to the government the member was instrumental in advancing—the Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross said it's very embarrassing. It's very embarrassing, she said. She announced that the province was being—previously announced the province of being—previously announced the province of being unfairly compared to other provinces because it was counting its numbers of kids in care differently, and it turned out that that wasn't true at all.

So the playing with numbers thing that the member likes to do and has done frequently in respect of the number of categories, erodes her credibility when she makes arguments and when she makes assertions. That would be true whether she was a man or a woman and it has nothing to do with sex. It has to do with honest research and it has to do with integrity and advancing arguments.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, so I'm not sure if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) knows about some of the programs that actually North Point Douglas does and executes.

I'm not going to ask him, I'm going to let him know some of them because I assume that he's going to, as is his typical MO, go into some rant and rave about whatever. So I do want to put on the record what some of the amazing programs that the North Point Douglas Women's Centre does and, you know, if we talk about value for reports or value for dollars, again, I want it—you know—explicitly understood that the \$120,000 that the North Point Douglas woman centre gets funds 4.5 positions. And in those 4.5 positions—which, again, I think is pretty good value for money—the North Point Douglas woman's programs—they do free counselling for women, they do parenting programs—I'm going to speak louder just to make sure that the Premier's hearing the

programs—parenting programs, examples: Nobody's Perfect Parenting.

They do safety, so they do—they help women leaving domestic violence and advocate for them and get help for them which, as I'm sure the Premier (Mr. Pallister) should know, you know, one of the first steps is actually women who are in domestic violent relationships—actually getting them to make those first calls or those first inquiries. So the North Point Douglas woman's programming includes that.

They do health classes. So they do nutritional classes, they do exercise programming, programming for children which—I think this is great. They have a community oven. So—it's a wood fire oven for community food accessibility. I think that that's wonderful. I've done many baking sessions with families of MMIWG, and I know that that goes a long way in the lives of women and children.

They have emergency housing solutions for women that find themselves in a—very vulnerable positions in respect of housing. They also—even though it's the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, they actually have drop-in for men, women, and children, which I think is a testament to the phenomenal work that they do, that it's not only for women, they also include men. And so there's men's programming there, as well.

So I want to put that on the record because I think that it should be point out—pointed out the phenomenal work that they do there, and the staff that they have who I know pour so much of their time, energy, and spirit into the work that they do.

This is the programing that the Premier has directed his staff—his minister—to cut. This amazing programing here for \$120,000 plus the 4.5 staff—this is what the Premier of Manitoba has directed his staff—his minister, his departments under his direction for the vision of this province—to cut.

So, again, I—you know, I know that the Premier goes on about this and that, but he hasn't really answered the question in respect of justifying cutting \$120,000 from an organization that does phenomenal, substantial work in the lives of women, not only in Point Douglas but St. Johns. I'm sure that other women in surrounding areas also utilize the North Point Douglas Women's Centre. How can the Premier justify doing so?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, I would encourage the member to do additional research where necessary to

become possessed of facts rather than simply rhetoric.

I said earlier, and she questioned this, that it's—I think it's well known by many people that Jack Layton was committed to balancing the budget, but Tom Mulcair just ran the last federal election on a commitment to do the same. And he said as recently as March 18th on CBC, on a program called The House, he said: are you just dumping more debt on the back of future generations? Kevin Page—that would be the former Parliamentary Budget Officer—had a take on that last week, that we have to be careful because we're leaving a huge debt to future generations without much to show for it.

Well you know, again, NDPers around the country, I expect maybe even a few in Manitoba are very cognizant of the big concept that the member seems unable to grasp: that overspending is a danger and that getting fiscal circumstances strengthened is a way to strengthen our ability to protect the vulnerable in our province and in our country.

Her record on advising the previous minister in the last term to provoke an adversarial fight with Osborne House runs in contrast to her now adamant defence of another agency and is puzzling, I think, to many. The vindictive approach in shutting down a women's shelter and personal attacks launched, an email attempted to be blacked out that wasn't blacked out which accused people trying to organize a fundraiser for Osborne House as being do-good ignorant white people—and the member now talks about being in praise of another agency which runs some programs which are different but some which are very, very similar to those run by Osborne House. Yet no voice lifted in defence of another agency, just a voice lifted now in anticipation of a by-election. It's—doesn't give credibility to the argument that she's making.

This approach was wrapped—this—these comments that were made were vindictive ones. What did Osborne House do that was so bad? Besides the good work they did, they actually asked for increased support from the government. They had the audacity to ask for some help, previous government decided in their own manner that they would take a resentful and vindictive and short-sighted approach in respect to the programs offered by that organization. They decided to act to denigrate the people on the board, to criticize them very, very harshly. They decided to essentially shut down the organization. That was how they handled a

women's shelter when they were in government and now the member launches very opportune attacks based on questionable evidence.

Again, I encourage the member to understand that, as she is not cognizant of the position of her own party when she advocates that we should ignore the fiscal circumstances and challenges facing our province.

I—again, I'll quote from the budget speech the NDP did in 2012—again, the year that they broadened the PST and added fees on things as far-ranging as new beer and wine taxes; a fee on every car owner in the province; additional cottage fees that would triple, quadruple, and quintuple some of the charges that people made on their family cabin at the lake if they had one. From that speech it says here, and this was the commitment of the previous government: we are balancing expenditure reductions with modest, fair measures to increase revenues without raising any major tax rates—that's what they said right in the speech, the same speech where they raised them.

Now, we have already reduced expenses—they said in the speech—we've successfully negotiated a pause in wage increases with many parts of our public sector—something else that they—the members of the opposition now decry they actually did.

Then it says—goes further and says: we've managed spending in the health-care system by increasing efficiencies and legislating a cap on administrative costs for regional health authorities—something else which we're doing which they criticize.

* (16:00)

See, eerily reminiscent of these words are the words in our own budget speech. The difference is, what they promise to do, they failed to do in that administration; what we promise to do, we are in the process of doing.

But the member ought not to criticize so harshly and so ferociously one program and, erroneously, I expect, when she fails to recognize the broader picture and the larger problem.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I would encourage the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to get over it, in respect of Osborne House. And I, you know, I'm sure that the Premier is, you know, a little disappointed that I beat his chosen candidate in St. Johns, the candidate that we found out later has half a million dollars in her personal

bank account taken from Osborne House to answer phone calls.

So, I mean, I understand that the Premier would be upset that I beat his chosen candidate that, actually, even after the election he chose to honour and, then, you know, we find out that she's got a half a million dollars in her personal bank account. So I would encourage the Premier to actually do a little bit more research on his candidates next time around.

So, you know, we know that the North Point Douglas Women's Centre provides the programming that's typically done by a neighborhood renewal corporation because Point Douglas doesn't have one. So, you know, if he is cutting the centre funding, will he replace the services with a neighborhood renewal corporation?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I assure the member that my comments in respect of her inability to do accurate research have nothing whatsoever to do with her electoral success. I recognize that she may feel somewhat put upon by the fact she wasn't the chosen candidate of her own party in that riding, and that others were trying to take her out, in high positions. I understand that, and I respect the fact that she faced some challenges in securing her nomination, I applaud her for her willingness to face those challenges.

She now needs to face the challenges of being accurate in her assertions if she wishes to have credibility in this position as an advocate for those things she claims to believe in. She'll have to explain why she tried to convince the previous government to change the way that children in care were counted so it would look better in newspaper columns. She'll have to explain why she makes the false assertion that we took salary increases when she knows that's false and when she knows that the previous administration gave themselves salary increases. And she also will have to explain why the administration she ran for chose to give themselves a vote tax of a million dollars as a subsidy to their members at a time when they were also running massive deficits. So, in effect, they were borrowing the money to pay themselves a vote tax subsidy in lieu of actually going out and working for their party.

This is an article from the Canadian—or from another newspaper that's not the Sun that publishes in Manitoba, and it says a number of embarrassing factual errors by the government—NDP government has led officials to backtrack on plans to change the way the province counts children in care.

It goes on to say a report from *The Globe and Mail*, Thursday, revealed several factual inaccuracies, and the member may remember that phrase being used to describe some of her false assertions over the last few months.

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

In a four-page backgrounder, the Province sent last month, after it announced it would no longer include voluntary placements in its total tally of children in care, the change would remove a little over 700 kids from their current tally of 10,295, bringing it under 10,000. The article goes on to say that the backgrounder indicated Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Ontario did not count voluntary placements in their tally, and in the interests of comparing fairly to other provinces, Manitoba would follow suit.

Except it appears somebody didn't do their homework. Quote: We found out recently it was extremely inaccurate, and this is embarrassing for all of us, said Family Services minister, Kerri Irvin-Ross, there was no intent at all to hide the total number of children receiving services. Turns out, four of these provinces count kids in voluntary placement in their total tally. And several of the figures cited by the previous government, who received advice from the present member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) on these issues, turns out that advice was wrong.

Now, the member would have to attest to whether it was deliberately wrong or it was simply an oversight. Either way, it was wrong, and, again, the member needs to explain why it would be that she would give this kind of advice to the previous administration, place them in this embarrassing position, all in the name of trying to create the false impression that we had less of a problem with kids in care than we really had.

I mean, it says in here a variety of things, but it turns out that the figures cited by the government regarding other provinces' kids in care were wrong figures. The Province did not date or source in the background where they got their information.

So this particular publication actually did its research, which is something that is—I encourage the member to consider, and reached out to the four provinces mentioned in the background here to ask them how they tally children in care, and all four responded by pointing the newspaper to data on their

website—not hard to get—all different numbers than what was given by the Province of Manitoba who received advice from the member—present member for St. Johns, the former adviser on these issues.

All four stated their numbers included children placed in voluntary care, yet the previous government claimed—after the advice from the member, I expect, and others—that this was not the case.

So here you go. That's the record of the previous government and the member who advised them on this specific issue. This is why I encourage the member and congratulate her on her efforts in capturing her nomination. Supported by the previous senior people in the NDP or not, she was able to capture a nomination and she deserves to be given credit for that. But she will get more credit from me and from others if she insists on being more scrupulous in her research than has been evidenced thus far.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I mean I don't even know where to begin with all the erroneous facts and that. I mean it's—it's—it's—it's—a conversation with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and trying to get some questions answered is—it's—your head just spins. I mean, the amount of erroneous stated facts in the Premier's last rambling on of God knows what, I'm not sure where—I don't remember actually ever seeing the Premier in the building. I actually remember seeing the Premier once in the cafeteria, so I'm not sure why the Premier would think that he would know what I did in respect of advice given, and for the record—I will certainly put it on the record that—so that he can stop with that, you know, nonsense that he's talking about.

I didn't work on the CFS files, so I honestly don't know what you're talking about, and you know, I'm just trying to get some questions answered. I'm just trying to figure out that if the Premier has chosen to cut \$120,000 from the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, is he planning on replacing that with a neighbourhood renewal corporation.

They're very simple questions that I'm sure that Tara, the executive director from the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, would like to know who—although she's a little bit busy right now; she's actually organizing a rally tomorrow which, of course, I'll be there to support her. I'll invite members opposite if they want to come down and actually hear from Tara directly on the consequences of your boss's direction to cut \$120,000, but she's

busy. So she's busy right now, but I certainly will see her tomorrow.

But she certainly—I'm sure her and her board of directors and the staff and the women that are reliant on the program would like to know whether or not, now that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has cut this funding—which again, I will put on the record, is a significant amount of dollars for the organization, but not that significant for the government in respect of the value that this government gets for that \$120,000—what is the Premier planning on doing now?

There's going to be an absolute gap in services, so is the Premier planning on developing a renewal corporation for Point Douglas? I think that Point Douglas—and again, surrounding areas as well—deserve to know that this gap, that the Premier has absolutely no problem cutting; this funding, that he has no problem cutting, that he can go to bed tonight sound and—you know, have a good night's sleep while four people just lost their job and thousands of women are going to be impacted on this.

*(16:10)

What is he going to do? Is the government going to be doing anything in replace of that? Are they going to be looking at a neighbourhood renewal corporation?

And I would suggest—I would suggest—and I would recommend to the Premier, stop concentrating on me, like, concentrate on the programming that I'm actually asking questions about, that are actually impacting on the lives of Manitoba women, that actually he has an equitable responsibility to as well.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I appreciate the member being clear that she wasn't involved in these issues. I understood, of course, that she was retained as an adviser on Aboriginal women's issues, and I understand that she's raising questions about a shelter. I understand that she was the recipient—exchanged emails with the previous minister, Eric Robinson, on Osborne House, in which she criticized rather harshly a fundraising idea that had emanated from Osborne House, and the response was something about do-good, ignorant white people. If she's now claiming that she isn't involved with kids in care, maybe she can explain why approximately 88 per cent of the kids in care are indigenous and she's an adviser in indigenous women's issues to the previous minister but doesn't deal with the issue of

kids in care. That doesn't make any sense, doesn't make any sense at all.

The member needs to understand this exchange of emails. Okay, well, here's APTN: Manitoba's deputy premier and Aboriginal affairs minister stands by comments made in an email obtained by APTN national news in which he refers to the ignorance of do-good white people. A three-line email—and this is from Melissa Ridgen, who's an APTN reporter—a three-line email from Eric Robinson, NDP MLA for Kewatinook, dated November 22nd, 2012, was sent to the Province's special adviser on Aboriginal women's issues, the present member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine). A copy was obtained through The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It begins in response to an email from the member outlining her concerns about a Winnipeg—about a media report that a Winnipeg clothing store was holding a burlesque fundraiser, proceeds of which would go to Osborne House, a provincially funded shelter for battered women. Quote, this is so bad—with capital S-O—and looks so bad—capital S-O—and is simply a bad idea on the part of the Osborne House ED, executive director. This is what the member wrote.

I'm not disputing that the member has a right to her views on whether the fundraiser is a good idea or a bad idea. That's not the issue. But the member claims that she didn't have involvement in issues about kids in care, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, she's actively involved in exchanging emails about shelters, shelters that protect women who have children. Kids who are in their care, presently, may or may not be needing state assistance later. And the previous government's record was a record of taking kids into state custody rather frequently, and the member claims that she was an adviser on issues pertaining to women. I would say shelters and kids in care are issues pertaining to women. So the—Eric Robinson replied: I know nothing of this matter. I haven't seen today's 'Freep'—I think he's referring to a local newspaper—but I will now. The remaining two lines of email are blacked out. When held up to a certain light, the type under the black bar that is used to hide the blacked-out word shows the words, quote: On the surface, it is not a very good idea, and, moreover, further exploits an already vulnerable group in society. It also further demonstrates the ignorance of do-good white people without giving it a second thought.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Now, that, combined with the reality that the NDP government admitted that in respect of this little attempt at subterfuge on kids-in-care numbers—there's a quote here from *The Globe and Mail*—this is, some would say, a reputable newspaper—that says—it's from an article, Manitoba backtracks on child-welfare data, and the quote is from a Cabinet spokeswoman, not a Cabinet minister, and it says: "We were definitely wrong when we said other jurisdictions didn't report [voluntary placements]. . . . That was a failure on our part to properly do our homework.' In a previous email, she said political staffers were involved in what she described as 'inadvertent' and regrettable errors."

Now, the member says she wasn't involved in that, and I accept her at her word, but I do think it shows a tendency—both these incidents show a tendency towards recriminatory approaches for people in the volunteer sector, at the very least, who are trying to support some of the same causes the member claims to support.

And, if we're looking to get allies, I don't think that the member should be discouraging those who would like to volunteer and assist, whether it's in women's shelters or in other worthwhile community projects. That would certainly not be a helpful way to build a stronger rapport and a stronger network of labour that can assist us in addressing the vulnerabilities of people in Manitoba.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, again, I can't stress how important it is for the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to actually just answer some simple questions. I mean, I think that the Premier—and I—you know, I'm not sure if the Premier thinks that, in some way, he's kind of intimidating me or—you know, which is—we understand, you know, is sometimes his MO, that he likes to kind of bully people.

That doesn't work with me. Like, I really don't care. The Premier can say whatever he wants. It means nothing to me. I've survived a lot worse than an hour and a half sitting with the Premier trying to get some answers. The Premier can, you know, try to spin and try and, you know, put all these erroneous, misleading, labyrinth kind of comments on the record. It does nothing to me. I don't personally care.

What I do care about—which, since we started at 3:15, so now we're about an hour into this discussion—is getting some sense of what—first off, how the Premier can justify this for one of, you know, Manitoba's most, you know, vulnerable organizations dealing with the most vulnerable and

advocating for the most 'vulnerable'—vulnerable women—like, how can he sleep at night knowing that under his direction, he's cut \$120,000?

And all he can do in the hour that we've been sitting here is ramble on about things that happened years ago and somehow try and attempt to bully or shame me or silence me. I mean, he's even used the word, she dare question. I'm allowed to question in this. This is Estimates.

It doesn't matter to me, honestly. You can say whatever you want to say, but the bottom line is you ordered the cuts of \$120,000, and that's shameful.

Mr. Chairperson: I would like to remind the member to address the comments through the Chair, because we get a little bit too personal.

Mr. Pallister: Well, I don't want the member at all to feel bullied, and I enjoy very much—we had a very good, honest exchange last year, a very sincere exchange, about our backgrounds, and many of the experiences that she shared with me, I value very much. It gave me an insight into where she's coming from, so the last thing I would want her to do would be to misunderstand that in questioning her inability to do coherent research, I am somehow attempting to bully her. That is not at all my intention, and I would hope that she would not feel that way, but her obligation, as with all people, is to be in charge of her own reactions, I suppose, to things.

I have also raised the—and attempted to raise an understanding among all members of the committee about the importance of moving to sustainable management practices. That should not, I would hope, in any way, make her feel threatened. I don't want her to feel threatened by my stating the preferences of people like Jack Layton or Thomas Mulcair towards moving to balance. That is not an attempt to do anything but to enhance the understanding of all of us on the committee of the importance of doing just what people in all political parties have advocated.

So, again, I am—I sincerely do not wish the member to feel that I am attempting to threaten her or bully her in any way. I very sincerely don't want that. But I would encourage her to understand this is a place of honest debate, and so if I am raising concerns about her willingness to preamble with facts, I hope she would understand I would do that of any member. And the only reason she would justifiably feel threatened is if I was making a valid point, and I believe I am.

* (16:20)

The fact is that she has failed to recognize that the inconsistencies of the previous administration in respect of things like women's shelters and their attitude towards Osborne House with the current issue she raises, the issue of alleged financial support or changes in policy in a riding now being-contest in a by-election. Those inconsistencies are real and they should not be glossed over.

Another article here, this is again from a local newspaper. You know, another woman at the centre of Deputy Premier Eric Robinson—and remember, these remarks about do-good, ignorant white people were triggered by an email from the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine). And I'm not suggesting she wrote the remarks of Eric Robinson, but I am suggesting she provoked them by attacking the people who were volunteering at Osborne House. The woman at the centre of these charged remarks about do-good, ignorant white people is not, in fact, white. And you know, the woman who offered to do a fundraiser is someone who felt, you know, race shouldn't even come into mind.

The member raises her womanhood as an argument and says I'm somehow attacking her for that. She raises—she says I can't legitimately refer to the—what I understand and have been taught by elders to be the seven generations philosophy because, somehow, I'm wrong about citing it. These are allegations which I think the member should understand could, by a less experienced member of this Legislature, also be interpreted as bullying and intimidating.

And so, you know, the member is alleging that I can't want a sustainable financial future for the province of Manitoba and care about people at the same time, and I would argue you can't pretend you care about people if you don't in a financially sustainable, well-managed province in the future.

I would argue that the tax hikes of the previous administration were made not for the purposes of investing in infrastructure, not for the purposes of helping vulnerable people, but rather to cover a systemic, dysfunctional government's need to feed its structural deficit. They were done for that purpose. They were also done out of necessity to feed the incredible growth in debt-service costs incurred by a government in good times, not in lean times.

This mismanagement has a price, just as does commissioning reports like the Peachey report—over

a million dollars in cost—and then ignoring the recommendations. It's a—so the member needs to understand, and I hope she does understand, that we're talking about vulnerable people in the years to come, and I would hope we're talking about fewer and fewer vulnerable people. And I know the member shares that concern.

The way we're going to do that is not to simply ignore the future, to call debt-service costs some kind of conjecture or just reflecting on yesterday is ridiculous. We're spending \$3 million a day more now—right now, today—than we're bringing in with some of the country's highest taxes. That's not a yesterday problem; that's a real problem today. It's a real challenge. The previous government recognized it as such but refused to address it. We recognize it as such. The difference is we're willing to address it.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I know that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is trying to somehow make a connection in respect of an email that I wrote I don't know how many years ago now in respect of Osborne House. And somehow that's connected to his direction to cut yesterday, \$120,000 from an organization that's still operational, that's still servicing women.

But, if the Premier is, you know, obsessed with his hand-picked candidate for St. Johns is—you know, and may be a little upset that she didn't win—oh, and I don't think she had a candidate's nomination. No, she didn't. That's right. She was hand-picked. This was one of your star candidates.

Let's talk about that a little bit because you keep bringing up Osborne House. So, you know, I do want to kind of point out—and, as the Premier has done and read from some things—I want to read from CBC, December 9th, 2016. And I quote: A former shelter in Winnipeg that's being investigated by the Canada Revenue Agency could also be causing harm to women at risk, says the leaders of a national woman's network in other local shelters. Women seeking shelter services are often put in dire situations, and if they look for those services at Osborne House in Winnipeg, there could be harmful consequences, says Lise Martin, executive director for the Canadian network of women's shelters and transition homes.

They tried to get in touch with Osborne House. Nobody answered. We know that Osborne House Inc., again—which is run by the Premier's hand-picked star candidate for St. Johns, had more than \$500,000 in assets according to its latest tax returns and continues, even as we sit here possibly, to accept

donations, despite the fact that the former woman's shelter does not physically exist anymore, and that's caught the attention of the Canadian revenue agency. And I quote, I am so upset, said Melissa Cook Crate, who works with women in crisis. There are Aboriginal women at risk who really need these services, these resources. I have a lot of questions, and Osborne House won't give me those answers.

So I guess the star candidate and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) have a lot in common because I can't get any answers from the Premier, either. So, I mean, I can understand why the Premier is trying in some respect to spin this and deflect again to something that happened years ago and really deflect from actually what happened yesterday and what's happening today and what's certainly happening tomorrow.

I will put on the record for the Premier, and I'll actually personally invite the Premier. I can even pick him up. We could travel together to go to the rally tomorrow. I'm a good driver. I'll clean my car; there's a little bit of dog hair in the back. But I'm a very good driver. The rally, for the Premier's information, is Save Our Women's Centre rally for the north woman's Point Douglas woman's centre, Friday, May 26th, 3 p.m. at 221 Austin Street North. And I'm going to read into the record what Tara, the executive director, put on this poster: We just found out—and I just want to be clear; I just got this email at 3:46 while we've been enjoying our conversation—we just found out that our provincial Neighbourhoods Alive! funding has been cut, affecting eight staff positions in North Point Douglas woman's centre—I was actually wrong, and I'll put that on the record. I was saying 4.4, but actually, it's eight. So I was completely wrong. From here on in, I'm going to say eight staffing positions—this is a direct attack on the health and safety of women and their families in North Point Douglas. Your support—the Premier's too—is needed to show the government that this funding is essential to our community. It's time to speak up and be heard.

So I'm going to ask the Premier, will he travel with me to go this rally and to meet with the executive director and the women, and, like I said, I'll even clean my very messy car for you.

Mr. Pallister: I really want to encourage the member not to make it all about her. It is about some larger issues. Her constant willingness to refer to, you know, this—her great victory in the riding of St. Johns as a point of pride for her; that's obvious,

and I respect that, and I appreciate that. But she shouldn't extend that victory dance to the back of the person she defeated.

An Honourable Member: You brought her up.

Mr. Pallister: She need not—

An Honourable Member: I didn't bring her up.

Mr. Pallister: —attempt to denigrate her former opponent.

Ms. Fontaine: I never spoke about her.

Mr. Pallister: It would not—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me. I would like to remind that when the person has the floor, we allow them to speak. I've been a little bit lenient, but from now on I would appreciate people speaking who have turn to speak and speak when their turn is there. Thank you.

The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the—your efforts, Mr. Chair, but I also appreciate the member's emotion on this issue, or passionate defensiveness on it. But it doesn't serve her well to denigrate people on the basis—she's making an allegation, or insinuation about someone she defeated in an election. That doesn't serve as a demonstration of character in no way, shape or form. Simple allegation that someone has achieved financial assets without some substantial—substantiation to how is—it's called innuendo, and is not a characteristic anyone should admire. We have the benefit in our province of having people who are willing to step up and do their part regardless of where they come from, and they come from, as the member and I do, from relatively modest backgrounds, but they are stepping up and they do their part. And, so, too, we want people who achieve considerable success in their lives to do the same.

So, if the member has an allegation to substantiate, she should make it, and if she does not, she should not use innuendo to smear the character of a candidate she defeated in an election. It's just not—it's just really beneath contempt.

* (16:30)

On the issue of her reference to the woman who ran against her in Point Douglas and the attempt, again, to belittle her participation in the electoral process because she was given—she was able to

capture an uncontested nomination as opposed to the member, who had a contested nomination.

I'd remind the member that the star candidate that she is supporting currently by way of these allegations in the riding of Point Douglas also secured an unchallenged nomination. So, in attacking one, she is also attacking her own candidate. This is lacking in dignity, and so she should not make such insinuations.

She's also supporting a candidate who currently, as of this time, with—without the entry of Steve Ashton or others in the race, is an uncontested candidate for leader. So, again, the member needs to be a little more consistent in her innuendo and in her smear tactics.

On the issue of working towards the betterment of indigenous women, I have some pride in the fact that I did spend a considerable amount of time in my life, and will continue to, advancing the causes of indigenous women, and I don't recall the member participating in any of those meetings, rallies, events or speaking engagements around the country. I don't recall her party voicing any support until the very last minute on the issue of matrimonial property rights for indigenous women, a long-fought-for success that indigenous women deserve all the credit for achieving. Twenty-five-plus years of trying to get equality in terms of property rights is a—*it was a fight worth having and a fight worth continuing, because the landing on that has yet to fully happen around all the First Nations communities of our country.*

So, again, you know, I have great admiration for anyone who wants to advocate and sincerely advocate and consistently advocate with principle for Aboriginal women and for their rights, but I have yet to see a trace of evidence of half a decade of payroll being invested wisely in the member. I've asked her repeatedly to produce some evidence of some research, some data that we could use going forward, something that we could use to assist us in terms of more meaningful activities that would add to the wealth of research that is there, that would contribute in some way. The legacy of the member's—the investment by the people of Manitoba in this member's activities remains somewhat marred by the absence of any kind of data, any kind of research, anything that would assist us as a result of a half decade of investment in her salary and benefits.

So I encourage her to put that evidence forward and sincerely, in a non-partisan way, contribute to enhancing the government's ability to act on the

things she claims she cares about. If there is no evidence, say so. If there is, produce it and allow us to work together on the achievement of these goals we do share.

Ms. Fontaine: I mean, it's fascinating to watch the way the Premier (Mr. Pallister) operates and thinks. So I, for the record, and I think that it—Hansard will clearly show, never brought up the Premier's hand-picked candidate, never brought up Osborne House. The Premier brought all of this up.

But the Premier thinks that he can just say and do whatever he wants, nobody can challenge him, I have to just sit here and just continue to ask my questions while he puts on the record allegation after allegation after allegation, including the last two minutes of his whatever that was in respect of attacking the work that I've done while I was a special adviser, which is, as we all know, maybe the fifth time that he's done that on record.

So, I mean, I think it is so adorable when the Premier, on one hand, does this, but nobody else can do it, just the Premier. Just the Premier can make allegations, can attack his colleagues—I am a colleague of yours—can attack colleagues, can bring up his star candidates, but nobody else can read from documents—but I'm not allowed to read from documents because it's an allegation then. But, when the Premier does it, it's research. It's, I don't understand, research. It is, honestly, just fascinating spending this—what are we now, an hour and 34 minutes?—it's fascinating spending time with the Premier that, on the one hand, he can do whatever he wants, but nobody else.

So, again, I just want to put on the record that the Premier started talking about and bringing up and reading all of this stuff about Osborne House and about his star candidate. In fact, I haven't said one word since the election, and my colleagues and everybody around me can attest to the fact that I have never mentioned one word about the Premier's star candidate, ever. I've never spoken on any of that, and I refuse to do it from this moment on in this conversation with the Premier. The Premier can choose to go on and rattle off whatever he wants to rattle off; that's his prerogative.

I want to, again, I know that the Premier is trying deflect from his pretty egregious decisions in respect of Neighbourhoods Alive! I want to concentrate on the North Point Douglas Women's Centre that he directed \$120,000 to be cut from their funding, which now, as we see directly from Tara, is

actually affecting eight staff positions. But the member, while I was speaking, said that that wasn't right, so Tara's not right, I'm not right. The only person in this room that is right is the Premier. The only person that's right in Manitoba is the Premier, when he's here.

So, again, I want to get back to the question: How does the Premier justify cutting \$120,000 from North Point Douglas Women's Centre, and how will he justify the gaps in service that all of the thousands of women that utilize that very critical and important resource, how will he—what is he going to do with the gap in service now?

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member demonstrates that she's not going to be part of healing the team atmosphere around her own caucus with that approach, and it's unfortunate she chooses to take it.

I've cited research, I've encouraged the member to review it, I've cited news articles—granted they will have to be verified by the members, but I've put the dates and publications on the record. The members are able to verify that. The member might want to do that. She resents it, because the points I am making are germane to the lack of credibility in the assertions she is making today, and her resentment shows through in her comments.

But, again, I appreciate that the member has tried, I think, more than a dozen times in her references to the—what she refers to as a star candidate in St. Johns from our party—she has tried to not reference that. I appreciate that that's her assertion today. She hasn't referenced it, she says, while referencing it. That's an interesting assertion, but not credible.

You know, the member has referred to—rather harshly to one of our female candidates. I would reference for the member the fact that we made tremendous efforts in our party to encourage women to get involved in public life, and I would want—I wouldn't want the member to not appreciate the reality of the fact that we were able to have the largest number of female candidates, in the history of our party, contest seats. I wouldn't want her harsh criticism of a female candidate to reflect badly on the desires others may have to potentially enter into public life or to seek election.

I was very pleased to see us have a record number of female candidates contesting seats in the last election, to see a number of them succeed. Of course, that's satisfying, and I know that seeing, you

know, the decimation of the NDP in the last election would be a hard thing for the member and for her colleagues to accept, I understand that, I get that. But I want the member to know that I'll continue, and my colleagues will continue, to encourage women of all races, creeds and colours and all backgrounds to consider being involved in public life and to—whether it's in seeking office or participating in the policy development exercises or, you know, getting involved in other aspects of what all political parties should engage in, you know, the work of being an organized political party—unsubsidized work of being an organized political party.

The member claims that she has a record of service, but she decries the fact that I asked her to provide some evidence, or she, in fact, criticizes me for asking her if she'd help, that's in essence what she's doing, because I've asked her simply to provide some information. A half decade of being on the payroll, you'd think there would be some ability even to—from the memory of the member's alleged activities—if she could chronicle some useful information in a summary form, that would be extremely helpful.

* (16:40)

She spoke last year with some passion about an issue that matters very, very much to a great many Manitobans and Canadians, and that—and she—that is the missing and murdered women's issue. And here we may have some contributions to make. I hope we do—sincerely are able to contribute in a real way, because Manitoba, with the highest percentage of indigenous women is—in the country, is home to far too many acts of violence, in as recently as these past few weeks.

Again, and so—I again—I don't want the member to be defensive in me asking her to provide some helpful information, I think she claims to have been passionate about this, I believe she is passionate about it, if she's not passionate enough to provide some data, some information, some research, something that we can use, she must be placing partisanship ahead of results.

And I don't understand why she wouldn't be willing to co-operate—or perhaps there is no information, but I think there must be and I'm encouraging the member to share that and to work with us on something that should not be a partisan issue. And I would encourage that behaviour from her rather than the defensiveness that she has put on display today.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) talks about women in public service, and absolutely I believe that that's something that we agree on, and the absolute need for more women to be elected to these positions.

But I don't think the Premier kind of gets the connection between wanting to have women in—more women elected, but at the same—on the same hand—at the same time, actually cutting funding—vital, needed funding—to women's organizations. You can't on the one hand say well, you know, we're supportive of women and we've—you know, we want to see more women elected to, you know, the Manitoba Legislature or wherever. I'm sure we agree, both the Premier and I that I would like to see more women elected everywhere, both federally, provincially, territorially, municipally, I think that we probably can agree on that.

The—I think where we fundamentally differ, is that you can't just express breath with a couple of sentences saying, you know, we need more women elected, and then in the next time that you utter breath you cut funding to women's organizations, the funding that goes to the very organization that puts in place the supports to get women elected, to help get women to a place where they can get elected.

You can't have one or the other, they are both married together, in respect of wanting more women engaged. Really, and I'm sure that the Premier and I must agree that we want more women engaged in every aspect of Canadian life, in corporations, on boards, everywhere, including elected positions. But you can't cut the funding from the organizations that deliver those services and programming that actually support the women to get them to where they need to go.

And I know that the Premier keeps trying to say that I'm acting defensive, I'm not. I am simply putting on the record the consequences of what the Premier has done, the actions of the Premier of Manitoba, that's all I'm doing. I mean, whether or not the Premier likes the way I do it, it is what it is. I'm sure my 15-year-old son would probably agree with the Premier. I nag him, he doesn't like it. So I'm sure that he would have a lot in common with my teenage son.

But the bottom line is that the Premier executed direction to his ministers to cut anything that he could. And this Premier of Manitoba chose to cut \$120,000 from the North Point Douglas Women's Centre—which, again, I do want to just go back

because I know that the Premier keeps saying that I'm putting on, you know, I haven't done my research, but I want to put on the email that I got directly from Tara at 3:46 p.m., who invites me to a rally and says right there in it that the Neighborhoods Alive! funding has been cut.

That's not in dispute. I don't know what the Premier is saying when he says that my facts are wrong. It's right here; I can take a picture and send it to him if he'd give me his cell number. If he wants to give me his cell number, I'll text him the picture. But it's right here—has been cut, affecting eight staff positions at the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, and I quote again from Tara: this is a direct attack on the health and safety of women and their families in North Point Douglas. Your support is needed to show the government that this funding is essential to our community. It's time to speak up, and it's time to be heard.

So that's all I'm doing. Yes, maybe my voice may be grating to some people; that's good. It's grating to my son. I get it. But I do also still want to invite the Premier to come with me to the rally tomorrow. Like I said, I'll pick him up if he wants. We can have a great conversation down to Point Douglas. I'll bring him a coffee if he wants; I'll clean the car; I'll even bake—I'll even bake—I don't know if the Premier knows I'm an excellent baker. I don't know what his favourite is. I'll bake. But we could travel together. I think it would be fun, both you and I.

Mr. Pallister: So it's important, I think, that the member understand and all of us understand that it is good to have a good heart, but it's also good to have a good head. And the reality of the situation we inherited is that we have close to a billion-dollar deficit. We have two credit rating downgrades in just the last couple of years as a result of uncontrolled spending growth by the previous administration.

And so what that means is that we have, this year, over the—over just a few years ago, we have a quarter-of-a-billion-dollar additional financial obligation to pay interest on previous overspending. That is actually \$235 million since 2009 that we don't have available. It's not available. And the member says I'm talking about the past. Well, the past rears its ugly head this year when debt service costs go up exponentially. And it will rear its head again when interest rates begin to rise, because they are at historical lows. And if they rise—and they are predicted to rise—then this amount may pale by

comparison to the obligations we'll have to accept. We'll have to accept them whether we like it or not. We'll have to accept them because of the overspending of the past, and to fail to learn from that overspending would be a dangerous mistake.

The member can cite, and she has every right to cite, specific programs. I've heard most of her colleagues have done this. This is, of course, a tactic that is used in opposition to attack the government of the day for not funding any number of different things, hundreds of different things. What they fail to recognize, though, is that they have not offered up any examples of where funding could be achieved elsewhere to fill the gaps that they identify.

And so we are borrowing money today, \$3 million approximately, more than we're bringing in, with some of Canada's highest taxes, and this is not assisting us in looking after the needs of our vulnerable population, not in the least.

In addition, we should not recognize the effects of public policy on vulnerable people. The previous administration broadened—as we know, it broadened the sales tax on several occasions, broadened the sales tax to include many things including, but not limited to, the insurance that one buys to protect their assets, their home, from loss in case of fire or theft or damage.

This is not an optional thing for most people; it's an important thing, regardless of how many possessions one might be blessed to have. The purchase of insurance to cover that loss is something most people consider to be an essential item, yet the previous government broadened the PST to include that. That's not a 1 per cent increase; that was an 8 per cent increase over a two-year period—8 per cent increase—8 per cent less for vulnerable people in places like Point Douglas, 8 per cent less that they had because they had to spend this additional tax money just to insure their little home or apartment or whatever contents they were able to accumulate in their lives.

One can talk about programs like the member is choosing to do. I choose to see the bigger picture and the larger problem and to say we need to address that. The member chooses one program in isolation; I choose to recognize we have 1 million-plus people with challenges in their lives made greater by the tendencies of the previous government not to address serious problems such as tax hikes which make us less competitive with our neighbours, make it harder for vulnerable families to succeed.

The failures of the previous administration are real; we need to learn from them, not repeat them. And so balanced, sustainable approaches is what we are taking to move—to steer the direction to a safer place. Wait times—the longest wait times in Canada, getting longer under the previous administration, and yet members kept running higher deficits and throwing money at the problem. The problem got worse.

* (16:50)

Surely, the member and all members need to understand that just simply the—professing support for programs and for the status quo doesn't address the inherited problems we must address.

We have serious problems with wait times that are the longest in Canada. They are double the national average. The previous administration had all the evidence; they could have acted on it. They paid \$1 million for the report they covered up; they failed to have the courage to act on the recommendations. We are now being criticized by the same people who created the problem for attempting to solve the problem.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I think the thing that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) doesn't get, and which is completely evident today in the last—I don't even know how long we've been here now—is, you know, the Premier says he wants to see the bigger picture or the larger problem.

I—the Premier doesn't understand that by cutting minimal funding to the government but substantial funding to the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, he is not seeing the big picture because he is putting in place the conditions that put more and more women and girls and children at risk, which will actually end up costing the Premier more money in the long run. So, clearly, the Premier doesn't see the big picture or he only wants to see, you know, the big picture that he perceives in his mind that fits whatever particular narrative he's trying to go with at the—during the day. We know that during question period, he said I was wrong, but clearly, the Premier has directed that \$120,000 be cut from the North Point Douglas Women's Centre. So I don't think the Premier actually has a good sense of what the bigger picture is.

I think—and actually, I would suggest very, very much that he is completely divorced from the reality of many women in Manitoba. The fact that he would put on record that he wants to see the big picture but

can cut \$120,000 from North Point Douglas Women's Centre that does phenomenal work—and I already, for the purposes of the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) information, laid out all of the different programming, and now, the eight positions that we know, actually, that \$120,000 covers, which is even more bang for your buck. If the Premier wants to keep talking about value for money and all of this, certainly, eight positions—I don't know how many programs this is—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—eight to 10 programs out of the North Point Douglas Women's Centre, all for \$120,000 is certainly, everybody at this table can agree, pretty good bang for your buck.

But the Premier can't see the bigger picture and see how, you know, the wealth and the health of the economy of Manitoba is absolutely tied to the health and the well-being of its most vulnerable citizens. That's the bottom line. You cannot divorce yourself from those that struggle the most and put in place and set in place those conditions that are going to make it even worse for them but still think that you're seeing the bigger picture and working for the betterment of the Manitoba economy. It's absolutely utterly archaic thinking. It's utterly divorced from the realities of many women.

And, again, I will put on record that if he doesn't believe me, that's fine; that's all good. Like I said, nothing bothers me here; this is my job. But I would invite him—and if he doesn't want to get a lift with me, I'm sure one of his colleagues will drive him. I invite him to the rally tomorrow to hear directly from Tara, the board of the directors, all the women. And I know that everybody in this room has heard the Premier repeatedly say in question period that he is doing something, he's consulting and he's listening to Manitobans. Well, here is a perfect opportunity to listen directly from the individuals that his decision is impacting on. He can listen to what they have to say. If he doesn't want to believe me, that's fine; if he doesn't want to believe anybody in the NDP, that's fine, too. None of us, I can tell you honestly, care. That's fine, but he has an opportunity—I even offered to, like, spice it up, I'd give some baking, his staff can tell me what his favourite baking is. I'll make his favourite baking and we can go together. I'm a good baker; I really am. You tell me what you like and I'll bake it, and you can go meet with the women, and you can go meet with Tara and hear directly what your direction is doing.

Mr. Pallister: I'll simply repeat that the member is producing far more light than actual heat, that her

allegations are not correct and supported by the facts. I've attempted to encourage her to speak to a member of our Cabinet, who is in the other room in Estimates and to get the detail so that she could correct her erroneous assertions, but she refuses to do so.

But she has also invoked her womanhood again in that preamble. I would remind her that she is the one who attacked a woman colleague, a female colleague, in her own party, the woman she is sitting next to, in fact, when she attempted to advocate, along with the party president of the NDP at the time, Ovide Mercredi, for support for one member, one vote. She took the other position and she attempted to use various techniques to actively campaign against her colleague, which is her right, but she ought not to try to create the impression that somehow she is—doesn't take the gloves off when she's combatting with her own colleagues who are female, because she certainly has and I expect she'll continue to. And that is her right.

But, certainly, one should not decry rational arguments when they're produced, and I produce them. I have produced repeatedly evidence for her to consider, statements from people like Jack Layton and Thomas Mulcair—they're on the record. I have produced newspaper articles, which can be verified, which attest to her actions in the past and speak to them. These are examples of research, and they support arguments that I'm making, which I encourage the member to consider and reflect upon.

So, you know, the issues around financial management matter. They matter greatly. Getting to the bottom of our fiscal problems is important. We have a challenge. We must accept that challenge, and do. But, certainly, I don't believe that it is wrong of previous NDP Finance ministers to provide evidence to me, as they have in their budget speeches and in other evidence that I've given the member, that they support moving towards balance. That's what we're trying to do here, so we can sustain social supports going forward.

This is the commitment that was made by the previous NDP government. But it is not the reality of what they achieved. Over a very short time period they doubled our provincial debt in a time when interest rates were declining and had moved to the lowest level that they've been in the history of humankind. They saw increased support from both the federal Conservative and Liberal governments in many areas of social supports, transfers and in equalization, but missed the opportunity to reduce

taxes. Quite the contrary, they actually increased the taxes. The tax burden on Manitobans was increased through their last five years by more than the tax burden on any other Canadian living in any other province. And yet they failed to recognize that in the midst of all of those decisions they took—and those were decisions they had the opportunity to make—they had other options. They didn't have to raise taxes, didn't have to say they weren't going to and then do it. That certainly was another option. They did not have to raise and increase fees on a wide variety of things. They chose to do these things to increase the revenues flowing to government. In fact, in Mr. Mackintosh's book, he speaks very clearly to this. He says that the arguments for raising the PST, which were put forward by the previous administration around using the money for infrastructure, were false arguments. He says that everyone knew, despite the talking points, that they were simply raising more tax dollars to cover more operating costs.

Well, that isn't sustainable. You can't keep doing that, and, on the one hand, saying that you care deeply about the services the member has referenced, you care deeply about the people who need those services, and, on the other hand, ignore the reality of the higher taxes you impose on those same people. This is a contradiction, and this does not work in the face of logic.

So let us not pretend that the people the member claims to defend today were not adversely affected by the actions of the previous government because they were, because their home insurance costs went up by 8 per cent, because their benefits, if they were able to work at a job, the cost of those benefits went up by 8 per cent, because the PST is applied disproportionately. It impacts who live in modest circumstances. Those kinds of impacts were real. They are real. They should not be denied. They must be understood.

If one understands that those impacts are damaging to the vulnerable people the member and I both care about, then one does not want to see a repeat. We cannot continue to run deficits on the backs of future generations. Thomas Mulcair believes that; I believe that. Jack Layton believed that; I believe that. The members of our caucus believe that, and we will do our very, very best to get to sustainability.

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

FINANCE

* (14:40)

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

This section of Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Finance.

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Just to clarify some things in terms of the federal-provincial agreement in terms of health care as to what is in the budget and what is not in the budget, it's my understanding that in the budget is the 3 per cent increase in health transfer from the federal government, but that not in the budget is the money for mental health, and not in the budget is the money for home care, and not in the budget is the extra 0.5 per cent—or half a per cent increase—which was negotiated with the other provinces.

Is that correct?

* (14:50)

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for River Heights for the question.

Yes, in response to his question—so the—of course, the context of this discussion is, as the member knows, that Manitoba went to the December federal-provincial-territorial meeting in Ottawa. The agenda for that meeting was eclipsed in large part by discussions around a new accord for Canada Health Transfer. Of course, the provinces were aligned in their concern that the federal offer on the table was insufficient to meet the overall need in the provinces.

We understand, you know, further back in time, of course—you know, the—I think it goes all the way back to the Romanow commission, where that recommendation to government, I believe when Paul Martin was the prime minister, was that annual increases from the federal government to the provinces should occur on a 6 per cent escalator per year. It was a 10-year agreement. When that agreement expired, the federal government—when it was the Conservative government—had indicated that they would move away from the 6 per cent, but they declined to do so. Year-over-year increases continued at 6 per cent.

And, of course, the Liberal government, in the lead-up to that December meeting, had said yes, we were also interested to move away from that formula; however, we also know what the evidence said. The evidence used the expression of the amount needed to keep the lights on. I believe that amount that they had indicated was 5.2 per cent annual escalator to keep the lights on.

Now, understanding that in the province of Manitoba federal support or the federal contribution as a ratio for overall Health expenditures is approximately 20 per cent—and decreasing, I might add, over time—it's a concern, of course, for provinces, but not only that, it was the research that backed up the position of provinces who stood and demanded with one voice that the federal government come to that 5.2 threshold. The Conference Board of Canada had indicated the 5.2 threshold as the one that was required. The Fraser Institute indicated the same thing. The Parliamentary Budget Officer had indicated the same threshold.

There were a number of iterations, as the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) knows, during the negotiation period. Of course, when some provinces landed and took what was being offered—yes, in respect of those provinces, at this point in time—then the amount that they have accepted is both that annual escalator plus an amount over 10 years' time for home care and an amount for mental health.

At this point in time, for the purposes of our budget and for this Committee of Supply, what we contemplated and what we booked for our records and for our documents was 3 per cent. And as the member said, at this point in time, no additional amount contemplated for mental health or home care.

Mr. Gerrard: Thank the minister for that clarification that there is no—none of the additional amount which was offered by the federal government in terms of mental health or in home care is in his budget, and the extra 0.5 per cent general increase is not in his budget either. So thank you for that clarification.

There was—I think it was \$20 million, that the federal government had said that it was going to allocate for the provincial government in terms of funding in relationship to indigenous health, a significant increase in indigenous health, and I suspect that much of that went straight to First Nations communities, but a component of that, my

understanding, went to the provincial government and I believe it was \$20 million.

Was that \$20 million put in the budget or not?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Chair, we're just looking for the complete response to the member's question, and these have been complicated discussions because, of course, the target has been moving. I want to provide that detail to the member. Also, not understanding if we have a commitment to meet in the Committee of Supply next week, we want to be clear to provide the information to the member either in the context of these discussions or we will provide it by tabling it in the House or by some other means to make sure he gets it.

On the issue of indigenous health, though, these conversations are ones that I have had with the federal Finance Minister. I know in my very first meeting with Minister Morneau, I made clear that according to our records, there is an increasing cost to the Province of Manitoba because of the number of First Nations people on-reserve increasingly seeking their health care off-reserve. I was somewhat surprised by the minister's response who said it really wasn't his responsibility to solve our problems in that respect, and he said that their commitment to First Nations was on-reserve.

And while we, of course, welcome the federal government to meet their obligations on-reserve in respect of First Nations' health, it was a somewhat troublesome answer to receive back because of the fact exactly that we understand that when First Nations people cannot access the health care that they need on-reserve, they will come off of their First Nations communities and seek those services in urban areas. There should be a recognition of that by the federal government.

In this case, we will seek to clarify for the member this \$20-million amount that he refers to. I know that in the lead-up to the federal budget, Minister Morneau indicated to me that his support for indigenous health would be on-reserve, so we will clarify if there is an amount that has come to government, but I could not confirm that for him at this time.

On the issue, though, of the federal funding that has been agreed to by certain provinces, let us be clear. Manitoba's been clear that we have stood up for the interests of Manitoba. We know that, as a result, to stand up those results have actually met with favourable results in terms of Canada's

commitment to things like Factory of the Future. That was a commitment that was threatened, and we, at this time, have a confirmation of that investment by the federal government.

* (15:00)

But our resolve to stand up for the rights of Manitoba and to insist that the federal government be an effective partner in the delivery of health in the province of Manitoba is unwavering, and so we want to be clear about that.

But what I can be clear on for the member right now is that there is no amount of money that we additionally included in our calculations in Budget 2017 or 2018 in respect of a federal support of indigenous health.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister for the clarification.

The minister talked about a general agreement to reach something like a 5.2 per cent increase. The—that is therefore my understanding from the minister's comments that that 5.2 per cent was what the minister was trying to achieve in December—is that right?—and would still like to achieve if the 6 per cent is not possible.

Mr. Friesen: As I explained to the member, there have been numerous iterations put forward by the federal government and, of course, you're starting at the 6 per cent annual escalator to—federal contribution to provincial and territorial health budgets.

And then, of course, we have it in saying 5.2 per cent, the federal government providing notice early on. Actually I think you could even go back as far as the end of the accord on health to see when the government had first contemplated a lesser amount as an escalator. At that time, they had indicated 3 point cent—3 per cent of nominal federal GDP on a three-year rolling average as a floor for an escalator, and of course, that was the original offer that really got the attention of provinces.

I can recall my officials saying how, you know, annually you'd kind of go into the room with the federal government in December, and I think the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) would remember the old rules, too, whereby you travelled to Ottawa and you waited in the room, and I think at some point during a dinner, someone would put an envelope on the desk—it was kind of an interesting situation—and you'd open your envelope and find out

what your amount was for health transfer and other transfers—equalization, social transfer, and whatnot. And of course, you know, the process evolved.

But I know that got the interest of all provinces when that was first explored.

At this point in time, I think what I would emphasize from the point of view of government, is that we are committed to getting the best possible deal for Manitobans, because we require it. We know that health-care expenditures are growing beyond the rate of expansion of other areas of government operation. We know that is not uniquely a Manitoba issue, but it is felt significantly here in Manitoba where too little was done over in time to be able to control the year-over-year growth in health expenditure.

Certainly, in other jurisdictions—BC, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia—more has been done to control year-over-year growth of health expenditures. It isn't just about expenditure level. It has to be based on results, and program efficiency, and alignment of the system in looking for duplication and waste. As we've said, as an example of this kind of thing, we know we do procurement in central government, we know we do procurements separately in infrastructure, separately in education, separately in health care. And we question this, we question if this returns maximum value.

We also know that in the province of Manitoba there are 182 separate bargaining units in health, over 150 of those in the WRHA alone; 183 bargaining units, if you add in the Selkirk Mental Health Centre. In other provinces by comparison, BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan have combined less than 20 collective bargaining units. We question the extent to which that would add value to a system.

So the reason I bring that up for the member is because it was actually a discussion item at the table during the federal-provincial-territorial meeting. The federal government took the view of saying, listen, if we simply return to you that amount every year, how does that emphasize a need for savings, how does it emphasize a need for provinces to attend to their own strategies to drive down year-over-year cost?

We tried, of course, to give assurances to our federal partners that those efforts are now well under way in the province of Manitoba; nevertheless, I would land on this for the purposes of the question, that we will continue to extract as much value as we

can as we continue in conversations with the federal government, because we know we require it with our population. We have parts of our population that are aging, we have some significant challenges as well in respect of the Indigenous population overrepresented in some categories in the health field—as the members knows, he's raised similar questions in the Legislature in respect of diabetes and other things as well.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister and his government each year are clawing back the children's special allowances. Now, my—the numbers I have here are in 2012-2013, it was 20 million; in 2013-2014, it was 24 and a half million; in 2014-2015, it was 25 million; 2015-2016, it was 32 million. What is the expected number for this particular fiscal year in terms of the clawback of the children's special allowances?

Mr. Friesen: The member refers to an issue that really isn't a part of the Finance's Committee of Supply. Nevertheless, on page 144 of the budget in the Estimates of Expenditure, the member does refer correctly to the fact that there is a recovery through the children's special allowance. I am aware of this as well, and was aware of it as a critic in my time in opposition. That amount was indicated, as he said, for 2016-2017 fiscal year, just over \$29 and a half million, and some increase to that for 2017-2018, the anticipated revenue there at \$31 million.

And I would suggest for a more detailed discussion on this item that is clearly under the Department of Families. I would advise the member to take it up with the member responsible for Families when those Estimates of Expenditure are considered, and I believe that those Estimates will follow those for Finance. So at whatever point in time that these discussions end, then those will commence.

*(15:10)

Mr. Gerrard: Thank you for that clarification on the number, and I think that this is a continuing concern that the Province is taking money away from—it's really supposed to be going to children.

But let me move back because I have a concern related to the transfers because those—money for mental health and home care is not in the budget. This presumably means that the Department of Health is not able to plan yet because of the uncertainty and, whereas many other provinces are making announcements about how they're rolling out

new programs in mental health with the federal money, that Manitoba has been absent in this area because there's been a failure to sign this agreement and a failure to be able to plan for this fiscal year because those agreements are not signed and because departments can't plan because the money is not in the budget at the moment.

I would, you know, ask the minister—and I presume that, as the Department of Finance, that he's told the other departments that if it's not in the budget, you can't spend it or even plan to spend it.

Is that correct?

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

I understand the nature of the concern that he's expressing. I would want to convey to the member that we don't believe that Manitoba has been disadvantaged in any way at this point. Understanding that when the discussions were had in Ottawa between the federal, provincial, and territorial leaders, there were many details still lacking in terms of eligibility for—program details, the extent to which these new federal dollars could apply to existing programs to enhance them or whether new programs would have to be built up to receive and be eligible for the federal amounts.

But, in addition to that, I would note that the way that the federal funding was structured, it's heavily back-end loaded in that in the first year, a less significant amount of that funding was to be received in the '17-18 year by provinces in order to allow that fuller subscription over time as the programs would be built up. And I understand that when it comes to other provinces, they are still working with the federal government in terms of receiving the finalization in terms of the details and the terms and conditions of the agreement on mental health. I do not believe that that process is expected to conclude until the fall of this year.

So I would want to give the member this assurance that we continue to interface with our federal partners. We continue to engage on this issue and we continue to follow, as well, the other provinces as they are working—as Manitoba is also working to understand more fully what the nature and extent is of the commitment that the federal government is making in respect of mental health.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. I presume that with the by-election under way, that there could not be an announcement of a federal-provincial accord until after the by-election is over. Is that correct?

Mr. Friesen: To the member's question, yes, as a new government, we continue to navigate, of course, through the provisions of a blackout, and we're working hard to make sure that we're in compliance with the Elections Manitoba act when it comes to what a government can and cannot do in a blackout.

As a matter of fact, I just went into the hall, exiting the Chamber after question period, to respond to a media interest on the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, and I remarked to the media that I was missing a podium, and they reminded me that I could not have a podium in front of me because it had a sign that advertised the government, and that would not be allowable, so a small inconvenience, but an important reminder to me of the significance of that.

In the event that Manitoba and Canada were to successfully negotiate an agreement in the next two or three weeks in advance of the end of the blackout period because of the by-election that is currently under way in Point Douglas—in that event, of course, like the member says, the provincial government would not be able to host any kind of media event to indicate that. But, in this case, there would be nothing preventing the federal government from advertising an announcement. And, of course, what government can do is respond to media interest on items; what government cannot do is hold events to promote the business and work of government policy, legislation, initiatives and things of that kind.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, last fall we released a report on brain health, and we used the word brain because there are some uncertainties about what would be generally included in mental health. For example, individuals with a traumatic 'blain'—brain injury may have a—you know, a condition which is similar to mental health. It may even have, you know, depression associated with that. And yet people, in general, with a traumatic brain injury don't feel that they should be said to have a mental health condition.

People with neurodegenerative or neuro-developmental disorders usually do not consider themselves to have mental health problems, but they clearly have a brain issue, which, again, in some circumstances, may have some aspects which mimic areas of mental health.

Individuals with addictions have been sometimes put together with mental health and sometimes put separate.

So what I'm asking is, what is the—this government in Manitoba position, and negotiating position, in terms of what it will be included in the mental health transfers?

Madam Chairperson: I would just like to remind the member the cup actually interferes with the speaker, so if you would mind being aware. Thank you.

* (15:20)

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question and I accept the premise of—you know, of the question: that it's important to distinguish with the appropriate degree of specificity that people have a need to receive the right kind of help in the right kind of way in the right category.

I can let the member know that I've—that I did not have that degree of discussion. I didn't hear the federal government in conveying their commitment to a mental health strategy. When I refer to the fact that there were many details lacking in discussion with the federal government at that December meeting, federal officials did not go into that degree of detail to talk about delineations in terms of their overall strategy. They used the term mental health to describe where the federal government was making the investment. I did not recall them using terminology like brain health or referring to brain injury.

I more recently became aware of the need to describe these things separately when I was contacted approximately two years ago by a constituent. In this case, I was contacted by a constituent. Their grown son had been a tourist in east Asia and had rented a motorcycle and had suffered a terrible accident, and, because that individual could not receive the kind of services that he would have required, you know, after the injury—traumatic brain injury, swelling, hemorrhaging—really a tragedy—and then returning to Canada, finally. The struggle that the family went through to find the kind of adequate placement for that individual in our health-care system—now, complicating this was the factor that the parents lived here in Manitoba and yet he was a resident of Alberta. But now, at this time, he could no longer care for himself. And I know the member will understand where those kind of interjurisdictional issues are very real and very important to those families when they occur. And yet it sometimes takes officials a little while for us to grapple with these things and try to come to the right decision because

we understand that for every rule there is an exception. In this case, I had the opportunity to meet with the family—just recently, two weeks ago—and they informed me that now their son is here, residing in the province and receiving appropriate treatment. It took some considerable time to get there.

So I accept the member's question, but I cannot indicate to him that the federal government was any more specific in terms of the type of offer they were putting on the table. They did not specify brain injury. I do hope that the member did avail himself of the opportunity to ask this question of the Minister of Health when that Committee of Supply was heard for a considerable amount of time, and I believe that those discussions concluded yesterday.

Mr. Gerrard: The Minister of Health had told me that the primary negotiating was done by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) and his department, which is why I wanted to bring it up and make sure that the Minister of Finance, in his efforts, will be sure to include this in the discussion and to try and make sure, for example, that people with traumatic brain injury could be covered in this initiative.

Now, I have one other area that I want to talk about briefly, and that is the tuition fee rebate which the government has ended. And this—because many students had planned on this, it was going to last for quite a number of years; it was a substantial benefit—I think up to two and a half thousand a year for up to 10 years for something like \$25,000. And so many students who I talked to had planned and this fact that the government has terminated this means that many students—when they graduate—are now in a position where what they thought was going to be there in terms of help is no longer there, and what they're going to see on their income tax form is in—that they will be paying more income tax because this is where it shows up; it was a credit or a rebate that appeared on the income tax so that this will, in fact, be a considerable tax increase over a number of years for people at the very start of their careers. And I just—I'm trying to understand why the government is increasing taxes on students and recent graduates at a very critical time in their career.

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

Well, I actually don't agree with the premise of the question because, of course, as that member knows, this government is committed to lowering taxes for Manitobans, and that is why, in Budget 2017, we have fulfilled our commitment to

Manitobans to actually index the basic personal amount. I was just actually looking up that amount today with my assistant, and we realized, of course, that the difference between the basic personal amount in Manitoba and Saskatchewan is still almost \$7,000. It's around \$6,700, and, of course, for those who will, in posterity, be reading this transcript years from now, that basic personal amount is, of course, that amount that a person can earn before they become subject to tax, and in Manitoba, we know we have a lot of catch-up to do because of the fact that the NDP never increased that amount year over year. Well, they sometimes begrudgingly would allow that amount to go up a little bit. It's funny to hear now how the NDP quarrelled so much on regular commitments to increase minimum wage, and yet, on the other side of the spectrum, these are the very people who prefer that method of a backdoor tax on an unsuspecting populace whereby the government would continue to extract greater amounts of tax dollars simply by virtue of the fact that they would not pass on in their own tax structures those increases reflecting cost-of-living increases and the effect of inflation.

Now, having said that, the member is right in suggesting we have brought changes to the tuition fee income tax rebate. Now, we've been clear to Manitobans, we need consistency and coherence in our tax credit system. We have a vast array of tax credits in the province of Manitoba, more than 30 tax credits, and with a value of over \$600 million. I have suggested, even today, to individuals, that a broad and vast array of tax credits that are misaligned is good evidence of an overall tax system that is perhaps excessive. The more you have a high-tax environment, the more it becomes incumbent on government to respond to interest and pressure and pull on levers and create special provisions for groups. We want to bring better coherence to our overall system. We need to do it on the basis of evidence and results.

* (15:30)

Now, in this case, as the member says, there is a change. However, I do want to be clear that there's a misnomer here. By naming it the Tuition Fee Income Tax Rebate, it implies that somehow students are getting this advantage. The vast amount of money returned in this case was not to students; it was to graduates. In this case graduates had up to 10 years following the graduation from their program. It did not have to be a program at a post-secondary institution in Manitoba. It could be any. It could be

Dalhousie University, University of Calgary, UBC—one of my alma maters, it could be Concordia, it could be Waterloo.

But the fact of the matter is, then, for anyone with a post-secondary degree—not just university, of course—college or other programs, because it was changed over time—they had 10 years to begin to apply for this credit. There was a max amount they could claim every month—every year. And they had, I believe, another 20 years in which they could fully subscribe the credit. That meant that 30 years could transpire after graduation from the post-secondary institution until the time when the individual would cease to be eligible for that tax credit.

Now, in our mind, we had to ask important questions about—from a government perspective—of whether it was working. What was the tax credit designed to do? It was designed to keep people in the province of Manitoba. We were able to show that there was no evidence suggesting that it was actually effective in keeping people in the province of Manitoba. I could quote for the record, but I won't go through the whole amount. I could indicate for the member interprovincial migration, net outmigration in 2006, 7,000 people; 2010, 2,600 people; 2016, 6,600 people. We have to ask ourselves was this effective in keeping graduates here?

The second—the next thing we would ask ourselves is if there's a better way to proceed. That's what this government has done. So while we have eliminated this Tuition Fee Income Tax Rebate, there are a couple things important to note: No. 1, we have kept the door open for the purpose of this taxation year. We have provided notice to individuals to say you have one more ability, one more chance to claim.

We are also creating a provision that individuals can claim not only this year—so they can claim for this year; they had the one more opportunity to do so. We have collapsed the amount of eligibility for this year to \$500, but they still can make that claim. We've done this in the same manner that Nova Scotia had proceeded.

I would also indicate to the member other provinces have done the same. Other provinces have gone the same route of eliminating this type of credit. It's not seen to produce value. Instead, we're putting our focus, as Manitobans indicated to us, on creating opportunity for those individuals wanting to go into post-secondary institutions, essentially not giving this back to a teacher or a doctor or a lawyer,

a construction person, an electrician 20, 30 years after their graduation, but creating an enhanced opportunity for individuals of lower income to have access to post-secondary education.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I'm—I thank the minister for providing his comments. I'm going to transfer this back to the MLA for Fort Garry-Riverview, but I want to make just a few comments first.

The phrase that the Finance Minister used—a backdoor tax on an unsuspecting populous, is a pretty good description of the ending of the tuition fee rebate because it, in fact, is exactly that. It's a very backdoor way that this government has, in fact, increased taxes on students and recent graduates.

And the minister is correct in terms of benefit to recent graduates, and my understanding in talking with recent graduates is that this increase in funding that they are getting as a result of this tuition fee rebate has actually been very influential in helping people to establish their careers here in Manitoba.

And so it looks to me from the information I have that this may actually be a very effective way of helping young people to establish their careers.

Second thing that I want to add is that when we looked at this carefully, in fact the loss of people to other provinces decreased considerably following the introduction of this tuition-free rebate, and so it appears that the increase in Manitoba's population and the decrease in number of people moving out of province may, in fact, reflect a fairly effective measure that this was in terms of keeping students here, and recent graduates.

But, having made those comments, I now want to turn it over to the MLA for Fort Garry-Riverview and thank the minister.

Mr. Friesen: What I would want to emphasize for the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) is that a tax credit is an incentive provided by government to a group. And so the member should not confuse issues. I don't think it's fair to suggest somehow that adjustments to tax credits, you know, indicate an appetite to hike taxes.

And I know that he and I could disagree on the topic. What I would want him to understand is a few things, and I think this is a good point to make while the member is at the table. My daughter is university age and we had good conversations in our household in the lead-up to the federal election. And it was a good opportunity for my daughter and I to speak on

political issues in advance of the first election in which she was eligible to vote. A year after she voted, she expressed some disdain, learning that the federal government was moving to eliminate the education amount federally. And I helped her in that teachable moment to understand what the net effect to her would be as a student enrolled in university on annual basis, and it was not an insignificant amount.

Now, this is where I think it is helpful to realize we need to look not only at the changes that the government is making to our tax credit system, we also need to look to those areas in which we are maintaining tax credits and the rationale on which we are doing so. That member will understand that this government has chosen to keep the educational amount. It's why the education amount is actually addressed in the budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act, because we need to change the reference points. We are keeping in Manitoba the education amount for students. This is the \$400 eligibility that a full-time student has for every month in they are—in which they are enrolled as a full-time student in Manitoba, or \$120 per month for every month in which a part-time student is enrolled in Manitoba. And if a student is enrolled for eight months of classes, well, that's a \$3,200 potential credit that they can claim.

This is being preserved in Manitoba. The value of this credit in Manitoba is over \$32 million. This is an amount that the federal government has axed, and yet we continue to say: no, we need to keep this. And this is why I think it's very helpful. It provides an opportunity for this government to express to students we are keeping this. And, moreover, that which we have done in addition to this is to not only preserve the amount that we are making available to students in the form of bursaries and student support for those entering institutions, we have enhanced that support by going back and working more aggressively with institutions to free up private-sector dollars and working on an increased enhanced ratio. We've been able to expand by four times the amount of student support that in this fall, students across this province will receive more than \$20 million.

And, if I could underscore one other point, it would be this: on the basis of evidence, we were able to examine household income for those who were claiming that credit, and we noticed that the vast majority of households that were claiming the tuition fee income tax rebate, well that was—those households had household income in excess of

\$100,000. The vast majority of them. Those households that had income under \$50,000—much, much less in terms of subscription to the tuition fee income tax rebate. Think of how we are now re-profiling support, essentially saying we will maintain support for all students, respect—irrespective of family income. But, when it comes to tuition support, we'll put our efforts into creating the opportunities at the front end.

* (15:40)

And I would end by saying this: this is what we heard a number of times in our in-person consultation meetings in the lead-up to the budget. We heard students in the room tell us: Minister, in this province the government took a view of saying let's help, you know, dentists and electricians and teachers and nurses, 10, 20, 30 years after their educational experience to keep a little more money in their pockets. We've taken the view to say let's help students get into those faculties, let's break down the barriers that right now exist for those families who have lower income, let's create opportunities where opportunities did not hither to present themselves.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I thank my friend from River Heights and for the very good questions that he asked today. We're certainly quite pleased to have members from the Liberal Party, independents that they may be, to participate as fully and as completely in Estimates as they should desire. So I was glad he had an opportunity to ask some questions to the Finance Minister today.

We can probably move quickly through the remainder of our questions if the Finance Minister is agreeable to do so. But time will tell, time will tell.

I want to start first by just asking him about the priorities and planning committee of Cabinet. I know that there's an org chart, but it might be helpful if the minister would agree to provide a list of all the staff and their associated titles and salaries. Would he be willing to do so?

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for Fort Garry-Riverview for the question. The question, is actually the first one we're referring to the actual Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, I'm on page 10 of that. And the member will see that the principal secretary, Executive Council, in priorities and planning, is Jonathan Scarth; the Priorities and Planning Secretariat director, Jackie Maxted; project managers, it refers there to

Elliot Sims and Caterina Ferliano; senior project managers David McLaughlin and Phil Goodman; issues management includes the deputy director, Andrea Smotra; and the agencies, boards, commissions, the ABC commissioner, Michelle Houde; in addition to these individuals I see as well an administrative assistant, Veronica Gagnon; and administrative assistant Lexi Karvey [*phonetic*]; and an assistant to that deputy director of issues management, which is Hannah Anderson; and also in addition to that, I see two more, and that is, there's an information—sorry, an issues management officer, Nicole Gruythuizen—sorry for the pronunciation of that name; and issues management officer as well, Tara Jago.

Mr. Allum: I'm not sure we're looking at the same chart, so maybe I misheard—page 10? But a few of the people that you mentioned at the—a few of the people mentioned by the Finance Minister at the end don't seem to appear right here. I'm wondering if it wouldn't be simpler and more expeditious if he could simply provide us with a list and showing their salaries as well.

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

Yes, the schedule 2c that I'm referring to is the same page the member has. The member knows that there's those six names that are—actually, six areas, I should say, on that org chart with more than six names.

But in addition to that, I also provided an updated list based on some recent additions, additional positions, technical officers, as well, and some of the less senior roles in that office.

Nevertheless, we will present that information, and I actually think we're trying to see if we can provide it in the context of this discussion this afternoon. But those are the correct titles, and I believe I have not neglected to mention anyone who's in the list. If I have, I will endeavour to correct myself and will make sure to include on that list anyone—yes, so we'll provide him that full list that he's asked for.

Mr. Allum: I appreciate that. It's—there are always moving parts. So, simply, if something gets published at one point and then things move a little bit, so the provision of the list would be greatly appreciated.

The budget for PNP increased this year. Could the minister tell us by how much it increased and why?

Mr. Friesen: Sorry, I'm just asking the member to just to clarify his question one more time. We were consulting with officials at the table.

Mr. Allum: Yes, the question was the budget for PNP seems to have increased this year. Could the minister tell us by how much and for what reason?

* (15:50)

Mr. Friesen: Sorry for the delay. We were just attempting to get a good explanation for the minister—for the member.

I'm looking at page 54 in the Finance Estimates book and I'm seeing there's no increase in terms of full-time-equivalent staffing in the department. I show 20 for the 2016-2017 year and I show 20 for the 2017-2018 year.

There is a incremental adjustment to expenditure. That's explainable in terms of the general salary increase for the year, and there's a—yes, predominantly for the general salary increase for the year. So, to the member's question: I'm not seeing an overall increase of FTEs, but I would also make note of the fact that this government has taken the view that it's very important to lead from the top and that is why, of course, after being elected, we decreased the number of Cabinet ministers from 18 to 12.

We decreased the number of technical officers working for government. Those are those individuals who are not civil servants but rather working for government outside of the collective agreement. Some refer to these as political staff.

And, of course, we also took the view that the reductions need to be very real, and that means that over time, where I know it was past practice to perhaps stake individuals who might have functions in PNP and other responsibilities and they would stake them in other departments, these individuals are the ones who are working with priorities and planning.

Mr. Allum: Just in relation to this issue, and I'm not looking to spend an enormous amount of time on it, but it strikes me, if I'm looking at page 52, Priorities and Planning Committee of Cabinet Secretariat, I see a budget in 2016-17 which was 2.2 and I see an estimate of expenditure for 2017-2018 of 2.3.

The question was: Why did that amount increase?

Mr. Friesen: The amount that the member refers to is explainable in terms of a general salary increase, changes to compensation for those individuals, a over-the-year change.

Mr. Allum: So could the minister confirm or otherwise tell us if the increased amount relates to travel allotment for PNP staff?

Mr. Friesen: So, to the member's question: no, the amount that he's referring to and that column relates to salary. So the difference that he sees from the 2016-17 year to the 2017-18 year, that increase is in respect of the general salary increase for salaries. Yes, on page 52. And then, of course, expressed on page 54. Yes, there we go. And, if he's referring to other amounts, the line that he sees there for total salaries and employee benefits is the one that we are referring there with the year-over-year change.

Mr. Allum: I thank the minister for that clarification.

It—I think it's public knowledge, and so I just want to review this, that Mr. McLaughlin joined planning and priorities at some point, but it appeared that he had been travelling back and forth between Toronto.

Can the minister just confirm if he—if the government paid for Mr. McLaughlin's travel back and forth to Ontario and, if so can he tell us by how much?

Mr. Friesen: Actually, just referring back to a—for a moment to page 10, I just wanted to clarify something I said. I was just thinking about a recent announcement of government, I wanted to clarify—and it will come back to the member, as well, in the documentation that we provide to him on the org charts.

But Mr. David McLaughlin, although it lists in these documents as senior project manager, has more recently taken on the role of acting director of communications, and I think that's probably the title to which he's currently being referred. So he's in an acting capacity. Just to be clear, because it showed as a senior project manager. The member is correct when he says that the information is public, referring to transportation costs incurred in travel by Mr. McLaughlin, whose principal residence is in the east and has travelled to assist us here in the province of Manitoba. Expenses accrued of—for that travel.

We all know that Mr. McLaughlin is a nationally recognized public policy leader on topics concerning

energy, the economy and the environment. He has 30 years of experience in government and private sector settings across Canada. He has been the chief of staff to a minister in Ottawa, he's been in—the chief of staff to a premier in an eastern province. And we recognize and appreciate the contributions that Mr. McLaughlin has made. He is instrumental in the development of the made-in-Manitoba carbon pricing model that we have referred to often. Mr. McLaughlin has relationships coast to coast and beyond the borders of this country in order to be able to intersect with key decision makers and stakeholders on these issues.

* (16:00)

As notable, past experiences include chief of staff to a former prime minister, chief of staff to a former minister of Finance, deputy minister to the former premier of New Brunswick, president and CEO of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy—and so pleased to have Mr. McLaughlin assisting us in government—I've given the correct title there. The amount that Mr. McLaughlin would have submitted for reimbursement to travel expenses would actually now be posted on the government website, I would imagine, as part of our proactive disclosure policy, which we continue to tighten up. We believe that Manitobans have a right to information, and where, in the past, information wasn't always forthcoming, we're now making efforts, of course, to improve as a new government to make sure our record is beyond that of the former government. The title I have in front of me here for Mr. McLaughlin is director of communication and stakeholder relations.

Mr. Allum: Sorry, Madam Chair. I'm uncertain if that was a period at the end of that sentence or if he's just thinking a little bit longer before he picked up on the next sentence, so that—hence, posterity won't know that there was a delay, but, nevertheless, there was a few seconds there.

No, I'm not—Mr. McLaughlin sounds like the consummate professional to me, and, I mean, too much of a—such a fine consummate professional, I'm sure, wouldn't want to spend all his time on Twitter, but, nevertheless, we would hope that he would continue to operate in that highest level of professionalism that his resume seems to suggest. And, you know, I've moved with my family from Kingston to Winnipeg here in 1996, and I hope that Mr. McLaughlin lays down the kind of roots that my family did here and he stays here for another

20 years, and is not just a gun for hire going out. And it does seem a little odd to me to, forgive me for saying, that you would bring in somebody from Ontario to make a made-in-Manitoba climate change plan, but there you go. That's the government of Manitoba for you.

I have just a few other things I want to review with the Finance Minister, if we could. One relates to the BITSA legislation that was dropped on our desks at 1:30, as it should be; I have no problems with that. But it seems that buried deep, deep, deep within that 80-page or so document—and they're never easy to read for the best of us, and I'm certainly one of them who's—needs some translation more often than not—it seems to me and to us that the government has abandoned its commitment to 50-50 funding of transit.

Is that correct?

Mr. Friesen: So the member's incorrect when he suggests that we are moving away from commitments in terms of infrastructure.

What the member will see from the budget that this government is actually making again this year a \$1.7-billion commitment to infrastructure, which is the second highest, in the history of Manitoba, commitment to infrastructure. He sees over 1.7 in infrastructure commitments not only in the 2016-17 budget; he also sees these now stated for the 2017-18 budget.

But it's more than just the gross spend. As a government, we've, of course, said there is a necessity to get better value, and we know, if we look back in time, if we even take the infrastructure investment on roads and highways by the NDP government, we actually saw a pattern by which that government underspent in years, and then, in the year prior to an election, they would ramp up spending in order to, for political reasons, try to trump it—that investment. And, of course, we know that, when you flood the market—as a matter of fact, I was on the phone today with a mayor of a Manitoba city stating exactly this: that if governments, at any level, rush to market in too great a hurry and flood the market with competing requirements, that, of course, industry will always respond. But they will do so building in a premium to the cost. And he talked about the necessity for consistent investments. This is what this government is focused on. It's why we are in section 88 of BITSA, as the member has referred to, delinking the requirement to fund at a percentage as a minimum requirement.

All members should recognize very clearly that, prior to the NDP move to somehow highlight a method of funding, there were provisions already to—for minimum investment in infrastructure. But what we've done, of course, is we have renamed that fund the Strategic Municipal Investment Fund, and the focus there is, of course, on the single-window basket funding. We have responded to municipal government who have asked for this. We've responded to municipalities with the fair-say approach—municipalities saying they want more ability to be able to set what they see as the priorities. They want more ability to be able to apply for government funding and not in a way that would require them to apply in two or three or sometimes four departments.

There was a labyrinth of approvals and application processes that city managers and CAOs faced in terms of trying to access funding. The result of this was that, year after year, there were amounts unexpended. There were amounts unallocated because of a failure to fully subscribe because of the difficulty the red-tape approach presented.

What we have done as the government is focused in on this. We've listened. We've eliminated provisions that are no longer consistent with the new single-window basket of funding for municipalities, while still emphasizing that over time we are making that long-term, stable investment in infrastructure.

As a matter of fact, that means, when it comes to highways—we know that for linear infrastructure, including bridges and roads, we are making a \$500-million historic investment in roads. And so we believe this is a good-news story for Manitobans, and I'm pleased to be able to provide that detail.

I would also note for the member that, on page 21 of the budget, it refers to this same partnership and this time that we've spent listening to our municipal partners, including the City of Winnipeg, to provide a simplified approach that provides the maximum amount of flexibility and autonomy for municipalities to be able to access provincial dollars, to be able to ensure that decision making is made on an efficient and effective basis.

Mr. Allum: Well, that was a lot to try to take in in a short period of time. So let me ask the Finance Minister this way and see if we can get a clear answer. And, really, I'm trying to live up to my commitment earlier to try to move things along in Estimates.

* (16:10)

There was a commitment to fund transit—50 per cent from the province, 50 per cent from the city. Does that—will that agreement exist, or has it been repealed by BITSA?

Mr. Friesen: Also attempting to comply with the members request to be brief, I note that now on the completion of the Health Estimates, the Committee of Supply for IMR—Indigenous and Municipal Relations—is currently being held I believe in the opposite committee room.

In any case, if it's not in session right now I think it's one of the sections of estimates that will be upcoming so that the opportunity that the minister would have—the best opportunity for the member that he would have—*[interjection]*

Yes, we're confirming? Oh. We're confirming that IMR is currently under discussion. Those estimates of expenditure are being considered in the Chamber right now. So if the member has the opportunity this afternoon, he can actually go to the Chamber and ask specific questions that would be better directed to the minister whose responsibility the issue of those grant programs are.

Mr. Allum: I have in my hand now Bill 36, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2017, tabled by the honourable minister.

So because the question—it relates to what we call the acronym being BITSA, could he answer the question has he in this piece of legislation repealed the commitment for a 50-50 share of funding for transit? Yes or no?

Mr. Friesen: And I know this is kind of a long-standing quarrel that governments in oppositions have at the table whereby they say well if you brought the change in the BITSA bill, then you should be able to answer every question on this matter.

And we can continue to have a discussion here, but I want to point the member to page 91 of the estimate of expenditure in the budget, because he will clearly see under the estimates of expenditure for the budget under Indigenous and Municipal Relations, under the appropriation 13.4 financial assistance, he will see there \$361,200,000 under the category of financial assistance to support the delivery of municipal services and infrastructure

renewal, an almost record amount to municipal government.

And because it's stated there in relation to funding in municipalities, related grants under the categories of grants to municipalities in lieu of taxes, and other categories, I suggest to the member that the detail of the answer that he's requesting would probably be able to best be provided by the minister whose responsibility the financial assistance to municipalities is as stated there in the estimates of expenditure.

I would also clarify that for the purposes of the BITSA bill and in the section 36 to which he refers—or section 88 to which he refers, the activity that government undertakes with this change is to delink that requirement of funding, that one-seventh of the PST. But remember that it is not affecting in any way any ratios of funding or grants that are otherwise established. It's simply a delinking mechanism,

Mr. Allum: Well I thank you, Madam Chair, I'm not sure if I would describe that as the minister skating, or dancing, or hiding, or just dancing around the question. It's—having a hard time trying to get a straight answer.

So what does it mean to delink in this context? To us it looks—looking quite directly at the bill, we see 88(8), sections 8 and 8.1 and subsection 9(1.1) are repealed; 88(9), subsection 9(2) is amended by renumbering it as subsection 7(6), and then there is very few notes which provide any kind of transparent explanation of this remarkable transformation and change of practice that will have implications, not only for municipal government, but for climate change and promoting better transit and to get people out of their cars and riding the buses and—which of course is critical to a good climate-change action.

So, if the Finance Minister—I'll give it one more try, one more college try, and just see if he can plainly tell us—you know, there's that great scene in Philadelphia, the movie, where Denzel Washington, obviously a great, great actor and a great lawyer—portraying a great lawyer in that, says to one of the witnesses, explain it to me like I'm a nine-year-old.

So I'll ask the Finance Minister, explain it to me like I'm a nine-year-old: Is the 50-50 commitment going to exist once BITSA passes or will that commitment cease to exist?

Mr. Jeff Wharton, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

* (16:20)

Mr. Friesen: I heard the member asked for a request to have the change explained to him like he was a nine-year-old.

I'm on page 53 of BITSA, looking at section 88, sub (4), and he will notice there's a line there where it says subsection 7, sub (1) is replaced with the following. So if the member can think that 7 sub (1) is a reference to where the previous government stated their desire to indicate that the new reference would be one seventh of the revenue generated by the provincial sales tax would then go to infrastructure investment. This now replaces the reference.

It simply says now we replace it with the following, and that's where we establish the new Strategic Municipal Investment Fund and 7(1) now says this new special account, known as the Strategic Municipal Investment Fund is to be established in the Consolidated Fund. This is the fund that I referred to when I talked about the government's intent to significantly invest in infrastructure, to having listened to municipalities that we would now reflect an approach that is mindful of this one-basket-of-funding approach, a streamlined approach, a fair-say approach that gives municipalities that which they have 'communicated' to government for a long time in order to get the best value, to get a consistent investment and to make maximum advantage—take maximum advantage of the amounts and not let them go unexpended.

Mr. Allum: Well, I appreciate the minister trying to dumb it down for me. That's good and—but I'm just not hearing an answer on the 50-50 transit—we're not—we know they already—that he's delinked the growth share of the PST. That we understand okay. It's on the transit fund itself. That was an agreement that was made several years ago, because I was at the City of Winnipeg when that happened. My understanding is that actually has happened over the decades and it's 50-50 when the NDP's in government and then once the Tories come along they cut that.

So all I'm trying to do is get confirmation today on that most simple and basic question: Is the historic commitment to 50-50 funding of transit—that's on the operating side, that's not even on the capital side—on the operating side, will that be repealed by BITSA?

Mr. Friesen: So, to the member's question: he's—I believe he's trying—he's concerned with the idea that somehow the provision under section 88 of the

BITSA bill then has implications directly for ratioed amounts of funding between municipal government and provincial government. There is no statement in BITSA pertaining to ratios of funding in respect of transit agreements.

A little more detail for the member, though. He does note in section 88, essentially, when it comes to that delinking that he asked for the explanation of, there is an explanation that simply says in the existing legislation—there's a calculation that includes the sum of 4.15 per cent of the amount estimated by the Minister of Finance to be the government's revenue under The Income Tax Act for the fiscal year. And then it goes to a 0.02—or, I should say 2 cents times the number of taxable litres of gasoline that the Minister of Finance estimates purchased in the fiscal year and 1 cent times the number of taxable litres of motive fuel that the Minister of Finance estimates will be purchased in the fiscal year. I think motive fuel is another name for marked fuels—or is that diesel fuel? Could be diesel fuel—I stand to be corrected. And then (b), the amount equal to one seventh of the amount estimated by the Minister of Finance to be the government's revenue under The Retail Sales Tax Act for the fiscal year.

That section 8 of the existing legislation is referred to there. In BITSA now, there is that reference that says, this is now, essentially, repealed and substituted with that new 7.1. So that is essentially the change that takes place, but again, just to reiterate for the member, the BITSA does not speak to any ratioed funding agreement between the provincial and municipal governments. For that answer, I direct him to the Minister responsible for Indigenous and Municipal Relations. Those—that Committee of Supply is currently taking place in the Chamber.

Mr. Allum: I thank the minister for that, and I think we'll continue to take it up right here if he doesn't mind. 88(8) of BITSA says: Section 8 and 8.1 and subsection 9(1.1) are repealed.

Now, I'm going to read him what section 9(1.1) actually says: Grants for public transit systems—the municipal grants for a fiscal year must include, for each municipality that operates a regular or rapid-transit system, a transit operating grant in an amount that is not less than 50 per cent of the annual operating cost of the transit system in excess of its annual operating revenue as determined by the minister in consultation with the municipality.

Under BITSA, that provision has been repealed. So can the minister confirm that that's the intention?

* (16:30)

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

I now see what he's referring to in that 88(8), where it—he's reading, exactly as he did, sections 8 and 8.1 and subsection 9(1.1), are repealed. And the member was asking, does that mean that funding for public transit systems is repealed. The answer to his question is no.

What he will note is that, whereas in the existing legislation last year he would have seen a separate subcategory for grants for public transit systems, then in essence what he would see now, if he was looking at page 91 of the Estimates of expenditure—not in the supplementary information, but in the actual budget in the secondary volume, and on page 91, under Indigenous and Municipal Relations, at the top of the page where it talks about financial assistance—he would essentially see this subcategory for public transit system included in what would have stated otherwise as other grants.

Those two amounts together, he will see there as an estimate of expenditure of 360 million 989 million—sorry, I stated that wrong—\$360,989 million.

Mr. Allum: Okay so I'm—that doesn't help me, I'm sorry to say.

Sometimes it takes a few times to get an answer through my head that I understand, but it seemed to me that I just read a provision, 9(1.1), into the record, that shows that there is, by law, a requirement for a 50-50 split in transit between the Province and municipality. BITSA tells us quite clearly that that section has been repealed.

So, consequently, will the government continue then to fund transit and/or rapid transit at a 50-50 agreement?

Mr. Friesen: Well, I'm happy to engage with the member on this issue, but as I've indicated, the minister responsible for exactly this area of Municipal Relations is currently right now in the Committee of Supply only a few steps to the north from this room. So I would suggest to the member that the full scope of discussion that he wishes to have, he can have the satisfaction of having that with the minister responsible.

For the purposes of this Committee of Supply, as we've indicated, yes, these provisions are in BITSA; yes, as he has indicated, certain provisions are repealed and there are some amendments. And he sees now that the funding that he refers to, that was formerly stated under transit operating is now stated under for financial assistance subsection (a) funding to municipalities and related grants. That amount stated there, over \$360 million.

Mr. Allum: Well, my reaction to the minister's suggestion that I walk a few steps to the north down the hall and ask somebody else in his government the very question I'm putting to him is a bit of a disappointment since the very act that repeals the section that we're talking about appears under the name of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen).

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

So he has an obligation here today to simply come clean on a pretty simple question, which is, by repealing this section, is the government abandoning the 50-50 commitment between the Province and municipalities to fund transit? It's a simple question. It only requires a simple answer.

Mr. Friesen: Well, the member is wrong when he says that I don't want to engage in this issue, because we've been engaging in this issue now for some time, and I'm happy to do it.

And of course, as he stated, the reference is right there in BITSA, as are other references in this 80-or-so-page document that comprises the BITSA bill for 2017.

As I've stated, he's indicated those sections that are repealed, including that convention that was previously in the legislation that links specifically an amount of revenue derived from the provincial sales tax to infrastructure. And, of course, that in itself is somewhat misleading. It was a point we continued to make when we were in opposition because the reference implied somehow that government was using one seventh of the revenue directly for infrastructure. That, of course, isn't the case because infrastructure investments are amortized and then the amounts are paid on principal and interest over a schedule of time. So it's somewhat misleading to imply somehow that you've shifted to a part A investment on infrastructure. So it needs to be clear that even the previous provision, as it was codified, was somewhat misleading.

In any case, so the provision that he talked about, which was that a section 8 of the existing

legislation is, in this case, repealed. That new fund, which is the strategic municipal infrastructure fund, is set up in the manner in which we said so.

I'm referring the member to page 91 of the Estimates of Expenditure, as the second volume of the budget and budget papers. It's Indigenous and Municipal Relations. The Minister for Indigenous and Municipal Relations right now is sitting down the hall in a current and concurrent section of the Committee of Supply. Now, at that table, that minister has seated with her deputy minister, her assistant deputy minister—I believe that the chief financial officer for IMR is also at the table. And this minister has the direct responsibility for this relationship and these grants and the way they flow to municipalities. It was that minister who was charged in her mandate letter to engage with municipalities and to come up with a new plan. And so that minister is there not only answering these questions but eager to answer the questions at the level of detail, with a description that may even satisfy the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum).

So what I'm trying to do is not stand in the way of the discussion that I would recommend to him he could best have at the level of detail he would desire to have it with that minister.

In any case, I would underscore this point. What we're talking about is a \$360.1-million investment in funding to municipalities and related grants, the category in which now that member would find that commitment to transit operating and other grants. But also, let us acknowledge what the issue is, and the issue is the context. The context is—the context being that over time we've said as a government there is a need for government to demonstrate financial—fiscal prudence once again. This former government walked away from their plan. They said they would balance the budget by 2012. Then they adjusted it to 2014. Then they subsequently pushed that date of balance back to 2016.

A book was launched last week in which a former senior minister of Executive Council under the NDP now describes that plan as a fiction. He said that it was a fiction that Treasury Board officials continued to warn government and provide the advice that they did not have a plan to return to sustainability. But government did not heed those warnings. They continued to weave the fiction to Manitobans, and Manitobans judged them.

So in this we take the view that we need to make the right investments. We need to get better value for the money we're spending. We need to engage meaningfully with municipal government. We may need to make sure that we're responding to them. They've told us for years that the process was broken. We've—we have endeavoured to fix that, and we are encouraged by the feedback we are receiving from municipalities that's saying we are on the right track.

Mr. Allum: I'm little concerned that while we're talking, having conversation about transit, the Finance Minister tries to throw another minister under the bus when he could equally just answer the questions.

It's a lousy joke. I'll admit that.

*(16:40)

But I'll say this. The minister keeps referring to some kind of notion that this is about capital and infrastructure. No, no; the provision is about operating costs of transit, and it's clearly being repealed in BITSA.

Now, the City of Winnipeg, as an example, is undertaking an ambitious plan to build rapid transit throughout the city. Leg—stage 1 of rapid transit runs right through my community; stage 2 runs right through my constituency and, as a result, operating costs of this expanded, ambitious, frankly, 21st century plan to expand rapid transit is going to increase operating costs.

When those operating costs increase, will the Province of Manitoba commit to funding 50 per cent, as has been done for the last decade or more?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Chair, in response to the member's question, he might have misunderstood. I think it was the former minister, Gord Mackintosh, that I was attempting to throw under the bus, not a different minister. But—well, actually, not really, because I felt, actually, that some of the detail coming out of that book that Mr. Macintosh has published is actually quite compelling. But I look forward to getting a copy of it, and I don't know if the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) has a copy of it yet. I don't know how sales are going on Amazon yet, but I don't know if I'll be getting an autographed copy or not. But I might pick up one at some time.

In any case, what I'm attempting to do for the minister—for member is to direct him to the minister

that has the responsibility for exactly the questions he's asking. And it becomes clear, too, that the question's perhaps not being asked in the capacity that the member has as a critic but more in the capacity that he has as a local member of the Legislative Assembly, in which case, all the more reason for him, as he represents his constituents, to seek an audience with the Minister responsible for Indigenous and Municipal Relations.

And that is one advantage of the Committee of Supply process that we have: that it provides this opportunity for any member of the Legislative Assembly, really, to sit at the table, and, if they can seek to have the agreement of parties, they can ask that question—but especially that opportunity's afforded to the critic, but to other members.

I know that when I was the critic of Finance, I asked questions of the former premier; I asked questions of the Health minister at that time. Sometimes they were constituency issues I raised, and I was able to get a little bit of time at the microphone. I know I always—I had to ask permission of the current Speaker, when she was the critic for Health, to be able to get a few minutes at the microphone to ask questions of Health, and that was always a tricky situation, because those were long and engaging conversations. But, I think, the best opportunities for the member to have a level of detail and the breadth of the discussion that he's inviting would be with the minister responsible. That would in no way, shape or form imply that somehow I am throwing that member under the bus. Rather, I have the utmost respect for that member.

That member to which I'm referring—of course, I cannot mention her name in these proceedings, but the member for IMR, of course, was herself a municipal leader—as a matter of fact, sat on the executive for the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. I believe she may have been the vice-president of that organization. And I know that for her to make the change and the shift to government—while that is always a process that is encumbered, is challenging for anyone—she was able to navigate that, because she had those relationships in place.

I don't think there's a single minister who wouldn't say that that minister is working every day, very hard to get an audience so she can listen to municipal leaders, including the mayor of the City of Winnipeg. I believe that her last meeting with the mayor was just recently.

We continue to interact with the City of Winnipeg and other municipalities. The issue of transit is very important, not just for the member's riding, but it's important for all of Manitoba. Some would say that the City of Winnipeg didn't move quickly enough to contemplate how to enhance transit. Right now, we're having conversations as a province, and, of course, the city is driving those conversations around that need for the next phase of that corridor. Our government has indicated that we will partner in that project. It's a priority for all Manitobans. There are many Manitobans who avail themselves of transit in the province of Manitoba, and it's important that we take innovative approaches.

So, once again, I would just suggest to the member there are others who probably want to ask questions on that side. I would be delighted to receive questions from anyone else if he wanted to excuse himself from these proceedings quickly to go and ask that level of detail of the minister who has the responsibility and, of course, as I stated, the cost area in the budget. He is exactly stated on page 91 of the Estimates of Expenditure; not in the supplementary information for Finance, but in the Estimates of Expenditure under IMR.

Mr. Allum: Despite that very kind invitation from the Finance Minister for me to go elsewhere—and I'm sure he'd appreciate that, though I have the highest regard and respect for the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Affairs (Ms. Clarke), I can say quite honestly we've been impressed with her performance across the floor of the Chamber. She seems to be doing a fine job at least in trying to answer questions, something she might try to teach to the Finance Minister, but—there you go.

We're going to—well—I also wanted to clarify one thing for him, because I think it's only fair. I hope that we would be able to move quickly through the end of our proceedings together, but owing to some advice from an excellent person within this—in this Legislature, I'm reminded that we're—we still need to talk to the Crown Services minister as part of his ministry. So we won't be closing off as quickly as I'd hoped today, so we'll just continue on.

I'm wondering, though, if he could tell us if Mayor Bowman is aware of this dramatic change to transit funding.

Mr. Friesen: We're endeavouring to answer the member's question.

In respect of his question about have—essentially, he's asking, have you met with the mayor? I can assure him that the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) met with the mayor, that the minister for IMR has met with the mayor, but, of course, that member understands from his time as a minister, as well, that each of us have stakeholder groups. And that's fluid, there's—that is somewhat dynamic because, of course, there are stakeholders who will drop in and meet with various ministers because they'll have various areas of concern or interest or policy that they want to discuss. There's overlap.

I know that in the first few weeks of government we learned some important lessons about time management because we didn't realize that groups would be dropping in and asking for meetings with all the ministers and all the members. And we were scheduling successive meetings, and you can understand how that process would very quickly go south. We've learned very quickly that it's important to drop in together to be at a table together to intensify those relationships, but to make them as efficient as we could. And I guess that just—we chalked it up to one of the early lessons that new members learn when they become ministers. You have to make the most effective use of your time.

But, of course, like the member says—and that's why we're attempting to make the most effective use of our time in these proceedings. It's an excellent segue for me to wonder—once again underscore that the member could be best served by going to the supplement—to the Committee of Supply for the member—Minister responsible for Indigenous and Municipal Relations, where is—she is seated in the Chamber, assisted by her deputy minister, assistant deputy minister, probably the chief financial officer, people from audit and other areas that are assisting her there. And they could have that fulsome conversation that the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum) is inviting.

* (16:50)

But I can say to the member, I have met with the chair of the Finance Committee. What we can also say to the member is that we know that we are pleased with the responses that we have received preliminarily from municipal leaders who came out of the budget that day, went into the hall, and said, well, considering the situation that we are all in as Manitobans, this is significant; we feel like this is significant funding.

So I know that AMM expressed broad-based support for the measures of this budget. I know that municipal leaders who were in the rotunda that day expressed that kind of support. I know that I'm seated here at the table today with members—I don't know if we're allowed to reflect on the presence or absence of members in this room—but I know that, you know, but we know, you know, that other members in this room will have also heard those tacit expressions of support saying, well, in this context.

And what is that context that they were referring to on that day in the budget? Well, they're talking about a context in which this current government is faced with a massive debt hole that we need to navigate out of for the sake of all Manitobans. I've shared at this table during these Estimates proceedings that in the third-quarter report we saw an increase of debt service charge to the province of Manitoba of \$61 million. We're seeing year-over-year increases of debt service charges, somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$100 million, might be a little less than that but a very, very significant amount.

I note that the member for Fort Garry-Riverview never responds. I've never heard him use the terms debt service charge. He never reflects on it; he never responds on it; and yet every day he talks about the need to make good investments. Imagine the investments that we could make with \$61 million that we do not have simply as a result of the fact that that is an increased cost that the government incurs to carry this degree of debt.

We are in a \$6-billion annual borrowing program, staring down an upcoming 6.5-or-thereabouts billion dollar borrowing program—some of the most significant requirements ever sought by government. It is a good thing that we have a Treasury Division that seeks to extract the best value as we go to markets to be able to get those results.

I would indicate to this member that I believe just in the last few weeks, Treasury Division was cited internationally for one of the deals that they were able to broker in order to get good value for taxpayer money. But, at the same time, we know that over time, we need to reduce the amount of borrowing that we do in order to make sure we can reduce the debt service charges and reinvest that money in strengthening front-line services.

Mr. Allum: Well, it's worth noting the minister never talks about what the interest rates are today or what the amount of money spent. We know that it's

5.8 cents on the dollar or thereabouts, which is in stark contrast to when his government was last in government and it was 13 cents on the dollar.

It's much more affordable in this day and age to actually invest in 21st century infrastructure rather than telling Manitobans that they ought to be content with 20th century infrastructure, which is where the minister is leading us. It's the preference of New Democrats to go forward, not back. It's clearly the preference of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) to go back, not forward.

I want to ask him, just while we're on the subject because he knows, among others that are here today, I have the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger), the former premier, and myself both try as best we can to ride our bikes to work. And I know that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Eichler) often has concerns about my personal safety when I'm riding my bike, and don't I know that I appreciate that about him. It means a lot to me that he cares that much about me. But can the minister outline for us what the government's financial commitment to active transportation is for the upcoming fiscal year?

Mr. Friesen: Well, first of all, I want to respond to the member's first comment about borrowing costs. Somehow, he makes this assertion that somehow everything is great when it comes to this level of indebtedness, and, of course, were that the case, we would not see this escalation in debt service costs. This is a concern to us as a government; it is a concern to Manitobans; it is a concern to bond rating agencies. It seems to be a concern to everyone except that member.

Now, I want to point the member to page 5 of the budget whereby he can see, when it comes to debt service costs, those costs were \$911 million in budget '16-17, stated there, forecast at \$938 million, and in this budget, stated as 991. So, year over year, an almost \$100-million increase, and even from the forecast, up significantly.

So this is a concern to us. But I reject outright somehow, the argument that because—the NDP used to make this argument that somehow, because the borrowing cost is more affordable on a per-dollar basis now, everything is fantastic. That's some very bad economic theory because it discounts, at all, increase to borrowing requirements. It also discounts the threat of interest rate hikes. And I know this as well; even recently, others have opined on this, including the former parliamentary budget officer, Kevin Page, now at the University of Ottawa's

institute of financial studies. He expressed strong concern about the size of deficit, finance spending across the board. He's done that for the first two years of the Liberal government. He said that Canadians should be concerned about ongoing deficit-financed activities.

He said with low interest rates—exactly the ones that the member for Fort Garry just cited now—borrowing more money may seem easy and appealing. The devil is in the details, however. If interest rates increase or economic growth further weakens relative to planning assumptions, people— young people will be paying dearly for today's debt-financed activities.

I would suggest to Mr. Page he does not even have to wait for young people to assume this responsibility 30 years from now, and I'm looking out at our audience and seeing some young people in the audience right over there. And I would note that, right now, the obligation is for all of us because, before our very eyes, we are seeing a significant increase in the obligation to the Province for this degree of carrying cost.

Now, factor in, as our budget has done in the economic analysis section, the real threat of US interest rate hikes. Right now, we've seen a 25-basis-point rate increase in the US by the fed reserve. We are seeing indications that it will not be the only one of its kind. Our own economists in the province of Manitoba are saying there will be downward pressure on the Canadian currency as a result of that increasing productivity as the economy recovers in the US. As a result of that, the Bank of Canada is going to have to make some hard decisions about what they value more. And if they decide to—in order to ease that pressure on a declining dollar relative to the US currency, our fundamental trading partner, that result will be an increase of borrowing costs.

We know that as prime rate goes up, that \$6.5-billion borrowing program I just referred to gets far more expensive. Imagine the hospitals we will not build; imagine the personal care homes we will not fund; imagine the teachers that we would not be able to hire because of the NDP failure to keep their eye on the ball when it came to escalating costs and deficit spending.

So that member says he looks at the future. The reason he looks at the future is because it's too scary for him to look in the rear-view mirror and see where the failed policies of the NDP party took this

province: \$23.1-billion net debt doubled in just eight fiscal years. If I were him, I would remove the rear-view mirror, I would put duct tape over the side-view mirrors, and I would just drive full speed ahead irrespective of the consequences.

Well, Manitobans decided it wasn't good enough, that there had to be an approach that actually acknowledged the context we were in, and that's what we feel we're doing as the new government, having an honest and unvarnished conversation with Manitobans about the harsh reality of having to do better—

Madam Chairperson: The honourable minister's time has expired.

Mr. Allum: I see our time is nearing completion here, and the minister didn't get to active transportation. As for an honest and unvarnished conversation with Manitobans, I defy many Manitobans to find in BITSA that they will be able to understand that the Finance Minister today abandoned—abandoned—the 50-50 committed to promote transit and rapid transit in our province. I want to tell him, categorically, that's a mistake.

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

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (15:00)

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

Yesterday, in this section of Supply, the committees considered a motion moved by an honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) to reduce the salary of the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living (Mr. Goertzen). The motion was ultimately defeated on a recorded vote. The motion also contained a small typo, which has not noticed and corrected—which was not noticed or corrected at the time. For the sake of clarity, then, I am advising the committee that the motion should have referenced line item 21-1.(a) rather than the line 16.1(a), as was stated in the motion. Rather, that line item 21—sorry, rather than the—in reference to line item 21.1(a), rather than item line 16.1(a) was—as was stated in the motion. Thank you.

INDIGENOUS AND MUNICIPAL RELATIONS

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Okay we'll go on to—this section of Committee of Supply will be

now considered the Estimates for the Department of Indigenous and Municipal Relations.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations): I do.

Good afternoon, everyone, and I'm pleased to finally be able to make a few comments on the 2017-18 Estimates, and to discuss some of the very important activities at the Department of Indigenous and Municipal Relations.

Before I begin, I would certainly like to acknowledge the First Nations peoples of Treaty 1 on whose ancestral land we're gathered today and to the people of the Metis nation on whose homeland we meet.

I'd also like to acknowledge the hard work of my department staff and the work that they do with indigenous communities, Manitoba Metis Federation, the Northern Association of Community Councils, Manitoba municipalities and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities.

This hard work is also being recognized by the communities and municipalities that we serve. Just an example, a recent survey of municipalities and planning districts indicated that 86 of—per cent of respondents rated our staff planning services as either excellent or good.

As you know, my department remains committed to a new way of doing business with all communities and municipalities across Manitoba, one that establishes new partnerships based on respect to achieve meaningful outcomes that matter the most to our communities, to reduce red tape to allow more efficient access to government programs and it ensures that all budgeted infrastructure dollars are fully allocated and spent to benefit all communities.

With respect to indigenous relations, this new approach means working positively and respectfully with indigenous people and communities. It involves walking a path to reconciliation that is built on the principles of respect, understanding—understanding, engagement and action.

To develop a strategic path forward, my department will be engaging with indigenous nations and the peoples in the upcoming year to enhance Manitoba's duty to consult framework, which will be the foundation for respectful and productive

collaborations with indigenous communities in the future.

The duty to consult framework will only serve to build on positive relationships with indigenous communities that are already ongoing. For example, our government recently addressed an urgent request from Norway House Cree Nation and provided gravel for the Chief Ken Albert Memorial Park walkway in exchange for an equal value of ice-clearing work during the fall freeze of the Sea Falls ferry crossing.

Through our collaborate efforts we've also made strides in the area of economic development by supporting the development of urban indigenous economic development zones in partnerships with First Nations to create jobs. Three zones that are now achieved to encourage economic independence for the communities of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation in the city of Thompson, Peguis First Nation in the city of Winnipeg and Swan Lake First Nation in the RM of Headingley.

I'm also very pleased to report that we are moving evacuees impacted by the catastrophic flooding of 2011 home this summer through our involvement in Operation Return Home. Our efforts to construct new housing and related infrastructure on lands safe from future flooding will enable First Nations of Lake St. Martin, Little Saskatchewan, Pinaymootang and Dauphin River to move home by the end of this year.

Another example of our collaborative efforts with the indigenous community involves the Treaty Land Entitlement Information Toolkit, which was developed in conjunction with our federal counterparts, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the treaty relations committee of Manitoba and Treaty Land Entitlement committee of Manitoba. This tool will foster relationships and partnerships with First Nations and promote economic opportunities for all stakeholders through the creation of urban reserves and other economic development opportunities.

My department has also renewed commitment to improve the process of provisioning land and related interest to Canada for reserve creation under Treaty Land Entitlements and other agreements. To date, Manitoba has facilitated the transfer of 467,306 acres of Crown land to reserve. These land transfers support economic development opportunities for First Nations, including the ability to build partnerships with all levels of government to responsibly

and sustainably develop Manitoba's natural resources.

We've also been working across government to identify ways of addressing the heart-breaking tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. Our government is engaging with community organizations, the national inquiry commission, and the federal government to ensure that supports are in place for families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. As well, I have met personally with individuals and family members affected by this issue, as well as the organizations like MKO, SCO, AFM and AMC, including most recently a productive meeting at the AMC First Nations women's summit.

Manitoba remains committed to full participation in the national inquiry, and we have advocated for the interests of Manitoba and the needs of family members and indigenous communities to be properly represented.

With respect to municipal relations, our new approach to doing business means developing a new partnership process with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and the City of Winnipeg to provide municipalities with a fair say in the way provincial funding is invested in their communities. That fair say started right after the election, when we embarked on the most robust municipal funding consultation in decades.

We heard from municipalities about how a new basket funding model can help give greater autonomy and flexibility to municipalities to make decisions on the best use of available dollars. The 2017-18 budget delivers on this new basket funding approach by consolidating our programs into one budget line that provides over \$361 million for municipalities. Combined with other provincial funding, this provides municipalities with the similar level of support that they had last year. The next step will be shaping these funds into baskets with the help of the municipalities. This model will provide more flexibility for the City of Winnipeg and municipalities to choose where to allocate the dollars that are available in these baskets, based on local priorities instead of making decisions just to meet the criteria of another complicated provincial grant program.

In the coming weeks, my department will meet and work with our municipal partners, including the City of Winnipeg and AMM, to finalize the design of our proposed baskets. As municipalities will

continue to have a fair say, then when we begin to flow funds—under this model in 2017.

Meanwhile, we're going to continue expanding and building on our new single-window application for our capital programs, which will free up municipal resources by cutting red tape and frustrating application processes.

We've also committed to working with the City of Winnipeg, the AMM and other municipalities—develop a long-term plan for strategic infrastructure investments so that we can truly make the most of every dollar that we have available.

Our government is also delivering on its commitment to provide no less than \$1 billion in infrastructure investments, and we're making sure that the major investments in our roads, bridges, and other core infrastructure is strategic by instituting the new return-on-investment test for large-scale projects. As an example, municipalities have identified a—water and sewer infrastructure as a key priority. That's why we've increased the Manitoba Water Services Board budget to \$18.8 million to enable the board to expediate upgrades to water and waste-water infrastructure in rural Manitoba.

The Province has partnered with the federal government and municipalities for 92.55 million under the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund to initiate 22 infrastructure projects, would not—which would have not otherwise proceeded.

These 24 projects come less than a year after our last announcement in July of 2016, where we announced another 23 projects that would be funded.

* (15:10)

One significant investment of \$13 million will include a new regional water plant capable of supplying water to communities of Binscarth and Rosburn with the potential to expand potable water services to Waywayseecappo and Gamblers First Nation reservations.

As a newly merged department, we continue to encourage this kind of collaboration between our indigenous and non-indigenous communities. A new partnership initiative for local services between Clanwilliam and Erickson and Rolling River First Nation is another exciting example of the benefits of this kind of collaboration.

My department also has a range of tools to support communities in their development. One of these tools, tax increment financing, continues to be

used to create more affordable housing and redeveloped neighbourhoods—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up. Thank you for your comments, Minister.

And does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): In fact, I do have some comments to be made.

I guess I want to point out at the beginning that this—this department, in terms of the critics, will be shared by myself, but also the member for The Pas (Ms. Lathlin), who will be asking questions as well, during these Estimates.

I want to note at the beginning, I guess, that responsibility of this minister extends to the Taxicab Board, and so I do want to make some comments in my introductory remarks about the situation regarding the government's intention to eliminate the Taxicab Board and to transfer its responsibilities—or, download the responsibilities to the City of Winnipeg.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government waited until the last possible moment to introduce this controversial Bill 30 and, in fact, I would suggest it should be an act to destroy 1,600 jobs and make way for a new, low-wage economy in Manitoba. What's even worse is this bill contains provisions to prohibit compensation to the many small businesses in the taxicab industry that it knows—fully knows will be affected by this legislation.

Imagine for a moment that your house, your pension fund or your farm is going to be worth a half of its value at the stroke of a pen. This bill will drastically reduce the value of their small businesses by this legislation, and not even be eligible for compensation. If the government was introducing this legislation for a social good or some obvious social benefit, then there may be a justification for the legislation, but no justification exists for the callous subsection 10 that specifically prohibits these small businesses from seeking some sort of compensation.

What's even worse, if you can appreciate that particular draconian aspect of this legislation, is the complete abdication of social responsibility of this government in facilitating not only the destruction of an important part of our transportation infrastructure,

but the red carpet of deregulation it's rolling out to a parasitic business model.

That's why we want this government to withdraw and rethink this legislation. There's no harm in taking some time off here and withdrawing the bill and rethinking it and do a proper consultation with the industry that's so obviously affected by it.

Subsection 10 of this legislation is stark proof that this government can foresee a serious decline in the investment values of these affected small businesses and families. They wipe out the licences with the stroke of a pen. That's why they've inserted this subsection in—so the taxi industry has no recourse for compensation. They have the power to destroy—to deny any monetary compensation in any drop or elimination of value, and this represents an abuse of government power. Talk about the heavy hand of government attacking—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

I just want to remind the critic, when it comes to community of supply, the Estimates, through section by section by the Bill 30, it should be done in committees—in a committee setting, not in the Estimates—or debate in the House. This is not the venue to discuss legislature of a bill, specifically.

Mr. Maloway: I am making comments regarding the minister's department, of which just is—just one part of it. And, as part of her department, she is responsible for the Taxicab Board, so all my comments should be viewed within the purview of her responsibility for the Taxicab Board.

Mr. Chairperson: When generalizing on that—on the topic, it's okay, but when it comes to actual bill going to section by section, it's getting a little bit detailed when it comes to this venue of Estimates and Supply.

Mr. Maloway: Thank you. I will try to refer—defer from referring to specific sections of this bill.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

Mr. Maloway: And now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, contrast this government's immoral attitude toward small business, which they say they support, and families, with the recent Canada-European free trade agreement. Now, most of people in this Legislature, MLAs, will be familiar with this agreement where we saw the Government of Canada moving forward on a compensation package to cover losses that'll be suffered by the Quebec dairy industry as a result of access Europeans are granted in the CETA deal.

So if it's good enough, Mr. Deputy Speaker, good enough for Quebec dairy farmers, then why can't we adopt fair practices here? Please tell me the difference between the Quebec dairy farmers and the Manitoba taxicab industry? And I can tell you what the difference is. The minister knows, Premier (Mr. Pallister) knows, that taxi companies in Manitoba don't elect MPs to Ottawa the way that Quebec dairy farmers can and do. Dairy farmers in Quebec are relieved that the federal government is committed to the long-awaited compensation. I believe the compensation is something like over a 10-year period.

The government is intending to transfer the regulatory responsibility for the industry to individual municipalities and will allow new transportation options for consumers to be explored. In reality, what it does is it wipes out all the licences of the taxis in Manitoba. That's what this transfer actually means. The government decision regarding the Taxicab Board, basically, they say is a direct response to the 174-page independent review by the Meyers Norris Penny consulting group. That's the argument that they used for doing consultations when we know they have done no consultations whatsoever. We have certainly met with a broad range of people involved in the taxicab community, and they basically tell us that they have had no proper consultation done on this particular bill.

So we say that that is another reason why the government should rethink this move to eliminate the Taxicab Board and go back to the drawing board, do the proper consultations, and then after they've done that, if they feel they still have to proceed then, and the picture doesn't look different to them, then perhaps they could proceed at that time. But this is certainly a big shock to people in the families in that business.

The minister also wants 137—I find this kind of hard to sort out in my mind—137 municipalities are going to have regulatory responsibility for the taxicab industry, which is, I've got here, a tower of regulatory Babel. I don't know how. I can see the City of Winnipeg, you know, developing a set of rules and regulations because at least there would be consistency among the Winnipeg operators, but when you've got each municipality because the Municipal Board, I believe, was pulled off its rural regulatory authority role, and so now these 137 municipalities are all going to be making up their own rules. I mean, that is going to be totally chaotic. I mean, when I say there's chaos in the

health-care system for the—when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) starts eliminating three of the six emergency wards, this is going to be just as chaotic as that. And the losers in this scenario, obviously, are the taxi industry.

* (15:20)

Here in Winnipeg, as in all major cities in North America, drivers are average working people that work long hours and are paying bills for this country. They don't have any big mansions or seven-car garages, and they don't take off months to work on vacation in Costa Rica or other southern climes, for that matter.

Their industry lacks the political and economic resources to take on companies like Uber, who—you know, this is geared towards Uber by—many people will say that, and have investors—and Uber has investors, by the way, like Goldman Sachs, Google Ventures and other private companies. I don't recall any taxi companies getting a \$3.5-billion cash infusion from Saudi Arabian investors as Uber did this past June. So we're talking about a major international company here that this government is inviting essentially into Manitoba by eliminating the Taxicab Board.

The minister—and I'm not finished my comments; I'll have to pick them up on the next question, but I can tell you that the minister's certainly been listening to our petitions every day—all day every day for the last long number of days, and they're going to continue up to November the 9th, but the reality is she will know if she listens to those petitions there's many other reasons listed there as to why this is a very, very bad idea on the part of her government.

And we say there's a very simple solution here: just withdraw the bill. This is not something that has to be done by any given time. One year is not going to have a huge effect on—the government should take the time and do—consult properly and do this right if they're going to do it—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member's time is up.

We want to thank the critic for the—of the official opposition for his remarks.

Under the Manitoba practice, debate for the minister's salary is the last item considered for the department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 13.1(a), contained in resolution 13.1.

At this time, we invite the ministerial and the opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

Could the Minister of Indigenous and Municipal Relations introduce her staff?

Ms. Clarke: I'm pleased to introduce this afternoon Angie Bruce, Deputy Minister of Indigenous Relations, to my left; also, sitting beside her we have Scott DeJaegher, who is the director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives with Indigenous Relations. On my right side, Grant Doak, Deputy Minister for Municipal Relations and next to him we have Ramona Mattix, assistant deputy minister, Community Planning and Development division of Municipal Relations.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mr. Maloway: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would suggest we proceed in a global fashion.

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, would you agree?

Ms. Clarke: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, thank you, and we—it has been agreed that the questions for the department will proceed with a global manner. This—with all the resolutions to be passed, one questioning—once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Maloway: Like to note that the minister has brought in sweeping changes to the taxi industry in Manitoba that threatens to disrupt taxi services and wipe out the investments of hundreds of Manitoba families.

Why did this minister not consult with the industry before bringing in Bill 30 that's aimed at paving the way for bringing Uber into Manitoba?

Ms. Clarke: The taxicab actually was created in 1935 when what is now Winnipeg was made up of 13 different municipalities, and the Taxicab Board was created to set jurisdictional disputes between the communities. Industry oversight has become riddled in red tape and has failed to evolve with the changing interests of those in Winnipeg.

The government just completed the most extensive consultations on the vehicle-for-hire industry in decades, where the public and stakeholders spoke up to say that the existing regulatory

regime needs to be modernized. We've heard from Manitobans and we're taking action.

The Local Vehicles for Hire Act will devolve oversight of the taxicab industry in the City of Winnipeg to the municipal government, bringing the City in line with other municipalities in the province and other major Canadian cities.

These changes will pave the way for modernization in Winnipeg's vehicle-for-hire industry and for a fresh regulatory regime that can be designed to better meet the local interests and better serve Winnipeggers.

Mr. Maloway: The minister tries to downplay the impact of the legislation. She is, in fact, paving the way for Uber, which is a multi-billion-dollar company that's broken many laws around the world in its efforts. There's just constant stories about Uber and their practices in an effort to undermine the existing regulated industry.

Many Manitoba families, virtually all of whom are new Canadians, have invested a half a million dollars or more into the industry, investments which this minister is going to wipe out.

Why won't she recognize the impacts of her actions and the government's actions on—that Bill 30 is—will have on these families?

Ms. Clarke: We will not comment and—or prejudge on the speculation about what the City of Winnipeg may or may not include in their vehicle-for-hire bylaw. We will work with them if requested to 'enshue' a smooth transition between the 'regulatory' bodies.

Other major cities have the authority to regulate the vehicle-for-hire industry in a way that serves the unique needs of their communities. Municipalities of Manitoba already have these powers elsewhere in Manitoba. The City has the freedom to set up a regulatory regime that works best for them and work in concert with other local services like policing, bylaw enforcement and transportation planning.

Mayor Bowman has advocated that he favours modernization to the regulatory regime, increased innovation, new technologies and new ride-sharing alternatives. And this is what the mayor has to say about Bill 30: I believe that this is an opportunity for customers and the City of Winnipeg to be presented with new options and innovations.

And our government is looking forward to working with the City to ensure that there is a

smooth transition in aligning its regulatory authority and other municipalities all across the Canada.

Mr. Maloway: The minister's projected saving here, based on the Estimates book, is seven employees, around \$587,000. Is she going to forward that—those seven employees and that \$587,000 to the mayor so that he can set up his regulatory structure?

Ms. Clarke: We recently had a meeting with the mayor and we had a really good discussion in regards to the transfer of the vehicles for hire to their department—or to their jurisdiction, which they are extremely happy about, given that all other municipalities much smaller than the City of Winnipeg with much less user uptake have had this opportunity for many, many years, and they are the only jurisdiction in Manitoba that doesn't have this opportunity.

*(15:30)

In regards to the financing expenditures or income, in regards to vehicles for hire, the mayor really doesn't have a concern, because he's very aware that it can be—the costs will be covered by licensing, et cetera, and they will perhaps operate differently within the government in regards to inspections and staff that's required to run the operations.

Mr. Maloway: So can the minister confirm, then, that the Province's—her department is spending—the Taxicab Board is spending \$587,000 a year, with seven staff members, to regulate the taxicab industry and, all of a sudden, the mayor's going to do it for free? Where is the mayor going to get the money to replace this money that has been put up by the province?

Ms. Clarke: As indicated, approximately \$600,000, as you've indicated, is for salaries, and \$148,000 in operating costs. The revenues from the licensing actually covered \$235,000 of that. However, licences have not been increased in approximately 20 years. There is a serious neglect.

This deficit in funding towards the Taxicab Board should have been borne by the licences; instead, it's been paid by the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Maloway: So, on that basis, then, would the minister say, then, that the City of Winnipeg is going to have to double or triple the licensing fees when the taxicab industry is transferred over to the city for regulation?

Ms. Clarke: Our government will not speculate on how the City of Winnipeg is going to set up their bylaws, how they're going to operate their financing in regards to income or expenditures. That will be their decisions and we will not be influencing that at all.

Mr. Maloway: And we've made it very clear, and the industry has to us, too, that no consultation, no proper consultation was done with the industry. You know, I've met with many people who make their livelihood from taxis, both here and throughout the province. It's already had a devastating impact on the reduction and the values of their businesses. I mean, right now, if you spend a half a million dollars a year, two or three ago, to buy a taxi licence, just the minister's announcement alone has cut the value. I understand the values in Toronto are like a third of what they were a couple years ago.

So, just the minister's announcement, basically, means that the businesses are worth about a third of what they were before. When I asked the minister again, what analysis does the minister have in terms of the impacts this government's actions in Bill 30, which is wiping out so many Manitoba families, what sort of analysis has been done?

Ms. Clarke: Well, I think we need to be very clear first and foremost. The Taxicab Board authorizes licences, and I think we need to be reminded that there was no new licences in almost 20 years, which certainly, probably, carried some impact on the cost of the licences that you're referring to.

However, the thousands and hundreds of thousands of dollars that you refer to is a secondary market and not determined by the Taxicab Board or this government. That is between the owner-operators and the people that are hiring, so we take no responsibility for what the values that they have placed on those opportunities for them to work within this industry.

I want to point out, in October 2015, the Province released a request for proposals to review the taxicab industry and make recommendations on how to improve customer service and strengthen public safety.

In December 2015, the Taxicab Board engaged MNP LLP to conduct a comprehensive assessment. The overarching goal was a financially viable, safe, and modern industry that meets acceptable service levels.

In December 2016, MMP published its report including 40 recommendations. Now, they conducted extensive consultations with taxicab owners, drivers, dispatch companies, members of the public, businesses and organizations that rely on taxicabs.

A consumer survey sought public opinion on usage of vehicles for hire and public transportation providers—importance of safety and service aspects, satisfaction with taxicab services and priorities for change—more than 10,000 responses to the reviews online and telephone surveys were received. Industry participants were notified of the survey through a direct email invitation to taxicab owners, drivers, dispatch companies and representative organizations.

Notice of the survey was posted on the Taxicab Board website, the MNP website, and a press release distributed by the government of Manitoba. The Taxicab Board also provided information and encouraged participation in regular meetings with the industry. A total of 675 drivers and owners completed the survey online. They were consulted, and they had ample opportunity, just as all other Manitobans, to participate in this report.

Mr. Maloway: Well, we'll choose to agree to disagree, I guess, on this issue about consultation, because certainly that—they tell me they were not consulted at all. You know, doing a survey a couple years ago is one thing, but then to go and take away somebody's business without compensation, I think, puts a little different perspective on it. They're different things.

And I want to ask the minister about this because the reality is that she's aware that—you know, when free-trade agreements are done—and I'm citing the Canada-European trade agreement—and trade agreements, when there's dislocations resulting as—coming as a result of trade agreements, there's often compensation arrangements made.

And does she not think it's fair to give the taxicab owners—taxicab industry the same treatment that the federal government—I mean, her federal government. The Conservatives before with Stephen Harper, you know, negotiated this trade deal and you know, they were smart enough to include in there, I believe, 10 years of compensation for the losses of the dairy farmers, largely in Quebec. That's just common sense. It happens all the time.

Why would she not agree that that approach should be extended here to the taxi industry? Why not?

Ms. Clarke: I'm not sure why the member opposite would want our government to be responsible for private transactions between owners and employees of the industry. This certainly would not be in the best interest of Manitobans. And our government—as we've indicated, this was a transaction that was within the industry, within the owners, operators, and certainly not where we had revenue coming in and not where we would be looking to compensate.

And further to that, I'd just like to add a little more information in regards to the background of this particular Bill 30. Years of reports, commissions, inquiries, and new regulations have created regime riddled in red tape, and the provincial inaction of the past has fostered an industry that absolutely is not serving the modern needs of a major city like Winnipeg.

And I'd also like to remind the member opposite, that was, in fact, his government that authorized this report and asked for a review of the taxicab industry. And I have some statements from stakeholders that support this review.

Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce—we're extraordinarily pleased with Manitoba's new efforts to modernize our vehicles-for-hire rules. It's a move that increases competition, driving innovation, and expands options for the customers. Putting the regulation of this industry into the hands of municipalities where the industry takes place is a wise choice.

I'd like to also make the member opposite aware that Michael Diamond, a spokesperson for the Winnipeg Taxi Alliance, whom our department met with twice, I believe, since this bill has been announced—and his comments after those meetings was we believe that if there's a level playing field, our members are able to compete.

* (15:40)

And, again, Mayor Bowman: I believe this is an opportunity for customers and the City of Winnipeg to 'bre' presented with new options and with innovation. We'll review what the Province has proposed, and we will have discussions. And those discussions are taking place.

Further to that—comments that I would like to put on record that are of utmost interest: Winnipeg has not seen a new standard taxicab licence issued in two decades. The Taxicab Board has maintained the same number of standard taxicab licences, at

approximately 400, since 1947; I think this begs for modernization.

At one taxicab for every 1,555 people, Winnipeg's ratio of taxicabs to population is lower than any other compared city. And public surveys indicated dissatisfaction with wait times—54 per cent indicated that they've waited too long for a taxicab to arrive, and the Winnipeg Airports Authority has indicated that a shortage of cabs at the airport is common.

And I have to also share a personal experience. Minister of Education and myself worked at the Salvation Army Christmas dinner, and because of minimal parking in the area, we took a cab over to go and work at that, and very pleased to spend our time there. And I happened to have an 'ab'—app on my phone that I used regularly for taxi service in the city of Winnipeg since living in here, and it was excellent. The response time was great. I live in—very near my work, and the response time was great. However, when we were done serving at Salvation Army, we used that same app to get a cab to bring us back to this area. We waited, and we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and we called again, and we called again, and then we placed phone calls and we waited. And then it was indicated to us by some of the people in that local 'areal' that we would never get a cab; no cab would come there, because it was not a desirable area of the city. And so, eventually, we found an alternative ride back.

But it—we felt discriminated because—for the people in that area, and for a cab not to come and get us. And it was not a peak time in business. So is a review required and is some modernization required? Absolutely, because these are the same stories that we're hearing from other—not just Winnipeggers but those visiting the city. So a decision to move forward with this Bill 30 is certainly—there is an indication that the current system has limited consumer choice to the extent that it has negatively impacted service satisfaction, driver working conditions and artificially high values on secondary market that limits new-owner participation.

Mr. Maloway: Well, Mr. Chair, I don't know where to begin.

Minister has a background in business, just like I do, and I can tell you that any government that dislocates a whole industry pays compensation. If you go back to Ed Schreyer's rise in Manitoba, in 1969, and the formation of Autopac—the auto insurance company in '71, I guess, it was—or '72, if

the minister checks back, all of those, you know, 10,000 Liberal and Tory private insurance agents who were demonstrating out in front of the building here—all were given compensation, or a—if they did not want to participate in the Autopac scheme. And many of them did. Many of them took the compensation that they were offered by the government, and they went on their merry way. And some of them realized their mistakes a couple years later and had to go out on the market and buy Autopac agencies at the current rates of the time.

But the NDP government of the time didn't go out and wipe out an industry like you're doing here. I mean, anybody who had an insurance agency, at that time, got compensation based on the value of it, if they got out of the business. And those that got a licence to participate, participated.

You know, I—the business that the member was in in her life, you know, it's possible that, you know, the Province could have come to her town and decided to build a freeway all the way around the town and leave her business high and dry with all her neighbours on the street. Would she not expect at that point in time, if the Province of Manitoba put her business out of business and caused her hard work—her many years of hard work to be reduced to rubble, she'd have a case?

And these taxi industry people have a case here, too, and this government knows it well, and you know why we know that? Because they put a clause in Bill 30. They put in a clause—clause 10 in Bill 30 that specifically says no cause for action or remedy arises as a direct or indirect result of the cancellation of a licence or certificate under section 1 and no compensation or damages, including but not limited to any loss of goodwill or possible profits, are owed or payable to any person in connection with or as a result of such a cancellation. They put in in the bill because they know that their lawyer is looking at this right now and would achieve a compensation settlement had they not put this in there.

This is totally arbitrary, totally unfair, and at a bare minimum this should be taken out of the bill. Now, I'd ask the minister again, as somebody with a long history in business and appreciation for fairness: Can she see why we would argue the way we do on this given all the examples I've given of the Autopac compensation, of the CETA dairy farmer compensation, and all sorts of other compensation, and we could take this to veterinary clinics and other lines of business as well who would all expect

compensation if a government came in, in an arbitrary fashion, and devalued their businesses.

Mr. Chairperson: Before I pass on to the minister to answer, I just want to remind the member that we're not talking about the provisions of the bill, we want to talk about the broadness of the debate here. So I'll pass it on to the minister.

Ms. Clarke: Member opposite speaks of my years in business and I started out as a very young business owner and with little experience. I was basically a student when I started my business. The reason it became successful is because I made good business choices. I made sure that if I was going to be spending money to advance my business or to grow my business, that I better be very sure, because I didn't—I started with nothing. I think when I started that business all I had was a big hole, a big black hole of debt.

So my decisions were really, really important and over my 33 years, I made many, many decisions. I went from a tiny little old building to building a brand new, very large building in 1979 after being in business only seven years. I did that because I thought my business plan out and I made sure that there was going to be value for money and I made sure that I was going to be able to afford whatever might come forward. I was very, very certain about that. And did it always work? No, it didn't, but I didn't have anyone coming in and offer to support me. There was no government funding. I had to rely on my own.

And I think within this industry, anyone investing in the industry to the owner of that particular industry, I would think they would do no less, looking at their investment, what they were putting into it and what the future would hold for them. There are no guarantees. If you're going to invest in your business, if you're going to sit waiting and hoping that if something goes off the tracks that somebody else is going to come in and take care of that loss for you—and, again, I have to make it very clear. These sums of money that you keep referring to, that is not a part of this government. It's a secondary market. It is between the owner and the purchaser. It is not a part of this government.

* (15:50)

And you speak about the industry as if you really are caring and concerning, and I have to go back to the date that Bill 30 was expected to come forward for second reading and our building was filled from,

I believe, around 10 o'clock in the morning. They were asked and told to be here and they sat here all day. They met with many of my colleagues, who are good friends and they live within their constituencies, and they waited all day because they wanted to listen and hear some debate on this bill and listen to our government and for myself to speak on it.

You ensured that I was denied that opportunity and that this bill would be put back 'til the next session of this government.

They left here very upset, and I had the opportunity with my colleagues to go and speak to them on their way out. You're right; they were frustrated. Some were almost angry. And I spoke to them, and their comments were quite different than what you're portraying here and what I've been hearing in your petitions over the last number of weeks. They felt very disrespected by the members opposite for dragging them in here all day for what they said was nothing. It was a—as fanfare. They called it disrespectful, they were humiliated and they did not feel respected in any way in this particular embarrassment to their industry.

So I ask that, you know, when you're referring to petitions, et cetera, on their behalf—we treated them respectfully and in this bill we are doing this out of respect for an industry. This is a business and it needs to be devolved to the City of Winnipeg so that they can look after it in their best interest, looking after the city of Winnipeg riders and make decisions that are based on what's going on in the city of Winnipeg in 2017, not back in the '40s or the '50s or whatever. This is an industry that needs to be modernized. If we want to grow this city to be a good business centre, a recreation centre, a tourism destination, we have everything here that can build the city of Winnipeg. But, if they can't get around and they can't get to the different venues, the different events that this city has to offer, then that will—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Maloway: Mr. Chair, before I turn the chair over to the member for The Maples for a few questions, I just have to say that I can guarantee you that, had the minister spent her 30 years in her business and a government of any stripe had come in and built a roadway around the town of Gladstone—I think, right?—she would be the first person out there

hiring a lawyer and getting a group together looking for compensation and loss of business.

And that is exactly what would happen here with the taxicab industry, which is why the government decided to put a clause in here saying you can't sue us for loss of value. So they know that the taxi industry will have a case. They will have a case and they will go take you to court and that's why you put this in here. You put a clause in there saying, no, you can't sue us for loss of good will or loss of profits.

And, so, I mean, that's where we're going to end up in this, I guess, in a court case, and exactly where the member would have ended up if her business had been adversely affected by arbitrary government action. That's what this is.

So I believe the member for The Maples has questions.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable—do you—does the minister have any comments on that last statement? *[interjection]* Okay.

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): I think I had quite a bit of discussion through the email with the minister, and the minister's aware that those prices have gone up not because—between the—those owners and those buyers. They are gone up under the watch of the taxi board and the taxi board under the watch of the minister.

And I can show you, although I removed their names—but I can show you under the taxi board, a *[inaudible]* those prices. Whenever somebody tries to reduce their price lower than the ongoing price, at that time, the taxi board questions them, how come that price is lower? You don't want to—you want to avoid the tax? It means the taxi board was involved and taxi board let it go although the prices are up. And the minister is indirectly responsible for that—the government indirectly responsible for that. So I can give this to the minister, and she can look at it.

Number 2, many times I think if they want to improve the taxi industry, they could have done differently. If they want to bring more licences and increase the number of taxis, it could have been brought on ongoing price. If ongoing price is \$400,000 now, either people are going to buy their permit from the taxi board or they can buy that permit from the ongoing price. That could have stabilized the prices. You could have—they could have—you could have added as many taxis on the basis of demand.

But those people had brought money, they left their country, the majority of them, and—so they can have better life over here. They sold their properties, they spent that money over here, and now the government totally does not care about them, because they are not from the major culture. I think this is totally discrimination and this should be stopped.

Mr. Scott Johnston, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

And I hope the government have a better hold of that—we don't care about the immigrants, but we only care about the other people that—like farmers that—like fisheries, but we don't care about them.

That's the way I feel. I'm emotional over here. I think this is totally attack on the East Indian community.

Ms. Clarke: Well, I once again want to 'reinterate'—'reinterate' that the Taxicab Board reviews and approves the transfer of taxicab business licences based on the requirements under The Taxicab Act and regulations which remain in force.

Now, in reviewing these transfers, it considers only those matters under its mandate. Assessing the value of the private transaction between two independent parties is outside of the mandate of this board. The value of the taxicab business on the open market is a private matter, as I've indicated, between the owners and the operators, and that's something that they must take into consideration.

* (16:00)

We, as a government and as a board, do not get involved in the private transactions.

And I have to remind members opposite, once again, we are not making decisions as to how this taxicab or vehicle-for-hire industry will operate under the City of Winnipeg.

This Bill 30 only devolves the operations of this vehicle-for-hire industry from the Province to the City. That is something that is already being done. All other municipalities—the City of Winnipeg, the City of Thompson, any other community that has vehicles for hire within their municipality—it is already those decisions regulating that industry or bylaws is made by those municipalities. That does not change.

Winnipeg is the only municipality, in all of Manitoba, that does not have the authority to control and to operate the operations of the vehicles for hire.

I am not sure why members opposite thinks that Winnipeg, being the only city in all of Canada that doesn't have this opportunity, and the largest, and our capital city of our province, that they should not have the same opportunity to oversee this industry as all smaller municipalities. It makes no sense.

Mr. Saran: Okay, No. 1, I think about the price—is that between privately between an owner and a seller; that's not true, because the taxi board registers their price in their meeting. Why the taxi board will be involved writing—or noting their price? They can simply transfer from—that permit from one to the other. They should not look at the price at all. But they were looking at the price. They were noting the price. They let it happen—they let it happen.

Number 2, when we talk about the other cities and we talk about Winnipeg, Winnipeg is more than 50 per cent population of Manitoba. Other cities are very tiny—of the percentage of population, even you can talk about Edmonton, you can talk about other cities—Brampton.

So I think—and, on that logic, maybe we should have—Winnipeg should be province of Winnipeg, and outside of Manitoba should be province of Manitoba. Are we arguing that logic? I don't think the City of Winnipeg is the same thing as compared to the other cities, because the City of Winnipeg is the major—more than 50 per cent population of Manitoba. Either City of Winnipeg should have whole control of the—or should be separate of province; otherwise, we should not compare this with the city of—other cities.

So I think, at this point, it's really unfortunate those people have been caught up with this situation, and, I think, the minister is simply transferring the responsibility to the City just behind the scenes, so they can do that harm to the owners. But they—any way they want to do it. And that's what is happening.

Ms. Clarke: In all due respect to the member opposite, this decision to transfer—or to devolve the operations of vehicle to—for hire from the Province to the City is nothing more than that. It is not based on culture, it is not based on population size, it is not based on any other issues. It is based on the fact that all other jurisdictions, municipalities in this province, already have the opportunity to make decisions about transportation within their municipality. Winnipeg deserves no less. And it should have probably—indications are, from the report from MNP, that this should have actually happened when Winnipeg became one and it didn't have the 13 municipalities. It should have been done a long time ago.

And I have to remind the members opposite, of which this particular member was a member of the previous government, it was the NDP government who commissioned this MNP report, which recommended significantly modernizing regulations and streamlining oversight of the industry. It was your decision.

The report also said that the process for licence applications have led to an overly restricted supply and limited choice, and it 'recommended' changes to allow ride-sharing services.

The current regulatory regime has failed to evolve with the changing interests of Winnipeggers. Where are your interests? We are, in fact, all Manitobans, and we all, in fact, use these services. We're putting an end to that, and we encourage the NDP to come on board.

And quotes from your own members, MLA for Minto: I think it's fair to say that when the report was commissioned, everybody agreed that the status quo was not working in the interests of Winnipeggers. In other markets, there have been some different kinds of regulations that are put on. Every municipality has dealt with it differently.

Our Liberal members campaigned on a commitment to bring modernization to the taxicab industry and that they would welcome alternatives if they were elected. Another quote, from the Liberals: Whether people like it or not, Uber's coming. We need to evolve with changes that are coming in this industry.

Another spokesman for Uber Winnipeg: We hope to bring ride-sharing to Winnipeg soon so that Winnipeggers can benefit from another safe, reliable way to get around their city in a flexible, income-earning opportunity.

It's a known fact that many drivers from a current industry will actually work for other ride-sharing services. And I have to make the members opposite aware that it is also the drivers of some of these particular industries that are asking for change. They want—they are not all happy within the current system. It is not just this government that is asking for these changes. It is much broader than that.

Mr. Saran: I think nobody disagrees that the industry has to be upgraded, but the way it's being done, that's being—I think that's not fair to the owners. So, upgrading, always the government can say, okay, you need this technology—you need this

technology. You can always find out that technology. But, on one hand, some people spend \$500,000 on the—that permit. On the other hand, other people can simply come in and take that licence for \$1. Where is the fairness? At least force those people to buy the taxi on the market. Uber can come. They can buy the taxi on the market, and Uber can—other people can come; they can then buy on the market.

I think that attack on the owners is unfair, and owners should be compensated. I—even before I suggested, somebody said particular communities should have so many licences because the drivers not treating them fairly.

So I said, I don't mind it. Let those people buy the taxis on going price. If they don't have money, government can guarantee their loan. If, at the end, they are able to have the profit from those permits, that's okay. If they are not able to keep up with that and then those taxis always come back to the taxi board, they can sell those permits further.

Similarly, I think, unfairly the *[inaudible]* Eastern community has been treated—how they're treating the people when they're—about fare. Sometimes they ask fares in advance. I think people, they work the whole night. They have the right to ask the money in advance, and because of that—because of those—the kinds of—those kinds of demands, and sometimes people don't want to pay the fare, they will accuse for harassment; they accuse for something else. So there's no fairness there, no balance. So those things can be improved by asking anybody who've taken the cab at 10 o'clock until 6 o'clock, everybody has to pay the fare in advance. As far as we go to the gas station in the nighttime, sometimes we have—if we have to fill up the car, we have to pay them advance.

* (16:10)

So those things could be improved. Those things can be understand. And I think cultural awareness can be make aware of sometime drivers are new. They may not know about the culture, so they can be—make awareness through the training. But, asking them, you brought money from the other country; you spent over here; hell with you guys; we are going to make you again poor. Where you start, we make—we will make you to start from the same place. This is totally unfair for the owners, especially, 90 per cent of people are East Indian; it's discrimination on the East Indian and we will fight up to tooth and nail and we would not let it happen,

does not matter if we have to go on hunger strike, we'll do it. We will do everything possible.

I think this government make sure they understand that, they understand the emotions, they understand of how much damage they are doing to the particular community. Therefore, this is not a fun game, it's not a just a, okay, let we—because they're only immigrant. Let we die them, let we know their business go down. We don't care. We can take care of farmers, we can take care of fishery people, but they're only immigrants. Who cares about them?

So I will ask the government, I will ask the minister, think more, don't immediately go through this bill, don't pass this bill, don't pass it on the back to the City. This, the problem of this price rise has been created by this new province—provincial government. First, they should deal with that or they should compensate those people, owners, give them their whatever price they bought, then make that licence \$1 licence, then it won't be any problem.

Why this government is not doing that? And if this government does this the way they are doing, they are really creating a problem. This community would not go down easily, does not matter what happens—

The Acting Chairperson (Scott Johnston): Member's time has expired.

Ms. Clarke: I think I've spoken to the secondary market in regards to the vehicle-for-hire business a couple of times already, so I'm going to take the opportunity to put a few other facts in regards to Bill 30 on record today and in regards to devolving this to the City of Winnipeg as the bill indicates.

Other major cities have the authority to regulate the vehicle-for-hire industry in a way that serves the unique needs of their communities, as I've indicated. And we're looking forward to working with the city to ensure a smooth transition in aligning its regulatory authority with other municipalities in Manitoba and across Canada.

In the seven municipalities that are outside of Winnipeg, bylaws exist governing local taxicabs and there's no role for the Motor Transport Board. And these industries are found in Brandon, Gillam, Neepawa, Portage la Prairie, Selkirk, The Pas and Thompson.

This bill eliminates also the role of the Motor Transport Board for vehicles for hire as the

legislation clarifies by the bylaws of the municipality where other—where an intermunicipal trip originates and will govern the trip. The bill also recognizes that some municipalities who have citizens travel outside the jurisdiction regularly may have an interest in establishing regional policies governing those intermunicipal trips. An example of this might be an agreement covering vehicles for hire travelling between municipalities into the Capital Region. Unlike the NDP, we have every confidence in our municipalities to create responsible bylaws just as they already do.

Municipalities, we feel, are best positioned to determine the safety and the customer service needs of their local markets. This legislation will provide the municipal governments with the tools to enact bylaws to meet those needs. Municipalities are also better positioned to align industry decisions with services, including local police and bylaw officers.

Additionally, there are various public services available to address concerns from taxi customers. Safety concerns can and should be brought to law enforcement. Human rights concerns can be brought the Human Rights Commission. Consumers are protected by existing bylaws. All vehicle-for-hire businesses will be subject to laws like the Manitoba Employment Standards Code, the drivers vehicle act, and The Highway Traffic Act. Businesses will also be subject to any applicable sections of the forthcoming transportation standard created under the accessibility for Manitoba act.

Meyers Norris Penny's consultations revealed a strong desire amongst Manitoba consumers to have an access to ride-sharing companies. The report recommends allowing ride-sharing companies into the market. This act enables municipalities to create bylaws to allow the operation of ride-sharing companies. Ride-sharing companies have quickly become an important component of the local transportation network in many other jurisdictions throughout North America, and their entry into Manitoba's market will increase competition among providers with a net benefit to customer service, and we will not speculate on if or when the City of Winnipeg will include this in their vehicle-for-hire bylaws.

Another issue—question that's often asked is about the insurance rate requirements, and they may vary depending on the type of vehicle for hire. Taxicabs will continue to be insured in their own class. At the request of a municipality, MPI is

prepared to work with them and establish any new insurance requirements that may be required for the implementation of vehicle-for-hire bylaws. Any new registration or insurance class for ride-sharing company vehicles would take into account the balance between time spent operating as a private vehicle and a time spent for—as a vehicle-for-hire.

And I also want to put on record that that bill is very clear that any operators that are licensed now that that licence will transfer automatically over to the City of Winnipeg and there will be no interruptions in their services.

Mr. Maloway: Mr. Chair, I want to say there's a steady negative impact from the potential passage of Bill 30. It's going to be even more significant following its passage.

I'd like to ask the minister to confirm that the reason there's provisions in the legislation that would stop the government's move of cancelling provincial licences and setting up transitional licences as being treated as expropriation. That's the simple reason that the government would be liable for potentially tens of millions of dollars in losses by people who've invested in the industry, operated under its rules, and will be devastated by the impact of Bill 30.

Regardless of the fact that she has her section 10 in here saying that the government can't be sued, the fact of the matter is they will be sued.

Ms. Clarke: As I already indicated there will be no interruption, that transfer of the licence. If you have the licence the day before the bill is passed, that same licence is still in effect the following day and transfers directly over. There is no interruption whatsoever.

Mr. Maloway: I'd like the minister to take some time and explain why this bill also contains the section 10(3), which is a provision to prevent anyone from filing legal action by having a provision that it would negate any legal action even if it's filed before the passage of the bill.

Like, why is that in there?

* (16:20)

The Acting Chairperson (Scott Johnston): May I indicate to the honourable member from Elmwood that those—that commentary is not appropriate for this particular committee, because specific sections of the bill should be considered by standing committee, and this is not the forum to discuss Bill 30 in detail.

Mr. Maloway: One of the major concerns of the taxi industry is the issue of safety, which certainly will be okay under the—that provision. When we were in government, we brought in some of the best taxi safety provisions in North America to protect against the kind of violence that led to the murder of Pritam Deol back in 2002. Taxis have that protection; however, Uber does not.

Will this minister be requiring that the current safety provisions be kept in place for any vehicle transporting for hire, taxi or Uber, after this bill is passed? Will these safety provisions be mandated for new participants like Uber drivers?

Ms. Clarke: I thank the member opposite for his comments in regards to safety. I think it goes without saying that, whether it's the provincial government, the City of Winnipeg, in the past, presently or in the future, the safety of all riders, the safety of the drivers, is of utmost importance. And there's been a lot of incidents in the media since you've instituted all the protection that you say that you have. And, respectfully, that you have done so, it still hasn't stopped assaults. It hasn't stopped a lot of alleged complaints coming in. It continues, and this is partially—maybe a society that we live in.

But it goes both directions. These complaints come in against the taxicab drivers. The assaults are on the taxicab drivers. I don't think, as a province or a city, this is what we want to see. We want to see drivers that know that they're going to get home at night, back to their families. Their lives are important. People hiring a vehicle to get from one destination to the other want to also be assured that they are going to arrive at the destination where they're hoping to go, and they're hoping also that they will get there safe and sound.

That also leads to another issue that's been pointed out, and another one that has been in the media since this bill was introduced, and that is that of a safe ride. From a vehicle perspective, we had an incident not too many weeks back where people from this city actually missed their flight, because their taxicab broke down several times in their ride to the airport. I don't think we see this as acceptable. We certainly wouldn't if it was ourselves. And so safety's a huge issue, whether it's the driver, whether it's the vehicle you're hoping to ride in.

Having said that, when this industry is devolved from the Province to the City, I am certain that's going to be—I'm assuming that would be a very high priority within the city. If their people don't feel safe

getting into a vehicle for hire, that certainly doesn't reflect very well on the city of Winnipeg, and it's not going to be a place where people are want to gone—to work or to go to events.

So I think safety is a very high priority in this government. It's going to be a very high priority with the City of Winnipeg, and one that will certainly be on their radar for looking at in regards to their new by-laws.

I'd also like to put a bit more information on the record in regards to this legislation. Bill 30 actually paves the way for modernization to the vehicle-for-hire industry, and a fresh, new regulatory regime that can be designed to serve Winnipeggers, and those who visit Winnipeg, much better.

Now, this act that is currently in place was created in 1935, when what was now is—was now Winnipeg was made up of 13 different municipalities, and the Taxicab Board was created to manage the disputes. Under 17 years under the NDP government, not a single new standard taxi licence has been issued in Winnipeg, and the system is dysfunctional. And I can't understand why members opposite would want it to remain this way.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

And, if they didn't, why did you issue a request for a review to be done? And why didn't you do something sooner? You've had every opportunity. This city has grown significantly in the past 17 years. Why would you let a vehicle-for-hire industry come to this point where it has broken down?

And now it has the opportunity for modernization and it is not the intention to take away anyone's income. We certainly—if there's more taxicab drivers, there's going to be more jobs and they're going to be jobs that are significant. The owners—or drivers from—that are currently there, they're not looking at losing their jobs; they're looking at increased—perhaps increased hours. They're wanting better conditions and that's significantly important to us as a province. And I know that it will be important to the City of Winnipeg when they're making their decisions.

So this is an opportunity for a clean slate. Winnipeg will have the powers necessary to create a modern regulatory regime designed to best serve the local interest of Winnipeg and, again, those who 'whithis' Winnipeg.

Mr. Saran: Yes. I think nobody's against that improvement, that it—that always—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order, sorry.

Did you want—?

Mr. Maloway: The minister is flopping around like a fish out of water here.

I mean, I ask her a very direct question about what is she going to do about the recognized safety features in the taxicabs that came about after the murder of Pritam Deol in 2002. And those were the shields and the cameras, whether or not the—these new Uber drivers that are going to be sprouting up all over the place are going to have shields and cameras. And she didn't answer that question. She went right around it.

We're talking about safety, in terms of the taxi drivers themselves, one of whom was murdered and the result is this jurisdiction brought in rules that have been—claimed everywhere that cameras and shields are important and positive. And all I'm saying is I'm asking her whether or not Mayor Bowman is going to adopt these rules that have probably saved the lives of several cab drivers since 2002, and what is she doing to make certain that these safety features are going to be in place? And are these new Uber drivers going to have them?

And the answer will—she doesn't know, or the answer will be no. That's what my guess is. I want to ask her again to answer that question.

Ms. Clarke: I will, again, put on record we are not going to speculate what the City of Winnipeg does, but I do respect the City of Winnipeg, the mayor and the council. They certainly will not want assaults or anything else of that nature throughout this industry or in the city of Winnipeg. They will take every precaution, just as they do on all other decisions within their mandate.

Mr. Maloway: Now, let's just get this straight: the Province is going to save itself \$587,000 and, you know, replace these seven taxi board employees, and it's going to transfer this responsibility off to the mayor—download it to the mayor. The mayor's all happy with that and thinks he's going to be able to regulate these taxi—the taxi business for free, I guess.

* (16:30)

And the minister is operating on a wing and a prayer here, if she thinks somehow that in addition to doing all this for free, that the mayor is going to

require Uber drivers to install shields and cameras. Does she really think that that's going to happen?

Ms. Clarke: I'm not sure why the member opposite disrespects the mayor and council and feels that they're incapable of making good decisions within this industry. They make major decisions on behalf of all of their taxpayers within the city of Winnipeg. They make major decisions all the time. I'm not sure why member opposite feels that the City of Winnipeg is not capable of administering and putting forward good bylaws and regulations in regards to vehicles for hire. They are elected by the people of this city, and I am very confident that they, literally, are looking forward to the opportunity to work with this industry, and there's every option for them.

They have their own police service; therefore, they have the opportunity to enhance the services of the Winnipeg Police Service and to get feedback and work together to ensure that our riders, as well as our drivers, are safe and that, as I indicated, we want our drivers coming home at night. We want them feeling safe when they're going to work. We want all riders to feel safe, and I cannot even begin to imagine that the City of Winnipeg wouldn't have that same attitude towards the industry.

Mr. Maloway: Well, good grief. I—if there's no guarantee that the City of Winnipeg is going to adopt a minimal standard here and require shields and cameras in all of these taxi cabs and require them in these new Uber vehicles that are going to be running around the streets, the minister has not seen fit to put any requirement in her meeting with the mayor. I gather there's no requirement. She's not indicated that the mayor has agreed to do all this.

You know, why wouldn't she tie this all down before she goes and starts passing bills that are going to put a significant amount of small businesses out of business, and then turn it over to the free market of the mayor and council who are not getting the—she's not transferring the money here, the \$587,000 with it, she's saying you, go—to the city, you, go and do a regulation that regulate taxis, that we've been doing for many, many years, with seven people and \$587,000—you, go regulate them for free. And, by the way, you know, they have shields and cameras right now, because of a death back in 2002. And we—we're not going to worry about that you guys do whatever you want.

If you don't want to make them, what are they going to do, yank all the shields and cameras out of there existing cabs? I mean, is that an option now?

And, to the new Uber drivers who are going to be springing up, what, are you going to wave that rule that they don't have to—the taxicabs that are operating right now are going to have shields and cameras and new people don't? And then what's going to happen if somebody gets killed—one of the Uber drivers get killed? What are you going to do then?

I don't see how you can, you know, deregulate this thing without giving some direction to the mayor. Like, give the mayor the money that you're spending right now, and require the mayor to have—keep the shields and cameras. Why wouldn't you do that?

Ms. Clarke: It's interesting that the member opposite feels—at least, I'm sure you feel that the City Council and—including the mayor do an adequate job of running the police force for the City of Winnipeg; they also run our paramedic services; they also run our fire departments—all very critical services within the city of Winnipeg, for sure, one with many, many, many employees. I don't know how many thousands between those three particular service groups within the city there would be. They are capable of making decisions, negotiating safety, ensuring that their members are also safe within the jurisdiction of their industry, their business or the services they provide, and yet you don't feel that the City Council can run a taxicab industry or vehicle for hire.

It just seems a little disrespectful of our City Council, having been a councillor before and responsible for all decisions that are made on behalf of the ratepayers at that time. I also had to make decisions, but—and I had confidence in the people that worked within our departments, although be it very small, compared to the City of Winnipeg. But I think our city councillors, including the mayor, when they run for election, they realize the scope of responsibilities that they have to the people that they're elected by, and to think that they're not capable of making decisions to run a safe and a very effective service of vehicle for hire for the city of Winnipeg just makes no sense.

They're very capable of this, and I don't for one minute think that safety is not going to be an issue. They are concerned about every single employee that they have working for them at this time as well as the safety—we hear constantly about, you know, the roads being in good repair for the safety of the residents of Winnipeg. We hear that they want bridges in good repair for the safety of the people of Winnipeg.

An Honourable Member: Louise. They do want it.

Ms. Clarke: Exactly, so, you know, why you think that they're not going to be concerned with the safety of this vehicle-for-hire industry to me makes no sense because they're elected to ensure that the people of this city are safe.

Mr. Maloway: Just seems to us that this is merely a totally irresponsible act on the part of the government to take a, you know, taxi board regulations which have enforced having, you know, having cameras and shields in place, having people that have invested their life savings into operating a business and now you're just arbitrarily going to devalue their businesses.

You put a section in the bill which says no compensation can be payable for devalued business. Like, how can you even get away with that? I find that unbelievable because you know that if you didn't put section 10 in that bill, a lawyer is going to sue you and is going to sue you successfully.

You know, and we have this happening at a direct time where we have examples of the dairy farmers under CETA are going to be paid out for their milk quotas over 10 years. I've given you examples earlier where we had the Autopac agents in 1972, when the Schreyer government set up Autopac, that all the existing insurance agencies of the day were given a compensation package and paid out or they were given that choice or they could sign up with Autopac.

None of this is being treated as an option here for the taxi industry. They are being treated totally different. They're not being given an option for compensation by this government. In fact, it's even worse because they're being given a provision in the bill that says they can't sue. Like, that is incredible that something that—like that would happen.

And then you're going to take a successfully operating Taxicab Board that's funded right now, and you're going to transfer it over to the City who has no idea what they're doing as far as the taxi board is concerned, and you're—and you've already said that, well, we don't have to give them the \$587,000 that we're spending because they're going to make it up themselves by doubling and tripling the taxi fees for the year.

* (16:40)

And then we have the issue with Autopac; we haven't even got into that issue yet, as to how

Autopac is going to police Uber and make certain that people are not driving these cars without proper insurance, because that is, in fact, what's going to happen here. You've got taxicab operators who paid a half a million dollars for a taxicab licence, which is now worth a third of that, okay. They put in these cameras and shields, and they're going to now be competing against some person who's operating—and, by the way, these taxicabs, by the rules, have to be upgraded and have to be changed over every number of years, so you can have some guy now with a beater and not even have the proper insurance out driving for Uber without any cameras.

And not only that, but I'm told with the taxicab industry that there's a rule that no cars can be leased. And evidently in other jurisdictions, other cities that the minister likes to say have got great systems, evidently it's the drug dealers who are out there leasing cars. But in Manitoba, taxicab companies aren't allowed to lease. They're not allowed to lease because in other cities the people that are leasing are these drug dealers.

Now, would she endeavour to check into that and do some research and get back to me and tell me whether I'm right or wrong about that?

Ms. Clarke: It's interesting that the member opposite is taking such a significant stand on a bill that simply devolves the industry from one jurisdiction to another—something, as I've indicated before, should have been done a long time ago.

The member opposite also is very set in the Province did not collect enough money in licences to cover the expenses, and it makes one wonder why in 20 years—20 years—there's been no increases in the cost of these licences, 17 years of which this previous government was in power.

What kind of responsibility did you show to the people of Manitoba, expecting the people of Manitoba to subsidize the vehicle-for-hire industry? They've been doing that for many, many years, and yet you're very concerned about the cost to the City of Winnipeg. Why weren't you so concerned to the cost that you were putting on the backs of the people of Manitoba for the past 20 years that subsidized this industry? It's fine to speculate and be all concerned going forward in regards to this bill. Where were your concerns for the past number of years when you could have been modernizing this industry and you could have been going forward, you could have been selling more licences? You had every opportunity. As you indicated, you worked towards safety, and

that certainly is a very important component. You keep going back to the fact that you obviously have no faith in the City of Winnipeg to run an industry such as the vehicle for hire, when, in fact, they know what the requirements are, they know what the people of this city want, and I think they are acting in really good faith to work with this Province and ensure that the taxicab industry becomes modernized, that it becomes the best it can be for the city of Winnipeg.

We are all working on behalf of the people of the province of Manitoba, and the Winnipeg city is a very important component and part of this. We've indicated as a new government that we want Manitoba to be the most improved province in Canada within our first term. And we are very aware that if we are going to do that, the city of Winnipeg is our capital city and that people come here, they come here to go to The Forks, they come here to go to hockey games, and I know for a fact that many people who come for concerts, they come for social events, they come for sporting events, they even want to just go out for an evening of entertainment, they depend on the vehicle-for-hire industry. And they want to be assured that they are getting into a safe vehicle. They want to be assured that they're getting a respectable fee that they're going to pay. They want to know that they're going to get to their destination. And they want to know that when they call for a vehicle-for-hire, that it is going to come and they are not going to have to wait extended lengths of time.

I don't think this is asking too much, because, having travelled to many destinations all across Canada, I have used vehicles for hire many, many times. And I expect no less when I got to those cities. And, if we want people to come to our province, we want people to come and enjoy everything that we have in the city of Winnipeg, we want to provide them good services—whether it's vehicle for hire, whether it's the businesses that we have in this great city—we encourage people to come to this building to watch and to see what we do as a government. And very often there is no parking out front. I've done it myself; I've parked elsewhere, previous to being a part of this government, and I actually took a taxicab here, because there was such limited parking.

But I also wanted to know that, when I called for a taxi to get back to my own vehicle, that one would come in a timely matter. So I don't know why you would think that, for an industry that's had no modernization, literally, no changes in 20 years, why

you would speak so strongly against a government now, that is working with the city whose main interest is looking after the people of the city and the people who visit the city—why you don't feel that this type of a modernization is in the best interests of all of us.

Mr. Maloway: You know, now the minister is suggesting somehow that, well, she'd be happier if she could create a profit centre here. So let's assume for a moment that that's desirable, that the government doesn't like the idea that it's spending \$587,000 regulating taxis. Then why not simply turn it into a profit centre and raise the registration rates, then?

I mean, you could do that. Why do you have to tear the whole thing apart, and turn it over to the City of Winnipeg, when it's—when all you have to do is simply leave things the way they are and increase the fees for registration of the cabs? That would solve that problem. I mean, at the end of the day, there's answers to all of these questions. But, you know what the—at—what this government is doing, it seems to be hell-bent on deregulation and throwing open the taxi industry to all this competition from, you know, 20-year-old vehicles driven by drivers who don't have them properly insured—[interjection] And no background checks. You know, the lowest common denominator. You think you're going to have—you've got problems now; wait 'til you see this system in operation.

When I'd indicated to you just a few minutes ago that, in some of these other cities, you have these drug dealers who are leasing cars—they lease—and you don't have to lease new cars; you can lease old cars. And that's what other cities have discovered under that kind of a system. So that's what you're—where you're headed. You're going to see more trouble, not less, with a system like that.

And, if you feel that somehow, you know, you think Uber is so—just a nice little furry—or friendly company here. I mean, Uber's a multi—you know, just look it up and you can read about all the problems Uber's got. It's a multi-billion-dollar company. The profits go—and, by the way, it isn't making money, either, so far. Wherever it operates, it seems to be breaking more laws than it can—you know, it's almost a goal of that company to break laws. It uses surge pricing; I mentioned that in the petition. It's got greater rates than normal fares in many jurisdictions—especially where there's—evidently there's a hockey game going on or whatever, they charge much higher rates for that. They use only credit cards. So, if

you're living in parts of the city where you don't have a credit card and it's 40 below, you're not going anywhere; you're not riding anywhere.

* (16:50)

They also don't even go to places in the city—they have creamers. In the insurance business, we have companies like that that blow into town and just give select rates for, you know, houses that—and people that never have claims, you know, but they're not around to pay the claims when, you know, the average person has one. And—so they do creaming, and also they are just all around—it's a model that, you know, people are not really taking a very sharp look at. It's all—there are—people are excited because, oh, it's something new, but at the end of the day it's a model that is not conducive to a harmonious relationship here between the taxi community and the Province.

And not only that. I've mentioned that in the rural areas, my understanding is up 'til now the 137 municipalities in Manitoba have—are covered right now under the Municipal Board—I think it is—and they are given regulations to follow. Well, under this bill, we're going to have 130 different sets of regulations, which is going to be, you know, equivalent to the Tower of Babel with all sorts of multiple, myriads of problems in those rural areas.

And so this is basically what's going to happen if the minister follows through on this idea of hers to somehow deregulate the taxi business and basically—

Mr. Chairperson: The member's time is up.

Ms. Clarke: If the member opposite sees me laughing, please understand that it's not that I take this Bill 30 lightly, because I certainly don't. I'm actually excited for the City of Winnipeg to have the opportunity what other municipalities already have.

The member opposite mentions 137 municipalities. Well, I guarantee you, there are not 137 municipalities in this province with vehicles for hire. We only wish that we were large enough that we required that.

But for those that do, I also want to correct the member opposite's statements. He doesn't know this industry as well as he makes out that he does. These other vehicles for hire in other municipalities are not governed by the Municipal Board at all. They get their licensing through the Manitoba Transportation Board. *[interjection]* Yes.

And further to that, their decisions and their bylaws are made within the municipality, but there are a limited number of them, because, unfortunately, we don't have that many communities that actually require vehicles for hire.

And the other reason I find it kind of humorous because the member raises the same questions over and over again in regards to the secondary market, in regards to safety, all very negative, and, of course, that is your position, of course, as an opposition to bring forward all the issues and those that you see most negative.

However, as I indicated earlier, you had every opportunity in the past 17 years to create a better industry for vehicles for hire in this province. You did absolutely nothing. You didn't try to expand, and, I mean, some of the information that came forward in the Meyers Norris Penny review verily—very clearly indicated these issues have been long-standing.

The comments that we got from the respondents—10,000 in fact—indicated that the complaints that they're putting forward have been consistent for a long, long time. You—they weren't acted on. You did not listen to the people of this province, the people of this city, and consequently, they are very happy about a transition to the city of Winnipeg. They're looking for a new modernized industry that they feel would be sustainable.

Very clearly, the mayor of the City of Winnipeg is also very certain that they can put forward a good, safe industry for the people in this province.

If I had to run my business, as you indicated, from an early age, and I had only looked at all the negative sides, I'd still be sitting in the same little building I started in in 1972. But you got to look at what are the positive effects of these types of decisions and what are the negative, and what is the best decision. You base your decision on the positive as well as the negative aspects, and you make the best decision going forward.

If I had not done that over these same years, I would be nowhere. And as a government, I am proud to say that this is a government that is taking all the issues from the past, including this one, where you didn't act, you didn't make decisions, you didn't modernize, and you didn't listen to the people that you were serving. So, consequently, yes, now we have a mess to clean up.

And, you know, to have you talk about downloading this to the City of Winnipeg, they don't look at this as a download at all. They are happy to have the opportunity to work with their people in their departments, and we are happy to work within our department to transition this so that it is done in the best and most respectable way of the owners and the drivers.

You speak as though you're speaking for the whole industry when clearly you're not, because we have had discussions also—many of my colleagues are—as I indicated, they are friends of people within this industry. When we give them the actual facts, and there's not a bunch of fear-mongering about what's going to happen, what could happen, there's—you know, that really doesn't provide a good environment. And, you know, we are very open about what we plan on doing, and the industry, we will work with them 'til the point that there was an issue. You talk about cameras—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up.

Mr. Maloway: Well, let's be clear about this legislation. It's draconian; it's authoritarian; it's discriminatory; it targets a community, particularly the Indo-Canadian community. This minister didn't consult, no matter what she says. I don't know how many meetings I've had, and there is nobody who's ever told me they'd had any consultation with this government on this matter.

It's clear, from the answers today, that the minister can't even answer the most basic questions about the legislation itself. It's clear the minister has no idea of the drastic impact this bill will have on hundreds of Manitoba families who make their living in the taxi industry, let alone service to customers.

Now why won't this minister admit that this bill has been botched, this government is being unfair in

its treatment of the taxi industry? Why won't she do the right thing and withdraw this bill?

Ms. Clarke: Well, as I've also indicated, I've listened to your petitions for several weeks, and I've listened to the information you've put on the record today, which doesn't change that this province, the people of the province, the people who elect us, the people who elect the City Council, they want a new, modernized industry. They want an industry that provides safe rides. They want an industry where the drivers are safe. They want an industry where they can count on the ride and have options also in regards to what type of vehicle or what type of rides they're looking for.

It's 2017. We can't look back, and we can't unchange the fact that nothing has been done in the past to make any effort whatsoever to upgrade this industry. The drivers and owners, in the past, whether they didn't come to this government asking for better ways of operating—I don't know anybody in a business that doesn't want more business to increase the bottom line at the end of the day, that wants better revenues, that wants to improve their business. But this didn't happen.

And I think there's every opportunity going forward that the drivers and owners within this industry can do just as well. They can—as it's very clear from the report that the timelines waiting for taxicabs is unbelievably long—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Piwniuk): The hour being 5 p.m., the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 25, 2017

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