

Third Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

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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	Ind.
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
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, Hon.	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>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 11, 2018

*The House met at 10 a.m.***ORDERS OF THE DAY***(Continued)***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS***(Continued)***COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY****(Concurrent Sections)***(Continued)***INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN RELATIONS**

Madam Chairperson (Sarah Guillemard): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Indigenous and Northern Relations.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Yes. I will actually make some comments this morning in my role as MLA, but also in my role as Health critic for the official opposition. So I will ask a lot of general questions of the minister this morning but also some particular questions on health issues because we know that health of indigenous people is a big challenge when we look at a number of factors, including Manitoba's geography, but also, unfortunately, a lot of the negative outcomes in indigenous health. And I hope we'll have a good discussion this morning about these things.

We know that the responsibility for indigenous relations is truly a cross-government approach. I know the minister is heading up the department, but I think everybody appreciates that it is a very wide number of issues that must be dealt with, and I'm looking forward to having a good discussions with the minister about some of the things that she's undertaken.

So, with that, we're ready to move into questions and answers.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the member.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item to be considered for a department in the Committee of Supply.

Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 19.1.(a), contained in resolution 19.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table, and we ask that the minister introduce the staff in attendance.

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): Good morning, everyone, and I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues who are here this morning to take part in this proceeding, as well as I'd like to acknowledge my honourable member for Minto.

Before we begin this morning, though, I would like to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba's the ancestral land of the Anishinabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene people and the homeland of the Metis nation.

And, with that, I would like to introduce the staff that will be working with me here today. To my left, I have James Wilson, who is our acting deputy minister. We have Dave Hicks, who is the manager of Consultation and Reconciliation. We have Scott DeJaegher; he's the director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives. And we have Shelly Ferens, director of Financial and Administrative Services.

Madam Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mr. Swan: I'd suggest, in keeping with our usual practice, we have a global discussion.

Madam Chairperson: Is this agreed to by the committee? *[Agreed]*

Thank you. It is agreed, then, that the questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Swan: In my opening statements, and, I believe, the minister's opening statements as well, we talked about how many of the issues involving indigenous people in Manitoba fall across a number of departmental lines.

Is the minister still the chair of the Aboriginal issues committee of Cabinet?

Ms. Clarke: In regards to that particular committee, that committee no longer exists. Within this particular government, we have a different approach in dealing with a lot of our issues, and, as you said, Indigenous and Northern Relations is a very broad department within our government.

And we have the opportunity, and we feel it has been most successful because we work directly with all departments in this government, because all of those departments are in—they are more responsible, in some ways, when it comes to funding or the decision-making process for issues. And you specifically refer to Health. Well, our Health Minister and his department, they are foremost the decision-makers in those particular decisions.

So we have the opportunity to meet with and to work with all of the different departments in our government, and we just find, along with our staff and—who keep on top of all of the issues with all of our communities—chiefs and councils, Northern Affairs communities as well as the Metis Federation—we have a more direct approach, and it has been very successful.

Mr. Swan: Well, one of the benefits we found of the Aboriginal issues committee of Cabinet is that it brought together ministers, plus deputy ministers, as well as staff, within that committee to make sure there was a cross-governmental approach.

So did the Aboriginal issues committee of Cabinet ever sit, or has it never sat since the new government was elected just over two years ago?

Ms. Clarke: I think what is different in this government is our relationship that is direct with First Nations chiefs and councils. This—in their opinion, they did not have the opportunity in previous government to talk directly with either the minister, deputy ministers, the staff.

They did not have that direct relationship, and now we feel that matters are dealt with in a much more 'expedited' way. They are brought forward very, very quickly. Our staff has a great working relationship with all other departments, and we can address those issues, and they have, obviously, a larger input.

The pact to reconciliation act, issues from there go directly to Cabinet, and we deal with them and they're dealt with in a timely manner in—from all respects. I think it's become very clear that our communities and their leadership are taking part in

decisions that are going forward that directly affect them, and that, to them, is really significant.

Mr. Swan: Just so it's clear: I'm not in any way suggesting your deputy minister isn't an excellent individual who has good relationships. I'm not worried about this deputy minister, but I am concerned that not all deputy ministers, who have a host of issues to deal with, are necessarily going to put indigenous issues first and foremost. And I'm concerned to hear that this government has decided not to, it sounds like, ever strike the committee, and certainly not to follow through with the committee.

As the minister probably knows, I asked the Education Minister about the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet. Is the minister still a member of that committee of Cabinet?

* (10:10)

Ms. Clarke: Yes, in fact, I am a member of the—sitting member of the Healthy Child Committee, and, in regards to that, the Minister of Education and Training (Mr. Wishart) is our chair. And, although there's been a lot of discussion of—certainly in question period in regards to Healthy Child, I think it's very clear that this government, in every department and across, you know, all our members, we really focus on children and we know that they are our future.

And I have to say that the discussions that we have around doing the best job that we can do and ensuring that all challenges are met for the children of the future is of significant importance, and we will continue down this path without a doubt. We have—my colleague ministers work very hard within their departments towards goals that we hope to achieve. Some we have achieved, some we're going to—be achieved in the near future and some in the longer distance.

But Healthy Child is very clear. The title itself speaks to the goals that we have, because with—we know if we have healthy children that they're going to have a healthy future, and that's really significant going forward.

Mr. Swan: I would agree, which is why I was concerned when I learned from the Minister of Education in Estimates that the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet has not met in almost a year, not since May of 2017.

Does that concern the minister, and has the minister made any efforts to get this committee—

again, comprised not just of ministers, but of deputy ministers, as well as individuals from the committee and also Healthy Child Manitoba—has the minister made any efforts to get this committee together to discuss the very issues that I think the minister and I agree are very important for children, particularly indigenous children in Manitoba?

Ms. Clarke: I've attended all the meetings and the fact that there hasn't been a meeting held recently doesn't mean there's nothing happening.

And you know, these are kind of the discussions that were held at the meetings that we did have since this government was formed and, you know, the direction at—when we formed government, there was no real direction within the Healthy Child Committee so we had several very in-depth discussions as to where as a government we needed to go. We viewed it through the lens of each individual department, what our responsibility was and certainly within the indigenous—and at that time, I was the municipal minister, as well.

And we had the opportunity to examine it through each of our departments, and what we needed to do as a department. And I have to say, you know, now that we are Indigenous and Northern Relations, that we've had every opportunity to look at the children and to look at the youth and see what our significant roles are going forward. And as you indicated, the health of the children most significantly is important, but also the education, you know, in order for a child to be healthy in their later years. We are focusing on the fact that education, a good home—a good diet, more specifically—and we've certainly addressed that within our department because we do have the northern healthy foods strategy.

And the meetings and the opportunities that I've had to ensure that children as well as their parents are having healthy diets so that they can live a healthy life and live beyond the years that so many of their family members never had the opportunity. And most recently I had a meeting with directors with the northern healthy food and the work that they're doing. They also shared with us the financial input from companies and businesses that have added to the amount of dollars that come from our provincial government to ensure that these northern 'communities' more specifically are fed and have a healthy diet when they get to school or beyond that.

And it was really encouraging to meet with the communities that I've gone to, too, because they are

so excited about their healthy food initiatives within their northern communities. They are doing things they have never done before, and I think kind of the leader in this initiative was—we got to go to OCN where they started their gardening in greenhouses, and they're producing food, and they were to the point where they're actually producing food for resale, which was really exciting for them.

Island Lake is another great example of food initiatives for children and—not only just so that they have food but where they grow it themselves. They are healthier overall because they are working with gardening. It gives them an incentive to do well. They are understanding the food they eat. They are going to be great parents down the road, because they've—have an opportunity from a very young age to do this.

But the most exciting was, we had a group in and Carl McCorrister from Peguis was part of the group, and he's leading the initiative in Peguis. And they started out and their main crop is potatoes, and they are loving their potato crops. And the interesting part of this is they're being so successful that they're actually looking at going into business and doing seed potatoes. So great initiatives there.

And Pukatawagan which is one of our most northern lake communities—so excited that they are now raising chickens, turkeys and pigs. And who'd have thought? I mean, back in the day? But, to have companies within Manitoba and corporate businesses financially supporting these initiatives, that speaks to what our government and our department has accomplished, you know, in two years working with these communities. And I really have to acknowledge one of my staff; Paul Doolan has led this initiative. And we look forward to great things. This is Healthy Child.

Mr. Swan: Well, I ask the question because one of the things that the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet is tasked to do is to provide guidance to Healthy Child Manitoba. Now, I appreciate that Healthy Child Manitoba is not within this minister's estimates. But would this minister agree that the work that Healthy Child Manitoba does, the research that they gather, the projects and the programs they run, are certainly important to positive outcomes for indigenous children in Manitoba?

Ms. Clarke: I would like to acknowledge that committee, because we had the opportunity when we—when our government was first formed and, of course, when I was appointed to that committee, to

review. They brought forward some of the work that they had done in the past, and some of it was successful, some of it had not ever gone any further than being, you know, reviewed and to follow different initiatives that had been put forward. But they sat there dormant with the previous government. Our particular department, we took information from that and we went with it within our department, and I know some of my colleagues did too within their respective departments.

I know the Minister of Education, for instance, he has gone to great lengths to ensure, through his department and the responsibilities within his department, to focus on children. And, I mean, ultimately, it takes a lot more than one initiative to ensure that we have healthy children all across our province. There is so many different scenarios as to what overall makes a healthy child, and, as I've indicated within my department, we acknowledge that for—in order for children to be healthy and to live a good life that food and nutrition is something that we were able to focus on. It's something that we certainly have funding going towards this. And we are just overwhelmed by the successes that we've had.

I was up in Norway House, just this past—oh, just a couple of months ago. We had the opportunity to take a cheque to them for \$16,000. And there was one elder that was there to accept the cheque, and he had not been a part of initiating the strategy for their gardens there—it was done through their schools—but he had become involved, and he was now the main co-ordinator, because he was so enthusiastic about the children and them being involved in their gardening and growing the vegetables and what they were doing with them once they were harvesting.

* (10:20)

These are success stories. They're huge success stories for our province, for our government, but they're not the stories you read about in the newspaper. You know, these types of initiatives should be acknowledged in a much greater way. Just being able to grow this food and to provide it to their communities. I'd have to acknowledge another one, Sandy Bay First Nation, through a training strategy in their community they started about a year and a half ago and they have a meat-cutting training going on with the community. It was supposed to be four tranches originally. They're already in their fifth. So what they do is they're training their individuals to be meat cutters and the meat that they're using to—for

this program in particular, which is pork, that's provided through HyLife in Neepawa. This meat goes to, first off, elders each week, and then it goes to children with families, young children so that they have good solid protein and that they have a meat in their diet. And, again, this is another initiative. It's not an initiative that was started through the Manitoba government. It's a federal program this particular training, but it's one that we're able to be a part of because of the Healthy Food Initiative that we're initiating.

And that's what our government is about. And when I reflect back to the other departments and what it means to work together within one government as a team, it's ensuring that whether it's training, whether it's providing education or ensuring that our children are healthy, we all come together and in the end the results are extremely successful.

Mr. Swan: I got some conflicting signals and a very lengthy answer by the minister to a pretty simple question. Does the minister accept that the expertise housed in Healthy Child Manitoba, the particular staff that have been attracted to work in Healthy Child Manitoba, does she accept that that's valuable to try to get better outcomes for indigenous children in Manitoba?

Ms. Clarke: I think that we acknowledge that information coming from many directions and the expertise of others is always good. We would like to think that we base our information when we're making decisions as a government on the best available information, and that comes from many avenues.

We have, as I've indicated, we've got great staff. I know Paul Doolan has worked on the northern food strategy and, in fact, I was to Iqaluit with him where he did a presentation to all our colleagues across the country on what Manitoba's doing. And I think our expertise comes from a lot of different directions. And I'm not saying in the past, you know, whoever was involved in the Healthy Child strategy in the past—I certainly would want to acknowledge that they have done a good job. There's—without a doubt. And we will continue to engage with wherever and whomever can give us great advice so that we make really solid decisions.

This government doesn't want to look back and say, well, you know, that was good, but maybe we should've done this or we should've done that. Maybe we should've talked to a different group. But I know for a fact that the chair of our committee

Minister of Education and Training (Mr. Wishart) has certainly been a great chair and he has made every effort to ensure that, as all departments, that we're doing our job and that we are all contributing in a significant way.

Mr. Swan: Well, I think we're going to classify the minister's response as somewhat ambivalent to the work that Healthy Child Manitoba does. So maybe we'll just move on to some more technical questions.

I'm going to ask the minister to undertake to provide a staff listing for the department's senior staff, including the department's technical officers.

Ms. Clarke: Would you like that list read out?

Mr. Swan: If the minister has that handy today, that would be appreciated.

Ms. Clarke: Okay, happy to share this with you. And, again, I'd like to acknowledge the great staff that I've worked with over the past two years. They are really dedicated to their jobs. They have a very clear understanding of all the issues that we are facing and, you know, most of them have been in this department much longer than I have. And I would have to say that the relationships within our department are very supportive. We have a great team.

And so, first of all, I'll acknowledge James Wilson, who is my acting deputy minister. And, having worked with James in the past, in municipal affairs, I feel very confident in his ability to work now in the indigenous role for the time being.

We also—the interesting part about our department is we have 64 First Nations communities. We have 52 Northern Affairs communities, which is an interesting part to our department, because they're very small communities throughout the North, and having met them initially two years ago and being at their AGA where they indicated they'd never had a minister come to their meeting was overwhelming. It was an event. But we have a really good relationship with those Northern Affairs communities now.

And I'd like to acknowledge Freda Albert, who is the executive director. She works out of our Thompson office. And Freda has been with the department many years and does just an absolute amazing job for our Northern Affairs communities.

So we also have two directors that work underneath—or, you know, with Freda. So, in the northern region, we have Armand Barbeau. He is a director. And we also have Stewart Sabiston. And

they work, respectively, out of Thompson and Dauphin offices. They oversee the staff in those particular areas.

We also have a great asset to our team is Dave Hicks. He's the Consultation and Reconciliation director. And, within my department, consultation and reconciliation is very imperative.

We also have Scott DeJaegher. Scott is our Policy and Strategic Initiatives director and also has been with the department for many years.

And we have Community Engagement, and I've already alluded to Paul Doolan. He's the director of that department and does a fantastic job.

So those are our key persons within our department.

Mr. Swan: I'm just wondering why Mr. Wilson is the acting deputy minister, and you gave the somewhat ominous comment that he's there for the time being. Is there an intention to make him the permanent, ongoing deputy minister, or what's the process?

Ms. Clarke: I thank you for that. Question is quite an easy one, actually. There is a request at this time that our government's taking applications for a deputy minister for my department as well as looking at other vacancies that exist within our government. *[interjection]* Yes, they've been posted, actually, across Canada.

* (10:30)

Mr. Swan: And is it the intention that Indigenous and Northern Relations will have its own permanent deputy minister all to its own, or is that going to be shared with the municipal government?

Ms. Clarke: Our department will have its own deputy minister.

Mr. Swan: I note in the organizational chart on page 5 that the Financial and Administrative Services position is vacant as of March 20, 2018. Is that executive financial officer position still vacant?

Ms. Clarke: I thank you for the question. We have some of our northern positions in Thompson that are vacant. They've been advertised for some time and we are really having a difficult time recruiting to the positions in the North. I was up and met with our director there, Freda Albert, and they get some staff that come and they sometimes don't stay that long. They just find—they find Thompson really remote. Sometimes I find that hard to understand because

those are great positions and it's a great working environment there. We've met with the staff there on different occasions, but she did indicate that they really struggle to recruit to Thompson.

Mr. Swan: Great. The minister may not have this handy this morning, but I'd like her to undertake to provide, then, what is the vacancy rate for the Department of Indigenous and Northern Relations?

Ms. Clarke: As of January this year it's 18.5 per cent, and, as I indicated previously, it is—most of those jobs are specifically in the northern offices.

Mr. Swan: Could the minister undertake to provide an updated vacancy number, then, say, as of May 1st of this year?

Ms. Clarke: That information is difficult to give out as of May 1st because, as you will clearly understand, in government things don't always move that quickly. We're usually—get the information within a month, so to ask for it in 11 days isn't—it is down slightly because we know that there is—at least one position has been filled and others probably will be shortly.

Mr. Swan: All right. Well, why don't we then—I don't want to create a bunch of work for the department. Why don't we say as of April 1st of this year which also coincides with the new fiscal year? That would be very helpful, and can the minister also provide a list of which positions are actually vacant? I understand her comment that there seems to be a greater difficulty filling the Thompson and other northern positions. That would be helpful to know as well.

Ms. Clarke: We will provide that information. We just don't have it as per list for right this time.

Mr. Swan: That's understood, and I thank the minister for that undertaking.

Now, it's not a very big department, as I think we can agree. I was concerned looking at page 11 of the Estimates book which talks about reductions of three full-time-equivalent positions, and I wonder if the minister could put on the record which positions are being terminated, and has that already occurred or is that going to happen in the upcoming year?

Ms. Clarke: In regards to the three positions that you're referring to, one position that was reduced was the finance and administration. Municipal Relations and Indigenous and Northern Relations now share a finance and administration person. And

the other two FTEs were in the Northern Affairs branch, and that was created through efficiencies. There were no layoffs.

Mr. Swan: Just—I'm not sure of the euphemism, created through efficiencies. Those were positions that became vacant that were simply not filled. Is that what the minister means?

Ms. Clarke: That is correct.

And I think, you know, going forward, we've had that discussion amongst the staff in Winnipeg as well as in our offices in Thompson and Dauphin that I've actually attended where they talk about their positions, and the really interesting one was the first meetings that I had in Dauphin and in Thompson.

And, again, they were thrilled to have the opportunity to actually talk face to face with the minister. And we went around the table and each one of the employees got to talk about their position. They got to talk about what they do within their position.

But they also got to talk about what they could foresee and a vision of where they thought our department should be and what we should be focusing on. And, you know, they actually presented some of these initiatives themselves where they wanted to pursue opportunities for our government in efficiencies. And that was really encouraging because, you know, in the difficult position our government was in financially, facing the deficit that we were facing and the cost of dealing with that deficit, and it was the employees that were putting forward information where they saw that within their own offices the inefficiencies that happened.

And, you know, that was really appreciated because they understood what we were dealing with, but they also understood what their jobs were and they understood what was needed in northern Manitoba to make their communities more sustainable, and we listened.

And, you know, we're talking about two positions here that were—became vacant for whatever reason, but we're actually getting better quality of work done. They are excited about having a little bit of extra responsibilities in some areas, and it's really encouraging when, as Cabinet ministers or as a government overall, that we see that our employees are working with us because we have the same goals and the same efficiencies. And, you know, to engage them in the reorganization of our department speaks very highly of how they look at their job within our

government, but also how they look at their job in their delivery of services to the people that they're working on behalf of.

* (10:40)

So we're really excited about the, you know, filling the positions that still remain vacant in northern Manitoba, and even talking with our director there, our manager, Freda Albert, and her praise of the staff and the work that they're doing filling the voids that exist there right now is remarkable because they are doing everything they can to ensure that there—the delivery of services is not being affected and that they are covering over every possible position that is vacant. And I know that they are also working very hard to fill the positions that need to be filled.

Mr. Swan: I'm sorry, did—does the minister expect us to believe that the employees of—in a department were the ones who came up with the idea of cutting two positions within Northern Affairs branch in a department that already has an 18.5 per cent vacancy rate? Is that what the minister's suggesting?

Ms. Clarke: Absolutely not. I did not indicate that. I'm just saying that they felt that—they provided so much information to us. It's hard to understand, I guess, when you're not there and you haven't met with staff that work in northern and remote areas and the challenges that they face going forward that we don't face when we live in urban areas in the southern part of the province, et cetera, and the distances they have to travel to work with the people of their communities that they serve.

But they came forward with great ideas. No, they didn't sit there and say, well, we can do this with less staff, we can do it with this. But, because they were enthusiastic about their jobs going forward and, you know, just the fact that they were actually asked and somebody listened to them and cared about them in their positions in the North and the challenges that they faced, that—invariably—I don't know about the previous government, but I—it would be interesting to look back and see what the previous government—that those positions were actually filled at all times, as well. Because my guess would be that they weren't.

Mr. Swan: Well, just so it's clear, I do agree that government employees do great jobs and they are looking to find ways to improve the work that I do.

But I asked the question because the minister seemed to be putting on the record that it was the

employees' idea to reduce those positions, and I'm glad she's corrected the record to say that it was not. And, again, I hope the department's successful in filling those positions in northern Manitoba. It's fair to say that there are challenges in filling vacancies. And—but, of course, we have a Premier (Mr. Pallister) who said he couldn't imagine why anybody wouldn't want to work for this government. But, like many things the Premier says, it doesn't always work out to be the case.

And that's a good segue into the issue of night hunting. We know that it's been raised by the Premier on numerous occasions. It is a serious issue and a safety issue, which I think everybody accepts. But, unfortunately, as the minister knows, the Premier decided to approach it in a way that created a lot of harm and a lot of hurt and a lot of anger, most obviously in his comments that the practice was leading to a, quote, race war, end quote, in the province. Those are not comments the minister made and those are not comments I know the minister would make.

What role does the minister play in developing a policy on night hunting for the province, which, I presume, is going to be included in the legislation that we'll be seeing next week?

Madam Chairperson: I do want to remind members that we are getting very close to discussing a bill on the Order Paper that has not yet been introduced into the House. I want you all to be very careful with your comments at this point.

Ms. Clarke: I just want to go back for one minute, if I could, in regards to, you know, the employees and the great work that they do for our government. We heard just this past week about the Transformational Capital Fund. And, you know, this speaks very clearly to the meetings that I had with our staff in northern Manitoba—which is almost two years ago, unbelievably—but—and we were so enthusiastic listening to them in both locations, because they had a lot to say. And, you know, being a new minister in government, I was so impressed with how deeply they were engaged in their jobs and the information they brought forward.

And, you know, this new capital fund that our Premier just introduced, you know, it gives these types of employees within our government to bring forward their ideas where they actually—they can bring them to us. And it goes back to Healthy Child, when we're talking about Healthy Child and committees and so on and so forth. You know, we

don't have to have always a formalized committee to have really great ideas coming forward.

There are a lot of stakeholders in this province that can really be influential and may come up forward with really good decisions. And as a government, the fact that we acknowledged that, I'm really proud of that. So I'd just like to put that on record.

Mr. Swan: Well, since the minister put that on the record, it was fascinating when there were some questions of another minister about this \$50-million capital fund, and the minister couldn't actually say how much of that would be hired on yet more private consultants.

How much of that \$50 million is actually going to be allocated for the minister's department?

Ms. Clarke: I just want to put on record that all departments in our government have the opportunity to participate in this strategy. And I think, going forward, we have a lot to learn from the people that we work with and beyond.

And I think the fact that we're a government that actually recognizes that good ideas come from, you know—we're looking for initiatives here that are not—that are going to be value for money, first off, that are going to promote better teamwork. And I would have to say, within our government we have great teamwork, not only at the Cabinet level, but in our caucus and beyond.

And, you know, when I look at my staff in particular—which I have a more closer relationship, of course, than I do with other departments—but when I sit and talk with my staff, whether it's in Winnipeg, Thompson, Dauphin, when I talk to our First Nations—and, you know, our staff has direct contact with them when they're working on different issues—some really great ideas come forward.

And I think the fact that we have the opportunity to capitalize on that as a province—I think that speaks very loudly that we value everyone that we work with and we value their ideas.

And they are going to have to be very innovative to, you know, be champions in this endeavour. And I think, overall, we should all be very excited to see what does come forward.

I think it's just a great opportunity to listen to people that aren't necessarily just around the Cabinet table. I think this is a good initiative. I really do.

Mr. Swan: Okay, so, again, since the minister raised it, I'm just going to try and understand, from the minister's perspective, how this works, then. We're told there's a \$50-million capital fund. An employee in the department has a good idea, as employees in the department, other departments, have had for a long time. Then where does the \$50 million come in? What does that get spent on?

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Ms. Clarke: Well, clearly, that money will be spent on that initiative, but, when we're looking at initiative, perhaps \$50 million, but that particular initiative may save the government many more millions of dollars than the 50 that's initially going to be spent on it. So it's a new initiative. It's—we look forward to seeing the outcomes, and it should be exciting.

Mr. Swan: Why—I'm still not really understanding how this works. So, again—and it's understood and we're not suggesting it should be a bonus system. If you're an employee who comes up with a great idea to save a million dollars, you don't get an extra \$10,000 bonus. That's not what this is intended for, we both agree on that. I'm just, I'm having trouble understanding then, an idea comes forward, does that mean the government then hires KPMG then to do a value-for-money audit? And the \$50 million, like the other millions of dollars, then goes out the door to more accountants? Or what exactly is this \$50 million going to be used for? Because I'm at a loss as the government's explained it so far, and I appreciate the minister talking about it today.

Ms. Clarke: Well, I think we need to be very clear. There will be no personal bonuses. This isn't a government that operates that way. We work as a team and we're looking at initiatives. This is a department. We're looking at projects and/or other opportunities, and I think one that I could probably—I'm going to use as an example, that something—an initiative that this government has undertaken in the past two years would probably be a good one if it wasn't already a—something that we're already doing so. And that's the basket funding to municipalities, you know, whereby they get their sum of money to now spend in whatever capacity they need and where there's not in-takes on grants and funds just all over the place, all different times of the year.

You know, streamlining a process and, you know, when you think about how things used to be in municipalities—and I have a lot of experience in that area. When I look at municipalities now having a

single lens to apply, and I think of the CAOs out in our municipalities and the chaos that there used to be meeting deadlines and meeting criteria and all the different communities that could sometimes never apply for a lump-sum of funding because they didn't fit the criteria. And yet they needed something else so desperately, but there was no funding for that. So I think from a government perspective that is probably a really example of something going forward that could've been, could've been a real champion, but we've already done it.

So, you know, it's those types of things whereby there's a lot of efficiencies to be gained and we are looking for those kinds of efficiencies. We are still in a deficit position. We are still paying a lot of money on that debt servicing, but as our Premier (Mr. Pallister) has alluded to already, we're going in the right direction. But our team is much bigger than the people that you see at our Cabinet table, at our caucus table. Our team expands wide beyond that, and I think the recognition that we have for our staff and the work that they're doing and the ideas that they have is significant.

Mr. Swan: All right, so the example we've been given is freezing transit funding, for example is it—the kind of example that we'll see as the \$50-million capital fund gets rolled out. So that's disappointing. I appreciate it's not the minister's fund and the minister didn't set up the rules for it, but that does not give us a lot of comfort.

But I did—we got into this, somehow, when I asked a question about night hunting. And I appreciate the caution from the Chairperson that we're not talking about specifics. But I wonder if the minister could tell me what role she played and has played in developing a policy on night hunting for the province?

Ms. Clarke: I'm really pleased to respond to that because I did with—work with our previous minister of Sustainable Development when this issue was brought forward, and we all know that it was brought forward for very significant reasons and it is a concern for people's lives. And safe hunting is something that not only my department, but, of course, our government overall takes very, very seriously.

I was in direct contact last summer when a young man in the northern part of our province was accidentally shot. I was in contact with the CAO and the reeve of that municipality almost on an hourly

basis from the time that incident happened. So it makes it very real.

I've also been involved, in regards to our personal business, whereby a brother ended up shooting his own brother. He died. And seeing the terrible, tragic events that follow these kinds of incidents, it's too familiar.

So I had the opportunity with our previous minister of Sustainable Development to go to Turtle Lodge. We spent a full day at Turtle Lodge with numerous chiefs and some of the council members. It was specifically to talk to the elders.

They also brought in experts from other areas, United States, from their conservation people, to talk about safe hunting practices, specifically in regards to First Nations that they had dealt with there, some of the initiatives that they had taken forward in discussions and as a result of these discussions with their First Nations.

It was a very humbling experience to be there, especially listening to the elders speaking to their hunting practices from the early days, why they hunted, how they hunted and what hunting meant to them. They also talked about night hunting and their culture. It was really informative. It was a very sombre day, I have to say.

We also listened to some of the younger chiefs and some of their council members on what hunting meant to them, culturally. And their views of hunting wasn't exactly the same, but that was to be respected.

But, you know, they had an honest discussion. There was also some elders there, mothers, grandmothers, who spoke about hunting, and they spoke about the depletion of stock, especially moose meat that they really depend on for their livelihood. And, you know, they talked about sport hunting—a lot of the hunting that's done in our province is sport hunting now—and their concerns for sport hunting.

So, yes, I've had a lot of direct engagement with our First Nations, the Metis Federation, of course, and the northern affairs communities. And, when we're talking hunting, the views on hunting are very diversified.

But the one thing that is in common—it doesn't matter who I've talked to and the discussions that we've had—everyone agrees safe hunting is got to be a priority, and that is something that I think we all respect. And, going forward, that has to be the highest priority.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the minister for talking about what must have been a very full day at Turtle Lodge discussing very serious issues.

What other consultation, then, has the minister conducted, or led, regarding this issue since the issue really rose in January of 2017?

Ms. Clarke: It—I have had these discussions in meeting with individual chiefs and councils in regards to their communities, just hunting in general and, again, their hunting practices. They are—they're very concerned, because there has been loss of life within their communities as well. So, again, safe hunting was the discussion. That's the discussion I've had with most, and also the discussion on hunting to provide the food for their communities.

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And it's kind of interesting, because even in the—I have a First Nation within my constituency, and following—you know, just having discussions with some of the elders there. And they have very specific—in fact, when we were in—last in Norway House and—with my staff for a very significant event there, and it was the particular season when they have—it was their spring feast. And they celebrate a spring feast and the main staple food there is rabbit, and they had rabbit soup and they had rabbit. And it was amazing to see the excitement within that community.

It was such an enlightening event to be there and to see how excited they were about this particular hunting of rabbits and how the younger generation goes out. They brought back all this rabbit. And that community of—there was literally hundreds of people in there. But it's a big deal. This spring feast is such a big deal. It made me understand more so hunting to them is not just a sport. It's not a sport. It's their livelihood. It's what they do.

But the elders, the fact that the younger generation brings them food, and that is part of their culture. It's overwhelming. And, you know, it wasn't—and again, they want their hunters to go out and they want them to come back at the end of the day.

So to think that they don't want safe hunting is—that's a priority for them, too, and that's why they teach their younger generation from very young up hunting—safe hunting practices. But they make them understand, too, that it is not just to hunt to hunt. They hunt for cultural purposes. They hunt to feed their people.

From my department, that is the perspective we look at hunting. That—we work with Sustainable Development, of course, because we have had engagement with our indigenous people as well as northern communities and we will continue to work with all of our stakeholders to ensure that there's a clear understanding and the utmost respect going forward in regards to safe hunting practices.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that answer, and in the discussions that the minister has reported there were obviously concerns about night hunting. But the minister also mentioned concerns about sport hunting. Are there communities that, then, have called on the minister to advocate for reductions in certain areas of sport hunting to make sure that there's adequate food, then, available for indigenous communities?

Ms. Clarke: This was an issue discussed at turtle island—Turtle Lodge in regards—some of the grandmothers from the farther northern part of the 'provice' are concerned about moose, the depletion of moose.

And I know from our department and 'sustainable' development there is a count being done. So they are taking this very seriously and—to ensure that there is adequate food for the northern communities that absolutely can't afford to buy any other types of meat. They just—it's just not affordable for them.

And, after all, this is their food of preference. This is what they have—that's been their livelihood is living on the wild meat and they have the utmost respect for that.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister for that. So can we expect there'll be any measures to deal with that issue as well?

Ms. Clarke: As I indicated, there's already a study going on with Sustainable Development counting the moose in the northern part of our province.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister.

Now, does the minister agree that there is section 35 of the Charter and other constitutional issues raised by the practice of night hunting by indigenous people?

Ms. Clarke: Well, as I've indicated, we have been working with Sustainable Development right from day one in regards to safe hunting practices. We've had Crown consultations directly at the community level, which I've also already indicated, and we will

continue to have input towards potential policy and legislation. And, again, we do that following discussions that we've already had and will continue to have with our First Nations or anyone throughout the province where we have the opportunity to meet and to discuss these issues.

Mr. Swan: That's fine, but just—I'm asking a specific question. Does the minister agree that there are constitutional issues that are raised by dealing with the issue of night hunting?

Ms. Clarke: Yes, as I've indicated, we'll continue to work with Sustainable Development. We know that, as indicated, this is a bill that's going to be coming forward, and we look forward to respectful dialogue within our department and any other stakeholders that we're going to be meeting with.

Mr. Swan: That wasn't the question. The question is whether this minister accepts that moves to impact night hunting raise section 35 and other constitutional issues. Does the minister agree with that or not?

Ms. Clarke: No.

Mr. Swan: So the minister is clearly stating today that, in her view, the regulation, or the banning of night hunting, is not a constitutional issue and does not require any constitutional consultations with First Nations?

Ms. Clarke: Okay, just a clarification when you're asking a yes/no question. Like, potentially, there could be an impact on treaty and Aboriginal rights but not necessarily. As I've indicated—and I think we all know this is a really sensitive issue. And, you know, as a government and specifically within my department, I know how sensitive this is. And I know how—and I think we all know how one word can be taken totally out of context and can really cause a lot of problems. And, I think, in all respect for the people that I represent as First Nations, Northern Affairs communities, I want to respect their rights all the way, as does our government.

But we do have to find successful solutions going forward. Lives are being lost, people are being injured, people are scared, and, as a government, we are going to make good decisions. But the only way that we can do this is going to be ongoing consultations.

* (11:10)

There has to be dialogue. And that—you know, our department is one hundred per cent committed to

having that dialogue with our First Nations people, with their input, and that's how we address every single issue within our department.

This one definitely, you know, this is not like healthy food, this one is not like a flood, this one—there's lives lost. And, you know, we know how sensitive it is. We don't want that to happen to anyone. But we also want to respect our First Nations and we will respect our First Nations. We'll not only respect their treaty rights but we will respect their hunting for cultural purposes. We certainly respect that. I respect it even more now because I truly understand it. I've been there. I've seen it. I've talked to them. I've talked to those elders, especially the grandmothers, who, you know, they are so proud of their young hunters. This is their tradition. I get that.

But do they want their children, their grandsons, granddaughters—you know, the granddaughters are hunting too, and they're proud of that.

This is a very sensitive issue, but we, as a government, we have to make decisions. And we will always respect the treaty rights of our indigenous people.

Mr. Swan: Well, I think I agree with the minister that words do matter, and it's why the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) words were so damaging and inflamed an already difficult issue. The words in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which preserve treaty rights, are also important and have taken on a great importance in terms of dealing with issues.

Does the minister take the position that any of the meetings that she's had—her day in Turtle Lodge or other meetings with First Nations or with elders or with organizations—does she believe that that has been a constitutional consultation, or does she believe that that's not necessary?

Ms. Clarke: You keep referring to words that have been said in the past by others, not by myself. And I think, as a previous minister in government, you know very clearly how words spoken can be taken out of context. I think you understand that as good as anybody, because when you are a political figure in the public, and especially in the media, they are looking for every crack that they can find to discredit you. And I think that is, clearly, has been the case in the past and it will continue to be the case. And it's even more so critical when it's an issue that affects everyone, really. This particular issue affects everyone.

And, clearly, as I've indicated, the consultations that I have with the First Nations—all indigenous people all across Manitoba, whether it's young hunters or elders, whatever—we will continue those consultations. I have given them a commitment that my door is open, and if they have concerns or they have issues, that my door is always open to them, regardless.

And I don't expect—because they are northern and it's very costly for them to travel, and that's why I make the effort to go to their communities. I can make one trip to the northern part of our province, which I plan on doing this summer, taking a week and just going and visiting all the northern communities, ones that I specifically have already indicated I'm going to go to.

And when I go, we have discussions on so many issues. And it's kind of interesting. But, you know, very seldom is the issue of hunting brought up other than the fact that in their celebrations and their ceremonies, the type of food that they have, the significance of that, the pride they have in that.

I know you have a lot of questions in regards to this particular issue and you've already acknowledged that this does not come under the Department of Indigenous and Northern Relations. We certainly are proud to be able to have this dialogue with our First Nations.

We feel in the past two years that we have gained a lot of trust and respect from our First Nations and indigenous people throughout the North and the province and that we—they now feel that we can have an open dialogue and that opportunity for them is always there.

So this issue has been on the table for a while, and we certainly acknowledge that it will continue to be an issue that's discussed. And we will definitely be listening to our First Nations and indigenous people.

Mr. Swan: Well, first just to make it abundantly clear: I'm not suggesting that the words the Premier (Mr. Pallister) chose to put on the record in any way reflected the words or the views of this minister. But, unfortunately, we know that, as the minister, sometimes you have to deal with the fallout of things that happen elsewhere in government.

But the minister has put on the record that she believes there may be an impact, may but not necessarily, be an impact on treaty rights.

I appreciate that the minister is not the only one dealing with this issue, but the question I have is very clear: Does the minister believe that the consultation she's had have reached the level of constitutional consultations, under section 35, or not?

Ms. Clarke: I'd just like to acknowledge and put on record, as of today, there is still a formalized consultation process that's ongoing at the staff level, and I think that's very significant. And I will say, once again, that the discussions within my department and along with my staff, myself and our indigenous people, those consultations and those opportunities for dialogue will always be there.

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

And her department has not provided any support or other assistance to any First Nation community or nation or organization, under section 35, keeping in mind there may be other areas of government that may have taken on that responsibility. I'm just talking about the minister's own department.

Ms. Clarke: Well, as I indicated right from the onset, we have been working with Sustainable Development. They are the lead in this initiative, and we will continue to work, you know, along with any other department, whether it's Sustainable Development, whatever issues, we continue to support our other departments.

But our main goal, definitely, is making sure that we are consulting with our indigenous leadership and their communities.

Mr. Swan: And, again, just getting to the minister's comment that there may or may not be an impact on treaty rights, has the department received a legal opinion on that issue?

Ms. Clarke: I think you could probably clearly understand that legal would come under Sustainable Development, and I'm sure that they've been working—I would certainly believe that they'd be working with legal advice on this issue.

Mr. Swan: I thank the minister. And just really one question before we move on.

Does the minister believe that geographic considerations ought to play a role in what a framework to ban night hunting would look like?

Madam Chairperson: I am going to remind members, once again, that this legislation has not

been introduced into the House at this point. The discussions now have become too close to discussing the bills and the potential content of bills coming forward, and we do not want to have a situation where we have more members who are not present to discuss bills to have an opportunity to raise a matter of privilege in the House.

Ms. Clarke: And, for that reason, I will not comment on that question.

Mr. Swan: In the course of her day of consultation and her other meetings, has she heard from individuals or groups that believe that there should be geographic considerations taken into account on that issue?

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Ms. Clarke: The only geographic—and I indicated to you already, the only discussion we had geographically was our elder grandmothers who expressed depletion of moose in the northern part of the province. That was the main concern that's been issued, you know, in a general way.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I have a number of issues I want to address with the minister, but I wonder if I can just get some clarification on some answers that she's given so far. I understand that the deputy minister for Education and Training is also serving as deputy minister—acting deputy minister for Indigenous Affairs. So when will a deputy minister be hired to serve as a full-time deputy minister?

Ms. Clarke: I don't think I indicated that the acting deputy minister would be hired. I said there was a competition out to hire a deputy minister from our department. I have no date on that. I do not do the human resources within my department.

Mr. Allum: Okay, maybe I misunderstood what you were saying. I guess I'm at a loss to understand how in a department as ginormous as Education and Training there would be time to do indigenous affairs at the same time, and so I'm assuming that's a temporary situation, and so the question was, when will a deputy minister be hired?

Ms. Clarke: Well, again, Mr. Wilson's title, clearly, is acting deputy minister, and I think that in itself would indicate that that is a temporary situation. I've also indicated that there's a competition open to hire and this is a very—has been advertised very broadly to hire a deputy minister for, specifically, Indigenous and Northern Relations. But I would have to also

add, Mr. Wilson has brought a great deal of knowledge of our department while still doing his work in Education and Training.

We also have some very talented staff here, as I've already indicated, that have been in this department a very long time and are doing a great job. And we aren't just doing status quo, getting through the days, you know, with the staff that we've got and an acting deputy minister.

When I think back to a year ago when I was the minister of two, what I consider, very distinct departments within our government: municipal and indigenous relations. We had one minister and we had two deputies. Now in that capacity we have two ministers and a deputy as well as an acting deputy, and you know what? We managed just fine. We're doing good. We're doing well. All the issues are addressed. We have no backlog in our workload at all. In fact, we have—we've actually done a significant—what I consider a significant amount of work and I can't praise my staff enough for the work that they do, and that includes the staff in the North, as I've indicated. You know, it's difficult for them to work without direct—you know, directly meeting with us every week. But we have phone conference calls with the staff and our department is in no way suffering at the this point.

However, having said that, we look forward to a full-time deputy minister in this department. We still have a lot of on-going work. We've accomplished amazing things. We've got—Operation Return Home, and those families are finally home after seven years, great things happening there. Shoal Lake road is under construction. I could just go on and on and on about the good things that are happening, and you know, we've had shifts in departments. We've had shifts in staff, and I'm sure, coming from a previous government, you totally understand that because nothing is status quo forever. But, when you work with qualified, professional staff that know their job, they can actually go from department to 'partment' because they have knowledge of what's going on and they have knowledge of what our goals are as government, and I think that's significant.

Mr. Allum: Yes, I thank the minister for that. I just asked when. That's not the question; I just wanted to reiterate, I just asked when the full-time—one would think that a minister would want a full-time, permanent deputy minister, not a part-time acting deputy, but maybe I have a different perspective on that.

You also—the minister also indicated that she had—the department has an 18.5 per cent vacancy rate. That's a remarkably consistent number that we've heard throughout Estimates. Is that a government target?

Ms. Clarke: Okay. I'll just—in regards to the deputy minister, I expect it will be very soon. Stay tuned. *[interjection]*

Yes. We're—it's a process, as you know. They've got—I'm not sure exact closing date for the applications, but I have heard from our Premier (Mr. Pallister) that they are really excited about the number of applications. I think that's something to be really excited about. And indications were that they're looking for someone that really, really fits this department. I think that's encouraging. So I'm excited, but I'm not concerned because I know we've got great HR people that are going to put somebody really great into our department to replace somebody great that we've already go there. So no concerns or worries from my perspective, going forward. I look forward to it.

In regards to vacancies, as I've indicated, our vacancies are most specifically in the northern part of the province. And I, certainly, understand first-hand from being there. We literally walked from office to office in Thompson and—about why that vacancy was there. And, you know, Freda had absolutely the best information. She not only told me when that vacancy occurred, why it occurred, but who was covering off on that job, and it was really reassuring. She literally had every position covered, whether it was from herself or whoever. And I just have a great deal of confidence in her management skills there.

We all experience this. I've been in business myself where, you know, I've had staff shortages, and sometimes I just couldn't even find the right person that I needed for my specific course—or—of action in my business. And, I mean, that happens within government too. You're very well aware of that.

And is there a target within our government at this rate? Absolutely not. We are doing—we're doing things differently than the previous government, and I'm actually very proud of that. Things needed to change, without a doubt. But are we targeting to work with minimal staff? No. We're targeting to work with really qualified staff, staff that's engaged. We also realize that staff have to be happy in their positions, and I have to say, for the most part—

clearly, I can only speak to my staff, but they come in with a really positive meeting—attitude.

And, actually, really proud of the goals that we've accomplished. And that's really encouraging, because it sure gives us a lot of enthusiasm to keep going. And, by doing so, we're also meeting needs of the people that we're serving within our department. And, when we're talking about engagement with our leadership in our communities, I think that's where it's most significant, because I have seen a real change in their attitude, going forward. They are coming to trust us and to work with us, and we are accomplishing really significant goals.

I met with the chief and council just a week ago, and they had such an extensive list. And we kind of got a handle on where they were coming from. And, you know, it went back 10 and 15 years, and they were simple issues, but they were never addressed. And so I've made commitment to this one particular community that I'm going to specifically work with them—myself and my staff—and we're going to start checking off those issues, so that they've got peace of mind. They were prepared to barricade a significant highway because they didn't think anybody would listen. That's the first opportunity. And, when I heard that this was going to happen, I invited them in. They were so happy to be there. In one hour, we established a timeline; we established a meeting, a second meeting to go forward. You can't do that without good staff, and I think that speaks really highly on our department.

* (11:30)

Mr. Allum: The Premier, in discussing, once upon a time, the night hunting issue, said that it was a practice that could lead to a race war. In relation to the MMF agreement, he said that money was hush money or persuasion money. Do you agree with that characterization? Does the minister agree with that characterization?

Ms. Clarke: I'm not going to speak to words that our Premier has said. He has the opportunity speak as he wishes.

As I've indicated, what's important to myself, my department, is the dialogue and the consultations we have with the people that we are representing in this government. And they have been most respectful and they will continue to be just that.

Mr. Allum: Well, presumably, when a premier uses such language or when a premier speaks in general, he's speaking for the entire government. So unless I

hear it from you now—from the minister now—I would assume that she shares those sentiments and that characterization of those issues, unless she's willing to put on the record right now that she doesn't share those views.

Ms. Clarke: Well, clearly, you can have whatever assumptions you wish to have. That's your opportunity to do that. I can only speak to the relationships that I share with the people that I'm representing and specifically, as I've indicated, we've got 64 First Nations, 52 Northern Affairs communities, as well as the Metis Federation. And the Metis Federation, as well—President Chartrand and I have an—actually, an excellent working relationship, and I would like to acknowledge that he's been reclaimed as president for the Manitoba Metis Federation going forward for another term.

These relationships don't just happen. When I came into power—or when I was appointed as the Minister of Indigenous Relations two years ago, one of the first events I went to—I think it was even in the first week that I attended—and it was with our federal minister Carolyn Bennett and it was with the Metis Federation. And when I walked through the door, President Chartrand was there to greet me and he literally threw his arms around me and, I'll say, tried to lift me off the ground. That's not an easy feat. But anyway, he was so excited because he had not had dialogue with a government official in 10 years, and that was—that's his exact words.

And since that time I've met several times with President Chartrand and, you know, there, too, a very respectful relationship. And the fact that we always have the understanding that we will not always agree on everything, they have a perspective on issues sometimes that is what they feel best represents their people. And we have a job to do as a government.

And as there—you're right. You indicate the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is the head of our team, and I have great respect for him, absolutely. And—but when I meet with the people of this province, our indigenous people, I have grown to have such a respect for the way they present themselves and—regardless of the issue that we're talking about. And, I mean, they have many issues that really concern them and they're not going to go away. We have an understanding that this is a long-term process. You don't catch up in one year, two years or four years, whatever. So we have made priorities of certain issues that have to be addressed right away and a lot of those issues are issues that are carried over. We're

working, really, with great success on a positive relationship so that they feel that they do have a voice in government.

And I think that's the difference you've brought forward. You know, some very significant issues this morning, and I indicated they're sensitive issues. But, you know, I think there's great pride in the fact that we can sit with them and talk about these sensitive issues and have an understanding, and I think they always leave the meeting feeling that they have been listened to and I think that's important. And I try to my best ability when I'm discussing their issues, whether it's with my staff, with our Cabinet, with our caucus or with the Premier, for that matter, that I ensure that their issues are brought forward in a really respectful manner and that they know that one conversation doesn't end it, that there can be many more whether it's in form of a formal consultation like we've had a Turtle Lodge, or a meeting in my office, or a meeting in their community.

There's always going to be differences opinion, but that just leads to good government. I've learnt a lot, and I'll continue to learn, but these dialogues and consultations will continue.

Mr. Allum: Well, it's not—it's sad commentary, I guess I have to say, that when the Premier, and he's quoted as saying so on the public record, that night head—night hunting is a practice that could potentially promote a race war; when he describes an agreement between Manitoba Hydro and MMF as hush money and persuasion money; that a minister of the Crown, a minister of the Crown who is responsible for indigenous affairs is not prepared to take issue with that kind of language.

I don't know how in the world that would promote reconciliation. I don't know how in the world that would promote dialogue. I don't know how in the world that would promote understanding, and, I think, judging by what's on the public record with President Chartrand, he's not feeling any peace, love and understanding from the government these days.

When was the last time the minister spoke to President Chartrand, and has she spoken to him since Cabinet ditched the agreement between Hydro and MMF?

Ms. Clarke: I am really happy to answer that question because I was probably the first member of our government, and more specifically our Cabinet, to meet President Chartrand after this

significant event, and I was, I think, to say slightly overwhelmed is even putting it mildly, at his response to me. And I think that really speaks to relationships.

I was not apprehensive. I had to go speak at an event, a Manitoba Metis Federation national event within days. I was, as I indicated, I believe the first minister or caucus member to have that opportunity. I was not intimidated to go. I was not apprehensive to go, because I know President Chartrand quite well. I've met with him on many occasions, and we've had some really engaging and interesting conversations, to say the least.

He's a very dynamic man, and he's a tough guy. He represents the Manitoba Metis Federation in a very strong and effective way, but, when I walked into that event, he was the first one of—to greet me, a big smile on his face, and welcome me. I probably had more photo requests at that particular event from his ministers and the Metis people than I've ever had, and I have a great relationship with all of them, all across our province.

You know, that just clearly shows a high level of professionalism. He has an issue with our government; however, he deals with it in the appropriate manner. Going forward, he's meeting with our minister of Crowns, and they are working on the issue. I have high respect for both of these individuals, going forward.

But it in no way infringed on me being at that particular event. It was a CFS event. I was welcomed in a way that I am always welcomed, and we spoke very briefly about this particular issue. It is not in my portfolio and we didn't elaborate on it, but we both agreed he was dealing with it, and he would continue to deal with it in his own way. But we would never allow it to interfere with the good work that we're actually doing together.

And I couldn't have been happier being at that particular event. And I actually shared this with my colleagues, as many of them I saw and told them what a great experience it had been, and how proud I was of his professional and very distinguished way of dealing with it in the proper parameters.

* (11:40)

And, you know, I'm just finding, with the questioning coming forward today, where you're trying to spread one issue in—and pit different government departments aside from each other or individuals that are outside of government. You

know, when you can have someone like President Chartrand boldly say: You know what, this issue belongs here; you and I are dealing with this; we are going to go forward; we're going forward in a positive manner for all the people that we're representing here today—that speaks volumes for me.

Mr. Allum: Well, the line of questioning isn't pitting government against the MMF. Government has pitted itself against the MMF by describing the agreement as hush money and persuasion money. In fact, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) described it as that.

Premier also described the Manitoba Metis Federation, the Metis people, as a special interest group in our province who may not—and that the MMF itself may not actually represent the Metis people of Manitoba, all of which is not us dividing, but your Premier and your government doing that very divisive thing. So let the record show who's actually stating things and who's simply asking questions about it.

Did your department have any role in reviewing the MMF agreement?

Ms. Clarke: Well, as you can clearly understand, I'm a Cabinet minister, and you have been a Cabinet minister. You know that there's discussions that are carried in confidence, and there are some that are public.

But again, I want to 'reiterate', you know, the Premier chooses his own words, and I have my own experiences.

And, specifically, you want to go with the Manitoba Metis Federation. I can't speak highly enough about the work that is happening with the Manitoba Metis Federation. The meetings that I've had with President Chartrand, you know, they can become very intense because that's the kind of leader he is. He's a strong—he provides strong leadership for his people. And he has a great following. I've been to their AGAs, and they have, like, 3,000 people there. Manitoba Metis Federation in Manitoba is—they're a huge, a huge group of people. But they're very positive, and I think that, again, speaks highly of strong leadership.

They're proud of who they are and they work together also as a strong team. They have their different cabinet ministers and their own structure within their own group.

But I've also been to their communities that are high population of Metis people, and one of them is

St. Laurent. And I went for their Canada Day celebrations—not last year, the year before—and I got to spend some time with their mayor and understand the Metis people a lot better. And it was a great day. I got to meet some of their elders and I got to meet many of the ministers that were there. And it was such a welcoming event and such a great experience.

I think we all recognize, whether we're in government, whether we're in business, whether we're the Metis Federation, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, we all have a job to do. And the job to do is to represent the people in the best way possible.

And I think we all know, going into—when we're elected into a position and chosen by the people to lead in whatever way that we do—and, for myself, elected as an MLA but then appointed as a minister in this elite government that we're in—and to work with colleagues that are all focused on doing the right thing for people of Manitoba, we have to take a high road and we have to expect and respect that there's going to be different decisions, there's going to be controversial issues, there's going to be sensitive issues. And we will never, as long as we're here, we will never accomplish all our goals. We understand that. We may accomplish some, but not always to the level.

But I think that the progress that we have made with all indigenous leadership and communities has become extremely respectful. And I couldn't be more proud of that. And the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and I have had that discussion, and he has been very supportive of the work that my team does within this government.

I've also had the opportunity and had these same discussions with all our grand chiefs, and we all focus—you know, our grand chiefs also have many, many issues to deal with. And, at the end of the day, we always agree that were not always going to be on the same page.

We're not always going to deal with everything in the same way. But, if we can leave a meeting with the same mutual respect, that's huge, and that's what we'll continue to do.

Mr. Allum: It doesn't sound like the minister's actually had a meeting; it sounds like you've met for a nice little chit-chat at an event you're at or some other thing you're doing.

I asked you when—if you've met—had a meeting with President Chartrand since Cabinet ditched the

agreement between the MMF and Hydro. I also heard the minister just say that her department did not participate in the review of the Hydro agreement, and yet the Crown minister—and I was sitting right here the other day—said that all departments participated in a review of the Hydro agreement.

So I want to give her last—a chance to—give the minister a chance to clarify. Did her department participate in that review? And, if so, who undertook that review in the department? And then finally what were the conclusions of the department's review of that agreement?

Ms. Clarke: Well, I think the member opposite understands that Cabinet is all departments and that we do have discussions in Cabinet. You've been there; you understand that.

Going forward, and, in regards to my meetings with President Chartrand, I don't know if you're aware, but most recently he's been in a campaign for his position that was called—within this past few weeks' time frame. He was just acclaimed this week.

So he has been actually campaigning. I am available to President Chartrand at any time. He clearly has indicated if he needs to meet with me, I will be getting a phone call from him. He has not called phoning asking for a meeting, and I've had no specific reason to call him and ask for a meeting.

As indicated, he is dealing with our Crown's corporation right now, and, from all intents and purposes, I think that's the way he wants it. Clearly, if it wasn't, I know President Chartrand well enough that if he felt that he needed to meet with me, he would be calling. And I would make absolutely ever effort to meet with him at the earliest possible convenience.

And, to indicate that I don't have meetings with him, just have chit-chats, you could not be more wrong. Our meetings with President Chartrand are always lengthy. And we met with him prior to the issue that you're referring to, and we had a very in-depth meeting on various issues that—within his mandate representing the Metis people of Manitoba. And we'll continue to have those meetings; there's no doubt about it.

Absolutely a great relationship there. And the same thing within our government and our Cabinet and departments. I'm always at the Cabinet table, and, going forward, if there's any requests that come to our department, we're always there and ready to participate in any level possible.

Mr. Allum: So, then, there's quite an inconsistency between the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and the minister of Crowns. The minister of Crowns plainly said, at this specific table just a few days ago, that it was a whole of government undertaking to review the agreement with MMF and Hydro. Presumably, that means that the minister's department played a role in that review, not just her at the Cabinet table talking about the issue but her department. That's what the minister for Crown lands clearly stated.

So the question is: Who undertook that review in her department?

* (11:50)

Ms. Clarke: Well, I was not at that committee, that you were with the Crown minister, of course. And how you're interpreting his words, you know, that is your version of what he's said and that's how you've interpreted it. I wasn't there to hear it. So I won't comment on his words. That's—you were at the committee meeting. You had every opportunity to ask him to expand on that, if you chose to, and perhaps you'll have that opportunity again. I'm not sure. But I wasn't part of that conversation, so I don't know exactly the words that were spoken by the Crown's minister and, therefore, I can't allude to what he may have been thinking, or saying, or how you've interpreted it.

Mr. Allum: So that agreement had been around for six months, eight months, prior to it being ditched by Cabinet. So there must've been opportunity for members of the department to review it, just as the Crown minister's said was taken for the whole of government. At what point in those eight months, did the department of indigenous affairs review the MMF-Hydro agreement?

Ms. Clarke: Well, again, you're referring to comments that the minister for Crowns has made. I was not part of that conversation. I did not sit at that particular committee.

So I'm not going to comment on what he said, what you interpreted him to say. You know, you could reflect back to him and, you know, get him to expand on what—but I, clearly, was not part of that conversation.

Mr. Allum: I'm surprised the minister doesn't have Hansard beside her bed each night reviewing it in full. But, in fact, and I'm quoting here, quoting what the minister for Crowns said, quote: "It was a whole-of-government review because a lot of departments would have an interest in this particular and very

unique proposal," as it was brought forward to government.

So the question again: Who in the department reviewed the agreement and when did that happen?

Ms. Clarke: I think that clearly indicates—I think your words were most of government? So, clearly, you're not giving full, you know, there's not a full disclosure of what those comments meant, or how it was said. So, you know, for me to comment on another minister's words without having actually been there to hear it, it would be senseless for me to comment on it.

Mr. Allum: Well, it would be a little startling to think that an agreement of this significance would not have been reviewed by the department of indigenous affairs. So I just put that on the record. The minister went on to say, quote, "Pretty well every department in government could be impacted by this particular proposal because it is such a comprehensive proposal", end quote. He went on to say, quote, "Obviously, senior staff from various departments as high up as deputies would be involved in this particular review", end quote.

So the question, again, to the minister: Did her department actually participate in this whole-of-government review? Who in the department participated, and when did they review it?

Ms. Clarke: Well, once again, you're picking out particular phrases, particular words that could be totally different context if you're hearing the whole conversation. I'm not going to go down that road. I'm not going to try to interpret words that I did not hear the minister's full dialogue on.

And, again, you know, I think it's clear to say, that the minister of Crowns is dealing with this directly with President Chartrand. And, from all indications, this is what President Chartrand has agreed to. This is what he wants. I've also indicated and put on record already that the relationship between President Chartrand and the Department of Indigenous and Northern Relations is a good one. It's been solid since day one. And he reaffirmed that to me, face-to-face, that our relationship, in no way, is affected by any disagreements or any issues that he's working with our Crowns' department, or any other department in government, as a matter of fact.

You know, we will continue working with him on issues that he brings forward to us. And that's one thing that we can be very sure of. If President Chartrand has an issue that he feels needs to be

directed to our department, he doesn't come from a different department through to us, he comes directly to us. And that's one thing I appreciate about him; he's very straightforward, he doesn't beat around the bush. We get right to business and we discuss whatever is of most urgent concern within our department.

We'll continue to do that. President Chartrand, he's a very straightforward person, and, you know, the fact that he has chosen to deal with—directly with our Crowns minister, I think, is a very good indication that they're going to work things out. They—there is a—I think, a desire from our Crowns minister to do the same in a very respectful manner, and I think that's been indicated. Their dialogue is continuing, and I have the greatest expectations that they will resolve it.

This is the way, you know—it wasn't all or nothing. They opened up the dialogue, and I have great respect for both of them and, again, the greatest confidence that they will find a solution going forward. And I think that speaks highly of these individuals.

Mr. Allum: Still having trouble getting a straight answer from the minister, here.

The Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Cullen) went on to say, quote, obviously we're dealing with, you know, First Nations, 'indishenous'—indigenous issues. We're dealing with municipal issues. We're dealing with agricultural issues. We're dealing with, clearly, environmental issues. There's finance issues here, as well; clearly, justice issues as well.

So, clearly, it's a whole-of-government approach to reviewing this particular proposal, would mean—because it could, quite frankly, impact all of those respective departments and an impact on a lot of Manitobans going forward. So it's—I'm, frankly, quite astounded that the minister is now telling us that her department had no participation in reviewing the agreement between MMF and Hydro.

So let me ask her this. As a minister of the Crown for indigenous issues, did the minister advocate on behalf of MMF in regard to this particular issue? Did she stand with MMF on this particular issue? Did she defend the agreement between MMF and Hydro?

Ms. Clarke: Well, I understand the aggressive approach the member opposite is taking on this, because it is a significant issue. But, again, I have the greatest confidence in our Crowns minister, as well

as President Chartrand. They're both very capable of working through the issue, and this is what we do; you know yourself from being a former Cabinet minister. The road isn't always easy. We know that. And it's what you do with what you've got to deal with. And within my department, we certainly never step aside from any issues that are brought forward to us. We have great expertise within our group, and, you know, the relationships that we've built are strong and—in regards to that—those relationships.

There is—there was an event. You know, I think I really want to put this on record, because it's really significant and it speaks to work that not only has happened within the Department of Indigenous and Northern Relations this past two years, but it speaks also of our Manitoba Metis Federation working together with our First Nations and our government and municipalities. And I think it's really significant and I think it would be negligent of me not to put on record and talk just a bit about the First Nations and municipalities business partnerships and additions to reserve forum that was held this week. And it was organized by the Southern Chiefs' Organization, specifically, Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. He's been doing extensive work across our province, working not only with the First Nations that he approved—you know, that he was elected by, but he is also working with our municipalities.

And this speaks to the strength of our province, and it speaks to overcoming issues, and I think that's what—it's a goal that we hope, as a province, to reach. But, to have that solid alignment between our First Nations, Manitoba Metis Federation, our municipalities and our government, it speaks of a direction that this province is choosing to go down and to be aligned with our Grand Chiefs and show our communities, our leadership, that there's better ways to build relationships and partnerships.

* (12:00)

Now, this event was a two-day event that was held, in our city of Winnipeg, this past week. They brought in, from BC, Saskatchewan, leadership people that have built businesses. They were First Nations communities that were suffering financially over the past years and now have become very, very successful. And, again, I'm putting this on record, because it speaks to relationships and the value of relationships between different organizations, different groups of people, although we're 'culturey' different, and how we get to be successful as a community and as a province in—to listen to a chief

and council as well as a city, City of Kelowna, and the group from the First Nations there, and listen to the successes that they've had in coming together with the Westbank First Nation, City of Kelowna, because they worked together and they worked out their issues and now are being so successful and working together to become even more successful because they overcame small issues and great issues. But it's about partnerships, and that's where our government is going in the future and right now.

Mr. Allum: Well, I appreciate that the minister's been to a lot of events; that's made perfectly clear by this. I'm not sure what else the minister's accomplishing, but, clearly, she's at a lot of events. So let the record show that the opposition has no disagreement. The minister has been to a lot of events—no argument.

As she—the minister indicates that they're all about relationships and partnerships, and yet with one of their most significant—government's most significant partners, Manitoba Metis Federation, the government intervened and interfered on an agreement be done between Hydro and MMF.

When they ditched—when the government, when the Premier (Mr. Pallister), ditched, and the Cabinet ditched, that agreement, it was described as hush money, as persuasion money that the MMF and a member for Southdale has now put on record that he regards it as hush money and persuasion money, which is very disappointing for us to hear. The MMF, itself, was described as a special interest group, not withstanding the deep historical roots that that, a nation, has in our province and in this region of Canada.

So I'm hard pressed to say, other than going to events, what relationships or what partnerships the minister is creating when, in fact, the reality of the government's approach, of the Premier's approach, has been to offer less than positive commentary about the relationships and the parties involved.

The minister of Crowns tells us that he's participating in discussions regarding the turning of the page agreement between the Province and the MMF and Hydro.

What role does the minister's department, the department of indigenous affairs, have with respect to provisions of that agreement?

Ms. Clarke: Well, I think, clearly, you know, your line of questioning remains consistent. And I think

I've clearly indicated that there's a process in place, a very respectful process in place. And it's ongoing, without a doubt. And as I've indicated, I have the utmost faith in not only our minister, but our government, as well as President Chartrand and his—their election process is not over, so they are still in election process 'til, I believe, May 30th or May 31st, so, you know, for them to continue, as we know as a government when we're in an election campaigning process, the day-to-day business is a little bit difficult to carry on. So I'm sure that is their first and foremost item of the day, shall we say.

But, you know, President Chartrand also spoke at this event. And you seem to minimize my presence at events. These are not social visits. Let's be very clear. I met with several chiefs and I had individual meetings with many, many chiefs, many different municipalities that were there, about their partnerships and where they're going with their partnerships. And to minimize this, that I'm just at social events, it couldn't be farther from the truth.

The fact that I was given leave to be away a full day at this particular event was very significant, not just to myself personally as the minister, but through our department, as well as our government. This was a significant meeting, and this was a significant learning and educational process.

Our Province, our indigenous leadership are moving in a different direction. They're looking to be self-sustaining. And to minimize it as a social event is really—I find that really disgraceful because they put a lot of effort into bringing these groups together. It is a first time—it was a historic event, and a lot of effort went into being at it, for me to be there, a lot of effort on behalf of Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, Southern Chiefs' Organization.

And one of the keynote addresses was President David Chartrand, and he spoke on his vision for the Metis and the First Nation partnership. This is no small initiative. We've got individuals here. President Chartrand is working on many issues, just as our Premier is, just as our Cabinet ministers are in this government with the support of all our colleagues. We are engaged with these people looking for better outcomes, not just better financial outcomes, but a better life for our First Nations, for our Metis people. We're all working towards the same goals.

And the fact that, you know what, we are aligning and working towards significant vision for the future is no small feat. And to kind of minimize, you know, this type of event is—we have

come a long ways, and we're not stopping. We're moving straight ahead.

And I think this clearly indicates, too, President Chartrand isn't sitting, dwelling on one issue every day of the week. He's out speaking at these events, and he is showing his vision for the Metis Federation, where they want to align, where they want to join, whether it's the municipalities or the First Nations or whatever.

But they—we are working towards common goals, and there is shared services. And the sharing of information and how we can make this province a better province overall speaks very clearly to what we have accomplished to get us this far in two years.

* (12:10)

Mr. Allum: Well, I want to turn over the questioning to my friend from Kewatinook, and let her ask about her people. But, in the absence of the minister actually providing any substantive information, tabling any documentation that indicates all of the achievements and accomplishments that she so vividly describes this morning, we're at a loss to think that these are mere words and not actually substantive actions.

The minister—member for Minto (Mr. Swan) and I, myself, both had the privilege of serving in Cabinet, and, yes, we went to many important events, but that is one small component of a much larger responsibility.

And, in fact, this minister has responsibility and fiduciary obligations to First Nation, Metis and Inuit people in this province. And it is her obligation, as the minister with those responsibilities, to advocate on behalf of those peoples when issues germane to those peoples arise at the Cabinet table.

For the minister simply now to say that she played no role in the MMF-Hydro deal, that her department did not intervene in the MMF-Hydro agreement discussion, and that she, herself, as a minister, did not advocate on behalf of the MMF and the people of—the Metis people in Manitoba, is, I would suggest, an abdication of her responsibility, her political responsibility and her fiduciary responsibility.

Being a minister is more than showing up at an event; it's actually working on the behalf of the very people—and the minister rolls her eyes at me and makes a face about it, and I appreciate maybe this is hard to hear—but one would expect, on this really, really fundamental, foundational issues, that a

minister of the Crown takes their responsibility much more seriously than what we've got from the minister this morning.

With that, I'll turn it off—over to my friend for Kewatinook.

Ms. Clarke: Well, I would just like to put on record that I take my role as a minister very seriously, and I think if you were to have a conversation with some of our chiefs and councils or President Chartrand, I'm not about social visits and I'm not about social events, but it is part of what we do and it is part of the learning process and—to be there in that capacity.

But—and I'd also like to clarify, when you 'indicate' I play no role in representing our indigenous communities, you couldn't be more wrong. And that is your assumption, and, in no way, does that speak to my role in this government.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): So I've gone to the Premier (Mr. Pallister) during Executive Council, and he stated on record, for anything that I asked regarding indigenous people, that I was to go to the individual ministries. And still—so I did that, and I still don't get any answers from the ministers themselves. So I just wanted to put that on record.

Every time I ask, in Question Period, for help for my people, the PC government deflects me to go to the feds. Now, I have a great working relationship with my federal cousins, as you guys tell—call them, so I know what they have put on the table for my people.

And it's actually quite disturbing as to what this government hasn't picked up in trying to support and help advance my people. And it's quite disturbing the amount of money that's on the table that you guys are leaving on that table. You know, we need help. We need—we actually need to be able to live.

I, myself, I know that because of all the policies previous in past, I don't have a long lifespan. There is just physically no way—I was brought up on a First Nation. There were water quality issues that I'm dealing with today because of those neglectful policies from the past. And that's just me.

There's so many First Nations people that are having the effects from when—in childhood, drinking this—these waters. They're now seeing—there's Sagkeeng First Nation, for example, which is not in my riding—people are dying left and right from cancer because of the chemicals that were dropped into the rivers in those—in that First Nation.

And, right now, I've actually gone to you three times now, Minister, for the problem in Little Grand Rapids. Water—sewage water is pouring, and I have the videos, pouring into their lake. And those people are drinking it. And my husband works for PennCo Construction. They're building a water treatment plant. And he went and looked at that pump that was put in there. It's a \$2,000 pump that was put in there several years ago, and it burnt out. And so nothing's been done.

There was a guy recently that came out—I don't know which company it was; he doesn't know either—that replaced that pump. And I stayed at a hotel there in the community, and he was joking: That ought to fix things for another couple of years. And he was joking. And then the lodge owner was quite disturbed, because he was laughing at the fact that it's just a band-aid solution and that he's going to be coming back. And the lodge owner was trying to say, well, they should—you should put a nice big pump in there and, like, make it work better for the people. And this guy was just laughing: What do you care? It's just Indians. And that kind of thing is what I deal with all the time.

And, you know, my husband assessed it, if they put a nice \$10,000 pump, we could prevent all these people from getting cancer, costing our Province or even taxpayers more money in the future, and simple solutions like this. You know, \$10,000, it may seem like a lot of money, but, if we pay that now, we won't be dealing with the exacerbated effects in the long term.

And so I would like to know—you told me that you had tried to address it in opposition. And so I'm wondering, when I try and work with my federal cousins, they haven't heard anything regarding this from this province as of yet. And so do you have a—can you cc me those letters you've sent, or is there a way I can get copies to verify that you—this department has been working on the Little Grand Rapids issue, specifically?

Ms. Clarke: I want to acknowledge the member from Kewatinook for being here today and for us being able to have a dialogue, which, you know, we could've probably talked about this one just—face to face at any time, just be aware of that; that, you know, if you have specific issues that you feel that our department should know, I want you to always feel welcome to come and discuss them with myself or my deputy or whoever, because I know, from the sincerity of all the issues that you always bring

forward, that you do have great concern for your people, and, rightfully so, because you know first-hand what the issues are, and you also know the short-term and the long-term effects.

And I want to acknowledge that, because you clearly are a very caring person, and you're always right there. I know that the people that you represent know that they have someone there that not only appreciates being their representative but deals with the issues, large or small, because sometimes it is those smaller ones that become large ones—exactly what you say. If they're not acknowledged and they're not dealt with, pretty soon they do come—they do become bigger ones, and, when they come bigger ones, they're obviously more expensive.

And I totally understand what you're talking about at Little Grand Rapids. I've been there. I've seen their system. I was horrified. This—and this is a number of years ago. So, previously—the previous government did nothing about it either.

*(12:20)

The one thing that I can share with you, and I'll try and get you more information in regards to the specific community, but our government is, for First Nations, is working more closely with Water Services Board, and they are going to be overseeing projects in the northern part of our province and with the First Nations. And, for me, that is—that's great news, because having been the Minister of Municipal Relations before, that's where Water Services Board comes from. And we—there was—Northern Affairs communities were funded through there, you know, when it came through the infrastructure money in the past, because I actually got to sit on one of those selection committees way back in the day. And there was good representation there for the northern part.

So now to know that First Nations are also a part of that, that's a huge step forward, and I think the good part, too. And again, I'm—I don't have the specific information on this particular community, but we intend on having a closer working relationship with Indigenous Services Canada, our former INAC group.

I had the opportunity to sit with them all day this week, and we just generally talked about a few things, but we also talked about the need for a much more closer communication dialogue and working relationship. And, actually, this is something that our First Nation chiefs have brought forward in our meetings this—specifically, in the past six to eight

months where, you know, they're opening up a lot more and we're discussing a lot more and we're getting more in depth in regards to the specific issues that exist on First Nations all across the province, but more specifically in the North, as we know that things are a lot more challenging there and much more difficult for their leadership and for the community's people. And you're right, it affects their health one way or another; even if it's stress or worry, it affects their health, and that concerns us.

So we're going to be meeting very, very soon with Indigenous Services Canada from the group here in Winnipeg. Minister Bennett was supposed to have been here this week, and I had—supposed to have had a meeting with her. But very often when she's coming here, she doesn't make it here. She ended up in The Pas instead, so I don't know what prompted that.

But, you know, we are going to find a way so that we communicate because these issues are overlapping, without a doubt. And so we want to have a closer relationship between our First Nations, the provincial government, the federal government. And, of course, you have a very important role in this because you're there first-hand. So very significant, and I thank you for the work that you do there.

Ms. Klassen: I appreciate trying to get that relationship, you know, the fact that you're trying to work on that relationship. That's really fantastic. You know, there's a lot of people that say there's a struggle on this side of the—you know, we're in politics, right? We're going to hear that, oh, it's them that doesn't want to meet, and then you're going to hear that it's these guys that don't want to meet, and so—and then we're just left out in between, still waiting in limbo forever.

A lot of the—to speak to what my colleague here was talking about, none of my First Nations get anything in writing as to all these great works that this ministry is supposedly doing. And I have a business background, and so I keep telling—get something in writing. And they say nobody wants to sign anything when we do have meetings with them, or, you know—I write it on a napkin if that's all you have, but get something in writing saying that this ministry will work with that First Nation on a specific issue. But the—and that's just advice.

But my next question is St. Theresa Point, the Island Lake communities, people are plagued with boils. And I've never personally seen one. Maybe I

got out of the reserve in time because none of my kids have that. But within these last 10 years it's rampant. I don't know—I don't even know what a boil is.

But even with these walkers, these stop meth walkers, a lot of them had to stop walking because of boils. And I don't know whether that's specifically due to—we're all MSRA, we all have that super bug within us, and so we're now resistant. So I don't know where that's coming from, and a lot of people are saying it's from the water that we drink in the communities, because I've gone there for the last couple of years—thanks to my position, I'm now able to afford to go home and visit my family.

But people are plagued with boils. And that's something that needs to be addressed immediately. It's affecting quality of life. And even during the fire evacuations, I literally had to call ambulances for a boil. And the ambulance paramedics were saying, well, that's something you don't need an ambulance for, right? And I'm like, no, seriously, this person's passed out. We can't move her. She screams in pain. We don't know, and there's blood everywhere. And, you know, it looks like a gunshot wound, this person that was lying there in the bathroom stall passed out.

And so, if that's something you guys can look into and work with the Ministry of Health, because I know if I try and bring that up, such a personal issue publicly, I don't want that, you know. I don't want—because I know the first thing that's going to come out in media is, you know, well, they're dirty Indians, they should shower more, you know, not understanding that we don't have running water in a lot of our homes in the North.

And so I'm telling you guys this, I don't want this to be a public thing in question period. So I would really appreciate this ministry starting to address that and working with the Ministry of Health.

I was wondering, have you ever heard of a First Nation bringing that issue forward?

Ms. Clarke: Well, I have to acknowledge, this is the first I've heard of it, and I actually met with the chief from Pinaymootang was here yesterday and I agreed, you know, he invited me up this summer and I confirmed one hundred per cent that I was planning to going up to the Island Lake First Nations there this summer anyway. So a meeting is being arranged.

In regards to boils, I don't know how to answer that because, you know, if you're indicating that this

is kind of an outbreak, I can tell you, I've had one, so it's not unknown. It's not a life-threatening. I don't know that they're contagious; medically, I can't answer that at all. That—and I'm not sure that our Health Minister could either. That's very definitely a medical issue and it needs to go to medical doctors.

But, you know, it—and it could be something that is just right now I don't even know how to answer that. I mean, I've been suffering with a chronic cough since last October.

Many of my colleagues, many of my family and almost everybody I know has had this cough, and it's going on for months and we don't know why.

Like, it needs to stop. And I don't want to minimize this issue one bit, but if there is a lot of it, it needs to be looked at and you need to know why and you need to know what's causing it, and most specifically, how do you stop it, because what's more concerning than the unknown if you don't know what's causing it and so on and so forth. And, you know, if there's—we need to ensure from a medical side, you know, what the cause is and how to fix it. So great point.

Ms. Klassen: It's nice to hear that you're going to the Island Lake communities. There is a lot of TB out there, and so just so you're aware. My own daughter is a carrier, but she's on high—she was put on a drug regime for about nine years as a child when she was—she was first diagnosed as a carrier when she was nine, but thanks to government shifts and everything, nothing was done about it 'til she was 13.

And then she was put on really strong drugs for about a year that she actually had to fly into Winnipeg to be given these treatments so that it could become dormant. And so, just so you're aware when you're going to these communities, this is what I face. And some communities I go in with a mask, and it's just to try and start teaching people it's okay to walk around with a mask and stuff like that, and as a means of hygiene and stuff like that.

It's very hard for them because, again, some—our First Nations don't have running water and there's always something in every community that's going around.

And so just so you make sure that you ask the chief what's going on or the nurse in charge if there's anything you should be aware of so that you're able to protect yourself.

Another issue with that is Javex bleach got put on the dangerous goods list, and it's so hard. Javex is, like, almost 26 bucks for a one litre, and yet that's what we need to make sure that we can clean our houses again. Growing up, we always had everything Javex-bleached down so that—our health was my mom's primary concern. And so, if you can work on that.

But my next—

Madam Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 12:30, committee rise.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

* (10:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of Committee of Supply will now resume the consideration for the Estimates for the Department of Sustainable Development.

At this time I invite the ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

As the staff is taking their seats, I'll get the minister to introduce her staff into the Committee.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): So I have the same staff with me as yesterday, again: my Deputy Minister Rob Olson; acting assistant deputy minister of Water Stewardship and Biodiversity, Lori Stevenson; policy analyst, Thomas Williams; and assistant deputy minister of Financing, Crown Lands Division, Matt Wiebe.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister, and I'll get the opposition critic to introduce his staff.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Yes, this is Chris—Mr. Chris Sanderson, the one and only.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

As previously agreed questioning for the department now will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Altemeyer: I think last night was rudely interrupted in the middle of the minister's response to a previous question, so why don't I cede the floor to her.

Ms. Squires: I appreciate your patience. I know I kept you in suspense for all night waiting for this

answer, so I'm just going to deliver it very succinctly, if you like, yes.

So, 31 FTEs is the answer to your question, and by category you wanted to know, so that included: three managerial positions; 21 professional/technical positions, five of those were middle managers; and 16 were professional or technical positions; and seven administrative positions.

Mr. Altemeyer: So just to double—when I look at the book, I came up with slightly different numbers. I was—it looks to me like there'd been a reduction across the whole department of about 230 FTEs since '16-17.

Does that jive with the minister's records? By our calculations in 2016-17 the department had 1,124 FTEs and this year we're down to 892—just wondering if that's the minister's understanding as well.

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much for the question. And, if you did look on page 11, you would notice that we do have a reduction of the 31 FTEs that I had explained earlier. But what you are referring to is the fact that we no longer count seasonal positions. We don't have an FTE assigned to them; we just have the dollar figures assigned to them. So the reduction that you're seeing is the way we count seasonals.

And I can assure you that the dollar amount is the same for our seasonal staff and right now that, you know, as you know, that includes the forest, the wildfire fighters, the people that work in campgrounds, the people that work in the parks and all of those people that are doing that hard work on a seasonal basis for the department are still engaged in the same manner; we just don't assign an FTE to it; we just provide the money in another way.

And this does give me a really good opportunity to thank our director of wildfires, Gary Friesen, and his entire team of wildfire fighters who have been working incredibly hard. They are managing so many fires, as everyone is aware of, as what we've been reading in the newspapers and seeing first-hand on television. It's quite a horrific incident this year with early firefighters, and I just commend the work that that department, Gary Friesen, is doing in ramping up his team. He's got many of his seasonal firefighters back on the job, and, by May long weekend, he'll have his full cohort of seasonal firefighters deployed and working to fight all the wildfires that are erupting throughout the province. And I also would like to put on the record that we

have engaged with some of our partners who we have reciprocal agreements with. That includes Minnesota and Ontario, if I'm correct, who will come in and assist us when we need that support for firefighting.

So we really appreciate the work that our seasonal workers do, and we will continue to engage them and deploy our resources and ensure that we've got everyone trained and ready to go. As most people know, May 11th, which I believe is, well, today; it's the opening of camping season, and we've got people in our campgrounds and our parks ready to go. And I do want to take this opportunity to wish everybody who's heading out on the weekend to have a fun and safe weekend camping and enjoying our beautiful parks and all that they have to offer, and would like to just remind everyone to use those extreme cautions and follow all of our restrictions as it pertains to our dry season and be very, very mindful of the fire conditions that are present.

*(10:10)

Mr. Altemeyer: Thank the minister for that answer.

What is the vacancy rate across the department and maybe by division as well? So I don't need to get into the details of it for all of the subsections of the department, but, you know, what's the vacancy overall: vacancy rate for Parks; for Finance and Crown lands; Environmental Stewardship, just that layer of the department.

Ms. Squires: So we certainly are committed to filling vacant positions on a priority basis, and right now we do have a number of competitions under way and working hard to fill some of the positions that are currently vacant.

I can tell you that as of May 1st we had a vacancy rate of 14.8 per cent, which is more or less in keeping with what we have had for a variety of—or for several years. Generally speaking, our vacancy rates fluctuate between 10 and 18 per cent, and that's looking at vacancy rates in the department going back to 2014. So right now we're sitting at a 14.8 per cent vacancy rate in the department, which translates to 132.1 regular and term position FTEs that are vacant out of a total of 892.45 positions in the department. Like I said, there's a number of competitions under way and human resources is assisting us in finding people to fill those positions and I look forward to welcoming new members to the Sustainable Development team in the very near future.

And to answer your question about by area of division in the department, we don't have that on hand, but I can get that to you maybe by the end of the day.

Mr. Altemeyer: That would be great. If the hard-working staff have something else that comes across their desks—early next week, Monday would be fine as well. So whatever works well for you.

I notice that Indigenous Relations, that subset of Finance and Crown Lands division has, from a dollar basis, has been cut in half almost over the last two years. It was—it had an adjusted line in '16-17 of 913–913,000. Today it's down to 543.

Does the minister have an explanation of what's happened there?

Ms. Squires: And that was a really good question from members opposite, because it really highlights a key—a new strategic direction that our department is going in working with our Indigenous Relations people and how we're engaging with indigenous people throughout the province.

We know that we can't just have a stand-alone department in our—in Sustainable Development that would be managing Indigenous Relations as a one-off. We know that Indigenous Relations is part of everybody's job, really, in Sustainable Development. We all are engaged with working with indigenous people. For example, in Climate Change branch, we are looking at incorporating indigenous teachings and traditional knowledge into the way we approach the environment and the efforts that we're going to mitigate climate change.

We know that in Crown Lands there's a lot of Indigenous Relations work going on there. This year, for the very first time, we involved people from the Wildlife branch in some of our indigenous consultations, whether it be consulting with indigenous people on a night-hunting ban or the shared management of the resources that we're engaging with them.

So we've included people from every section of our department in that work that we would call under the category of Indigenous Relations.

So I can tell the member that there hasn't been any operational cut to the Indigenous Relations branch. There were two vacant FTEs that were reduced. One was for a senior manager FTE, was vacant, like I said, and that senior manager position was cut, because, like I'd said before, our—the head of

the Indigenous Relations branch is working with everybody in the department and didn't need another senior manager branch underneath him to do some of that work. He's a—greater collaboration between him and everyone else in the department, and every department head is assisting him in some of that work on Indigenous Relations.

* (10:20)

So we did remove that vacancy and we also reduced one administrative position. Again, it was vacant in the Indigenous Relations branch. It had been for some time. We eliminated it and we're also moving to a more shared administrative pool.

And, as somebody who used to be a former secretary or a former administrator, I can tell first-hand that we know that administrators would rather be working in a bit of a group and have a little bit more knowledge about all different aspects of a department, and not just specifically dedicated to this one manager and this one little bit of the department and not have a greater knowledge about some of the other works that can go on in the department.

So we know that our administrators are a lot more pleased with the combined—the resource pool that we're developing and that they can all work together, be more of a team. And that's really what our focus is in Sustainable Development, is having everybody work more as a team, more collaboratively together. And nowhere is that more evident than in our Indigenous Relations branch.

And so I do want to also use this opportunity to thank our senior manager in Indigenous Relations and his team that he's got—and everybody at Sustainable Development for their efforts in helping to develop a really good working relationship. We've made significant progress this year in our engagement with indigenous peoples, and that is something that our department is committed to and that we will continue to advance, our relations with indigenous peoples.

Mr. Altemeyer: Appreciate the explanation. The minister hits on another question that I was going to ask, just about FTEs. Sometimes these get cut in-year. So I'm wondering if she could—and, again, if it would be more—a better use of her staff's time and resources, details for this can be provided, you know, next week would be fine. But I'm wondering if she could let us know how many FTEs were cut in-year during the past fiscal year, '17-18, and, you know,

which division those FTEs fell under. So maybe an overall number now and then maybe a divisional breakdown later on, if that would be helpful.

Ms. Squires: So I just need a little bit of clarification from the member. We don't make, you know, we don't go offside our budget in-year. So what we propose in budget or in the Estimates process is what unfolds during the year. So we don't have in-year reductions, and is that what the member is asking?

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, yes, I thought the minister had just given, actually, a couple of good examples of how this can happen, where, you know, within the year a decision is made to get rid of the managerial position in Indigenous Relations that had been vacant, but then the position was removed, is what I was talking—that type of scenario.

So how many other examples of that were there in the past fiscal year? I appreciate it's difficult to budget for positions you might be not aware you're going to cut for the current fiscal year, the one that we're in right now. But how many positions were cut in-year last year? That's the question.

Ms. Squires: So thank you for the clarification for that question, and last year, if the member recalls, we had published, in the SILR, that we were going to look at a reduction of 34.75 FTEs, and that is what we delivered on. So there were no additional reductions to the ones that were budgeted for and published in last year's SILR, much like this year. There's 31 that we're planning for and that's what will be executed throughout the year.

And just—I would like to note—or put on the record that this department has had an average of 26 FTE reductions every year, for the past seven years, so we're certainly on—you know, in keeping with the average FTE reductions that have been seen historically, in this department, for the last seven years.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thank you for that clarification. Good to know. It doesn't relate directly to our topics of passion on conservation issues, but the minister, of course, also has some other duties which fall under this Estimates book, so I'll maybe merge two of those into one question.

We note slight reductions in both Francophone Affairs Secretariat and the Manitoba Status of Women Secretariat.

Can I get an overview of what those involved? Thanks.

* (10:30)

Ms. Squires: Thank you for the question regarding the Francophone Affairs Secretariat and the Status of Women secretariat. This year has seen tremendous opportunities and excitement and initiatives undertaken by both of those secretariats, and I'm really proud and pleased to be working with all the individuals in both of these areas. And it is definitely an incredible joy to work with the director at Francophone Affairs, Teresa Collins, and the director and all of her team and the director at Manitoba Status of Women, Beth Alldridge, and her entire team.

With the work of the Manitoba Status of Women secretariat we have expanded our role significantly and taken on an extremely exciting endeavour with the merger of Status of Women and the Family Violence Prevention Program.

We wanted to bring them—these two areas together because we thought that there would be a lot of synergies in putting domestic violence, family violence, gender-based violence and sexual violence all under the same entity of Status of Women. And I think that my team over at Status of Women has risen extremely high in regard to executing this work, and really, really pleased to see some of that work unfold as we're moving towards trying to eradicate all forms of gender-based violence in society.

And so, when we have the merger of family violence into—the Family Violence Prevention Program into the Manitoba Status of Women secretariat, there were—there was a vacant policy analyst position that, because of the synergies between the two departments coming together and more of a collaborative approach, that that vacant position was eliminated. So that's where you're seeing the reduction in the Status of Women.

And in regard to the reduction in the Francophone Affairs Secretariat, there were three vacant FTEs that were eliminated, two were vacant translators and one was a vacant administrator. Now, I do want to point out that in Francophone Affairs Secretariat we did increase the budget by \$67,000 and—for the operations of the Francophone Affairs Secretariat, and that allows us to really look at how we fulfill our obligation to translate material. My Francophone Affairs Secretariat is translating even more and more work on a daily basis, and that is exciting to see because more Crown agencies, other agencies that the government has linkages

with, special operating agencies and so forth, they are now requesting that their materials are in both languages, which is certainly what we're pleased to see after our government had introduced and passed Bill 5 which enhanced francophone—it was the francophone enhancement act, to ensure that we are moving in the right direction to supporting our Francophonie in the province of Manitoba. It's a wonderful thing to see all departments in government, all Crowns falling into line and requesting more of their products and their services available in both of our official languages.

So that means that we're spending a little bit more in translating—translation services that we sometimes contract outside of core government, and we're finding that the products are able to be turned around in a much timelier basis. Sometimes in government things get—have to happen on the quick, and somebody will come to us and need something translated on an urgent basis, because they want to release a document, or go to the community for consultation, or just report findings to the government—or the public at large, and they realize, I need to have this in both languages and I need to have it right now, as soon as possible.

And so having the flexibility to outsource some of the translation is definitely what our—what we need to do. We need to provide those resources to the Francophone Affairs Secretariat so that they can do that outsourcing work when work is needed on the quick, and we're pleased to be able to provide them. And that's where the additional \$67,000 went to.

Mr. Altemeyer: Yes, we know—thank you for that information. The line item for Climate Change and Air Quality, the budget line for that section, in 2016-17, was \$1.3 million. Today, it's down to less than 1.1–1.075, on page 83, as I read it.

Can the minister explain what has been changed or lost in that branch?

* (10:40)

Ms. Squires: So the member is correct that we did reduce the budget for this branch by \$11,000 in—from year over year, and where that came from—and, actually, it was a \$32,000 reduction because we did stop subscribing to two memberships that we had that weren't very effective for us, and that was The Climate Registry, which was a \$12,000 annual cost, and The Climate Group, which was a \$20,000 membership, which we were not receiving

value from these memberships. We have not been obtaining their data and putting it to good use and, in fact, some of the data that we're getting in Canada and in Manitoba and even from our own Climate Change and Air Quality branch staff are able to provide us with the data that we need in a much more productive fashion. They're able to get us the information that we need and able to obtain that—the information from some of the relationships that they've forged with their other FPT colleagues and that sort of thing.

So we just didn't see that there was any need for continuing this membership of these two very expensive entities which certainly—you know, it wasn't data that was applicable to us in the context of our Manitoba goals and so that saved us \$32,000. But we also did have two increase in salaries. We like to give people raises from time to time and we also like to—we were happy to fulfill our salary increases for all of our employees in keeping with their contracts.

So we did that. We gave them all a raise and reduced the membership to these two groups that weren't providing any value.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thanks for the answer. So I appreciate that that accounts for \$32,000 of the difference. By my quick math, we're looking at more around a quarter of a million reduction altogether. If it was \$1.3 million in 2016-17, so \$1.3 million, and now it's down to 1.075. We're now looking at—yes, \$230,000 cut, and then if there was a salary increase—of course the hard-working staff, they certainly deserve that—then that would suggest that the cut would have had to have been larger than that because the salary increase would have shrunk it. So there's still—there's some additional decisions that have been made that I don't have a number for just yet, and if it would be useful again, if staff needs some extra time to go look into the details, next week is fine.

Ms. Squires: So I can't seem to determine where the \$1.3-million figure is coming from, but we'll look into that. What we think you're looking at is a figure from two years ago, because what I can—from the Estimates of Expenditures for '17-18, it's \$1,086,000, and then for this year, the Estimates of expenditure is \$1,075,000. So that's the \$11,000 difference that I'm referring to. But the \$1.3-million figure, if that's going back two years, from two years ago to now, there has been some reorganization in the department and in the branch that would've been accounted for more specifically in last year's Estimates. But I can

certainly get an analysis of where we've been with the branch from two years ago to date, if that would be helpful for the member.

Mr. Altemeyer: Yes, that would be great and much appreciated. Thank you.

Just quickly back, sorry, to the Francophone Affairs Secretariat funding—sorry, I was remiss in following the staff person's excellent suggestions here. But some of my colleagues have noticed cuts in some other departments. So St. Boniface university, of course, among them, the assistant deputy minister in French education was cut, and then we have the three FTEs from this minister's secretariat and the funding reduction.

Is this a trend that the minister expects will continue? Will there be further cuts to French languages in-year, in this current year? Is any of that part of the plan for this fiscal?

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the member opposite for his interest in our Francophone Affairs initiatives and the hard work that the secretariat and all the staff employed in the branch do. And I can assure the member that we certainly wouldn't be doing any reductions in-year at the secretariat. And I can also assure the member that it is certainly not a trend at all.

* (10:50)

We—our government is very committed to enhancing the Francophonie in Manitoba, and right now my staff are in negotiations with the federal government in terms of increasing the shared agreement envelopes.

We're not having a lot of success in those—in that in the sense that the federal government has chosen a different route with how they want to have their partnerships, and we're pushing back on that.

We're saying we think that the shared agreement between the federal government and the Manitoba government on the implementation of French language programs and services in the community should be increased and enhanced, not—and nothing less, and so that work continues.

We are certainly looking at ways that we can enhance the Francophonie here in Manitoba using the dollars that we do have, and I can say that some of the grants that we offer, which there's been no reduction in any of the grants that we do offer the francophone community, they have been incredibly significant and profound in the effect that they're

having, and I anticipate that that work will continue and we really value the collective efforts to enhance the Francophonie here in Manitoba.

Not too long ago I'd sat on a panel of senators on the official languages who were going across the country to inquire about each province's investment in the Francophonie, and they looked at the Manitoba budget and said, you know, quite rightly, they looked at it and said is this all the Province of Manitoba spends on francophone. And they were just looking at the grant line that we have in terms of our shared agreement with the federal government, which is based on a funding formula that has been in place since 2008. We have not received an increase, but that is the shared envelope with the federal government and we're looking for an increase in that envelope.

But I explained to the senators that we have so many other—not just in my department and not just in the Francophone Affairs Secretariat funding into the francophone communities, we also have so many other departments that fund francophone initiatives and are really going to funding the enhancement of the Francophonie, so we see it's definitely a whole-of-government approach.

So what my Francophone Affairs Advisory Council is certainly going to be taking a look at, too, is working to see where—how much does the government commit to the Francophonie whole-of-government approach and where can we have some advancements and possibly some new investments. And so we're excited about that work and we do believe that work will continue to enhance the Francophonie in Manitoba. That is a commitment from our government. It's a strong commitment.

We are very engaged with the community and I can also say that we have received, to date, about 98 per cent or 95 per cent of all departments and Crown agencies have provided us with their French Language Services reports and we're seeing an enhancement in the bilingual capacity all across government, not just in designated positions but non-designated positions as well.

We have over 25,000 students enrolled in French immersion and francophone education, which is the highest number ever, and so we're really excited about that and, again, these French Language Services reports that every department's coming in with having shown that they've gotten over—not over capacity, but they've got their bilingual positions filled with bilingual individuals and even many of

those non-designated positions are being filled with bilinguals in the province.

So we're incredibly excited about that work and we think that that is an enhancement of the Francophonie in Manitoba that's going to continue on its upward trend.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thanks for that. We noted, as well, past practice was to have a separate line item for provincial government funding to the International Institute for Sustainable Development. *[interjection]* It was just a matter of time before one of our phones rang, you know. It's inevitable. It's just a question of who—I'll probably be next.

But, yes, it used to be a separate line item for that of—usually a little bit north of a million dollars. We don't see that line in here this year, so I'm hoping that doesn't mean there's no funding going to the IISD anymore and that it's just gone somewhere else. So can the minister tell us where that's gone and if the dollar amount will be maintained from last year or if it's changed, anything like that?

Ms. Squires: The member is correct that we are continuing our investment and our commitment to the International Institute for Sustainable Development. And that one point—or \$1,013,000 commitment to the IISD is moved from the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund into our made-in-Manitoba climate and green fund enabling vote subappropriation 26.3. Did I get that right? It's a good thing I have finance people who understand these things better than I do.

So it has been moved into that area, and we are very pleased to continue our partnership with the International Institute for Sustainable Development. I'm certain that I don't need to share with the member all the good work that IISD does. They have been—certainly, we're very proud to have them here in Manitoba, being an international expert on so many initiatives, particularly climate change and helping communities adapt to climate change and to transition to a low-carbon future. So our partnership with them is more integral than ever before, and I just really appreciate the work that Jane McDonald and all of her hard-working staff members and her entire team around the world do on behalf of all Manitobans and on behalf of everybody in the—on our planet who cares about the ongoing sustainability of our environment and our atmosphere.

So that fund is there. We are excited to continue the work that we do. There'll be definitely more

collaboration with IISD than ever before and also with the Prairie Climate Centre, the research that they do and their atlas. I'm certain members opposite have seen the atlas, and as alarming as that information is that is shared in that climate atlas to see how, specifically, climate change is going to impact the prairies and to see how our plus-30 days are going to almost triple over the next few decades and the alarming effect that that will have on our communities, particularly our northern communities and some of our ecosystem in general and our habitats and our species is quite alarming. So the work that the Prairie Climate Centre does in conjunction with the International Institute for Sustainable Development is—it's groundbreaking and definitely information that needs to get out there to more and more people.

* (11:00)

A few weeks back I went to the—spent some time at the U of W and made an announcement with the Prairie Climate Centre and an additional \$200,000 for their atlas which is specifically for agriculture purposes. We know that our farmers are going to be looking at planting and harvesting a very different crop if we are not successful at reducing climate change in Manitoba, and so the atlas, especially with the agriculture subsection of that atlas will give our farmers the tools that they need to make decisions about how they're going to really farm in the province and how they can continue to put bread on the table not just here in Manitoba, but around the world.

We have been proud to be the providers of bread on the table in countries around the world, and our farmers will continue to rise to that challenge and they will continue to be good stewards of the land and the Prairie Climate Centre research will certainly give them the opportunity to adapt their practices to sustain their crops and whatnot.

So we're really pleased with our partnerships with the IISD and Prairie Climate Centre and that work will definitely continue.

Mr. Altemeyer: Thanks for the answer.

A couple of questions about the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund: like, I guess, the first one, first couple ones would be—I assume that's also in the green fund for this coming year, and secondly, I'm—I realized as I was doing my research there's no annual report available yet for the '16-17 year. So we're, like, a year past when that

wrapped up. So I couldn't find any references to what the fund is funding, but my basic question is, will the, like, usually that fund has been used to support a combination of multiyear initiatives sort of on a program basis. Climate Change Connection, I believe, is one, and there's some others. Maybe Compost Winnipeg, I think, has tapped into it, and then there's also some one-off project funds.

So, since there's no report, I guess I'm wondering, yes, is SDIF money including in the green fund total, first of all, and secondly, are there any scheduled changes to the amount of money that the program groups have been receiving from SDIF plan for this year?

Ms. Squires: I—the member opposite is correct that much of that SDIF fund has been moved into the climate and green plan, so perhaps what I might endeavour to do is just list the funds that have moved from the—what used to be the SDIF fund and is now moving into the made-in-Manitoba climate and green fund, so I'll list those out so you can know, so we don't go one by one through them all.

So, as you know, it was a \$4.5-million fund, and it continues to be a \$4.5-million fund, and here's the breakdown: so, we have \$1 million for the climate change fund; the \$1,013,000 for the IISD; the Manitoba Eco-Network, \$30,000; the Manitoba Eco-Network Manitoba Water Caucus, \$25,000—if I'm reading too fast, I apologize. I'll slow down—the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, the Critical Wildlife Habitat Program, \$45,000; the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, north, \$518,000; the American waterfowl management plan, through Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corp, is \$75,000—no, pardon me. That is the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation wetland-peatland inventory for Manitoba is \$75,000. The American waterfowl management plan is \$518,000.

And then we have \$850,000 in that fund that is unallocated for initiatives that might come up in-year, and I think that was in keeping with historical practices.

So I'll help the member out with the math because it's already done for me. That was \$3.556 million that is now in what would be called the made-in-Manitoba climate and green fund. The other \$944,000 was transferred into the department because it's more aligned with programs in the department. And that includes the \$359,000 appropriation for the aquatic invasive species initiative; \$170,000 for the Manitoba Forestry

Association woodlot program; the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation grant to cover off salaries of \$121,000; the Bear Smart program, \$40,000; the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site, a global figure of \$134,000; and then we have a \$30,000 commitment to each of the First Nations communities that are involved in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, so that includes a \$30,000 appropriation to Bloodvein First Nation, Little Grand Rapids First Nation, Pauingassi First Nation, Poplar River First Nation.

And, while we're on the subject of the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage Site, I just want to take this opportunity to thank them for their work. This has been a very long process for these communities that have been involved. They have been diligently doing their work, and they have great reason to be optimistic. They will receive word in the very short foreseeable future on whether or not they are granted that World Heritage designation from UNESCO, and we all, here, are very excited, and we're waiting with bated breath for word to come from the UNESCO World Heritage entities on whether or not we are successful at receiving that inscription that would give Manitoba its first mixed-use cultural designation, and it would give Manitoba its first World Heritage Site.

So there is much anticipation, and we are all eagerly waiting good news, and very excited about that project. So our government is pleased to continue with that funding arrangement with—for First Nations communities, and we're very excited about the future of Pimachiowin Aki.

* (11:10)

Mr. Altemeyer: Thank the minister for that answer and that breakdown.

I guess, in a similar vein, could she provide sort of a similar overview of the—I believe it's a \$40-million total in the green fund, sort of where the different monies come from to make that up?

So we know that there's—where is it here now—so we've got \$1 million accounted for for the IISD. We now have \$3.556 million, if I heard the minister correctly, coming from SDIF. So just an explanation of where the remainder is from would be great.

Ms. Squires: So we did increase the budget for the made-in-Manitoba climate and green fund, and it sits at \$40 million right now. Much of it is unallocated. I did share with you some of the commitments that we've already made, but we—as member opposite

knows, we are at the outset of developing our green plan.

We were hoping to have passage of our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan, the implementation act, this spring. Unfortunately, that didn't—doesn't look like it's working out, unless members opposite want to make a commitment right now, and take a strong stand on climate change adaptation and a commitment to the environment, and commit today that we can get that bill passed before the end of this session. It's certainly not too late. I know our House leader is sitting here, and he could possibly accommodate that if members opposite wanted to come into an agreement. We could have a little conversation with your House leader, and our House leader could certainly accommodate any willingness on the part of members opposite to move forward on taking strong action on the climate and getting—helping us get our work under way to transition to the low-carbon future and move forward with a lot of the really exciting initiatives that we are embarking on.

Having said that, our work certainly will not cease just because there's some, you know, complications with members opposite wanting to help usher in this new era where Manitoba is heading in terms of transitioning to that low-carbon future. So we are going to continue to make investments, with that \$40-million initial investment to the green fund for this year.

The—there is some money that we've allocated, but, by and large, the other \$34 million, we're going to be looking at a number of initiatives. The member opposite, I'm sure he's read the legislation for our made-in-Manitoba climate and green fund. In section 12(1) and 12(2), it talks about the fund and what we will do with that fund.

So the legislation, page 12 of the bill, says that the purpose of the fund is to provide financial support for projects, studies and activities that will do one or more of the following: (a) reduce greenhouse gas emissions, (b) address the effects of climate change, including measures to adapt to climate change, (c) promote sustainable development, (d) improve the management and protection of water resources—and that's a really key thing.

And I mentioned in one of my conversations with the media that—somebody had asked me, well, why is water protection and water initiatives in your Climate and Green Plan? And I said, in Manitoba,

considering that we are a province, by and large, shaped like a bathtub, we receive so much water from four neighbouring—or three other neighbouring provinces—Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta—as well as four US states south of the border. We are the benefactors of all that water, and that water is a huge blessing.

If anybody reads the news and reads about Cape Town being almost to the point where they are out of their fresh water, and so they're on restrictions. And the last time I checked, I think each household—not person, but each household in Cape Town—was allowed a daily allotment of 15 litres of water a day. And I saw somewhere that the Canadian average household uses in excess of 350 or 400 litres of water a day. So we would be in incredible peril if that situation—if a drought ever came to Manitoba and we were in a situation like Cape Town and were limited to 15 litres of water a day.

* (11:20)

I would remind everybody that if anybody had a shower today—and a very brief shower, at that—they would have used their 15 litres of water. That would've been your entire water supply for the day exhausted in one shower, or three toilet flushes. So the water we receive in this province is a huge, huge blessing, but it also needs to be managed, and so our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan has an entire pillar devoted to the management and responsible management of water in the province.

Mr. Altemeyer: And the minister referenced that there's significant amounts out of that remaining \$34 million that is unallocated. Can she clarify how much of that is allocated and how much of it is unallocated for the current year?

Ms. Squires: And that is a really good question that members opposite asked, and it certainly does point to a trend that our government is taking in our approach to climate change. We recognize that it's certainly not a—it cannot be one department or even one branch—*[interjection]* Are we okay? We're good to continue? Okay, good.

Mrs. Colleen Mayer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

So, as I was saying, we are taking a whole-of-government approach to climate change, and we know that the days of having climate change being restricted to one branch or even one department is just not the solution in which we want to continue to move towards reacting to climate change. Climate

change is really an entire whole-of-government focus.

And one of the things that the federal Auditor General had remarked on in their report—and it was a broad range report of looking at each province and territory's response to climate change—one of the criticisms that they had was that climate change was siloed into a very specific branch in government or a department in government, and it wasn't providing the results that the auditors general of Canada were looking for in terms of having everybody approach to—every government moving to a whole-of-government approach to climate adaptation and mitigation.

We know that climate change work happens in a variety of branches. We know that there's entities within Crown Services that will be specifically working towards targeting climate change adaptation and action on climate change. We know that there's initiatives in Agriculture that are under way that are really directed at mitigating climate change and adaptation. Manitoba Infrastructure also has a significant focus on climate change and several other departments that have that focus. Even the Department of Education has a focus on climate change. This is certainly something that is moving beyond one specific branch or one siloed entity in government, and it's really all-encompassing.

And so the auditors general in Canada had concluded that they would like to see a more holistic approach from governments, as they really become mobilized to face climate change head-on. And our government is certainly answering that call by pulling in all the departments in looking at how we can respond and react to climate change.

And so, when I say that the fund is—been available to us for that purpose, we are certainly going to be working in collaboration with Manitoba Infrastructure, with Agriculture and Indigenous and Northern Relations and other departments to make sure that we have the right approach. We're not going to be looking at water as specifically a, you know, a specific initiative to move water from one point to another without really taking a holistic view of that and putting it in the context of the Climate and Green Plan. When we're building a new school, we're not going to be just looking at it from, you know, how many classrooms do we need to build? And I know Minister Wishart—or the Education Minister has announced the building of seven new schools in our province, thus far, and he's got a lot of more good

announcements to come. But I think that this is historic for Manitoba to be seeing this kind of increase in the building of schools.

* (11:30)

And when he's building new schools, as we know, the new one in Brandon East is going to be LEED certified. It is going to be a leader in green technology and efficiency when it comes to the building, and so it will be a green school and we're really pleased about that, that our students can go to a LEED-certified school, that that school will help us meet our goals of reducing carbon emissions in a very responsible manner.

So we're taking a whole-of-government approach to climate change.

Mr. Altemeyer: My—I appreciate the minister's response. We did many of the things that she is referring to in exactly the same effort to instill a more holistic approach to green issues, generally, across departments.

My original question was about unallocated versus allocated in the green fund. So far the minister has, you know, properly clarified that about four and a half of—\$4.5 million out of the \$40 million is—involves IISD money and the SDIF money. I'm just wondering what the rest of it—where it's coming from and what it'll be used for.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Squires: I did want to provide an answer to the critic's question, and in terms of—I appreciate his interest in our government moving towards that more holistic approach to the climate and green fund. And I know he was really wanting the—to find out what the purpose of that fund is. And it certainly will be a fund dedicated to mitigating climate change and helping all of Manitoba transition and adapt to a low-carbon future. And so we're excited to be doing that work with Manitobans and working with industries throughout Manitoba, and different sectors and different individuals in their households. And we take a look at what we can do, as individuals, and on how we can adapt to a low-carbon future.

And all of us, throughout all of the community, has a role to play in small initiatives, whether it be ensuring that we put our recyclables in the recycling bin and making sure that our recyclables are going into the right bin and not putting other things in the recycling container that certainly can't accept those materials. And sometimes it actually contaminates

the other materials in the recycling bin. And you may be wondering, what does this have to do with climate mitigation? Well, it actually has a lot to do with adaptation to climate change. And we know if we're going to be successful in reducing our overall carbon emissions, we're going to have to be looking at it from a recycling perspective.

And our government did announce the creation of a recycling task force in last year's Throne Speech. And I'm really pleased—we'll be very pleased to be working with this entity that will be specifically committed to recycling initiatives. We know that 30 per cent of the contents of Brady landfill are recyclable materials and that we could divert those from Brady landfill, or other landfills throughout the province, into an appropriate recycling facility.

And, likewise, we also know that some of the materials that end up in recycling facility are not recyclables and actually have to then be diverted out of the recycling track. And there's a variety of methods, whether it be machine or manual labour, but people actually pulling out the things that shouldn't be in the recyclables and putting them into a waste track. And then they have to cart those materials to the landfill. And, of course, all of that creates carbon emissions in that process.

And we're also looking at the materials that are coming off of that recycling line. We know that China, for example, has really tightened its limitations and restrictions on what kind of materials it will take. And, if a block of plastics, for example, is contaminated in every way, shape or form, they will not accept that. And that is certainly a wake-up call to us here, in Manitoba, to make sure that our blocks of recycling that we are wanting to find an end of life for and an end-user for these—for all this plastic, we need to make sure that it is in the format, or it's in with the consistency that is in keeping with other countries' requirements.

And so we want to find a home for those plastics to be recycled. And so, therefore, we're needing to look at ways in which we can make sure our plastics are less contaminated and in the quantity and the consistency that other countries that could possibly be purchasing these products would want them in.

And so that is really a call-to-action for every Manitoban to really look at how they're recycling and their initiatives towards disposing some of the things that they're using. And so we're very pleased to be having a number of agreements with our producers and the responsibility that the producers

are taking, whether it's the people that are taking care of end-of-life of electronics and batteries or plastics or paper products, and even refrigerators and larger appliances and smaller appliances.

All of that stuff really should be diverted from the landfill—find an appropriate end-of-life use for that and, really, it will help overall reduce the carbon footprint of the province.

* (11:40)

We have said many times, and our government believes, that the best the way to deal with methane is to not create it in the first place.

And we know that that is a—it is a lofty goal and it's certainly one that is, you know, 100 per cent elimination of methane might not be achievable, but we can certainly do our part by looking at more organic recycler—or composting and getting organics out of that landfill to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and particularly that really potent one of methane gas. And we believe that the best way to deal with methane is to not produce it in the first place.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I have a limited amount of time, so if the minister can try and keep the answers as short and focused as possible it would be helpful in getting as many questions as we can.

My first question has to do with the approach to forest fires. Last year we saw the big forest fires around Wasagamack, Garden Hill and St. Theresa Point. And I visited there.

I've talked with people who were on the ground at the time. It was very clear that this started out as a small fire not far from the communities and that with a focused effort early on that fall—small fire could have been put out long before it became the really dangerous and huge and problematic fire which required huge numbers of people to be evacuated. It clearly points to a need for a change, a change in being able to put out small fires, but also a change in making sure that First Nations communities as well as other communities are well prepared.

We saw the circumstances of a number of homes being burned in Little Saskatchewan quite recently, and I think that also highlights this, so I'd be interested in the minister's update on the approach to forest fires.

Ms. Squires: It is a really good question that member opposite asks about the Wildfire Program in the province of Manitoba, and as he's well aware, the

way we're fighting wildfires today is remarkably different from the way we were fighting wildfires even a decade ago, or two decades ago, in the sense that the scope and the scale and the time-season of firefighting has expanded beyond anything we've ever seen.

In fact, last year one of the directors involved in the Wildfire Program certainly thought we were done for the season and that we were done fighting wildfires for the year.

And then some major fires, including the ones that the members opposite had mentioned, erupted, and we were fighting those fires later in the year than ever before.

We were still fire-fighting fires last year in October, and we know that the wildfires and the pattern of wildfires and the increase in wildfires is definitely a direct correlation to climate change. And in the previous question about, you know, how we're restructuring to adapt to climate change, well, fighting wildfires certainly comes into play because we're on the ground fighting these fires a lot longer than ever before.

And this year our team has done a remarkable job, and I really want to give a shout-out to Gary Friesen, who is the director of the Wildfire Program, and his entire team. They have staffed up in—just overnight to fight some of the fires that we're dealing with right now.

And, you know, my thoughts and prayers are with the entire team every day as they're going out to battle these fires.

We know that this is tremendously important work, but it's also very dangerous work, and unfortunately, as we saw last week, there were two deaths associated with a wildfire or linked to a wildfire, and that's a reminder to all of us that these wildfires can become escalated in a very, very short period of time.

* (11:50)

This year, so far, we've had 60 wildfires that we have been fighting, which I think might be a record for this time of year, and it's certainly putting our resources to the test. And I can say, by and large, our team is responding to that admirably.

We do have 35 extra firefighters that are working right now on various fires throughout the province, and that also includes 10 helicopters and five water bombs, but—water bombers, pardon me.

But, as the member had asked about, like, how are we modernizing our firefighting resources and making sure that they are responding to fires in an adequate way in a timely basis.

And what we're doing is moving towards a more provincial focus in and less regional driven, so that we don't have regions specifically just tasked with fighting fires in their region, that a firefighter in Manitoba, who's part of our wildfire firefighting program, would be working for all of Manitoba and not just a specific region, and would be deployed and redeployed where it's needed.

We are working to enhance our employment of First Nations communities on First Nations—in First Nations communities so that we can, for one thing, provide more economic resources and jobs for those communities that are often remote and where there aren't plentiful jobs to go around in those communities in the first place.

But we really do think that the way we need to work is more collaboratively with our indigenous partners at fighting fires, and that is something that our department—and I want to commend our Deputy Minister, Rob Olson, for the work that he's doing in leading up a bit of a modernization strategy for fighting fires, so that we can provide the right response at the right time, and really be working with one plan, one centralized directive, and being able to respond quicker and faster and in a way that is more appropriate and also includes the indigenous communities to work side by side with us and be part of us and part of our strategy.

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

My second question has to do with the climate change plan. I was very disappointed that there wasn't an action plan for agriculture in the climate change, and that nitrous oxide, for example, wasn't even mentioned, and that the agricultural emissions were estimated either 30 or 32 per cent, but they didn't include any of the gas or fossil fuel used in tractors, the heating of barns.

I was talking with people with Keystone Agricultural Producers; they're saying that the numbers should be closer to 38 per cent. I'm not sure that it shouldn't even be 40 per cent.

So, clearly, when it comes to agriculture, the minister needs to get rolling and needs to make sure that there are more accurate figures for the total number of greenhouse gases produced by agriculture.

So my question, really, is: What is the minister doing with respect to agriculture and, specifically, with respect to nitrous oxide as a part of that?

Ms. Squires: The members opposite had asked a couple of questions rolled into one, there, so I'm going to try to get an answer specifically to each section of his question with my answer.

The first one, regarding the carbon emissions report, we are limited to reporting, and we obtain all of our data exclusively from the National Inventory Report on carbon emissions. And so all of our numbers are reflected—are reflective of the findings of this report.

Can there be efficiencies and accuracies improved on the National Inventory Report that all provinces and territories and the federal government use and that is controlled by the federal government? Absolutely, there can be improvements to that data. And we're working with our federal counterparts to ensure that that data is available, updated and accurate and enhanced upon.

But I certainly do welcome the member's voice in working with the federal government to encourage them to constantly be improving the National Inventory Report data so that when we're talking about a-sector-by-sector emissions or when we're talking about other initiatives, it's very important that we're actually seeing what is being put into the atmosphere and what we're doing that is actually reducing the carbon emissions.

And we can make evaluations based on programming that's working to reduce carbon emissions on a go-forward basis from that data. So we're really relying on that data to be effective, reliable and informative.

So, in regards to what we're doing with agriculture as a whole, I do want to point out that our agriculture producers have been good stewards of this land for a century and more and more. And they will continue to be good stewards of the land. And we're looking forward to working with them as they adapt to a low-carbon future. And we know that they are going to be a huge part of the answer as we move to the low-carbon future.

We have—we are developing the concept of a centre for sustainable agriculture that will be—it will build capacity for agriculture-related climate change research and how we can get to having decreased emissions of GHGs, enhanced sequestration of

carbon in the soil and greater resiliency to extreme weather.

* (12:00)

If members opposite will recall, we just had introduced and had a committee stage for our Bill 7, The Sustainable Watersheds Act. And that will enable GROW, and I'm certain that the member opposite is familiar with the initiative of GROW, the GRowing Outcomes in Watersheds, which is the made-in-Manitoba approach to ALUS, and that will enhance our ecological goods and services in the province and, ultimately, it will be taking lands out of production and helping enable these landowners, which will predominately be farmers, that will be taking, you know, areas of their land that are by and large unharvestable, taking them permanently out of production to grow grass and wetlands and trees, which all will sequester carbon.

And so, as we expand the acres of land that are taken out of production through GROW, we will be sequestering even more carbon. We will be doing, with—through our no-net-loss-of-wetlands initiative, we will be ensuring that we've got enhancements of our wetlands. Seventy per cent of Manitoba was once a wetland, and while we're probably not going to get all that wetland back into the province—I think this building was probably situated on a wetland a couple of centuries ago—and we know that we're probably not going to restore all of those wetlands, but the more wetlands that we can restore and enhance and preserve and protect in this province is going to have enormous ecological benefits down the road at sequestering carbon.

And so our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan does propose a number of initiatives to be working with our agriculture producers to help them transition to the low carbon future, and, ultimately, many producers have been on the front lines of climate change for years and continue to feel those effects probably more acutely than you and I who are urban dwellers and are perhaps not as exposed and in touch with the land as they are.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the minister, and certainly we need to be working closely with farmers and agriculture producers as we move forward.

The minister and her government campaigned on a plan for eco-certification of the fisheries on Manitoba's three great lakes, and I'm going to ask specifically about Lake Winnipegosis because it's the worst affected. And I would ask the minister, what is

her plan and timeline for eco-certification for Lake Winnipegosis?

Ms. Squires: I thank the member for bringing up the issue of sustainability on our lakes. And I do want to mention and commend the member for some of his passionate advocacy in relation to some of our species, the sturgeon and other species in Manitoba. And just for generally having a concern about our—the sustainability of our fishers.

Member knows that Skownan First Nation was the first to achieve eco-certification to much success. That was a huge, international success, and we're delighted to be continuing to work with them on their goals for maintaining that certification.

We have 16 other fisheries in the province that are engaged with us, right now, in pursuing eco-certification. We are at the preliminary stages of working with these fisheries. And we're pursuing this with great excitement. We do believe that it is a collaborative approach. An eco-certification is undoubtedly something that we need to work hand-in-hand with all of the fishers, all the indigenous communities that rely on the fisheries for their sustenance, and their economic development and well-being. And so it is a very collaborative process and one that we're quite excited about.

Now, those 16 fisheries are definitely the smaller fisheries in the province. Work does continue on Lake Manitoba, Lake Winnipeg and specifically, member had mentioned, Lake Winnipegosis, which we know is certainly a fishery that requires definite, significant commitment to. And that there's a lot of things that need to be done for sustainability in that regard to the Lake Winnipegosis and the fishery. So we are engaging in a very collaborative approach to them.

We are hearing a little bit more consensus now than any time before on the need for sustainable—a sustainable practice and sustainability on the fishery. What all the fishers have said to us—and I take this very, very seriously—the fishers are asking us to be a little bit more part of the data collection process and to have access to the data a little bit more—have it more readily available to them. So we're looking at ways in which we can engage them in collaboration on the data.

* (12:10)

And, when we're all in agreement with the data and the figures, that would certainly allow us to then lead to an evidence-based approach. And when we

use that evidence-based approach, it's definitely more—we get farther faster when we all agree on the evidence that's presented. And, up until now, we've seen a lot of disbelief, if you will, from a variety of people who use the lake in terms of the sustainability of the resource. And we are, first and foremost, looking forward to that citizen engagement and collaborative approach to the evidence, that would point to the need for very urgent, sustainable initiatives and eco-certification.

So it is a collaborative approach, and I, certainly, am very mindful of the many people throughout Manitoba—and I've had the pleasure of spending time on the lake, and there was one day in particular, it was a -30° degree day and some fishers had taken me out on the lake and had introduced me to their way of life and their practices, as commercial harvesters and fishers.

And there's a balance to be had, and I know members opposite is aware of that, and we need to work hand-in-hand with, you know, our fishers, who we know are predominantly indigenous fishers and who have very limited economic opportunities. And we want to manage our resources sustainably with them, in conjunction with them, as we look at eco-certification of our fisheries, including Lake Winnipegosis, especially Lake Winnipegosis.

Mr. Altemeyer: I thank the—my colleague and the minister for their dialogue on those important issues.

My next question for the minister and her department is: Has her department received a legal opinion on the regulation or potential banning outright of night hunting in Manitoba? And has the minister consulted with the Constitutional Law branch of the provincial government on this question?

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much for the question. And I do want to ask for consideration of a little bit more time to discuss my answer on this. I would like to give a full answer to this. But, as members opposite also know, there is notice on the Order Paper that we will be tabling legislation in a few short days on this very issue. And I, certainly, would be loath to say anything, specifically about that legislation and that legislative process, that would put that legislation in peril.

So I am going to ask for a quick moment to receive some advice from the Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. I guess, with the bill maybe being introduced in a few days—or next week,

we can only do general—talk about generally about the topic but not about the bill 'pacifics' itself, okay?

Mr. Altemeyer: If I may, and yes, I agree with the minister. We don't want to be talking about whatever the government has in mind, and that's why I phrased the question the way that I did. If it helps, I guess, a related question would be: Does the minister agree that there are, you know, section 35 and constitutional issues associated with any action along these lines, and does the minister believe that any discussions that may've taken place, or are taking place, that they meet the threshold for a section 35 consultation?

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the member's patience as I sort of ascertain what I can and can't speak about publicly at this point about our legislation that is imminent, and I am really excited about our forthcoming change here in Manitoba. And I can confirm for the member—we are all familiar with the 2006 Supreme Court ruling, the *R. v. Morris*, that gave—that outlined that night hunting specifically was a right for indigenous people to night hunt in a safe manner.

And, of course, there were restrictions, if you will, on the right, which, for them—in order for them to exercise this right to night hunt, there must be the access—they might—they must have the right of access to the land in which they are wishing to pursue night-hunting activities, and it also must be done in a safe manner.

So that is what we've learned from the Supreme Court decision from 2006, the *R. v. Morris* case.

I can also confirm for the member that we have had extensive involvement from constitutional lawyers every step of the way. We have had an extensive engagement that is reaching back even before my mandate as the Minister of Sustainable Development. In this past August when I became the minister, there was already engagement that had taken place and consultation that had taken place prior to then.

* (12:20)

But, specifically, since our government has been—since we formed office, we have been engaging with indigenous people. We had an elders' gathering of—to find out opinions and to receive advice on how to proceed, and then we followed through and had extensive section 35 consultations that was conducted by members of my branch, as well as members. We've had—the framework has

been determined and devised by constitutional experts. So we, certainly, have worked in that—within that framework, and we believe that it has been a very collaborative process thus far.

Mr. Altemeyer: Yes, I thank the minister for that response.

Obviously, legislation across the country has been challenged; sometimes successfully by various indigenous groups.

Bringing in this type of process is challenging for everyone involved. It's an emerging area of law, as our society, I think, more properly recognizes the inherent rights of indigenous people and finds new ways to acknowledge that.

So let's—we'll wait for Monday and see what the proposal holds, and then see what responses are from there.

And, again, trying to be cautious in respecting the integrity of the process, could the minister share her opinion as to the role, if any, that First Nations and indigenous groups, including the Metis, would have to play in the regulation of the practice of night hunting?

So, again, not asking any specific question about what may or may not be in the law that her government will be proposing, but just from a policy point of view, from a policy perspective.

There is a form of self-regulation with the MMF, Manitoba Metis Federation, now. What's the minister and her department's view about a similar arrangement for other indigenous—primarily First Nations in our province?

Ms. Squires: Thank you very much for that question.

And I can confirm to the member that our government embraces the notion fully of shared management when it comes to the issue of hunting. And we are, certainly, seeking an ongoing collaboration with our indigenous partners when it comes to setting goals for sustainability of our fish and wildlife resources, and, in the way of, you know, we pursue our sustainability goals of our—of all of our fish and wildlife resources. We know that we've got incredible challenges in dealing with our, you know, our moose population, the caribou, particularly the woodland caribou in this province is facing extreme obstacles, and there needs to be a shared agreement in terms of the management of our natural resources.

And the one thing that I'm very pleased, in all of my conversations with our indigenous partners, and I've had numerous engagements myself in addition to the actual specific section 35 consultations that my department has undertaken, and I am very pleased to say that by and large we're seeing a very large, broad agreement from our indigenous communities to work in partnership with the Province in fulfilling our mutually agreeable goals on sustainability. They're as concerned about dwindling populations of some of our iconic species in this province. They are as concerned about those numbers as we are, and they want to be part of the solution. They are also equally concerned about unsafe hunting practices and want to be part of a solution.

And so we are moving into an era of greater collaboration, and we know that no one wants to be responsible for taking that last moose out of the woods or taking that last elk or caribou. We don't want to be taking the last fish out of the lake. And so there is a broad agreement amongst many people in this province and, in particular, with our indigenous community, that sustainability goals must be addressed and they must be addressed together, in partnership, and I'm very pleased and proud of the work that our department and our government has done in pursuing the notion of shared management of our resources.

Mr. Altemeyer: Appreciate the minister's response. I think—I mean, I have some additional questions on that front, but I think they can wait 'til after the legislation is introduced. So I thank you for that dialogue.

Maybe last one, just to finish off, I note, in the green plan, the government stated that it is looking to increase the WRARS levy assigned at landfills and use that revenue to engage in food-waste composting and other organics diversion, which you and I have had good, productive conversations about in the past. Is the WRARS levy going up in this fiscal year, and, if so, what's the size of the revenue that will be coming in, and what would it be used for?

Ms. Squires: In the essence of time, I wanted to quickly provide an answer to the member, and, also, I'm not sure if this will be our last opportunity in Estimates. I certainly hope not, and perhaps we will convene again later this month or in future time, but given the fact that member opposite did share with us yesterday that he does plan to leave and pursue other opportunities in which he can make a valuable contribution to our province, I did want to just take this opportunity, in case it is my last opportunity, to wish him the utmost success.

And I know that our province has benefited from his contribution to the environment and his goals in helping everyone transition to that low carbon future, and I know that wherever he does find himself at home, it will certainly be of benefit to all Manitobans, and I wish him all the best in that.

In regard to the WRARS levy, I can confirm that that is one of many tools that we're looking at. We have not specifically committed to increasing the levy right now. It is simply in our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan as an overall—another tool in the tool box, if you will.

But just to really give that recognition and awareness to the need to start to really think about everything that goes into that landfill and ways in which we can help divert organics, if you will, divert recyclables from the landfill, those are definitely mutual goals that we have, and our government has that goal of looking to ensure that our landfills are—the contents are reduced significantly and that we're not adding to that landfill in unsustainable ways. And so the WRARS levy is one of many—

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 12:30 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Piwniuk): The hour being 12:30 p.m., the House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, May 11, 2018

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