

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

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The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GORDON, Audrey	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	Assiniboia	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, September 30, 2019

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

At 1:30 p.m. the Sergeant-at-Arms, carrying the mace and followed by the Speaker, the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk and the Clerk assistants of the Legislative Assembly, entered the Chamber.

The Sergeant-at-Arms returned to the north doors and met His Honour the Administrator with the mace.

Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms (Mr. Ray Gislason): His Honour the Administrator.

His Honour the Administrator, accompanied by the honorary aides-de-camp, the officer escort, the Premier and the Provincial Court judges, entered the Chamber and took his seat on the throne.

The Sergeant-at-Arms made obeisance with the mace and retired to the side of the Chamber.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Hon. Chief Justice Richard Chartier (Administrator of the Province of Manitoba): Please be seated.

Madam Speaker and members of the Manitoba Legislature, I welcome you to the First Session of the 42nd Legislative Assembly of the province of Manitoba.

Je vous souhaite la bienvenue à la première session de la quarante-deuxième Législature de la Province du Manitoba.

Translation

I welcome you to the First Session of the 42nd Legislative Assembly of the Province of Manitoba.

English

I offer my congratulations to all new and returning members of this Assembly. I also offer the congratulations and appreciation of all Manitobans to all candidates who sought election to this Assembly in the recent election. Your commitment and contribution to the validity of our democracy is deserving of our respect.

To all Manitobans, your government is grateful for the honour to continue serving the people of our province. You have renewed your government's mandate to continue its mission of fixing Manitoba's finances, repairing its services and rebuilding its

economy. While significant progress was made in all three areas during the previous term, much work remains to be done in order to complete the task of moving Manitoba forward towards greater prosperity for all. As a government that keeps its promises, your government will continue to work to make Manitoba more economically competitive by reducing regulatory red tape and encouraging innovation.

Passage of The Business Registration, Supervision and Ownership Transparency Act (Various Acts Amended) will help Manitoba complete implementation of the New West Partnership Trade Agreement and will provide Manitobans with more access to customers and opportunities across western Canada.

Your government will address the issues of addictions and honour its obligation to keep our streets safe from crime, and your government will continue to work to strengthen our education system, support families in need and deliver better health care sooner for all Manitobans.

In the coming days, this Assembly will be asked to complete all necessary legislative requirements in order to fully implement the measures outlined in Budget 2019, measures that increase funding for health care, education and families, measures that increase support for tourism and our creative industries while also investing more than \$1 billion in strategic infrastructure, and, most importantly, measures that lower the provincial sales tax to 7 per cent.

In 2011, the previous government was elected based on its promise to not raise the provincial sales tax and a commitment to let Manitobans vote on major tax hikes.

Just 18 months later, both of those promises were broken. After making goods—after making more goods and services subject to the PST, the PST rate was increased to 8 per cent without the consent of Manitobans. That increase took more than \$300 million annually off the kitchen tables of Manitobans.

The previous government took more from Manitobans and gave less. Your government is committed to taking less from Manitobans and giving them more.

* (13:40)

Reducing the PST back to 7 per cent is part of your government's plan to guarantee \$2,020 in tax savings for Manitobans over the next years.

Manitobans have given your government the mandate to move forward towards a stronger economy, better services and better jobs. The work to achieve those goals resumes today. They will continue to guide the decisions of this government throughout its mandate. It is the path Manitobans have chosen, it is the bright future they deserve and it is what your government will work hard to deliver.

I now leave you to the business of the session knowing you will faithfully discharge your duties and responsibilities.

May Divine Providence continue to bless our province and guide this Assembly in all of its deliberations; God bless Manitoba; God bless Canada; God save the Queen.

His Honour the Administrator rose from the throne and retired from the Chamber escorted by the Sergeant-at-Arms carrying the mace and followed by the honorary aides-de-camp, the officer escort, the Premier and the Provincial Court judges.

Prior to their exiting the Chamber, the lyrics of God Save the Queen and O Canada were sung.

The Speaker proceeded to the throne.

The Sergeant-at-Arms approached the Speaker, made obeisance with the mace, then placed the mace on the table.

Madam Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom, know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Please be seated.

At this time I would just like to take a moment to welcome everybody back, and especially to all the new members who are joining us here, a very special occasion it is for you, I'm sure, and all the best to everybody as you are taking on your new tasks before you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 1—An Act Respecting the Administration of Oaths of Office

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I move, seconded by the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter), that Bill 1, An Act Respecting the Administration of Oaths of Office; Loi sur la prestation des serments d'entrée en fonction, be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

* * *

Mr. Pallister: I move, seconded by the member for Southdale (Ms. Gordon), that—my motion has the name of the member, Madam Speaker. I need your guidance—*[interjection]*—it's appropriate to say the name—Doyle Piwniuk, member for the electoral division of Turtle Mountain, be Chairperson of the Committees of the Whole House, and Deputy Speaker.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Pallister: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Morden-Winkler (Mr. Friesen), that Dennis Smook, member for the electoral division of La Vérendrye, be Deputy Chairperson of the Committees of the Whole House.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Pallister: I move, seconded by the member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), that Andrew Micklefield, the member for the electoral division of Rossmere, be Deputy Chairperson of the Committees of the Whole House.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Pallister: I move, seconded by the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Cullen), that the speech of His Honour the Administrator be taken into consideration today.

Thank you.

Motion agreed to.

* (13:50)

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): On House business, Madam Speaker.

Could you please canvass the House for leave to limit the debate on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne to three members in the following order: the Leader of the

Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew); the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont); and the Premier (Mr. Pallister). Each member's speech would be limited to five minutes and following the third speech the Speaker would be obligated to put the question on the motion.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to limit the debate on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne to three members in the following order: the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew); the member for St. Boniface; and the Premier? Each member's speech would be limited to five minutes and following the third speech the Speaker would be obligated to put the question on the motion.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

THRONE SPEECH (First Day of Debate)

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): I move, seconded by the member for Seine River (Ms. Morley-Lecomte), that the following address be presented to His Honour the Administrator: We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, thank Your Honour for the gracious speech addressed to us at the First Session of the 42nd Legislature of Manitoba.

Motion presented.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to say a big thank you, kitchi miigwech, to the people of Fort Rouge for sending me back to this Chamber to serve in another Legislature, and also a congratulation to all my colleagues returning and new MLAs.

I am very proud to stand with a strengthened opposition team that will work very hard to keep this government to account. I want to take a minute to acknowledge that everyone on our team did something very difficult to be here. Some of them made history in their election to this Chamber; others defeated Cabinet ministers or incumbent MLAs; and still others conducted themselves with great integrity, honesty and perspicacity in finding their way to the hallowed Chamber of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

And we will certainly need all of those skills and attributes to be able to hold this government to account. We know that their focus in the last Legislature was to cut health care, to close emergency rooms and to raise the cost of people's Manitoba Hydro bill. And our increased size of our caucus on this side is a clear repudiation of this government's

agenda, and we will hold them to account each and every day, Madam Speaker. Gives me great pleasure to stand here as the voice of progressive Manitoba.

And we heard in that short Throne Speech that this government saw fit to bring forward an extended soliloquy made up of partisan attacks, and yet they didn't even mention climate change once, Madam Speaker. And this just a few days after my colleagues and I joined 12,000 people out front of this building as the young people of our province and our world demanded that we take immediate and substantial action to address the issue of our time which is climate change.

On a perhaps more cross-partisan note, Madam Speaker, today is Orange Shirt Day, and I want to thank all of my returning colleagues who did support The Orange Shirt Day Act in the last Legislature which recognizes this day officially in our province as one that we observe in honour and commemoration of the survivors of Indian residential schools.

Our country has learned the lessons of the past to a certain extent. We saw the apology on behalf of the Crown by Prime Minister Harper in 2008, and now it is up to each of us to carry the lessons of that past dark era forward and to ensure that no child in this country is separated by force from their family simply because of who they are and, perhaps more importantly, that we never see fit to allow a government policy to judge an entire group of people based on racist and outmoded thinking.

And so the true import and significance of this Orange Shirt Day in 2019 is that it's another opportunity for us to stand together and reaffirm that slogan that we now see imprinted on T-shirts, that every child matters. In our language—and I'll table the Anishinabe transition for the benefit of Hansard—we say *gakina abinoonjiiyag apiitendaagoziwag [every child matters]*. Every child matters.

The significance of this, Madam Speaker, is that the residential school survivors themselves stood up, demanded justice of this country, and when they were met by leaders of the federal and provincial government, they displayed a great amount of wisdom, a great amount of compassion and a great amount of courage, which I think is a true lesson on what it means to be a human being, that when you are done wrong, the proper response of a fully formed human being is not to strike back, but rather to rise above with love, with compassion and with generosity.

And so while we honour the residential school survivors themselves on Orange Shirt Day, we alt 'aso'—we ought also to take a moment to recognize the true lessons of humanity that have been shown by these generations in many of our communities.

In the past year, I wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to make Orange Shirt Day a federal statutory holiday. And it is my hope that this will be accomplished by the next prime minister of our country. I will write to the next Prime Minister to do so. It would be a fitting tribute to these residential school survivors. It would mark the progress that our nation has made while still giving us an opportunity to commemorate their courage, their grace and their compassion. And so perhaps that's something that the Premier and I can work together on during this Legislature.

With that I say thank you again to everybody who played a role in sending us here, and congrats once again to all the elected members.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I'd like to start by acknowledging Orange Shirt Day. It's a reminder of the causal daily cruelty and denial of dignity that was a legacy of residential schools, as well as the ongoing decades-long legacy of governments undermining and tearing apart First Nations families. We must remind ourselves this day, and every day, that every child matters.

We must reflect, too, that the residential schools mark the worst of what government can do: institutional cruelty, neglect and death, even as warnings were raised over a century ago that what was taking place was a national crime.

Set against this, we are also today marking the outcome of an election, which in many ways represents the very best of our values. Democracy offers us the peaceful transition of power. And while we live in a society that is unequal, and is growing more unequal, the democratic right to vote means that at the ballot box, at least, every person is equal.

We can and should lament that more Manitobans did not vote and that so many people feel disengaged from the political process. I am grateful to everyone who put their name forward to make democracy better in Manitoba. I say that especially for candidates who ran under the Manitoba Liberal banner, but it is true of all parties. There are good people in every party, and no one has a monopoly on good ideas, though sometimes it certainly seems this government has a

monopoly on bad ones. Our job is not just to criticize but to demand the government prove its case.

Much of politics is treated as theatre, which is to say it is assumed by the people watching it that it is not serious, that people pretend to be someone they're not and recite lines over and over that someone else wrote for them. One consequence of this is that the theatre of lip service is seen as a substitute of action.

The decisions made in this Chamber every day have an impact on the lives of over 1 million people in Manitoba and more besides when we include our role in Canada and the world. This is not just a question of decisions to act, but decisions not to act, that Manitobans may be harmed by neglect and cuts, and there are many areas where we are deeply, deeply concerned about this government's policies—on health care, education, climate change, on the economy and, indeed, on democracy—that these systems are already more fragile than the government realizes and the measures this government is proposing is putting them at greater risk when we need to be strengthening them.

* (14:00)

In the often hyper-partisan atmosphere in this Chamber it is easy to dismiss complaints as theatre or posturing. I hope we can consider the serious nature of the decisions we make, that we approach our task as legislators with humility and, when necessary, set aside our partisan blinders to listen in earnest to the voices of people who cry out for help or in warning that we are headed in the wrong direction.

We have the opportunity in this Chamber to set our province on a path that will affect people's lives for the better or for the worse for years and decades to come. Our obligation is to the future, not just ourselves. We look forward to working with you all.

Thank you. Merci.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Congratulations on your re-election as Speaker, Madam Speaker.

Also, congratulations to my colleague, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), and to his team, including those—all those who sought office under the banner of New Democratic Party. As well, to my colleague from St. Boniface, congratulations also to him and to all the—of his candidates who sought office on behalf of the Liberal Party.

And congratulations, of course, as well, to all my colleagues here and all who sought office on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party, and to all who put

their names on the ballot. Thank you for making democracy work and for giving Manitobans a choice.

It is my hope that this Assembly will continue to be the foundation for ongoing dialogue, for co-operation, for debate on important issues. I look forward to working with all my colleagues here to move our beloved Manitoba forward as we continue in our efforts to fix the finances, to repair the services, to rebuild the economy of our province.

Back in 2016 our PC team asked Manitobans for their trust, and in return we said that we would keep our word and we established a plan that included better jobs, better care, better education, better value for money and better together; and promises were made, promises were kept. And, Madam Speaker, three weeks ago, on September 10th, Manitobans renewed their confidence in this party and in its leadership and they made their choice, and their choice was forward, not backward. They elected the largest back-to-back majority governments in the history of Manitoba.

And we will move forward, Madam Speaker, forward to better care sooner; forward to better education, better outcomes for our children and 20 new schools; forward to a made-in-Manitoba climate and green plan; forward to a stronger economy and 40,000 new jobs; and forward to affordability, which means, Madam Speaker, lower taxes and more money on the kitchen tables of Manitoba families, Manitoba small businesses and Manitoba seniors.

Over the course of the next couple of months our government will be putting forth an ambitious 100-day agenda that will see record tax relief, better health care sooner, more schools for students, more jobs for Manitobans and made-in-Manitoba climate change solutions.

And we will bring forward legislation to begin implementation of the 2020 \$2,020-tax-rollback guarantee. We will work towards implementing recommendations from the 2019 review of planning, permitting and zoning to help do a better job of attracting capital and creating jobs in this province, and we will host the inaugural Manitoba jobs summit later this week.

Working with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority we will create 200 new nursing positions. We will continue with the planning and then the construction of the St. Boniface emergency department and we will initiate the Frontline Ideas

Fund for healthcare workers to streamline operations and improve patient care.

In addition, we will initiate the teachers idea fund to support innovative solutions brought forth by teachers to streamline operations and improve educational outcomes for students. Moving forward on the construction of 20 new schools has been previously identified in our new schools guarantee.

We will continue to advance and lead in the elimination of barriers to interprovincial trade within our country. We will announce initial funding recipients for the growing opportunities in watersheds trust, and will consult with the private sector and develop a plan to eliminate the use of plastic bags in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, our team is ready to continue the hard work of making Manitoba Canada's most-improved province. Manitobans should expect nothing less. Manitobans deserve nothing less.

Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success. I encourage all members of this House to work together to achieve the betterment of our province for the good of its citizens now and in the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is the motion of the honourable member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lagassé), that is, the motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

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

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, on House business.

Could you please canvass the House for leave to consider a sessional order motion today without notice.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to consider a sessional order motion today without notice? Leave? *[Agreed]*

GOVERNMENT MOTION

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I move, seconded by the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine),

THAT the following sessional order applies for the First Session of the 42nd Legislature, despite any other rule or practice of this House.

Sitting schedule for September and October 2019

1. Subject to the following, the House shall sit Monday to Thursday from 1:30 p.m. until 6 p.m., from September 30th, 2019, until October 10th, 2019:
 - (a) On Friday, October 4th, 2019, as a separate sitting day, the House shall sit at 10 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. to consider Departmental Estimates in the Committee of Supply. The Speaker shall not call Routine Proceedings on this day, only Orders of the Day;
 - (b) On Friday, October 11th, 2019, the House shall sit at 10 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. to consider Routine Proceedings and Orders of the Day subject to item 10;
 - (c) The House shall not sit on the mornings of Tuesday, October 1st, 2019, and Thursday, October 3rd, 2019;
 - (d) If there are more than 40 hours of Estimates time remaining when the House rises on Friday, October 4th, 2019, the House shall then sit on the mornings of Tuesday, October 8th, 2019, and Thursday, October 10th, 2019, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. to consider departmental Estimates. If there are fewer than 40 hours of Estimates time remaining when the House rises on Friday, October 4th, 2019, the House shall not sit on the mornings of Tuesday, October 8th, 2019, and Thursday, October 10th, 2019, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Budget process

Reinstatement of financial process from the Fourth Session, 41st Legislature

2. The steps or segments of the financial process introduced and concluded during the Fourth Session of the 41st Legislature shall be reinstated in this First Session of the 42nd Legislature as follows:

- (a) The introduction, debate and adoption of the budget motion and Messages of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor tabled on March 7th, 2019, shall be deemed to have been introduced, considered and concluded during the First Session of the 42nd Legislature and that the ensuing steps of the financial process be continued in this current session;
- (b) The sequence for consideration of the departmental Estimates by the Committee of Supply, tabled in this House on March 21st, 2019, shall be reinstated and remain in effect for the duration of this session, subject to any subsequent amendment agreed to by the House leaders of the recognized parties;
- (c) The departmental Estimates shall be reinstated during the First Session of the 42nd Legislature at the same stage as they were when the Fourth Session of the 41st Legislature was dissolved with 92 hours and 26 minutes left for consideration of the same;
- (d) The consideration of departmental Estimates must be concluded by Thursday, October 10th, and reported to the House by Friday, October 11th, 2019. On Thursday, October 10th, subject to item 15, if all departmental Estimates resolutions have not passed, the chairpersons of the Committee of Supply shall immediately put all questions necessary to dispose of the remaining matters. These questions are not subject to debate, amendment or adjournment.

* (14:10)

- (e) The consideration of all remaining steps in the main and Capital Supply procedure set out in appendix D of the *Rules, Order and Forms of proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba* (The Rules) must be concluded by Friday, October 11, 2019.

Reinstatement of Bill 22

Reinstatement of Bill 22 – The Business Registration, Supervision and Ownership Transparency Act (Various Acts Amended) from the Fourth Session of the 41st Legislature.

3. Bill 22 – The Business Registration, Supervision and Ownership Transparency Act (Various Acts Amended) is to be reinstated during the First

Session of the 42nd Legislature at the same Second Reading stage it was at when the Fourth Session of 41st Legislature was dissolved.

Conclusion of the Second Reading, Committee Stage, Report Stage Amendment and Concurrence and Third Reading on Bill 22.

4. Second Reading stage on Bill 22 is to be completed on or before Wednesday, October 2nd, 2019. If necessary, 30 minutes prior to the adjournment hour on Wednesday, October 2nd, 2019, the Speaker must interrupt the proceedings and, without seeing the clock, put all questions necessary to conclude, without further debate or amendment, the Second Reading stage of Bill 22.
5. Rule 92(7) of the Rules, regarding the requirement for two days notice of a standing committee meeting, is to be waived for Bill 22.
6. Committee stage on Bill 22 is to be completed no later than Monday, October 7th, 2019, and reported to the House on Tuesday, October 8th, 2019.
7. If the committee stage is not completed by the noted date, the following provisions are to apply if a committee is sitting:
 - (a) The committee shall not rise until clause by clause is completed and the question to report the bill has been decided by the committee.
 - (b) If the committee has not completed public presentations, it must close public presentations at 9 p.m. By unanimous consent, the deadline can be extended to 10 p.m. The public has the ability to provide written submissions for an additional 24 hours.
 - (c) At 11 p.m. any member of the committee who wishes to move an amendment to Bill 22 must file 20 copies of the amendment with the Clerk of the committee, and the Clerk must distribute the amendment to members of the committee. After that time, an amendment may be moved only if copies of it were filed with the Clerk and distributed as required by this provision.
 - (d) At midnight, the Chair of the committee must interrupt the proceedings and, without further debate or amendment (other than an amendment distributed as acquired by paragraph (c)), put every question necessary to complete clause-by-clause consideration of the bill under consideration.
8. Report stage amendments and the Concurrence and Third Reading stages of Bill 22 are to be completed on or before Thursday, October 10th, 2019. If necessary, subject to item 15, the Speaker must interrupt the proceedings and, without seeing the clock, put all questions necessary to conclude without further debate or amendment the report stage amendment and the concurrence and third reading stages of Bill 22.
9. At any time this session when the House is considering any stage of Bill 22, the two sections of Supply in the committee rooms may meet concurrently with the House to consider departmental Estimates. The Chamber section of Supply will not meet at these times, and the House will be in session in the Chamber to debate Bill 22. During such sittings:
 - (a) If there is a recorded vote requested in the House, the two sections of Supply must recess for the duration of the vote.
 - (b) If there is a recorded vote requested in a section of Supply, the House must temporarily interrupt proceedings to resolve into Supply so that the Chamber section may convene, receive the request for a recorded vote, and then conduct the vote in accordance with rule 77(10), 77(11) and 77(12). Following the vote, the Chamber section may rise to allow the House to resume consideration Bill 22 while the two sections of Supply continue meeting.
 - (c) If on any day the House concludes its consideration of Bill 22 prior to the adjournment hour, the House may resolve into Supply so that the Chamber section may consider departmental Estimates.
10. The House is to not see the clock or adjourn on Friday, October 11, 2019, until the items set out in this Sessional Order are completed and Royal Assent has been granted to the following bills:
 - (a) Bill 22 – The Business Registration, Supervision and Ownership Transparency Act (Various Acts Amended);
 - (b) The Loan Act, 2019 and The Appropriation Act, 2019.

Adjournment on Friday, October 11, 2019

Matters to be completed before adjournment on Friday, October 11, 2019

11. At the conclusion of the actions required by this Sessional Order, the Speaker must adjourn the House without a motion for adjournment. The House then stands adjourned until the call of the Speaker.

General Provisions

Recorded Divisions

12. A recorded division on any item referred to in this sessional order cannot be deferred.

Interruption of proceedings

13. Where this sessional order requires the Speaker or a Chairperson to interrupt proceedings to take any action:

- (a) the House will not adjourn on that day until the Speaker or Chairperson has put all applicable questions on all items; and
- (b) at 30 minutes prior to the adjournment hour, the Speaker or Chairperson will interrupt debate and put all questions with no further debate or amendment.

Priority of actions to be taken

14. On Monday, September 30, 2019, the Speaker shall call:

- (a) The category Tabling of Reports from Routine Proceedings to allow for all remaining volumes of supplementary information for legislative review 2019-2020—departmental expenditure Estimates to be tabled, followed by:
- (b) Orders of the Day—to allow the House to resolve into the Committee of Supply to consider departmental Estimates.

15. On Thursday, October 10, 2019, if these actions have not already been concluded, at 30 minutes prior to adjournment they will be considered and resolved in the following order:

- (a) The chairpersons of the Committee of Supply shall put all questions necessary to dispose of the remaining departmental Estimates resolutions.
- (b) The Speaker shall put all questions necessary to conclude the report stage amendment and the concurrence and third reading stages of Bill 22.

16. Where:

- (a) this sessional order requires the Speaker or a Chairperson to take any action at a specified time; and
- (b) at the specified time, a point of order or matter of privilege has been raised and is under consideration by the House or Committee;

the Point of Order or Matter of Privilege is to be set aside, and no other Point of Order or Matter of Privilege may be raised, until the required action has been taken and all matters relating to the required action have been resolved.

Amendments

17. After adoption by the House, this Sessional Order may be amended by unanimous consent of the House.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), seconded by the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), that the following sessional order applies—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Oh, thank you. Dispense.

It has been moved by the honourable Government House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), seconded by the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), and the motion was in order.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the motion?

Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is the sessional order proposed by the honourable Government House Leader.

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

* (14:20)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

TABLING OF REPORTS

Madam Speaker: As per the sessional order, I am now calling tabling of reports under routine proceedings to allow the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2019-2020 Departmental Expenditure Estimates books to be tabled.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Education and Training): I am pleased to table Manitoba Education

and Training Supplemental Information For Legislative Review 2019-2020 Departmental Estimates.

Thank you.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I am pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review Departmental Expenditure Estimates report for the fiscal year of 2019-20.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Families. *[interjection]*

The honourable Minister of Justice?

Mr. Cullen: For the Department of Justice.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Families): I am pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2019-2020 departmental estimate—or—expenditure Estimates for the Department of Families.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I am pleased to table the 2019-2020 Supplementary Information for Legislative Review Estimates supplement for Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today in—Assembly to table the Manitoba Civil Service Commission's Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2019-20 Department Expenditure Estimates.

Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today in—Assembly to table the Manitoba Employee Pensions and Other Costs Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2019-20 Department Expenditures Estimates.

Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today in—Assembly to table the Manitoba Enabling Appropriations and Other Appropriations Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2019-20 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table Supplementary Information for Legislative Review '19-20 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for Manitoba Sustainable Development.

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise in—Assembly today to table the Manitoba departmental of agriculture expenditure Estimates for 2019-2020.

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the annual report for the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage for the fiscal year 2019-2020.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the Manitoba Growth, Enterprise and Trade Supplementary Information for Legislative Review 2019-2020 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): I am pleased to table the Indigenous and Northern Relations Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for the 2019-2020 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the Municipal Relations supplementing information for legislative review for the '19-20 Departmental Expenditure Estimates to the Department of Municipal Relations.

Hon. Ron Schuler (Minister of Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the Department of Manitoba Infrastructure's Supplementary Information for Legislative Review of the 2019-2020 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Madam Speaker: As per the sessional order, I am now calling orders of the day to allow the House to resolve into the Committee of Supply to consider departmental Estimates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for Executive Council, pursuant to the sessional order recently passed in the House.

For the committee's information, these Estimates are being reinstated at the same stage from the previous Legislature, where we last met on April 23rd, 2019, for a total one hour and 48 minutes. Given that these Estimates only contain one resolution, by practice, the discussion will be—will proceed in a global manner.

For the information of the speakers, when you have one minute left in your speaking time, I will just flash the little yellow reminder to let you know that you have a minute left.

Would the honourable First Minister like to introduce his staff that's here—present today?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I have with me Fred Meier, Clerk of the Executive Council, Cabinet secretary. Charlotte Price is here, assistant deputy minister, Cabinet strategic priorities. Aurel Tess is over here, Provincial Comptroller with Manitoba Finance, and my assistant's Ryan Werbicki over there, who is special assistant.

Mr. Chairperson: The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Since this is our first time back since the election, I'll kind of use the first question maybe as a bit of an opening statement.

Just want to take a moment to congratulate the First Minister and the other MLAs in the room on your elections. It's not an easy thing, and the way I always talk about it is: Not too many people in the history of our province get a chance to sit in that Chamber. Not too many people in the history of Manitoba get to be an MLA or to wear one of the pins that a few of our colleagues are wearing here today. And I do take that seriously, regardless of partisan stripe or affiliation, that we're all doing an important service here and all of us did do something special in getting elected here. So I just want to take a second to acknowledge that.

Also, specifically want to tell the First Minister, you know, well done, in terms of receiving a second mandate and getting re-elected to the government side. I know that we have different outlooks on the future of our province, though I think we share a common vision for making Manitoba a great place to live, and I look forward to serve in a role as opposition leader so that that difference of outlook not only creates many memorable comebacks and, you know, points in question period, but hopefully does actually advance the project of making this province one that we're all proud of.

You know, our team, we ran an election campaign that we're very proud of. We ran on a message of building a province that works for all of us, not just those at the top. And so our focus over the next few years will be to stand up for health care, will be to stand up for education, will be to stand up against climate change and to ensure that what happens in this building, the Manitoba Legislature, can help forge progress towards achieving those goals.

I know that the First Minister will articulate—he has started to articulate today with the mini-Throne Speech—but with the more fulsome Throne Speech later this fall, will set out his agenda. And I'll tell him that I will listen with an open mind and an open heart. I'll take seriously the proposals that his government is bringing forward, and I will do my best to give voice to the reasonable concerns, the practical questions and the hopes and dreams that people in our province have for having a province that works for all of us.

So I just want to take a minute to just put those words on the record and once again to offer congratulations to the First Minister, to all my colleagues from the different constituencies around the province who are here at the committee table.

Mr. Pallister: I thank my colleague for his words and also want to offer my congratulations to him and his team and also to the newly elected members who are with us on the committee today, from—the member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor), the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv), the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses), and also to offer, if I could, my congratulations to the Leader of the Liberal Party for his efforts in the campaign. He, as the Leader of the New Democratic Party, worked very, very hard and their preparation was obvious in their articulation of the positions they wanted to advocate for. And I thought for the most part the campaign itself was focused on issues, and I think that's always preferable.

And I also, of course, would offer my congratulations to my colleagues who returned to the Legislative Assembly and also, if I could, also to the families of our members, because it is not possible, really, for many of us to make this commitment to public life without the support of our friends and family, and for us, say, personally, in our household, first year that the place has been empty of children for over a quarter of a century, so it was a different experience for my wife this time. Esther was able to be involved in the campaign more than she had, and that was great to be able, as a couple, to share that experience with something that over the years we

haven't been able to do as much just because of the nature of our lives and the other tasks outside of politics that are also very important in life.

So I say thank you to her and thank you to all of the partners, spouses, family members because it is a commitment we make, but it also has a resultant effect on those around us and on the relationships we have with those we love.

So, for each of us, I know this is a pursuit of love, love for our province, love for the ideals that we share and sometimes don't, but ideals nonetheless that we speak for here that, as the member for Fort Rouge quite rightly said, are a privilege. And the honour of being given the stewardship of public office is something that many have aspired to over the years; many others have not, but for us, we have the opportunity to actually serve. When it's in that serving, that we demonstrate our caring in a real way and demonstrate our abilities in a real way as well.

So it would be my hope that where it is possible, and I believe it is possible on many occasions, to work together, to articulate positions that express Manitoba's best interests that we can also look for those occasions to do that as well as the normal course of events seems to be, in particular—a lot of western democracies lately that seek out points of disagreement, I think there is also a real opportunity to seek out points of agreement.

I remember today as a special day in respect of residential school recognition, recognition of the horrible public policies that resulted in so much hurt and harm and continue to. But I remember being part of a government that deserves some credit, but also being part of a, more importantly, the House of Commons, that came together regardless of political party stripe, to make this apology initially happen and to make the recognition of the wrongdoing of the past something that we—institutionalize isn't the right word—but that we have come to understand more fully, and to demonstrate we understand more fully, so we can move forward together.

* (15:00)

I think it's one example, and there are many others, where we have the opportunity to overcome the barriers of the things that divide us, I guess, and just work together for the united best interests of all. And I look forward to working with all my colleagues to see if we can make those types of things happen as well as we conduct the normal—all too normal—political debates on issues where there certainly is

ample room for disagreement, both within our caucuses and among us as party members, because that happens too.

But I look forward to the opportunity to serve and to serve with colleagues in the Legislative Assembly in the upcoming session. And I think that there's every reason for optimism as Manitoba continues to move in a—on many fronts in a positive direction.

Mr. Kinew: Well, and that concludes the most non-partisan exchange that you'll see over the next four years between the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and myself—or maybe three years, I don't know, we'll see—no, just kidding.

The Premier did mention Orange Shirt Day and the residential school, I guess, history in the response there. Earlier today in the response to the Throne Speech, I did mention the idea of making this a day that's nationally recognized. The case for doing so, I guess, has a few propositions to it. Maybe the most solid foundation on which the idea rests is that it is one of the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to have a stat holiday nationally recognized that would observe—be observed by Canadians and that would be a day to remember what happened in residential schools, but also more importantly, perhaps, to educate future generations so that we could learn from the mistakes of the past and use those lessons to forge a better tomorrow in our country.

And I think there's maybe just, like, a broader point that TRC may not have articulated exactly, but just that as we move forward on reconciliation, that having a public holiday to mark the occasion and to gather in communities like ours, which is happening today—many schools—I saw people posting about Steinbach, Winnipeg, you know, northern communities all reviewing Orange Shirt Day celebrations. And, you know, that's a good learning opportunity for kids, good learning opportunity even for adults. Because I know, like, many of us, my age included, we didn't learn about residential schools when we were in elementary or high school. And so some of us are learning that later in life about all that.

So I just wanted to see, you know, if the Premier's interested at all in joining me in advocating the next Prime Minister to pursue that as a national stat holiday. I'd previously written, you know, the current Prime Minister on that topic and, you know, his government expressed some interest. You know, I think there's a general consensus that I think all the parties support doing something in this space, and I

think part of the debate is which day to honour: June 21st, September 30th, what have you. So I just wanted to, you know, I guess, share a bit of the background on that issue with the First Minister because it is, you know, something that a lot of people have worked on up to now: different MPs and the commissioners, Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

And so, yes, I just wanted to ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister) whether he'd consider perhaps writing a letter to the next premier or advocating of behalf of this idea of implementing that call to action, which I would propose could be fulfilled by making Orange Shirt Day a stat holiday.

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the member's interventions. I wouldn't dismiss the recommendation out of hand and I'm interested to speak to him on that note, and we can pursue that if he'd like. I would also say in terms of the TRC recommendations that we have acted very enthusiastically on a number of the recommendations already—and I'm just looking for a summary sheet but I don't see it, but when we get it I'll refer to it—this is just an overview document. But there is a progress report, I think, getting prepared, annual progress report that should be released in a couple of weeks' time on The Path to Reconciliation Act.

So there'll be—this would be for new members. Our returning members would be aware of this, but we file an annual report on the path to reconciliation each year and there'll be a report coming out in the next few days that I encourage members—all members—to have a look at, that outlines in every respect each of the TRC recommendations and what we're doing or not doing on each one. So there's—that's out there for you to have a look at. And there are many of them that we are acting on, about—approximately 90 per cent already of Justice uses recommendations on the Phoenix Sinclair issue have already been acted on, the bulk of those since we came to government in '16.

Our family reunification numbers would be an example of some progress, about a 8 and a half per cent increase in family reunification numbers so far. More to be done, but it's a start. Apprehension's down by 9 per cent so far. These are positive directional stats. They're not suggesting we're, you know, satisfied at this point, but they're progress. They represent progress.

The taking care of our children act, the CFS amendment act, was brought in to improve outcomes, in particular, obviously, for indigenous children which are impacted by the policies of that department most directly, most frequently. And these are focused

more on community-based prevention, establishing and strengthening lifelong connections and enhancing a child's connection to family, to community, to culture at the same time as opposed to the sort of approach some have referred to in—less than charitably as the old approach, as a kind of a bounty hunter approach where the agencies were actually, you know, funded based on how many kids they could get out of the community. And this has got to change and we are changing it.

The social impact bond project that's under way is an interesting one and it's—involves increasing through the greater involvement of doula's or mothers, elders, strengthening the relationships and preparatory work that can be done directly with expectant mothers and then with new mothers to help them, to give them the supports that they need and deserve to have so that they do not lose their children to an agency that then takes them away from the mother.

And so these are on the—in the category of preventative and focusing largely on the child and family services' side of the TRC. Of course, it's much broader than that. There are many other categories that have been—where recommendations have been made. But I just—I wanted to express that as a quick overview, I guess, just in respect of some of the actions that we've been taking as a consequence of the TRC.

Mr. Kinew: So perhaps I'll follow up with the Premier in another venue about the idea of the stat holiday, and we'll just maybe table that one for the time being and return to a topic that we discussed on election night, actually, when we had the congratulatory phone call after the election results were announced.

I raised the issue of, I guess, the needs of agri—agri-producers across the province and I specifically mentioned the AgriRecovery program to the Premier, raised the issue with him and also, you know, shared a few thoughts on, you know, that night as well, publicly, in addition to that private conversation.

So I do want to raise the issue because I recognize that, you know, the First Minister's government made an announcement today, or at least, I think, had a conference call, if I'm not mistaken, shedding some light on what the plan is.

What I heard, and I'm sure the Premier's heard a ton of this as well, many times during the campaign and, really, over the summer, had to do, I think, with, you know, livestock producers and, you know, them

being in a very tough position. I guess more recently there's issues with crops coming off the field.

*(15:10)

So I wanted to check in with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) if he could share with us an update, because my understanding that it's not actually going to be the AgriRecovery program that's going to be invoked here, but there's going to be another federal-provincial kind of co-operation to help ag producers across Manitoba. But it is an issue that I take serious. It is an issue that I raised with the Premier previously, and so I'd like to check in and see what's planned, and if the Premier can explain the steps that his government is going to take to help producers.

Mr. Pallister: Well, this is another in a series of challenges that ag producers face and have gotten in the habit of facing. It's not isolated to hay shortages in northern Interlake either, as the member has alluded to. I've just spent a good part of the weekend touring some of the crop areas in southern Manitoba and there is a ton of crop down, to put it mildly, not just in the Red River Valley, but in Agassiz, Portage La Prairie, Spruce Woods, Dauphin, Swan River, Arthur-Virden and throughout the Riding Mountain and the Turtle Mountain ridings and up into the Interlake.

A lot of crop down and the rainfall in much of the province in the last six weeks, I would say, is what you might expect in a year. So it's pushed some pretty good crops down into the stubble where yield and *[inaudible]* are going to both suffer, and there's some real hardship out there, not the least to a lot of my friends and family I grew up with, you know. So, it's all over the province, I would say, widespread in terms of the water problem.

Ironically, in the same year, probably, as well as a water problem, we have a drought problem in parts of the Interlake, so this is the challenge, in terms of a response. Also, compounded by the reality of the federal cost-sharing program which we—is probably not for this table, but we can talk about more because there's a good example where a unanimous approach to a different strategy for disaster financial assistance would be, I think, a positive step for us to take as a group, together.

The Harper government departed, for example, on—from past practice on the deductible formula, basically tripling the deductibles for provinces, and this has impacted provincial treasuries, in particular, disproportionately on agricultural provinces like ours, Saskatchewan. And I've long advocated at the

premiers' meetings, not just the western Canadian national budget, we should revert back to a more reasonable and fair deductible strategy on that issue because that puts a big burden on Manitoba and other ag-based provinces.

So there's one mark down for the member's consideration, also for the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) to consider. But it goes beyond just deductibles into the actual administration of the FAA plan itself. I had the honour and challenge of being the minister in charge of that program some 25 years ago, and it was a mess then and it's almost as bad now, I have to say.

The challenges are many and I don't wish to get into the weeds too much on the details, but just for example, there are impediments to declaring a disaster in certain areas because of what limits severely your ability to have a claim in a subsequent year. And so, this is a—this becomes a very, very difficult challenge for all provinces, that they have to weigh the benefits of calling for a disaster. In this instance, I think, we've got, probably, oh, what would there be? Five RMs that are severely impacted? Approximately, how many are there? About five? *[interjection]*

There's a limited number of RMs that are impacted right now more severely than others. And if you invoke the program, in essence, you're punished if next year there are 10 because your claims process is inhibited by the fact you called a disaster the year before, because they don't cover ongoing situations. They say they're not disasters; it's an ongoing situation, and then they wash their hands of it, you get me? So we have a real problem. I'd be happy to arrange for a briefing, if other members are interested, in more, you know, interested in more detail and more background on this particular program. But we should be changing it, especially with climate change. You know you're getting increased incidences of drought, flood, forest fire. This is very, very relevant to us moving forward, and I think it's a good example where some type of all-party approach could help us lever more effectively.

Mr. Kinew: So our team would take the Premier up on that briefing offer and he can follow up, I guess, on how best to do that.

Just a clarification question more than anything before proceeding: You know I was asking about the AgriRecovery program, which I believe there's 16 RMs that have declared, you know, states of agricultural disasters. Their hope was to trigger the ag recovery—have the AgriRecovery protocol triggered

by the provincial government so that they'd be able to claim under that. If I'm hearing the Premier correctly—and this is the point I want clarified—he's talking about DFA, the disaster financial assistance program, and he's saying that there are now five RMs that have declared states of emergencies and are asking the Province for a declaration under the DFA. I just want to make sure that we're kind of talking about the same thing.

So I guess what I'm asking to be clarified is, in addition to the 16 RMs that are seeking relief under AgriRecovery, is the Premier also saying that there's five other RMs that are looking for DFA?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, just to clarify, we're talking about ag recovery program, but I wouldn't say—my remarks were intended to discuss—when I was referencing the difficulty of filing a claim in a second year, I was referring to ag recovery, but I'm not saying that the DFAA guidelines are at all anything but in need of update; I'll put it that way. And when I referred to the deductible, I was referring to the DFAA, so I'm sorry; I was building a bridge between two support programs.

My briefing note tells me there are 12 RMs that have declared a state of ag emergency. And so I don't mean to, in referencing five, I'm talking about five that I think are most profoundly affected. But everyone that's affected by a disaster is affected. So the degrees are somewhat different by area. But, no, my information has 12 declaring that they have a disaster. But, again, if the member would like, we can arrange as I offered previously—or for any of my colleagues that would like it too—a briefing on when—on the challenges of calling for a disaster under the ag recovery program; that's the issue that I'm trying to communicate on right now, that once it is called, it creates difficulties in a subsequent year to call it again. And so we have to weigh the pros and cons of calling. You can't just willy-nilly call everything a disaster each year, each subsequent year, call it a disaster again and again and expect to get support from the federal government under this program for ongoing events; that's our responsibility.

Once in a while, events of a negative nature, that might be our responsibility too—depends. So the depends is why I'm offering the briefing.

The department has a number of risk-management tools that farm families can use, not limited to MASC providing forage insurance, which is available and can be purchased in advance of a challenging hay year. So, in '18, for example, there

were over \$10 million paid out in claims to farm families that had purchased forage insurance. It's important to understand that that is an option that is available to all farm families who wish to plan to protect themselves in the event of forage loss or, you know, reduced yield as a consequence of drought. Those products are readily available. Ag stability program provides producers with margin-based programs to protect against large, short-term profitability impacts of a negative nature. So that's what the ag stability program does, but Manitoba Ag provides information to producers on managing feed shortages, alternative feed strategies. The department works closely with the beef producers, works closely with KAP, the Keystone ag producers, and they have established, I think, very, very effective collaborative approaches to assist farm families that are looking to access feed, for example, crop producers that need to find alternative food sources. So that work is ongoing with the department and with major ag groups.

* (15:20)

You know, we've been blessed with some—never totally, but largely over the last three to—in some areas five years—with some really, really good farm years, very, very good yields, good quality, lots of grain in the bin and good—reasonably good prices, too.

That situation, every farm family knows, doesn't always exist. The way one farmer described it to me this weekend, he's got two sons coming up to work with him in the farm, and they're both in their early days of farming. I said, how'd your year go? He says, a good year for my boys to experience so they know what farming is really like.

And that's the practical nature of farming. It's not always there. Sometimes it's really challenging and it's been really challenging for a lot of farm families this year.

Mr. Kinew: So I just want to pick up on a comment that the Premier made there. He referred to it as an ongoing event and hinted at potentially difficulty in having claims, if ag recovery was triggered, being made in a subsequent year. Just wondering if the Premier can share with the committee what information he has to suggest that this is an ongoing event or that this will be repeated next year.

Mr. Pallister: I have no information of that nature, nor did I state that it was. I was referring to the consequences of filing a claim if, in fact, a similar event occurred next year would invalidate our ability

to make claims under the program in a subsequent year.

So there's a danger. Whether it will or not—or ill or will not occur. I didn't bring a crystal ball, so I'm not going to pretend I can predict. But I know the consequences are very real for producers if you use the program, because in a subsequent year you would be disallowed from doing so for that area and potentially for other areas more broadly. So if it affects 10 or 12 RMs this year and we file a claim under the ag program—the ag stability program—and it affects 20 next year, we're disallowed from filing for 20 next year. That's the challenge with this particular situation and that's—that is a real challenge.

I should also mention a couple other resources, though, that producers would have available to share these with the member. Because the feed shortage issue is a big issue. No—I grew up on a farm which had some pride, at least, in its ownership. I was a labourer, not the owner. My grandfather and dad had a lot of pride in the Hereford herd that we built up. But an adverse year for feed that causes a disposition of that—of a herd of cattle before their time is a significant loss to a family.

So the feed shortage issue is very real and very, very important to address. And producers have mechanisms at their disposal and they have an insurance program on the forage side that they can avail themselves of, but it doesn't change the challenges to a family of dealing with that issue. The department—the Province has a Manitoba hay listing program that is responsible for assisting the management of pastures during dry conditions. I referenced the alternate feed programs that the department is assisting.

There's also assisting producer families with—there's also feed and balancing rations. There's early weaning of calf opportunities. There's a program called creep feeding with beef calves on pasture ammoniating roughages of lower quality. There—through Manitoba Agriculture there's a lot of excellent information and supports available to producers and to operators of cattle operations and others, of course, as well.

In July we announced that livestock producers will be temporarily allowed a permit to cut hay and to graze on Crown land. That isn't normally the case, but this year's conditions made that a necessary course of action, and so with the Crown lands leasing programs, you are administering the use of available land. I don't have in front of me the acreages involved, but I know

there's been significant efforts in this area made by the departments, and perhaps we could have that for the member for—to share with him at a future discussion. I think it'd be interesting to have that information available, but, anyway, that permitting process has been used to assist in—for producers to activate additional hay.

I know that close to 200 parcels had been approved for that use, but in terms of the total value of the hay or the measure of the amount of hay, I don't have that with me right here.

So this is, I should emphasize it's—this program is to allow hay to be produced in areas that are not normally used to produce hay. So this is Crown land that has available grass that has not been in the past allotted for hay cutting permits.

Mr. Kinew: To follow up, I'd like to ask the Premier (Mr. Pallister) why, you know, his government decided to invoke the ag stability program instead of the ag recovery program.

The reason why I ask the question is when the municipal leaders and, you know, producers of it speaking about this issue over the past few months, they've typically asked for the ag recovery program to be invoked, for that protocol to be triggered by the Province. However, if I'm understanding the First Minister's comments today and if I'm, you know, correct in what I've been briefed on in terms of what the Ag minister announced, it actually went to the ag stability program, which is a separate program, but I'm just curious as to why the decision was made. You know, I'm sure producers are interested to know that there are these additional resources being brought forward, but I'm sure they'd also like to know some of the rationale and the explanation for that.

So, again, just more of an explanation rather than, you know, anything too specific, just as to why ag stability is being brought in here as opposed to ag recovery.

Mr. Pallister: I just asked the clerk to get him a more detailed explanation and provide it in the briefing, if you're interested—or if the member is interested in that, and if not, then just to get something in writing to him on the detail of the difference between ag stability and ag recovery, but I'll generalize and at the risk of what every generalization of not being entirely right and just say ag stability is a margin-based program. It's basically an average formula so that you can claim if you have a year that's below the average but not have a year that's above the average. The ag recovery

program is more designed to provide immediate like feed assistance, like I've been alluding to with the Crown lands program that we've been trying to assist, and this is in that issue or transportation assistance.

So, under the ag recovery program that the member has talked about and that KAP has asked for, you're talking about additional supports, additional cost assists. Under the ag stability program, you're talking about basically an insurance program, if I could generalize to that degree, so where you pay into it when you have a year that is below a certain margin, you're able to draw on the program. If you have a really good year, you don't draw on the program.

Mr. Kinew: So is it fair to say then that the decision to go with the ag stability route was based on financial considerations from the government's side? Was it like a—just to reduce expenditure? Was that the motivation?

Mr. Pallister: No. That's not an accurate observation at all.

* (15:30)

Mr. Kinew: Can the First Minister explain what went into the decision making, then?

Mr. Pallister: I've already offered to give the member a briefing—and any of his colleagues who would like one—and I think that that would go far to him understanding what went into the decision making.

I can tell him, because I now have it in front of me in more detail, what the ag stability program is. The ag stability program is a business risk management program under the Canadian agricultural partnership we've entered into as a province. And what it does is it helps farmers manage income risks by providing financial assistance when their businesses experience a large margin decline. And some farmers will be eligible for coverage under the ag stability program this year.

The federal government pays 60 per cent of the cost, the provincial government pays 40 per cent of the cost. Producers do not pay into that plan. All farmers are eligible including farming on reserve lands as well. If they conduct at least six months of farming activity and they complete a production cycle within a fiscal year, they're eligible.

Farmers have to report farming income for income tax purposes or submit the equivalent information if they're tax exempt, and farmers have to meet all program requirements including deadlines for sending information, paying program fees. All ag

commodities are eligible except for aquaculture, forestry products, peat moss, game, cannabis and the processing or resale of items that are not produced by the farmer. You can't just have another business on the side while on your farm and say that you're going to claim under the ag invest program. So it's for ag commodities.

The support is based on margins, and this is basically just the difference between your allowable expenses and your allowable income, so your net. Income and expenses directly related to the production of farm commodities are considered allowable. Examples would include the sales of your commodities, obviously, purchases, fuel, inputs and your ag insurance proceeds or premiums. Those are also factored in. Margins are adjusted for changes in inventory, accounts payable, receivable and purchased inputs. Other income, like custom work—which many farmers do—rental income, program payments are not allowable. That's separate income from these calculations—nor are expenses such as overhead, repairs, rent, interest, depreciation not considered allowable.

So by using margins what that does is allows the program to respond to changes in input costs or commodity prices. So in other words, if expenses go up dramatically or commodity prices drop dramatically, this can trigger your ability to put a claim in under this program. And it treats all farmers similarly regardless of what their holdings are, what their business structure is, what their debt load is. Commodity sales, fuel, fertilizer, pesticide, feed can be variable. They're all included in the calculation. So one year fuel may be higher, pesticide may be lower; varies from year to year. But they're all factored in to the calculation, so it's based on the net proceeds on a margin calc.

Supports based on the reference margin on the historical average, a margin based on a farmer's actual results except for beginning farmers whose reference margin is calculated using industry averages because they haven't got a, you know, history of—they haven't got a calc—they haven't got a record yet of how they've been doing on their farm so you have to use something to establish a starting point for a new farmer, and that—there the industry average is what is used.

Farms that have expanded have their margins adjusted accordingly. Farms that have downsized have their margins adjusted accordingly as it would hardly be fair for someone who has downsized their farm to be made ineligible as a consequence of

reducing the size of the farm for any claim that they might make.

So it allows for those calculations to be weighed based on the relative size of the farm, and if it expands margins carries forward the track record on margins, but they're adjusted according to the expansion or the reverse, as the case, if they get smaller. The average reference margin is calculated using the average of the margins over the past five years. Then they exclude the years with the highest margin and lowest margin. That's the starting point. If the participant hasn't farmed for five years yet, then the average of the past three years is used instead.

I hope members found that interesting. That's—but that's the mechanism for being able to recover costs under this program. It's a program that farmers have benefited from on too many occasions, but by necessity in the high risk—in a high-risk industry this is the kind of program we need to have to stabilize, hence the name ag stability.

Mr. Kinew: These various programs that we've been discussing over the last little bit, most of them do involve some interplay between the federal and provincial government, and so I'm curious to know what communications have been taking place between the federal and provincial government.

If—I'm asking if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) can update us, at least generally speaking, on what sort of communications have been taking place over the past month on this topic with the federal government.

Mr. Pallister: We'll make sure that any detail the member desires is made available to him at the Ag Estimates.

Mr. Kinew: Has the Premier raised the issue himself with the federal government?

Mr. Pallister: We'll make sure that any detail the member desires is made available to him at the Ag Estimates.

Mr. Kinew: I'm reminded of Marshawn Lynch when he used to do his post-game interviews there and just say, I'm only here so I don't get fined, kind of thing. Have we hit that sort of point in this ag recovery, ag stability questioning? Is that fair to say?

Mr. Pallister: I believe the member can get an answer to that question at the Ag Estimates.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, just observe, for your benefit, Mr. Chair, I'm sure once we get to Ag Estimates we'll be told, you should have asked that at Executive

Council—you had your chance there with the chair of Executive Council, with the Premier, and you didn't take it. So we'll have a little bit of, you know, the snake biting his own tail, perhaps, when we get to that point of Estimates.

An Honourable Member: Can I have the opportunity to respond to that?

Mr. Kinew: For sure. Yes, please.

Mr. Pallister: I would suggest that the member ask the question at Ag Estimates and then he can evaluate better.

Mr. Kinew: Alright, well, we'll wait with bated breath for the Ag Estimates process then, won't we?

I'm wondering, apart from the joint programs, what additional supports are being offered by the Province to producers, whether they're dealing with trouble getting the crop off or whether it's the livestock producers we were talking about earlier there.

Which additional programs are being offered or additional sources of support are being offered?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I had referenced previously a number of initiatives the Ag Department's engaged in.

I would mention that we've also offered a number of other programs to assist in the ag industry, such as water source development funding, which, of course, is of no one's concern in the high water areas currently, but is a concern in drought-stricken areas.

And the new intake for that program was just announced in September, and this is well-digging and dugout renovation to assist in providing better water storage on farm sites. So that's a preventative program that's had some interest. I don't have detail, but we can get more detail if the members are interested in that, in terms of the number of farm families that have availed themselves of that support. It's a worthwhile program.

As well, Western Livestock Price Insurance Program is there to assist cattle farmers against unexpected price declines, and cattle producers are encouraged to use this as a tool in their risk management approach.

We talked about AgriInvest; it's a self-managed producer-government savings account. Essentially, it allows producers to set money aside so that they can, similar to, like, our fiscal stabilization account, I guess, conceptually or an emergency fund in your own personal financial plan, it's designed to set money

aside to be available at some future point, should it be needed. And so there is a mechanism there to incent that to happen. That's there, obviously as a way to assist if incomes go down in subsequent years, because you've got that reserve set aside.

* (15:40)

The livestock cash advance—Manitoba Livestock Cash Advance is a non-profit administrator of the federal advance payments program that provides producers with a cash advance on the value of their product during a specified period. And the program helps producers to meet their financial obligations that benefit from the—from better market conditions. And there's a livestock tax deferral, provisional also under Agri-Food Canada that allows farmers who sell—I would say who are forced to sell because of bad conditions are forced to sell their breeding stock, or part of their breeding herd, during a drought or flooding for that matter, in prescribed drought or flood regions to defer a portion of their sale proceeds in that year, so they can defer them to the following year, which is a real assist in terms of the tax planning on farm.

So there—most of what I've just referred to are either shared programs or partnership programs which don't involve producer contribution. The forage plan does, though, and that—we get more information; that was—that could be part of also—of a briefing if members were interested.

So there's a forage insurance program available that we'd be able, I think, in that briefing, to tell—share with members the uptake on that, how many farm families have availed themselves of that program. And it is a program that's available to assist when circumstances such as ones that've existed in several municipalities this past year come up.

Finally, we also recognize, certainly do, that when one's business is threatened, one's way of life is threatened, that there are stress levels that can be dramatically high. And so Manitoba Agriculture provides telephone and online counselling to farmers through their northern—Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services operations, and that as someone who, like a number of my colleagues, has lived through things like the BSE crisis in the cattle industry, I can tell you that counselling is tremendously important and tremendously valuable and a service that has been utilized by a number of our ag producers over the years, and this year will be no exception. There—farming is a demanding business, and it is one without the guarantees that some

businesses provide or give a sense of, at least, and so this is where the stress can add up, and it's important to have that counselling service available to ag producers.

Mr. Kinew: The—I think one of the things announced today was there would be a deferral of loans from the Manitoba ag services corporation, and then, I guess, maybe, leaving the door open a bit to perhaps further deferral of loans beyond that.

So I'm just curious because, you know, this is not the first time we heard about Manitoba ag services corporation the past week. It was also the basis—one of the bases, I guess, for a qualified opinion from the Auditor General. So I was wondering if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) could explain why Manitoba ag services corporation was not included in the summary financial statements for the Province.

Mr. Pallister: Not the Province's money. Belongs to farm families and farm producers and it's being treated under our books the same way it's treated in every other jurisdiction.

Mr. Kinew: So the Auditor General writes: In my opinion—that's a quote; his opinion—my opinion, the trusts are assets under the control of Province and the final—financial position and results of operations should be recorded in the summary financial statements for the years ended March 31st, 2019 and March 31st, 2018. In this respect, the summary financial statements are not in accordance with PSAS, which require that the Province account for all assets under its control.

So this is the second year, I believe, that there was a qualified opinion provided on this basis. So I'm wondering why the Premier did this again for a second year.

Mr. Pallister: It was the right thing to do last year, and it remains the right thing to do.

Mr. Kinew: What sort of work will the Premier undertake to try and address this difference of opinion between the Auditor General and his government?

Again, the Auditor General is the independent office tasked with looking at these things. They've returned a qualified opinion two years consecutively. So I'm curious to know what sort of work there may be to reconcile those two positions.

Mr. Pallister: We've been working diligently with the Auditor General to build a better understanding of the Auditor General and the Auditor General's office of the logic and rationale for not including a trust fund—

which is beyond the control of the provincial government, but is rather managed on behalf of ag producers in a trust for their benefit; and the money, not belonging to the Province, belonging to the producers instead, as is the nature of the way that such programs are treated, from British Columbia to the Maritimes, and only Manitoba treats them differently. We've been trying to communicate that to the Auditor General for a long time, over—well over a year and a half.

That being said, we'll continue to believe that the correct approach is not to treat workers compensation money or ag insurance money as if it was an asset of the provincial government. What that does, it creates the false impression, when that money goes up in value through no work of the provincial government at all, that somehow the provincial government's doing a good job of managing money that's not in its—that's not its responsibility to manage, not in its purview, that doesn't belong to the taxpayers of the province writ large. Rather, it's a trust. So we've taken the trust out for clarity, greater transparency, and, therefore, it's reported separately, as it should be and as it is in virtually every jurisdiction in the country.

Mr. Kinew: Can the Premier (Mr. Pallister) explain to the committee what sort of communications he's had to convey this to the Auditor General?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I wouldn't say pleading, but an on-going exchange of views has happened over quite a long period of time. I would mention that eight other provinces agree with us on our handling of Workers Compensation Board funds, that they should not be treated as if they are under the purview of a summary government document, but rather treated separately, as they are, in trust for the workers of the province to avail themselves of, if they have an injury, or there's a liability issue that they should be compensated for.

So the Auditor General will, I'm sure, at the next opportunity, be availing himself of—making himself available to answer the member's questions on why he views the approach that is taken by eight other provinces is wrong. But I'm sure he'll welcome that question. I'm sure the member will be excited to ask the Auditor General why he's virtually alone on his understanding of the way—or misunderstanding, some might say less charitably—of the way that money is being managed and handled and reported to the people of Manitoba, on behalf of the citizens of Manitoba.

Mr. Kinew: The Auditor General is an independent officer and provided his qualified opinion based on public sector accounting standards. And I take the

Auditor General at their word when they say that this was a sound basis to provide a qualified opinion onto this government's books.

As an aside, when the Premier talks about asking the—Auditor General questions, I did have the pleasure, in a previous life when I was a journalist, of asking a previous Auditor General some questions about the books of the Province. And, though they did kind of provide tons and tons of insight about what the public sector accounting standards are and what goes into providing the Auditor's opinion on the Province's books, I have to admit that the biggest take-away that I drew from that conversation is that if you look at volume 2 you can see how much public sector officials are paid in the province. So me being a reporter, just cracked open that volume and looked up the last names of different people I knew, and it's one of the bits of trivia that a lot of people get into once the new Public Accounts come out each year is, they look up people they know and see how much they were paid by government.

* (15:50)

But just getting back to the more serious issue of the Premier, you know, implying that the Auditor General is wrong in their assessment of the books. I'm just curious, like, on what basis did the Premier make this decision and then stick to this in a second year?

Is there some sort of opinion? Was it just an internal decision? Was there some other reference point that justifies why the Premier has earned this qualified opinion from the Auditor General for two years in a row?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I would just encourage the member in his research.

We have proactively disclosed every aspect of these trust funds on our website. It's all out there for anybody who wants to see it to see. I'm sorry that he disagrees with the esteemed opinions of eight other auditors general across the country.

This is the correct way to administer, under public accounting principles, the funds in a discreet trust fund not under the management of the government. That that is what the vast majority of our Canadian provinces have decided is the correct way to do things.

We have consulted on an ongoing basis with nationally renowned accounting experts Ernst & Young to make sure that we are complying with the highest standards of public accounting and we continue to do so.

Mr. Kinew: What was the basis of the communication with Ernst & Young, and what sort of advice did they provide on this topic to the government?

Mr. Pallister: Not only is—are the funds all proactively disclosed, but the advice is also proactively disclosed. The member's welcome to read it on the website.

Mr. Kinew: So is it fair to say that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is going to continue this and that there will be a, likely, another qualified opinion next year that they'll account for the same—they'll account for the books using the same approach as was provided this year?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'd point out that it's more transparent. I'd point out to the member that it's—allows for summary accounting that is more reflective of the government's responsibilities in areas of management, that it's not made fuzzy by the performance of multi-million-dollar trust funds someplace else which can then throw in a summary—throw the summary interpretation off and cause people to believe that the government's actually managing better than they are or worse than they are, for that matter.

If the investment portfolio in the MASC's trust fund has a wonderful year, it makes it appear that the government has had a wonderful year managing people's money, when it hasn't because the money that is managed by MASC is not part of the summary performance of a government and creates the false impression—we'd be overstating our assets by over a billion dollars if we were to add these trust funds into our summary reporting, and it's not our money.

It's not our money. Trust assets can't be withdrawn by the government. They can't be used for any other purposes than—other than the purposes for which they were designated. There is—that's the essence of trust funds.

They are administered but they are not available to us, and they should not be accounted for in any other way than the way we're doing them, because to do so would be to imply that the money that belongs to ag producers, for example, was an asset of the Province's. It is not. That the money that's in the Workers Compensation Board's trust fund was an asset of the Province's. It is not.

And so, we're accounting for them separately because that's the accurate, honest way to account for

them, and that's the way that eight other provinces agree we should be accounting for them.

I would also argue that the Province cannot deny, for example, under the ag program, under MASC, access to trust funds that could be used to pay insurance indemnities to producers. It's not our business. It's the business of the Manitoba crop insurance organization. And so we do not have control over those funds, nor should we. Therefore, reporting the funds in—whether it's workers comp or MASC as if they were assets of the government is wrong. And in my estimation, and in the estimation of experts that we have consulted with, we have to report it the way we're reporting it.

I also point out that under the conditions of the trust agreements that govern the handling of these funds, these funds can absolutely never ever be returned to the Province of Manitoba. They cannot ever be withdrawn by the Province of Manitoba, and they cannot be used for any other purpose than the purpose for which they are designated, which is to support workers and farm families in our province.

So what we're doing is reporting the way we should be reporting, and I'll encourage the member to convey his support. I'm sure the Auditor General would be pleased to hear his support for the Auditor General's position, but it is not a position that is shared by the vast, vast majority of experts in respect of this—the handling of this issue across our country.

Mr. Kinew: I note the Premier's reply, but I note that, you know, in black and white in the Public Accounts, it says the trusts are assets under the control of the Province. So it appears that the Premier is incorrect.

So, having noted that, and then also that—I guess the difference in accounting here moves what the government has stated as being a deficit actually to a surplus position—I think the concern that I've heard articulated by many people who watch this government's record when it comes to cutting health care in-year, reducing the amount of expenditures in areas like health care, is that this is perhaps a technique being used by the government to justify further cuts, further reductions in expenditure, and the loss of more services and emergency rooms as we've seen over the government's past term in office.

So that will be one of the things, I think, that we watch for when it comes to this difference of opinion on accounting standards. You know, the Premier's talking about some rationale that he received from a consultant, Ernst & Young, about the reasons why

they should change the accounting this way, but I think the concern that many people have is that this government continues to approach things with an eye towards cutting health care, cutting education, and that this is another step being laid to accomplish that goal.

And I hear the member for Riding Mountain (Mr. Nesbitt) nodding his head vigorously in agreement, and I notice that this has—

An Honourable Member: You can hear nodding?

Mr. Kinew: Well, when the 'nodding'—nodding is so—as vigorous as the member just exercised, yes, it is audible around the table, though perhaps not recorded in Hansard.

Anyway, so that's, I think, the concern there is that, you know, the government—in disagreeing with the Auditor General—may, in fact, be laying the groundwork for further cuts in subsequent years.

But, again, my question was, you know, is this going to be the practice of the First Minister going forward? Like, assuming the Auditor General doesn't change the accounting standards that they use to judge the Province's books, are we to expect further qualified opinions? Or—well, maybe that's too hypothetical for the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to ask. But is the Premier going to continue using this approach to accounting for these trusts and tabling the Public Accounts?

Mr. Pallister: Let me take steps to help the member take the black helicopter out of the sky and stop being so cynical and paranoid.

We're trying to make sure that the money that belongs to Manitoba farm families is booked as belonging to them and not booked as a summary asset of the Province of Manitoba. If we were to try to do anything that the member has suggested, to access those funds in some manner, we'd be sued—and rightfully so. The money is in an irrevocable trust. It is for the farm families of Manitoba.

All of the other provinces of our country have similar legislation. Eight of them account for their respective workers compensation board or ag support programs in the same manner as us. These assets do not belong—our assertion is they do not belong to the Province of Manitoba, and eight other provinces agree with us. So I would encourage the member to be comforted in that knowledge, to understand that to reflect the assets of agricultural producers' trusts or the Workers Compensation Board reserves on the balance

sheets of the Province of Manitoba would have the effect, which it had under the previous administration for years, of artificially increasing the asset position of Manitoba by over a billion dollars. And that was not an accurate reflection of the actual assets available to support things like health care.

* (16:00)

What we are doing is making sure that there isn't a false assessment made by those who might not understand that, that there is not a—an assumption that somehow this million dollars-plus is available for other things. It is not. It's available to support workers. It's available to support farm families and it is not appropriate that we overstate the assets of the Province of Manitoba.

We have to properly account for the ag producers trust funds and we do. I've invited the member to view the website to view, in fact, the advice that we've received in respect of this issue. The Workers Compensation Board reserves, under public sector accounting standards, supported by eight other provinces, are accounted for in this way.

And so the member is attempting to ride a horse which has died, and it is time he dismount.

Mr. Kinew: And I'll continue to refer to the Auditor General as a human being and one worthy of our respect.

Perhaps we could turn to some consideration of Manitoba Public Insurance. You know, I guess one of the issues that's arisen over the past number of months is the role of insurance brokers, the provision of online services for MPI in the province of Manitoba and the actions that the government has taken to insert itself, in some cases, in between MPI and the brokers.

But I think where I come at it is maybe just from a more everyday person's perspective, which is, like, if you are in another jurisdiction, many services can be provided online. You know, in the States, you're able to file claims from your smartphone.

In other provinces you can book—including some provinces with public insurance—you can book some services online. So it does seem to me that Manitobans ought to be able to access more insurance services online, that Manitobans ought to be able to, you know, book appointments and, you know, carry out a number of functions that MPI delivers or that brokers deliver—that they be able to do that online.

So I'm curious to know what the Premier's views are just at that level, you know, before we talk about the specifics of MPI and Autopac.

Like, does the Premier (Mr. Pallister) share the view that Manitobans should be able to access more insurance services online from our public insurer? Does the Premier agree that Manitobans would be better served if we have more access to online bookings and that Manitoba Public Insurance should move towards more provision of online services?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, well, the computer isn't a new invention and the previous NDP government made no progress on this particular offering of services electronically for close to two decades.

We have now begun the initiated processes in government of making that progress happen. So, yes, of course, I think that the availability of electronic services is something that should have happened for Manitoba ratepayers—including Autopac customers—many, many years ago but didn't for some reason.

So now we have a negotiation moving forward between MPI through a conciliator's appointment and the insurance brokers, with the goal being to make that which never happened in 17 years of NDP government actually happen now.

Mr. Kinew: I think a more accurate statement of the facts is that the work was undertaken and the Premier, within the past year, handed over control of those online assets to insurance brokers through a series of directives that he made to the public insurer, executed by the Crown minister, who lost her seat in the most recent election. However, those are all issues that we can unpack in, you know, the coming questions.

The question that I asked more generally was just about the provision of online services, and does the Premier share the view that Manitobans would be better served if they could access more online services on, you know, smartphones, Internet-equipped devices?

Would Manitobans be better served if they could book more services online, and does the Premier share the view that it would be great if you could file a claim from your smartphone, and that our public insurer should be moving in that direction to provide greater access and more convenience towards motorists in the province?

Mr. Pallister: Well, if the member's aware of some directive that was given by a minister, he'd best produce evidence of it. And other than that, he would

then be simply engaging in innuendo and false speculation.

The fact of the matter is that the negotiations which should have been afforded with insurance brokers by MPI did not take place for 17 years under the NDP government and are now taking place.

Mr. Kinew: You know, when I was asking the previous question, I overheard a colleague on the government's side asking, what about jobs? And I think it's a legit question, but I think the outcome of a free and fair negotiation should be to find a balance recognizing the important role of brokers but also in finding a way to bring more online services to motorists in the province of Manitoba.

And I would note that the current arrangement that the government is overseeing is not really a free and fair negotiation, the reason being that, you know, this government has effectively given the insurance brokers a veto, because they can walk away and they will know that services won't be provided online in absence of them signing off. So there is a legitimate question about jobs, but there's also a legitimate question in the question I've asked already about when Manitobans are going to be able to access services online.

So, again, do we have, you know, kind of, a shared view, the First Minister and myself? Does the Premier believe that Manitobans should be able to access more online services? And if he shares that view, when will Manitobans be able to get those online services for their car insurance, for booking appointments, for some of the other things like claims that they might like to be able to access through a smartphone or computer?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, the member puts a false assertion on the record in respect of his comments about a veto. As a matter of fact, the previous NDP government basically vetoed any progress that could have been made on this file over their entire 17 years in office.

And there was no agreement reached, nor was one pursued with the insurance brokers to make sure that the important services of being able to—that Manitobans deserve to be able to avail themselves of were available to them or expanded under their watch. And the reasons for that, I'm sure, many and varied, but the fact remains that there was no progress made. And so the member makes an assertion about vetoes. He should be referring to the 17 years where there was no progress made on this file.

Now there is progress being made: a conciliator has been appointed, people are at the table discussing this and we expect to see progress made in—as a consequence of that initiative in the not-too-distant future so Manitoba rate-payers get the availability of products they deserve.

Mr. Kinew: But does the Premier (Mr. Pallister) agree that Manitobans should be able to access more online services that MPI delivers?

Mr. Pallister: That was the result of dialogue in both Saskatchewan and British Columbia between their insurance industries and their auto-insurance monopolies, and that would be what the NDP never pursued for 17 years here in Manitoba, and what we're pursuing now.

Mr. Kinew: So is it the First Minister's personal view that Manitobans should be able to access insurance services online?

* (16:10)

Mr. Pallister: I've answered the question previously.

Mr. Kinew: I know the Premier often thinks that, you know, partisan attacks, et cetera, qualifies an answer, but—a simple question and it remains unanswered.

Is it the Premier's personal view that Manitobans should be able to access more car insurance services online?

Mr. Pallister: The member's here in Estimates to ask for my personal view, but I'll give him the view of the Premier of Manitoba, because that is the role I am here appearing at Estimates in. My goal would be to see an agreement reached as has happened in other jurisdictions between the insurance distributors and the insurance product designers and producers, so that there can be better access to electronic—through electronic means and all others on a consistent basis, at as low a price as is possible, by Manitobans, of all insurance products that are distributed through MPI.

Mr. Kinew: So what is MPI negotiating with the insurance brokers exactly?

Mr. Pallister: Here's—I'll help the member understand the background to this because it is important that he understand that the NDP had 17 years to improve the availability through electronic means of insurance products and failed to do so.

They had, through MPI, discussions with the Insurance Brokers Association and arrived at an agreement on June the 7th, 2011. In that agreement, on page 3, they agreed that Manitoba Public Insurance

would provide \$250,000 in funding to IBAM as in clause 4.0. In clause 5.0, they agreed that IBAM wouldn't communicate anything unless the government said it was okay.

It says in section 5.1, both parties acknowledge that communications to members of IBAM, consumers and other stakeholders are integral to ensuring the objectives herein are achieved. To that end, the parties agree to consult and collaborate with one another when creating and issuing such communications. In other words, MPI and the Insurance Brokers Association agreed that MPI would pay a quarter of a million dollars a year to IBAM and that they'd both handle, confidentially, the communications that they issued in respect of the discussions around electronic availability of product.

From this point on, in 2011, no progress was achieved. No progress was arrived at. So when the member makes an assertion about a veto, he's barking up the wrong tree. The previous government's record demonstrates that they were willing to forward a quarter of a million a year to IBAM in exchange, in this contract, for confidentiality in the communications that occurred around this issue between IBAM and the Insurance Brokers Association of Manitoba. That is pretty clear evidence that there was an agreement not to make progress rather than an agreement to make progress, and this agreement resulted in over a million-and-a-quarter going to IBAM, ostensibly, according to reports in one of the local media outlets, to be used to bring in high-priced entertainment to the IBAM annual banquet.

My concern isn't so much that as it is the fact that there was no improvement made in the availability of electronic insurance product services during this entire time and in the years preceding it, a decade. So this was the agreement made in the NDP term in office. This was the agreement that was made which resulted in no progress whatsoever being made on what we are now attempting to make progress on, which is to reach an agreement with IBAM and MPI on the distribution—better distribution, we would hope, as this happened in Saskatchewan and British Columbia—of insurance products; better availability of those insurance products through electronic means.

Mr. Kinew: What prompted the government to pass a Cabinet order directing MPI to engage in conciliation with the Insurance Brokers Association of Manitoba? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Could you repeat your question?

An Honourable Member: Sure, would you like me to?

Mr. Chairperson: Please.

The Leader of the Official Opposition, would he repeat his last question, please?

Mr. Kinew: Yes. I'm just curious to know what prompted the government to pass a Cabinet order directing MPI to engage in conciliation with the Insurance Brokers Association?

Mr. Pallister: I'd also just share with the member that during the time the NDP was in government, the commission rates paid to brokers effectively tripled versus the consumer price index while no progress was being made on product availability through electronic means at the same time the rate of commission payment, I repeat, tripled beyond the consumer price index.

So the assertion the member makes about—and, you know, the implication is very clear, he's implying that somehow the government is taking actions which are unfair to ratepayers and favourable to the insurance industry. Yet the evidence contradicts that totally. The evidence would support the argument that the previous NDP government colluded not to see electronic distribution of product, paid IBAM to be quiet about it, and then tripled their commissions during the last 10 years that they were in power. Those are the actual numbers.

As far as the rationale for trying to get electronic product availability enhanced, I think they're pretty self-explanatory. We know that customers in other provinces benefit from agreements having been reached between their auto monopolies and the insurance broker arm. That's exactly what we're in pursuit of here. The directive that we gave under The Crown Corporations Governance and Accountability Act was to encourage—which empowers us to issue directives to Crown corporations where leadership is required, as it clearly is here.

The directive provides instruction to MPI to engage in a process of conciliation with the insurance brokers association to reach an agreement regarding the future service delivery strategy for customer transactions under both The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act and The Drivers and Vehicles Act. This directive applies to the development and introduction of online services related to motor vehicle licensing and insurance in Manitoba and the participation of insurance brokers in providing those services.

The minister is acknowledging that IBAM is an independent organization not subject to this directive, but it strongly encourages it to participate in the conciliation process to achieve a resolution on the matters of contention. So we're moving MPI and the insurance brokers together so that we can get an agreement to enhance electronic distribution and availability of Autopac products for Manitoba.

Mr. Kinew: I didn't know the Premier (Mr. Pallister) had such strong views against insurance brokers, as he outlined in the preamble to his answer there. And kind of surprising too.

I would note that the Premier used the term monopolies several times in his preceding answers, perhaps attempting to discredit, but I would remind him that it's public insurance. That's the way that MPI should be framed, to be thought of as a public insurer. You know, shouldn't be thought of as a monopoly with some of the negative connotation that that term has in an economic discussion, but rather that it should be thought of as the provision of a public good—specifically, the provision of affordable car insurance. That's what Manitobans want, is affordable rates.

* (16:20)

And now that insurance seems to be moving online and services become more convenient when they do, I think Manitobans are quite right to ask that they have the ability to access those services online. You know, it should be totally doable to have a public insurer deliver services online. You know, it should be totally doable to have a public insurer deliver services online. I'd point out that the document that the Premier was reading from, previously, is also the source of the de facto veto language I was using earlier. Because in that document, it specifies that if the insurance brokers don't agree to the proposals under conciliation, then they have the ability to walk away, effectively handing them a de facto veto, but also removing the ability for MPI to negotiate because, eventually, they know that they'll just have to deliver what IBAM wants; otherwise, IBAM will be able to walk away. And in the absence of their agreement, that there won't be online services added for Manitobans. So that's where that language came from.

I'd also point out that under the Premier's watch the public insurer cancelled a project worth about 4 and a half million dollars, 4 and a half million dollars invested by MPI to enhance the provision of online services, and so, that certainly seems like a missed

opportunity and one that could have led to greater service delivery.

So I just wanted to make those notes because the Premier (Mr. Pallister) was making some commentary and I wanted to answer a few of the comments that he did make. And just to ensure that the record shows that, perhaps, you know, greater balance is required.

But, again, I return to what the Premier's comments were when he was talking about making this order for MPI to enter into conciliation, and then asking that the insurance brokers participate into that process as well, recognizing that they are independent and can't be directed to participate if they don't want to.

So I'm curious to know the Premier's intentions with that process, the conciliation process. Like, the outcome that the Premier read into the record that is being sought through this conciliation, and I think it does leave some room as to what the end point will be. Like, is the end point just going to be, like, maybe like a very narrow sort of agreement that specifies just newly added online services, online bookings, stuff like that? Or is the outcome, like, maybe a more global agreement that would govern online services in the context of maybe, like, a new master agreement with MPI and IBAM. So I'm curious about the Premier's intent in having this conciliation process started. Is it the Premier's intent to do something very narrow, or is this a more global revisiting of the relationship between MPI and brokers?

Mr. Pallister: Well, a few erroneous assertions there. Too many for me to respond to all of them. I'll just respond to a couple of them. And nothing disparaging about referring to the Manitoba Public Insurance monopoly as a Manitoba Public Insurance monopoly. That's what it is. As far as the assertion that there's somehow some bias inherent in my comments against the general insurance industry, none is intended.

The idea here is to arrive at solutions that benefit the customers of—that need MPI products and need access to them. This has happened in Saskatchewan, it's happened in British Columbia. Agreements have been reached. We believe they can be reached here, too. And so, unlike the NDP who actually paid a million and a quarter to the insurance brokers association on an agreement that they be quiet about issues, and that's right in the contract, we don't agree with that approach. That didn't lead to any kind of additional availability of—through electronic means of insurance products through the entire time the NDP was in power. That agreement was signed in 2011.

Nothing happened to enhance electronic availability of services in that last six years that the NDP had the opportunity to make progress. No progress was made.

We're endeavouring to have a conciliator assist MPI and the insurance brokers in arriving at a progressive outcome, but we're not in any way, shape or form, accepting the thesis somehow that the member's advancing that we're favouring one side, disparaging another. Not the case. So the member's now asking me to predict the outcome of conciliation process. I would prefer not to do that. I would prefer to see progress made. And, clearly, that's the goal with appointing a conciliator in the first place.

The agreement, the application, the scope, the directive is all public information. The member can read it. There is no such directive within any of this document that should imply or, in any way, speaks to a preconceived outcome. Nor is there anything in this directive that favours one side or the other. We're simply appointing a conciliator to come in so that the sides can get together and have a discussion around the issues, and hopefully we can move towards a solution.

That's the process. That's the goal, and I believe there will be outcomes achieved that were never achieved in 17 years the NDP were in power.

Mr. Kinew: Well, what the Premier has achieved already is to essentially just light four and a half million dollars on fire that was spent to develop these online services and, you know, that project was cancelled. So that's an inauspicious start towards providing more online services for Manitobans.

But, again, the question, you know—and I do think it's—I take at face value the First Minister's assertion that he doesn't want to predetermine the outcome here. However, I do think it is still reasonable for the Premier to answer what sort of agreement would be the outcome of this conciliation process, still leaving room for both sides to arrive at some sort of agreement as to the details.

So, again, you know, I repeat my question perhaps more clearly this time: what is the Premier's goal in having ordered this conciliation? Does the Premier want a narrow agreement that would just govern online services and then would perhaps sit beside, if you will, broker compensation—the broker compensation agreement?

Or is the Premier looking for a more global agreement that would also include broker compensation and these other matters, along with

online services, to be part of this new agreement that comes out of the conciliation?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, I tried to explain the member the purpose of the conciliation. I think, perhaps, the best way to clarify it to his satisfaction may be to simply read from the directive itself, which is available to him. He can go online and read it, but it is—outlines that MPI will engage in a conciliation process with IBAM to reach agreement regarding future service delivery strategies and the modernization of service delivery options.

Again, I emphasize this is something that did not happen for 17 years under the NDP, despite the fact that computers were invented a long time before the NDP came to power.

The fact is also that we have directed that they will negotiate with the objective of reaching one or more agreements or written letters of understanding to address the development and introduction of online services relating to motor vehicle licensing and insurance in Manitoba, and the participation of insurance brokers in providing those services.

So, again, not prejudging the outcome, but rather, setting up the formula or the format for the discussion to happen is the goal of this directive. The principles to be applied in the negotiation service follows. There are a number of them and I can share them with the member if he would desire to have a better understanding of the nature of what it is that we are wanting for an outcome here.

Mr. Kinew: Again, I've reviewed the document that the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) reading from, though I do thank him for reading it into the record.

The question, though, has more to do with the intent of his government behind ordering this conciliation. Do they want a new narrow agreement that just covers off certain online services, or is there a more broad agreement, like a master agreement, that would also see compensation and other issues addressed, with broker compensation addressed under that?

Mr. Pallister: Again, the member is asking me to speculate on the outcome of a conciliation process which our governments initiated between MPI and the Insurance Brokers Association which is up to them through this conciliation process to determine. So my bias is—which is what he's asking me to share—are irrelevant in the case. I'm not going to be at the table with the conciliator. I'm not going to be venturing into

the discussions with IBAM and between IBAM and MPI.

But I think it would be helpful for the member to understand that the principles to be applied in this negotiation are outlined in the directive which he says he can read, but it's clear from his line of questioning he has not read. So I will share them with him.

(1) Manitobans expect and must be able to access an online distribution and payment channel for their insurance—automobile insurance needs.

(2) Manitoba is committed to supporting the stability and health of small business in the province.

* (16:30)

(3) A conciliator will be retained by Manitoba to assist the parties to seek to reach these agreements. The conciliator will be an individual who is wholly independent of the parties, wholly impartial and free of any personal interest or other conflict of interest.

(4) Each of the parties will be responsible for its own costs of participating in the conciliation process—I note here that we're not going to pay IBAM \$250,000 to be part of the conciliation process as the NDP did each year so they'd be quiet about the discussion or lack of progress on the discussion around the distribution of electronic availability of insurance products. MPI will pay the reasonable costs to the conciliator in accordance with the budget agreed by the conciliator. The conciliator will be responsible for the conduct of the conciliatory process in accordance with practices and procedures commonly used in commercial mediations. This may include the conciliator proposing to IBAM and MPI agreements to apply to the conduct of the conciliation process.

(6) Each of the parties will identify up to the three representatives as principal participants in the negotiations.

(7) The time frame for the conciliation process will be established at the outset of the process. It's expected some issues will need to be addressed on a priority basis so that actions to assist customers may be taken sooner.

(8) The discussions in the conciliatory process will be confidential unless the parties agree otherwise. The process will be without prejudice and any statements made by a party may not be used by the other party as evidence in any legal proceedings.

(9) Conciliation process discussions shall be held in private.

(10) IBAM and MPI will not make public statements about the subject matter of the negotiations during the continuation of the conciliation process.

(11) MPI agrees not to institute any new online services during the continuation of the conciliation process except in accordance with any agreement made with IBAM—excuse me.

(12) And, finally, at the end of the conciliation process where requested to do so by the Minister of Crown Services the conciliator will provide a written report to MPI, IBAM and the Minister of Crown Services, setting out any non-binding recommendations on how the issues considered in the conciliation process may be addressed.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

That's the principles of the discussion, the directive that was given. No preconceived notions, no predetermined outcomes, simply a conciliation process that—I know that the new member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) is a lawyer and he will have probably had some experience in this type of process. I would hope he'd agree. I'm simply outlining the process for the discussion to happen so that we can hopefully move forward to resolve the differences between the two parties.

Mr. Kinew: Number 11, that's where the veto comes into place. Again, MPI, by order of this government, is not allowed to add any online services unless the insurance brokers sign off on it, unless the insurance brokers approve. So essentially it means that the insurance brokers can simply walk away and say, no, and then MPI does not have the ability to add online services. The net effect of that is that MPI has to get sign-off from brokers before adding online services. In effect, it removes leverage from MPI.

And so the Premier (Mr. Pallister) in fact has put forward at least one predetermined outcome. And the predetermined outcome that the Premier has put forward is that MPI is not able to, even on an interim basis or a provisional basis, to begin offering online services while the conciliation process moves forward. And so that's the nature of some of those earlier comments. And, you know, the Premier read that onto the record, so I'm sure he agrees with the interpretation there.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

But, again, I'm curious about, I guess, the genesis of some of this process. Premier said that he doesn't want to talk about the outcome, so perhaps we can

back up and talk a bit about what led to the conciliation in the first place. Can the Premier tell the committee whether senior management, whether the board at MPI was in favour of conciliation?

Mr. Pallister: The member has just put on the record glaring and clear evidence of his—the fact that he has not read the directive. If he had read the directive he would understand that the institution of a new online service during a conciliation process is the only aspect of this which is restricting MPI in any way, shape or form.

Now, I would emphasize that in 17 years the NDP did not get any online services added, through agreement with MPI or otherwise, through initiation with a discussion with IBAM, no progress was made whatsoever for 17 years.

And now the member is saying—he's implying that, somehow, this agreement of discussion around conciliation favours one party or another because it says that MPI can't act during the process of conciliation to add that which it is discussing with the insurance brokers association. I would have to profoundly disagree. I would say to the member that, at the end of the conciliation process, where requested to do so by the Minister of Crown Services, the conciliator will provide a written report to MPI, IBAM and the Minister of Crown Services setting out any nonbinding recommendations on how the issues considered in the conciliation process may be addressed.

That is right in the directive, and that says that there is no veto, no—in fact, the consequence of IBAM walking away would be that a report would be filed by a conciliator which very likely would be seriously considered by the government and very likely would be seriously considered to be acted upon, and so would not be in the best interests of the Insurance Brokers Association of Manitoba to, as the member suggests, get up and walk out of the discussion.

That being said, the terms of the discussion—the conciliation discussion are clear, and if the member would read them, he would refrain from putting false information on the record about any veto, any directive being given by the government that would favour one side or the other because such is clearly not the case if one simply reads the directive.

Mr. Kinew: I'd remind the First Minister that the interest that should be safeguarded is the public interest in these matters. And specifically when it comes to Manitoba Public Insurance, the public

interest is to have affordable car insurance delivered through a public insurer. And now that we know that online services are here in other jurisdictions, Manitobans should be able to access those services online.

And while the Premier (Mr. Pallister) was elucidating on his views of section 11, in fact the question was about the genesis for this conciliation. And so I'd repeat the question again as to whether there was support for conciliation process from senior leadership and the board of MPI. So perhaps we could just begin with one before beginning to the other.

Was senior leadership of Manitoba Public Insurance in support of conciliation?

Mr. Pallister: I would just share with the member who speaks so nobly about the public interest that the public interest was hardly served by the previous administration agreeing to pay the insurance brokers association a quarter of a million dollars a year in exchange for mutual confidentiality around discussions which did not proceed to make electronic distribution of insurance products available to Manitobans.

I would suggest to the member that tripling the compensation to the insurance brokers members during a 10-year period—the last 10-year period of the NDP government was very likely not in the best interests of Manitoba ratepayers or the public, either. Yet these are both courses of action the previous government followed which limited the availability through electronic means of insurance products and boosted the compensation of insurance brokers significantly through that same time period. The argument that this would be in the public interest could not be made, yet that was the action of the previous administration.

As a counter to that, we have proceeded to initiate conciliatory discussions with the goal of making sure that insurance products are more readily available through electronic means, as has been the case in other provinces like Saskatchewan and British Columbia for some time through agreements reached, which we desire to see it reached here in Manitoba between the insurance brokers and Manitoba Public Insurance corporation.

So that's our goal and that's what we'll continue to pursue.

* (16:40)

Mr. Kinew: So was the senior leadership of MPI supportive of conciliation?

Mr. Pallister: As the member quite rightly referenced earlier, the first concern that we should have and certainly I do, and our government has, is the best interest of Manitoba ratepayers to be able to get access to products more readily, at a reasonable price. And so, because that is our first concern, I am less concerned about the views of IBAM and MPI in respect of their willingness to engage in conciliation, than I am in the ratepayers benefiting from the conciliation exercise. For that reason, we have issued a directive so that conciliation can occur. And it would be our sincere hope that in the best interest of ratepayers such conciliation would result in a better distribution model that is currently the case here in the province.

Mr. Kinew: I noted that pretty much everybody talks about it as online services, but when the Premier speaks about it he talks about electronic services. I don't know if that's just a personal choice of words, or whether there's more substantive represented by that choice of words, because it strikes me that there is already electronic technology used on the back end, in an insurance broker's office, and so I just want to be clear that when the Premier is talking about electronic services, he means not services on the back end to co-ordinate between brokers' offices and Manitoba Public Insurance, but he is, in fact, talking about consumer-facing online services that a layperson would refer to online services as such things as being about to book an appointment online, being able to file a claim online, being able to purchase and renew insurance online.

Is that what the Premier means when he says electronic? I just want to make sure that there's no kind of wiggle room there.

Mr. Pallister: The member's got me trapped. I guess I mean online. And electronic, whatever, I use interchangeably in this instance. I have no hidden meaning. There is no black helicopter hovering over me. I am simply talking about the availability of products through a computer for people who want to be able to get products the way they want to get them. I'm looking for the conciliator to assist us in moving forward in that process, as has happened in Saskatchewan already, as has happened in British Columbia already; has never happened in 17 years under the NDP; as will happen now.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, so returning to the previous question, what about the board of MPI? Was the board supportive of conciliation?

Mr. Pallister: I'll continue to treat discussions that boards have with the respect they deserve.

Mr. Kinew: Not necessarily an answer that inspires a lot of confidence. But I ask again, was the board of Manitoba Public Insurance supportive of conciliation?

Mr. Pallister: My goal in life and in politics is not to inspire confidence in the leader of the opposition but rather work in the best interests of the people of Manitoba. So I'll continue to be of a single mind and focus in that direction. The member is cynical about my positions. That is his choice, but I think Manitobans spoke relatively clearly in the last election and the one before that they're not as cynical as the member is when it comes to that type of issue.

Mr. Kinew: So was the board of Manitoba Public Insurance supportive of conciliation?

Mr. Pallister: I'll continue to keep the board discussions as I should, with the respect they deserve, and I'll treat them that way.

Mr. Kinew: What communication did the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his government have with the board of Manitoba Public Insurance about this?

Mr. Pallister: I'm sure the member can use whatever channels he has available to him to avail himself of any communications through various means. I'll let the Crown Services Minister, who is responsible for those relationships, respond at the appropriate time in Estimates to any questions about communications with boards of Crowns.

Mr. Kinew: So were there communications between the government and the board of Manitoba Public Insurance about this topic?

Mr. Pallister: Asked and answered.

Mr. Kinew: No. So, you know, I'd ask again, will the Premier tell us about the communications between his government and Manitoba Public Insurance's board on this topic?

Mr. Pallister: Asked and answered.

Mr. Kinew: Can the Premier provide us with an update on the status of this conciliation process?

Mr. Pallister: Those discussions are confidential and I'll continue to treat them with the confidentiality that will lead to effective outcomes.

Mr. Kinew: Has a conciliator been named for this process?

Mr. Pallister: Yes.

Mr. Kinew: Who is the conciliator?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'm a little concerned that the next thing the member is going to ask me is, given the name of that conciliator, what's his phone number so I can talk to him, and I'm not sure that that's going to be helpful to achieving the outcomes that we desire from this conciliation process, so I don't know. I'll get guidance from the clerk on how far I go down this road but I'd like an assurance from the member he's not going to personally contact the conciliator to attempt to push him to do certain things like ignore this issue the way the previous government did for 17 years.

And my clerk tells me he's going to get advice and get back to me on whether it's a good idea to give out the name of the conciliator at this point.

Mr. Kinew: Will the Premier also provide, you know, the rationale behind this advice when he receives it?

Mr. Pallister: I assure the member that any advice we receive will, in due course, be made public, and that would be certainly an important part of this, but I would also assure him that the role here should be for us to have effective outcomes that were never achieved in the past on this issue and that's what we're after.

Mr. Kinew: So can we record this as an undertaking or are we just going to pause for the response?

Mr. Pallister: I have no trouble taking this as an undertaking. I have, as I've always done with the member on his questions and I have always endeavoured to get back to him with the answers. On this one, I'm not undertaking, though, to give him the name. I'm undertaking to get advice on the wisdom of giving him the name and I want to be clear about that.

I don't want to do anything which would interfere with progress that can be made under this conciliation process, so I want to make sure that we're not—in giving out the name, that we're not interfering with the effectiveness of the conciliation process in some manner.

Mr. Kinew: I would like the name. Again, I'm not, you know, curious about the person's phone number or email address. I'm able to use Google, as the, you know, Premier's staff were when they were looking up

AgriStability and AgriRecovery at the beginning of the Estimates sitting this afternoon.

So, yes, it would be great if the First Minister could provide the name. Again, it's part of—just the Estimates process, looking into MPI, the current status of some of these issues that are before the public insurer and again, you know, the name would be helpful.

So, can the Premier (Mr. Pallister) undertake to provide the name of the conciliator?

Mr. Pallister: Previously asked and answered.

Mr. Kinew: How about a timeline? Is there an expected timeline for the conclusion of this conciliation?

* (16:50)

Mr. Pallister: Yes, you know, this is a difficult thing with this week. We want the process to work, and we don't want to do anything—I would hope no member wants us to do anything which would jeopardize the effectiveness of the conciliation process. And so that's the difficulty in imposing a timeline on a conciliation process is that it creates a sense—it may create a sense of favouring one side or the other in the process.

There's clearly in the directive, and which the member—I invite the member to read—it's very clear that we want to see an outcome in a reasonable period of time, but beyond that, as far as the specifications, I'd have to say to the member that I don't believe that it would be in the best interests of achieving an outcome through a conciliation process to say, you know, you've got three weeks to get it done or we're, you know, we're going to impose an outcome.

So we haven't said that, and the member can see it when he reads it, but we haven't imposed a hard deadline in the directive. We've simply issued a background, instructions and a formula or a format with principles to be followed so that there is a fair process there to allow for honest discussion to happen and an agreement to be reached. Again, you know, no progress on this thing for two decades, and we'd like to see progress made.

Mr. Kinew: Well, the question was just around the expected timeline. Is there an expectation as to how long this is going to take?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I would like to have seen it done 15 years ago. As far as an expected timeline now, it was helpful for me to suggest that there should be an expected timeline. I expect we would have had it in

the outline here and we would have instructed them to arrive at it through a deadline process, but that's not what conciliation is supposed to be about, normally, what I understand about conciliations. It's our hope, they'll arrive. It's our hope they'll arrive at a mutually beneficial agreement. But it's our sincere belief that there needs to be improvement, and that's been clear, needs to be improvement in the availability of product to Manitobans.

Mr. Kinew: So I guess the other rooms have taken, like, a short break, so I was just going to offer the Premier, if you want to take five minutes, we could take a break. If he's good to keep going, I'm good to keep going as well, but just want to check in.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there a will to take the five-minute break?

Okay, then we'll continue on.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, so changing tack a bit, but still focused on Manitoba Public Insurance, I'm curious about the decision to change the reserve rate requirement for MPI to hold. So I'd like to ask the Premier: What prompted his Cabinet to pass a regulation changing the reserve rate requirement for MPI?

Mr. Pallister: Not having any detailed notes with me, I can only share with the member that what prompted this was a desire to make sure that we stabilize rates against uncertainty for the future benefit of all Autopac customers, and that having more reserves would expose Autopac consumers to greater risks in terms of rate fluctuation would be the assumption going into the requirement to enhance the reserves to give additional protection and rate stabilization to Autopac customers was the goal.

Mr. Kinew: Was there some sort of specific change in outlook for MPI that brought that on, this consideration?

Mr. Pallister: I welcome the opportunity to give the member more detail. Unfortunately, we don't have a great amount of detail here to share with him, but I would do that as an undertaking to share with him what the rationale was for this decision, because I think it's a fair question and an important one to address.

My understanding is, from memory, that other insurance monopolies had higher reserve requirements, in general, than we did and they were of the opinion—for their size of their operation, for their book—and so it came to be a concern, relative to these

other jurisdictional analysis that had been done, that we were not adequately protecting ratepayers against potential downturns or risks in the future with the level of reserve that we had established.

And so the idea was to protect the consumer through additional savings, if you will, to stabilize rate fluctuation going forward. But I will undertake to give the member more detail on that question because it's a perfectly good question.

Mr. Kinew: And, you know, recognizing first off that I appreciate the undertaking, just wondering, just to clarify, so the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is undertaking to come back with the rationale behind this decision, which has led to the Cabinet making this order?

This would include any, whether it was legal advice or whether it was a cross-jurisdictional analysis or whether it was maybe some sort of financial outlook provided to MPI, because I could see it being in any one of those areas, you know.

So just to clarify that that's what the undertaking is.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, that's a fair undertaking. That's a fair description of what I'm undertaking to provide. As much information, background information as I can garner, I'd be happy to share it with the member, in respect of this decision.

Mr. Kinew: So am I right to assume we're going to go in the Marshawn Lynch direction with further questions in this space? Like, it's an undertaking, and then is the Premier willing to answer other questions about this topic?

Mr. Pallister: Not unless they're asked.

Mr. Kinew: So has there been legal advice provided to the government on this topic of the change to the reserve rate?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I've undertaken to provide the background information on the decision-making and to give whatever information I can make available to the member to him, so I think beyond that, to speculate on what the nature of that information which I've undertaken to get might be, would be, probably, counterproductive.

I'm concerned that if I was to speculate on area of information that I did not have available to the member at our next sitting, for example, I might be criticized harshly by the member for not making that information available to him. Therefore, I won't undertake in detail to say what information I will

provide, but rather, undertake to provide the information that I can get for the member on this issue.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, so we'll look forward to that undertaking and follow up at that time, I guess.

I'm curious to know about whether the government has plans for MPI to divest itself of any of its current holdings. I know there's been some discussion about Cityplace. Is that part of the government's current plans, like, to have MPI pull out of that?

Mr. Pallister: I'm not aware of any plans but I can certainly inquire and get back to the member on that.

An Honourable Member: Okay, so perhaps we'll—

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, sorry. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: Sounded like you had recognized me, Mr. Chair, but—

Mr. Chairperson: Didn't have it on.

Mr. Kinew: Microphones, eh? Keeping you like a switchboard operator in past days: busy.

Yes, so we could perhaps pick that up at another time with the Premier.

* (17:00)

Maybe we can change gears a little bit and talk a little bit about, you know, the issue of addictions. Certainly, it's been an ongoing conversation, going back into the previous Legislature. It was a hot topic during the campaign itself. You know, the issue of addictions certainly has been an ongoing conversation going back into the previous Legislature. It was a hot topic during the campaign itself. And even this week, there's, you know, comments by Mr. Chipman last week that have talked about other ways forward in terms of tackling with the addictions crisis.

I put on the record that this is an issue that I've taken a personal interest in and spent a good deal of time talking to a number of experts on. So I'm curious to know what the status is for the First Minister when it comes to responding to the addictions crisis and, in particular, the issue of meth use in Winnipeg, in Brandon, in Swan River, in other communities across Manitoba.

So would like, I guess, just to begin by asking the Premier what new measures will be taken to counteract the use of meth and to help combat addictions in our province.

Mr. Pallister: Well, the member's aware of a number of initiatives we've taken already. I could just quickly review and say that the Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinics we've opened throughout the province—we've committed to an additional one just a few weeks ago, as well.

The—these investments total well over \$20 million already, but there's much more in terms of expense—non-budgeted, I would actually add—on many of these items: tripled the number of women's treatment beds at the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba in Winnipeg—included in that six mental health beds at HSC; worked with the City and with the federal partners on an Emergency Treatment Fund discussion—joined the Government of Canada's treatment fund, I should say, but also worked in terms of partnering with municipalities, in particular the City of Winnipeg in this instance on a task force that resulted in some significant recommendations we're acting on, which I'll outline later; sanctioned the use of olanzapine by paramedics, which I've had some initial discussion with the paramedics about this just casually, but it seems like that is beneficial to—has been beneficial to them and their work; and introduced amendments—Personal Health Information Act, Mental Health Act.

In addition, though, during the run up to—I think it was actually two weeks prior to the election campaign beginning, we announced other initiatives as well. The David Asper appointment to—through Police Commission work—to investigate and research other initiatives that we can take to enhance downtown, in particular public safety, though we expect a number of these recommendations may have benefits to other communities.

You know, meth is not—doesn't isolate—the problems around meth use and meth addiction don't isolate themselves to certain communities within Winnipeg or around the province, and the member knows that this is a real concern for him, for our government. And certainly he's communicated clearly it's one that he wants us to pursue. And we've got that message loud and clear from not only him but, of course, from the various people that come up to this at the front line and must deal with it.

But the issue of public safety is also a concern, obviously. People are impacted by it who are not, you know—not meth addicts themselves, but are caught in the behavioural aspects that meth unfortunately seems to highlight in some. And so a sense of public safety in the downtown area of Winnipeg and elsewhere in

the province has been eroded—perhaps not exclusively because of meth, but because of other factors as well. But it's also had clear impacts on criminal behaviour and increases in crime have statistically been reported significantly linked to meth, though not exclusively.

And so the public safety piece is an important aspect of this. People deserve to feel safe in their own community. And so I look forward to those recommendations. We've asked Mr. Asper to report within 60 days, and that clock is ticking. So there is an urgency there that we feel we want to communicate—have communicated to him of his work. He understands that.

In terms of the educational aspects, as well, there hasn't been an upgrade in our drug education units for—in public schools for 20 years. I believe that that is something. That work is under way now, and it needed to be underway a long time ago. Changes in education, equipping front-line teachers to have better materials, more relevant to the circumstances we face today, is also an important aspect of this, but the member specifically has asked about treatment programs and I know—I note from the Chair that I'm running out of time, but I'm happy to talk more about some of the initiatives we have under way.

And I've said to the member this is an issue. I don't—I have, despite the treatment by some, I see this as one that we're all concerned about, and it's one I'm very interested in ideas and hearing ideas from all members. New members to our House have their views and have concerns, and they've—previous roles they've been involved in, I know they've dealt with this at—in their service in other areas. So I'm interested in their suggestions and ideas, sincerely, as well.

Mr. Kinew: I think the biggest suggestion that I would have is that I think there's sort of two categories of response that are needed on meth specifically, but also on addictions more generally.

First category is—maybe you could lump in as immediate responses that would include things like detox and harm reduction and public safety.

But the second category, and one that I would encourage the First Minister not to lose sight of, is the longer-term, prevention-based initiatives needed to counteract addictions in our province over years and decades to come. And, specifically, I think this goes beyond just education, though education could be a part of it. It has to do with preventing people from experiencing emotional trauma, emotional pain, adverse life experiences, adverse childhood

experiences, because the experts agree that addictions become an issue for people who have some sort of adverse life experience and then don't have a healthy means to cope with it, be that through therapy or, you know, perhaps religion, social networks that they may find supportive.

So, inasmuch as we do need to see action on detox and transitional housing and treatment programs, we also need to keep an eye towards improving the justice system, the health-care system, the CFS system, housing in the province so that we can be sure that we're mitigating those traumatic experiences that some people experience.

So that's just a comment that I'd leave the Premier (Mr. Pallister) with again. There's immediate steps to take, but also some of these longer-term projects will move the needle on addictions, perhaps not within a year but over a number of years.

I am curious about the government potentially collaborating with private sector and other organizations that have been lobbying in this space. On Friday—I believe it was Friday—Mr. Chipman held a talk for the chamber of commerce, and, among other topics, he did touch on addictions and his organization, which I think the media is describing as the alliance, in short form, have been talking about making investments to combat addictions, but I'm curious as to what the conversations are between the First Minister's government and this group.

Are they currently exploring potentially collaborating or what is the status? Is there some joint initiative being explored there between the government and this group that's led by Mr. Chipman but referred to as the alliance?

* (17:10)

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for his comments, and we have had—I am told that there have been meetings—ministerial meetings with representatives of the alliance. I've had personal meetings with Mr. Chipman and discussed this issue as well.

There have also been other reports, as the member knows: VIRGO report, Illicit Drug Task Force and the alliance report. And we've reviewed them all in detail and, I think, as the member alluded to earlier, there is an acknowledged rising use and distribution of meth and other dangerous drugs, and so there needs to be continuing care, and I think that's the theme that he was addressing earlier. And causative factors have to be considered, long-term solutions need to be sought, not just short term, but there are short-term needs as

well. And so it's a combination of these that our Safer Streets, Safer Lives Action Plan is attempting to address.

We're moving forward on some of the ideas that come from each of those research reports or consultative documents, as the case may be, and also the alliance, which is a cross-section of concerned citizenry from a variety of backgrounds; it's not solely private sector, but involves others as well.

One of their ideas was a sobering unit, and that acute medical sobering unit is an idea that we're pursuing and committed to acting on, and we, in the recent election campaign—drop-in centre as part of that as well, the expansion of more flexible-length withdrawal services because this is a— it's a horrible drug to withdraw from and very, very difficult to withdraw from, and so one size does not fit all in this instance nor in most of areas of addiction.

So that is something we acknowledged and are working towards, understanding and acting on. And also in terms of street outreach, there's a need to expand and enhance support for street outreach programs. We did do some additional supports for Bear Clans, that group of people that's done a tremendous amount of service to the benefit of not just Winnipeg, but Brandon's group as well, and deserves to be commended yet again for the work they're doing.

But these are ongoing and real challenges. I referenced the education piece because it was not a piece that was acted upon for a long time, and I'm talking in this instance about educational programs within our schools. Drug education programs had not been revised or upgraded, so that work is under way right now in that department.

But there are a variety of other mechanisms we need to pursue. But there's also the issue of public safety, which was not one that was referenced, I know, in the platform of the official opposition at all, but it is one that is important. People who are coming to Winnipeg, Brandon, Thompson, Portage, Selkirk, you name it, they're coming into the community, deserve to feel safe, and they deserve to be safe.

And so actions need to be taken to make sure that public safety is real, that people who are coming to shop for Mom for Christmas or coming to attend a Moose game can come to downtown Winnipeg and feel perfectly safe. That's a goal.

We all share that goal, and we know that the recent polling has shown that a significant number of Manitobans don't feel safe when they're downtown.

We need to work together to come up with ideas to make sure that we, as I understand from just anecdotal research, that Minneapolis has dealt with this issue, and is active in a number of initiatives in downtown Minneapolis that helped to give the people a greater sense of security, better lighting, better co-ordination with security people that are working in the private sector companies, but haven't been co-ordinating their activities very well. So they've—these are just a couple of examples. I expect that Mr. Asper, his work, we'll come across many other ideas and initiatives that we can pursue to assist there.

So it's not just about acting in one piece of this thing; it's—we know this from—I know this from—obviously in discussions with other premiers, this is not unique to Manitoba; we're focused on Manitoba, but we can learn from other jurisdictions as well and learn what initiatives they have taken that work, what have worked less well, how we can implement those and come up with better practices that will assist us in making sure communities are safe for the people within.

Mr. Kinew: So the Premier (Mr. Pallister) referred to talking to the alliance, and I'm just separating the issues here; perhaps can discuss one after the other. So I'm curious to know what services the government is looking at providing in conjunction with the alliance.

Mr. Pallister: I'm not sure I understand the specific question the member's asking. If we've read the alliance's report and we've had ongoing—and I understand there's ongoing dialogue with the coalition which has members who are also involved in giving us input in other areas, so it's not—it's sort of not a separate distinct entity. I think there's a lot of Winnipeggers and Manitobans who share—have shared their initiative—have shared their ideas for initiatives with us. The alliance is a cross-section of various groups. I don't have the list in front of me, but I think the member's probably familiar with it. Various—part of it is business—private sector businesspeople; part of it is people involved in the front line in drug treatment and prevention activities.

So it's a cross-section. We've got their report with ongoing dialogue with the group that Mr. Chipman has emerged as a spokesman for and continue to be interested in acting on the advice we receive and have acted and will continue to act on it.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, you know, the question is in the proposal: What is the government considering? Are they looking at funding, you know? Everything that the group brought forward? Or are there certain

aspects that the government's taking a look at, prioritizing over others? Is there one aspect that the government wants to focus on, you know? It's a question as to what—of what that group has brought forward is the government actively considering?

Mr. Pallister: Well, I referenced earlier one of—and the difficulty with this is that some of the alliance ideas are also being brought forward by other groups and individuals as well, so it's not exclusively just the alliance. We're not just acting on it because the alliance recommends. *[interjection]* Yes, give credit to everyone; spread it around. So the alliance, one of their ideas was the acute medical sobering unit and that is one of the things I've referenced that we are acting upon. They had also recommended a drop-in centre, and I understand that there's work proceeding to act on that advice as well. So those are just a couple of examples, but I'm hesitant to just give the alliance ownership of suggestions that came from, you know, also, them plus, you know, the municipal partnership that we had come up with a number of sort of synchronized ideas and suggestions for action that we're also acting on.

I wouldn't want to create the impression it's just the alliance and we're acting on their advice, on their behalf. Because we are hearing them, but we're hearing from other groups and individuals as well.

Mr. Kinew: Thank you. The First Minister mentioned David Asper in a few of his previous comments. I'm wondering if he can share with the committee the genesis for this kind of new mandate David Asper's been given, and he's got 60 days to come back. I'm curious if the Premier can talk a bit about the discussions that led to that, the thinking that took place and what led to this new direction.

Mr. Pallister: Just a moment, we're trying to dig up the specific background on the David Asper piece. I'll just reference that. Caucus members, not just around the city, but around the province have shared their perspectives on this issue that have had input from a wide array of sources, not limited to but including, at least, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the mayor, in terms of David. I referenced Mr. Chipman earlier but I would add the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, through various venues, discussions, not just ministerial, but members of our caucus, and also, obviously, through interventions made, not just exclusively in question period, but certainly have been made in question period by members opposite, we've

heard a wide array of suggestions and concerns and have acted on them and will continue to act on them.

* (17:20)

I could just share with the member, certainly I, from a personal perspective, I've had numerous discussions with people; I'm very concerned about this issue as he is. My—the perspectives that have been shared with me by our enterprise team members that have given me advice on a variety of issues have reinforced the concern that more needs to be done. I've had very interesting and heartfelt conversations with Scott and Anne Oake, and their diligent efforts are to be applauded in respect of working on this issue and related issues around addictions.

And also with the, you know, community representatives at the municipal level, as well. There's numerous interventions and discussions with the members of the AMM. Those folks have also shared, whether anecdotal evidence of concerns—and sometimes it stops at that—but also ideas on actions.

So the consultations—and I'm sure it's the same—I know that the official opposition prepared a research document as well, which was the result of discussions they had had in respect of certain aspects of this, especially focused on the treatment aspects.

This is—document I'm referring to now is just simply—has this been made public? *[interjection]* Good. Well, we can make—if members are interested, make copies available as well if they need—want to see this. This is just essentially a—what I'm referring to now is a letter from the Attorney General (Mr. Cullen) to Mr. Asper, so more specific to what the member had asked about the parameters of the discussion and so on. And this talks about the commitment to improving safety in downtown Winnipeg. This was sent out on September the 18th.

Winnipeg Police Service had—in '16 had done a Centreline downtown safety strategy. And there were commitments there that were made to work with the private sector to increase foot patrols, expand camera surveillance in downtown Winnipeg. And then, in '18, the City of Winnipeg expanded those strategies. So—and that meant decommissioning the Portage Place shopping centre bus shelter, which had been a centre of a lot of problems over—increasing, it seemed, over a long period of time and had become a crime hot spot. But there's a lot more that needs to be done, obviously.

So the 2018 police services stab report showed that there was a 10 per cent increase in downtown violent crime in Winnipeg—Portage Avenue district

specifically—and that property crime was up by 22 per cent in the area. So these are the causative factors. I don't know if I need to recite them, the members know—anecdotally they know that there's been an increase in crime and they know that that's a relevant factor to consider.

So what we asked the police commission to do was report back with a concise set of recommendations on actions and initiatives that could be pursued to reduce crime and ensure that Manitobans feel safe in downtown Winnipeg. And it does go on to reference Minneapolis in this directive. Their improvement district pursued greater collaboration between the police, private sector to keep the downtown safe and economically prosperous.

I can go into more detail but my—note Chairman is telling me my time is up.

Mr. Kinew: So I am curious to know more about this. You know, the document itself is public, as the First Minister notes, but I am curious about the process that led to this and sort of the conversations with Mr. Asper or with the police service or with others on the police board.

Just wondering if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) can share a bit about what led to this letter and the order that it represents. If the Premier can talk a bit about—acknowledging that he's already, I think, addressed some of the public safety concerns currently—if he could talk a bit more about the decision making and some of the conversations that led to this letter being issued.

Mr. Pallister: Sure. Well, I would just say that the Winnipeg Police Commission seems to be—it's not the only agency that we could ask for assistance here but it seems to be an appropriate one to ask and so that's what we're doing and the Attorney General has asked them to consider the following measures, as outlined in their—in the communication that I referenced earlier. Among these initiatives: to increase downtown foot patrols, including more effective use of front-line officers.

Now these are measures we're asking them to consider, not, you know, be responsible for the implementation but we're asking them to consider the efficacy of these types of measures and see whether these are things we should be pursuing or whether they don't work, to what degree they might be appropriate to Winnipeg or maybe they're only appropriate to Minneapolis.

Well, you know, we don't know yet and that's where we're asking the police commission to do that investigative research and consider these things but other measures, like including more effective use of front-line officers—cadets potentially, downtown business improvement zone ambassadors, the use of both the city and privately owned and operated close circuit security cameras to 'implood'—improve public safety in the downtown area, improved lighting potentially in areas that are perceived as unsafe by Winnipeggers.

We know, and I may have these numbers not exactly right but I believe there was a survey done a couple of years ago about downtown safety. I'm not sure who conducted it. Do you remember?

I just remember being struck by the number and it was something like 90 per cent of women felt unsafe in the downtown area of Winnipeg after dark. And it just struck me reading that—and I know members will have their own perspectives on this but just to have that significant a percentage of people, in this case women, feeling unsafe in our downtown, it's obviously a concern and now this—with the increased incidence of meth use we're seeing—the increased interaction that we're seeing of a criminal nature.

I think this is a course of action that we should take a look at. So I mentioned lighting, ensuring communication connectivity, information and data sharing between Winnipeg Police Service, private security personnel and volunteer downtown patrols, stronger enforcement of existing laws that prohibit aggressive panhandling, better co-ordination between the police service, the private sector and the prosecution service to address chronic and high-volume users of public resources and target prolific violent and property offenders and expanded community engagement.

So we're asking, in this case, that they report back by November 17th and the report should include recommendations for action and advice as to our role, regulatory roles included, respecting provincial, municipal and private funding responsibilities and program monitoring to strengthen safety in downtown Winnipeg.

So that's from Minister Cullen—oh, am I not supposed to use names here? No? Okay. I'm sorry. I apologize then.

An Honourable Member: Very easy-going Chair.

Mr. Pallister: Well, old habits die hard. From the Attorney General anyway, so that's the same letter I just quoted from.

Mr. Kinew: So this, you know, well, you know Mr. Asper will report back November 17th.

What's the plan after that? Is this report going to be made public? Will it be considered by government first and then there'll be different announcements broken off from it? I'm just asking the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to shed some light as to what the next steps will be by his government once he receives the report.

Mr. Pallister: Well, we have acted on previous reports that we've commissioned and we intend to act on this one as well.

Mr. Kinew: Will the Premier share this report publicly after it's received?

Mr. Pallister: I do anticipate that will be the case.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, so changing tack a bit to a return to some of the other reports that the Premier was referring to earlier on, he mentioned the VIRGO report. Can the Premier update the committee as to the status of implementing the VIRGO recommendations?

* (17:30)

Mr. Pallister: I can, in due course, as I am—obtain the update.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Pallister: In anticipation of more detail, I'll just begin by saying that the ministers of Health, Families, Education and Training and Justice have already moved forward on a number of mental health and addiction program and service recommendations. Some—most of the ones I'll refer to now are specific to the VIRGO report, but others as well.

These are in the budget, which we expect to see passed in the next few days. One of them is standardizing opiate replacement therapy by developing an updated recommended practice manuals and increasing access to better training.

Another component's going to relate to screening, brief intervention, referral to assist practitioners to screen for alcohol and prescription illicit drug misuse or addiction and mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.

I've got a million dollars invested in the realm of withdrawal management services aligned to Canada's

emergency treatment fund bilateral agreement. We've concluded a tendering process to establish withdrawal management services in both Winnipeg and Brandon. Those services are—just began about three weeks ago.

Since June of '19, youth counsellors from the Addictions Foundation are accessible to existing and future clients from new locations across nine agencies across Winnipeg, including ACCESS Fort Garry, Aikins Street Community Health Centre, Centre Santé St. Boniface, Eagle Urban Transition, MacDonald Youth Services, Ma Mawi, New Directions and the StreetReach Program.

So, VIRGO report also recommended improving access and coordination of mental health and addictions services. Needs of youth, obviously, are evolving, and it's vital we keep services grounded in the communities, so co-locating these services at different sites allows counsellors to be aware of emergent trends and it lets them adapt their responses to new revolving issues as well.

So, it's just under the specific area that I've referenced related to VIRGO. In April this year, naltrexone and acamprosate which I am—can't pronounce and am not familiar with, but I understand they were moved from a part 3 exception drug status to a part 1 open benefit, which means a physician prescribing those drugs for a patient no longer has to receive approval from the Pharmacare program before doing so. And patients eligible for Pharmacare drug plans offered by Families can then immediately take the prescription to a pharmacy and have the costs covered.

In June, we announced one and a quarter million dollars a year approved to enhance staffing resources at the five Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinics throughout the province, so that included expanded hours of operation in Brandon, which the member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson) would be pleased to learn about. As well, these clinics can then better meet demand, because they can obviously see new patients during existing walk-in hours while ensuring that there's dedicated time for providers to deliver follow-up care as well.

Close to a million dollars we've invested to add an additional four women's treatment beds at the Behavioural Health Foundation, and 12 additional treatment beds for women when the Portage Avenue location reopens in the new year. So that—those beds will be able to support more than 170 women requiring treatment each year.

And we've also expanded mental health programming offered by the Strongest Families Institute by an additional 500 families per year. That's preventative programming. It helps families work together to develop their capacity and their resilience to address challenging issues as they emerge.

As the member has alluded to frequently, and I agree with him on this, that it's the preventative work that we can do that often, I think, is as important as the immediate issue of treatment, though, of course, both are important. And so the preventative work here is that we're helping families address challenging issues as they emerge, rather than subsequent to the emergence of those issues.

So there are a number of other initiatives we've pursued. I hope that that gives the member a little bit of extra information in respect of the VIRGO report. There—we've implemented 27 recommendations from the VIRGO report so far. It was only released last year, and the work continues on a number of other initiatives as we speak.

Mr. Kinew: So maybe zooming out a bit into more of a cross-departmental view, I'm curious, like, how are these things quarterbacked across different government departments when it comes to addictions specifically? Is there, like, a Cabinet committee dealing with the addictions crisis? Is this like a standing item at Cabinet, without diving into the specifics of those conversations? Just curious, like, how is the Premier (Mr. Pallister) managing this across the different departments that he oversees, seeing as the addictions issue does cross many of these neat departmental lines, like Health, like Justice, like Education?

So I guess the question is, when we look at things like implementing VIRGO, responding to the alliance, dealing with even other organizations, Main Street Project, Bear Clan, you know, organizations like that, BHF, how is it that the Premier and other ministers are collaborating? If you could shed some—shed some light, rather, onto that process.

Mr. Pallister: Sure, I'd be happy to. This is sort of one of the areas of concern that, not specific to this issue, but certainly for this issue and for a number of others, that I've spent some time researching and my deputy has as well, and we're very concerned about, and more than that, we've acted to make changes so that we don't have siloes. And in this instance, I think, as much as many, it's particularly important.

So this has been a co-ordinated effort, both at the deputy minister level and at the ministerial level, I'd point out, because each of the departments has different special areas of concern, but they cannot be isolated from one another on an issue like this. And so we need cross-departmental co-operation. So this affects—on a regular basis, there are discussions at the ministerial and at the deputy minister level around the issues pertaining to not just addictions but others as well. But in this instance, the member's raised this in the context of addictions. Department of Health, Department of Families, Education and Training, Justice, each of them has aspects that are relevant to the solutions we need to find, the actions we need to take in these areas. So it's—I think it's a very important point the member makes that the need for collaborative discussion on this issue, not just with other jurisdictions but within our own, is especially important. And so we've endeavoured to set up systems not only in reference to the people that I mentioned but in terms of other activities, other subcommittees.

The member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield), for example, led a research project in respect of child and family services issues, did an extensive amount of outreach and work to prepare that research document, and other members as well. These are shared, many of these issues, and I won't specifically speak about what's shared in caucus except to say that a number of these issues are on occasion shared by other committees and other gatherings and groups, and that allows for, well, as my dad used to say, as—when he was trying to get me to do more work on the farm as a kid, he'd say, well, another pair of eyes on the job's a good thing. So we believe that is the case is with these types of issues as well. And so consultative work and cross-departmental co-operation are essential if we're going to arrive at better outcomes.

Mr. Kinew: So how is that work formalized and how does that actually get executed? Is there a Cabinet committee related to this or is it ad hoc, or is there, like, a standing meeting for these DMs and ministers? I'm curious as to how this collaboration is actually formalized and managed with an eye towards ensuring that it actually leads to some action to help with the addictions issue.

* (17:40)

Mr. Pallister: Well, I'll just say that, just as an example, at just the deputy ministers' meetings, cross-departmentally, on this topic of biweekly meetings, there are other committees comprised both of upper

bench members and Cabinet members that discuss these types of issues. Not exclusively, though, so I wouldn't suggest that we just got one committee that deals with these—this issue. There are several, but the discussions continue, the actions continue. And they will continue as we have more research done. For example, I mentioned the police commission research, which the members will have a chance to have a look at and comment on in the not-too-distant future, as well.

Mr. Kinew: So a big aspect of the meth issue has not just been public safety, but also public health. There's an ongoing outbreak of a number of STBBIs, which are being transmitted in many cases through intravenous drug use. In some cases, it is through contact between partners. But I'm curious to know what responses is the government taking to address those outbreaks of STBBIs.

Mr. Pallister: I think the Health Minister at Estimates there—which I believe are under way—would be better equipped to give you examples specifically around the health-related issues associated with addictions of various kinds. And so I would just suggest that as a better avenue than me.

Mr. Kinew: So how engaged is the First Minister with this side of the addictions issue, though? Can the Premier (Mr. Pallister) shed some light? Like, is there updates that he's receiving? Has it been delegated entirely to Health? How engaged is he with the public health aspect of what is a pretty serious addictions crisis in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: I peruse with great interest any available report relevant to this issue. I've read studies nationally, regionally, internationally as well. I continue to be engaged. I continue to be briefed by my colleagues. I continue to be open to input. And I appreciate the input of the member on ideas and initiatives that we can undertake.

We have taken this very seriously. I've raised the issue at premiers' meetings, I've raised it at the western Canada premiers' meetings, as well. I've benefited from the input of some of my colleagues cross-jurisdictionally here and in the United States. I continue to be engaged on the issue, and I know the member understands it to be a serious issue, as do I.

Mr. Kinew: I do think it is important—sorry, waiting for the mic to be turned on.

I do think it is important to keep an eye on this side of the addictions issue, if I could just share a bit with the First Minister. In particular, for a government

that keeps an eye towards responsible stewardship of the Province's financial resources, the public health aspect of this is a tremendous human cost. But it also—it is a tremendous potential future cost being borne by the health-care system.

You know, it was the Department of Health's own estimate that one additional case of HIV leads to \$1 million in expenditure over the lifetime of that patient by our health-care system. Again, tens of thousands—in some cases hundreds of thousands of dollars if somebody contracts one of the forms of hepatitis. Those are future costs that'll be borne by our health-care system.

In some, though realistically perhaps not all of those cases, they could be headed off with preventative measures, with harm reduction, with outreach, and so it does make sense to focus on expanding those sorts of initiatives and those sorts of interventions by government.

There's also another aspect in which drug use impacts public health, and that's not necessarily on the transmission of infectious diseases, but it's also on the impact of—the long-term impact of the health of drug users. So in conversation with people in the cardiac unit at St. Boniface, they tell us that one of the new patient populations that they've been seeing since the meth issue has taken centre stage in the province is that they're now seeing younger people with cardiac issues that are present simply because they're long-term intravenous drug users.

And these are people who are going to be very sick, and so there's the human cost that they're bearing. But it's also a very expensive form of health-care intervention to have to deliver, which is to say providing heart surgery to these IV drug users who are seeing cardiac failure is very expensive to our health-care system.

And so there is, I think, multiple dimensions by which the public health aspect of the addictions crisis needs to be taken into account.

The human cost is very important. The financial costs cannot be dismissed as well. So I'd encourage the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to keep an eye on that as he weighs the recommendations in VIRGO, recommendations from the alliance, recommendations from community groups like Main Street, like the Bear Clan.

Again, on the surface, when they bring forward needle collection. In addition to the provision of clean needles as a recommendation, as was recommended

in the task force, on its face, it might look like this is public safety or just like a neighbourhood cleanliness type of issue. It's just about getting needles off the street.

However, there is also this longer term, you know, perhaps multi-year impact that comes with these sorts of interventions on improving the public health of our province. So I hope that, you know, the Premier in his own deliberations but also, you know, with his ministers and the DMs under their supervision, that they are keeping an eye on some of those longer term public health impacts as well.

So I'm curious to know whether that is as a matter of course regularly a part of the discussions, or is—this is something that the Premier can take up on a go-forward basis? Because I do think that this is an important aspect which doesn't necessarily make the front page every day, but is an important dimension of the addictions crisis that we're seeing across the province.

Mr. Pallister: I thank the member for his preamble and his comments, and I hear the sincerity that he has on this issue. And I would ask him to accept the sincerity that is in my heart on this issue as well, and to say to him, I thank him for his interventions and his advocacy is sincere.

So we are acting on the advice, including advice from his own—he himself and his own members on—in a sincere way, with significant resource application, and we want to make sure we get the best possible value from each of the investments we make, obviously, not just short-term but mid-term, long-term, as he's alluded to.

So I share the sentiments and I assure him that, in every way, at every level, cross-departmentally, inter-jurisdictionally, we are sincerely approaching this issue with heart and mind and focus as best we can.

Mr. Kinew: Wondering if the Premier can shed some light on how he's approaching this as a manager. Are there certain outcomes that he would like to see take place as a result of these investments? We know that when the issue of addictions is reported in the media, there are many, I guess, indicators.

Some—these reports talk about, you know, this many tens of thousands of needles collected, this many million of needles distributed. Other reports may highlight, again, rates of disease or infection being spread throughout the population. Still other reports would talk about incidences of crime, property crime, violent crime, many of which, recently, have

been tied to the use of methamphetamines in Winnipeg and across Manitoba.

So I'm curious, because when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) says value for money, of course, money, the financial component is one of it, but the other side is the value. And so I'm trying to ascertain a bit of how that value of these investments will be judged.

And so, maybe as a more general and even philosophical approach, what sort of outcomes is the Premier looking to move and what would he consider to be positive? Is it, you know, incremental progress on these indicators? Is it some other thing that, perhaps, I haven't outlined that the Premier is looking to advance?

So I'm curious to know by what criteria will the First Minister judge success or at least progress when it comes to moving the addictions file forward?

* (17:50)

Mr. Pallister: It's a very fair question, and it's a question of some interest, in terms of its analysis and its research around answering it. The Western Australia study that was released a couple of years ago was very interesting for its observations. I'm assuming about, I think, 70-plus recommendations in their concluding report that they emphasized the danger of applying simplistic outcomes as targets in terms of achieving the broader goals.

The broader goal, of course, is to—in the general sense—is to reduce the incidence of addiction. That's a broader goal. But the report talks about the danger of using reference to, for example, you know, fewer needles on playgrounds or in neighbourhoods as a measure. If there are fewer needles on playgrounds and in community areas found, then there are very likely going to be a direct correlation of fewer needles distributed. If there are fewer needles distributed, then we have a—we create a false dichotomy. We create a circumstance where we don't distribute needles so we have a better outcome because there are fewer needles found.

But as the member knows, that means there'll be an increased incidence of disease as a consequence of needle sharing and other activities.

So it's a difficult, difficult area. In fact, the member's own party released a study which acknowledged the complexity of this issue. The outcomes at this stage have an ascending problem, will be defined by their nature generally, because if

we specifically talk about target outcomes, 25 per cent reduction in incidence of crime, you know—276 per cent increase in drug-related calls for service over the recent time period. That—you're going for short-term victories at the expense of proper planning and co-ordination.

So what we're after now is better co-ordination and planning around the design of ways to address this issue. And what we're focused on is making sure that we do everything in our power to focus our resources in an intelligent way to achieve that reduced incidence that I talked about, of addictions.

At the same time, though, treatment has to happen. And so there's an investment that's significant—tens of millions of additional dollars over budget last year on treatment mechanisms for addiction—for cases of addiction presently that, it would be argued by some, is not addressing the preventative side. And so you need to address the preventative side. There's an educational component to this, right? And that has to be addressed.

So it's, as virtually every study has concluded, you have an incredibly complex series of issues that need to be addressed: causative factors the member alluded to; poverty; the increased addiction rates among people who have experienced trauma in youth; could be indigenous—could be related to an indigenous person's parent being disaffected in respect of the residential school experience, for example, and so what happened as a consequence.

Today, of course, we acknowledge those concerns. What might happen there would create a sense of trauma or additional circumstance in one's life which might lend towards the greater likelihood of addiction.

So it's—I guess what I'm trying to say is that, as the member has acknowledged in his earlier preamble, what we have here is a set of serious and significant challenges, not exclusively around meth but around addictions and mental health issues that are much broader and more complex than I can encapsulate in a targeted, you know, number for reduced crime or reduced incidence of presentation at a RAAM clinic. You know, we're into a situation right now that we acknowledge is emerging, growing.

It is interesting to note that in other jurisdictions around the country, the problems are very different. When I speak to Premier Horgan, their concern is more around—is more—frankly, around fentanyl in Vancouver right now than it is around meth.

In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, their concern's more about alcohol-related concerns. We are in—and I would say, perhaps, Saskatchewan to a similar degree—is in a meth circumstance right now that is without precedent. And we're trying to learn and pick up as much information and act as best we can by using all the resources that we can make available but, at the same time, also accessing the knowledge and experience that others around the world and around the country and around other jurisdictions—not limited to the United States—Portugal, Italy, as well, that have faced this challenge are addressing.

So it's a focus. It's an issue which the member has raised and, obviously, I share his concerns that we look for the best possible ways to address it.

Mr. Kinew: I just pause to note for a second that the VIRGO report said that alcohol continues to be the biggest challenge in Manitoba when it comes to addictions.

And so, certainly, and this is something that I've had, you know, conversation about with community leaders too, is that, while rightly there is a great deal of emphasis on responding to methamphetamines today that perhaps we shouldn't lose sight of the impact of problematic alcohol use and problematic use of other substances along the way because many folks and many families need help when it comes to those issues as well.

So just wanted to put that on the record because certainly the lion's share of the media attention is on meth, but VIRGO report and others suggest that, you know, alcohol and other drugs continue to be a major scourge on many of our families, many of our communities, many of our loved ones, so we got to keep an eye on that as well.

And I think that's why the focus on prevention can be positive because the flip side of the corollary between using prevention to attack multiple different substances is an insight that was shared with me by some experts in the field of addictions medicine. And they said that the reason why they don't like the term meth crisis and they prefer to talk about addictions crisis, is they said because today it's meth, few years ago it was pills; prior to that it was maybe crack, and then before that it was alcohol, and maybe even before that it was, like, sniffing or something like that. And they said and what underlies it all is just like the baseline life experience that drives somebody to addiction, and they said that's why you need to deal with that sort of baseline condition if you want to see

progress in terms of the prevalence of addictions in our society.

And an example that they gave, that kind of illustrated it neatly for me, was they said that's why you can go to a community that's a dry community and still find addictions manifested either maybe through, you know, sniffing gas or sniffing paint, something like that.

Their argument was, basically, unless you address the underlying condition, it's not necessarily the substance, though certainly some substances lead to way worse acting out and way worse behaviour. They said unless you deal with the underlying condition, you're still going to have people finding different ways to get high or different ways to try and self medicate, different ways to try and deal with the mental health or addiction that they're dealing with.

So I think that that's all important to keep in mind. And then in terms of keeping an eye on the different indicators, we certainly did talk about public safety and public health and some of those other issues, prevalence of needles in the community. But I think there's also probably some other indicators that we may not be able to neatly capture in statistics such as how many tents are there underneath bridges or in public parks today as opposed to a few years ago, right? I'm not sure that we have an accurate count on that, though that's probably one of the more visible signs of the meth issue that we're facing in the province right now.

And, conversely, you know, if we were to see progress, then very likely we would probably see less people camping out under bridges and camping out in public parks. And I think we all want to see that. Does seem to be humane.

So I'm curious about all that, but just sharing some comments on the record because I do think it's important to focus on that prevention piece. You know, if you—and I'm not speaking you to the First Minister, to be clear to the Chair; speaking you in the general—if you were to bring about a Manitoba where there were kids without traumatic childhoods or without adverse childhood experiences, if you were to create a province where people didn't, you know, have painful experiences on the job site or in other places, then in that world, which may seem very tough to imagine from our current starting point, perhaps we could bring about a Manitoba without addictions. So I think that, again, that sort of thought exercise is useful in informing at least some of the work that we can do around prevention. And, again, that prevention work's

important because not only does it suggest that we could have some answers and some action on methamphetamines, but it would also deal with the problematic use of other substances like alcohol or, you know, other drugs that we don't want to see young people or people of any age to be using.

So I figured I'd just make some unsolicited commentary as we're drawing close to the end of our session here and just leave those thoughts on the record.

Mr. Pallister: I appreciate the—I very much appreciate the comments of the member on this topic and others and thank him for those.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 6 p.m., committee rise.

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN RELATIONS

*(14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Before proceeding with questions, I'd like to invite the minister to introduce her staff.

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): I'm pleased to have the following department staff here with me today from Indigenous and Northern Relations, to my left have Michelle Dubik who is the acting deputy minister. Across from her, Scott DeJaegher, director of policy and strategic initiatives; Brenda Feng, executive financial officer; Paul Doolan, acting executive director for Northern Affairs; and Geoff Sarenchuk, director of Consultation and Reconciliation branch.

Mr. Chairperson: The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): I would like to ask the minister to provide a staff listing for the department's senior staff.

Ms. Clarke: We have an acting deputy minister, Michelle Dubik. We have a financial and administrative services executive financial officer, Brenda Feng. Northern Affairs acting executive director, Paul Doolan. Consultation and Reconciliation acting director, Geoff Sarenchuk. Policy and Strategic Initiatives director, Scott DeJaegher. Community Engagement director, Paul Doolan. Financial and Administrative Services director, Amber Zhang. Northern Region director, Armand Barbeau. And North Central Region director, Stewart Sabiston.

Mr. Bushie: Is that the same staff that was with you at the end of the last session?

Ms. Clarke: I believe that is the same. Yes.

Mr. Bushie: What is the current vacancy rate for the department of Indigenous and Northern Relations?

Ms. Clarke: The information I'm providing here today is as of March 31st, 2019. At that time, excluding the minister and my office staff current, there was vacancy of 18 positions out of 80, so approximately 22 per cent.

Mr. Bushie: Is that an increase or a decrease from previous?

Ms. Clarke: That would be a decrease from 28 per cent.

Mr. Bushie: Will the vacant positions in that 22 per cent be filled?

Ms. Clarke: In the Northern Affairs Branch, there's two new hires as of September 30th and October 7th, and one new staffing request.

For the Community Engagement branch, we have one new hire and a new hire in October, the other was June 2020 start date.

And policy, okay, sorry, I've got to draw a line here. I'm going to 'reiterate', I'm going to start from the beginning just so that we don't get mixed up here.

Northern Affairs Branch—two new hires September 30th and October 7th, with one new staffing request.

Community Engagement—there's one new hire with a June, 2020 start date.

And the policy strategic initiative—one new hire in October.

Mr. Bushie: Is there a target goal for the percentage of vacancies you want to hit?

Ms. Clarke: Our Northern Affairs Branch is under review; we're looking at doing a transformation. There's a lot of these positions fall within that, so when that review is completed we will have a clearer indication of what the number of staffing it will require to run more efficiently.

Mr. Bushie: When will that review be completed, and who was commissioned to do it?

Ms. Clarke: In regards to this process, we did an RFP. It was commissioned to Meyers, Norris, Penny. And

that draft report and the recommendations we are expecting to receive no later than December, 2019.

Mr. Bushie: And what about the remaining vacancy rates for the rest of the department?

* (15:00)

Ms. Clarke: Okay, in the department consultation and reconciliation 'brance', it's currently staffed, fully staffed, at this time. In finance we have two vacancies, but what we're going to need on that team in the future will be informed by the review that I discussed earlier.

The review will help us inform what services we offer and how we best fill the positions that are vacant right now, that will lead us into the future. And looking at that reorganization in policy and strategic, there is one vacancy that is actually being filled right now, so there's minimal vacancies in all the rest of the areas.

Mr. Bushie: So the RFP encompasses the Northern Affairs communities; what about the First Nation communities?

Ms. Clarke: The First Nations, that falls under policy and strategic and finance. The Northern Affairs is a separate entity. The Northern Affairs Branch is just for the Northern Affairs communities. First Nations, Metis, Inuit, that's the whole department.

Mr. Bushie: So the RFP is specific to both?

Ms. Clarke: The RFP is just for the Northern Affairs Branch, for the 52, I believe 52, Northern Affairs communities—unincorporated communities.

Mr. Bushie: So what is the plan for the First Nation communities?

Ms. Clarke: Well, as you understand, most of the governance for First Nations is a federal jurisdiction. Anything typically that falls within funding through our government for First Nations does not come from INR. It comes from Health, Education, from the other departments, but it is not funded through our department.

Mr. Bushie: In the organizational chart from the previous two years and going into, well, previous year and going into the upcoming year, you had Indigenous Relations as part of your flow chart, your organizational chart. And now it's not there anymore.

Can you explain why that's not there anymore?

Ms. Clarke: Just for a bit of history on this department. Originally, in May 2016, we were the Department of Indigenous and Municipal Relations;

that was for the first 18 months. So, of course, in everything all as I've explained right now, the policy and strategic, the community engagement, they are in the consultation and reconciliation. Now we list them separately. But they were all just under one heading.

At that time it was all Indigenous Relations, but that has since been split and now we're just Indigenous and Northern Relations.

Mr. Bushie: So, in the flow chart, even though it was listed, it's now listed as being separate, the omission is support services. The omission is now support services. which is now not in the organizational chart. So where is support services?

Ms. Clarke: Support services is included in all the three branches that are now shown in Indigenous and Northern Relations. It's a part of those divisions.

Mr. Bushie: Not considering outside directives, could the minister please list any internal targets and mandates set out by her department?

* (15:10)

Ms. Clarke: You talk about internal targets, but we are given a mandate each and every session that there's an expectation that we will fulfill, and we have been fulfilling that expectation, and in some cases we've expanded and gone well beyond that.

But, as a new member, I will just outline some of the commitments that we are responsible for, and this is a new mandate finalizing and ensuring the consistent implementation of framework for respectful and productive consultations with indigenous communities, including agreements to address adverse affects on indigenous rights, engaging with indigenous communities and all Manitobans to develop a comprehensive reconciliation and engagement strategy, building respectful and effective partnerships to responsibly and sustainably develop our natural resources, and ensuring an ongoing implementation of Manitoba's treaty land entitlement obligations, and furthering reconciliation through a principled approach that will enhance opportunities for economic development with full participation of indigenous communities.

And I am expected to work with Cabinet colleagues as we fulfill the following platform commitments. That includes developing a policy framework for urban reserves with the municipal minister, relations, completing Operation Return Home and 'implemating' our Look North program

with the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade (Mr. Pedersen).

And as part of a Cabinet team, I will be assisting in implementing our economic development strategy led by the Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade, fixing our finances, reducing red tape, transforming government and reporting outcomes led by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), delivering our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan by the Minister of Sustainable Development (Ms. Squires), and achieving a more open government led by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Cullen).

We also will continue in our work on duty to consult, as well as our successes so far with the mining protocol, Look North strategy, economic development and, more specifically, tourism.

I'll also be part of a team of Cabinet ministers working on murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, as well as gender-based violence.

Mr. Bushie: Is there any changes from your previous mandate letter to the current one?

Ms. Clarke: I think the roles are similar, but they're definitely expanded. In the earlier months and in our earlier sessions we were just focusing on getting these initiatives launched. They have all been launched. We've been moving ahead and forward. We now have a committee of Cabinet for the economic development and that strategy has expanded and is pretty much up and running.

With the murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, although we were a part of the inquiry, going forward—Manitoba was a part of that inquiry—I guess we could say that we will be looking for a move from the federal government as we work through our Gender-Based Violence Committee of Cabinet to ensure that our work goes forward.

And it's one of the ones too, that it isn't just our department that's working on it, it's Justice, it's Health, it's Education. We have many committees—our—many of our departments that are going to be working forward and finding outcomes for this reconciling engagement and the operation return—or, pardon me, the duty to consult, it is in a finalized stage and we're hoping to get it approved and through government.

Operation Return Home has been a very large part of our portfolio and we are hoping to have most families home by the end of this year, which was—is a huge achievement.

Mr. Bushie: Can I ask that the minister table the report she's reading from?

Ms. Clarke: Yes, I am pleased to table this, but it's public information. It's on the government website.

Mr. Bushie: How was the mandate identified?

Ms. Clarke: I'm not sure what you mean by identified.

Mr. Bushie: All the mandates you were referring to, how were they identified as being part of your mandate?

Ms. Clarke: I'm not sure what you mean by being identified—how were they identified.

Mr. Bushie: How did you come up with your mandate and what criteria did you use to develop your mandate?

Ms. Clarke: As Cabinet ministers, we don't produce our own mandates. This is given to us by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) and his executive team.

Mr. Bushie: Are you committed to meeting the recommendations in the missing and murdered indigenous women's report?

Ms. Clarke: That's a discussion that will be held within our Cabinet and our caucus. There has been no public statement at this point and I would think that we would probably be waiting for a statement of process from the federal government as it was their initiative.

Mr. Bushie: So, at what stage is the department at in achieving its set targets and its mandates? What stage are you at?

Ms. Clarke: We just received our mandate so we are just starting. This is our first day back in session so we haven't advanced too far on that, given we are just starting.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): To follow up with the missing and murdered indigenous women inquiry, the port—the report got tabled a year ago and you guys have had no discussion on Cabinet on how to implement any of the recommendations?

Ms. Clarke: Actually the report was tabled on June 3rd, and that was the day that our session was recessed. I was there.

* (15:20)

Ms. Adams: The report was released October 4th last year, like, so, I've seen a copy of the report—there was a ceremony in Thompson; I was at it—with the

recommendations, so you guys knew the recommendations and you've had no conversations about how to implement it?

Ms. Clarke: I was in Gatineau, Quebec when the inquiry was released on June the 3rd, 2019. I was there and I was the third row back from the front. I was actually there. So there was—it was not October of last year. Absolutely not. No.

Mr. Bushie: Could the minister please elaborate on what applications she has made or plans on making to the ideas fund?

Ms. Clarke: Actually our department is, as I believe probably all departments within this government are, really excited about this ideas fund. We did it within the civil service, giving the frontline workers the opportunity to come forward with ideas.

And I think of the \$2 million spent on this initiative in its first pilot project. I forget how many millions of dollars were saved and great ideas came forward. So as a department we're very excited about it and we are working on some ideas at this point. However, those ideas will not be public until they've been handed in and sent in for approval. And hopefully we get approval because it's a great opportunity for our frontline workers to actually share their ideas.

Mr. Bushie: In the first 100 days, you have been tasked with, I quote, beginning public engagement on the implementation of comprehensive duty to consult framework.

What will this public engagement entail?

Ms. Clarke: We've been working on this duty to consult for some time now, and it is just at that process stage where it is going to public consultation. So we are looking out the guidelines and working out the financing for the cost, et cetera, to get this approved for moving forward.

Mr. Bushie: So when it goes to public consultation, what is that going to look like? What type of public consultation?

Ms. Clarke: That's what we're determining right now. We're in that process of figuring that out.

Mr. Bushie: So who is responsible for carrying out this engagement?

Ms. Clarke: Okay, two different ideas here.

There's going to be a proponent guide and it will be for engagement with the, and just as an example,

Manitoba Hydro or mining industry, going forward, and there will be direct engagement that will be done with the First Nations and the Manitoba Metis Federation on the implementation of the guide and as well as funding models.

Mr. Bushie: Will the minister be involved in the process?

Ms. Clarke: As a normal process within any department when we're going through these types of engagements and consultations, it is done through staff, et cetera, and the information is brought to me, and we discuss it amongst ourselves before it goes forward.

But I have on—actually with the duty to consult when they were meeting with—at one point they had a group up in the North, and I think it was with the chiefs and councils with—through MKO and there was one done in the southern area with SCO. And I actually did attend portions of both of those events, as I typically do with any work within my department. I am very much a hands-on person and try to attend portions of, or if not all of, most of these types of events.

Mr. Bushie: So back to the engagement process. So there's going to be two types of engagement process, one for industry and one for indigenous groups. They're not going to sit in the same room together?

Ms. Clarke: To date, the engagement plan has not been totally finalized, but the proponent guide is actually a new aspect of this framework and it'll lead to better consultations actually between the industry proponents and the communities going forward. And we'll be engaging with both, but they will be separate policy documents.

Mr. Bushie: So when will the policy documents be finalized?

Ms. Clarke: The documents are actually ready to go, but we haven't finalized the engagement plan yet, so that will carry on.

Mr. Bushie: So when is the deadline for completion of the comprehensive framework?

* (15:30)

Ms. Clarke: Well, as indicated, the mandate for having the engagement done is set out by the Premier (Mr. Pallister) as being completed in the first 100 days, and we hope to go forward after that as quickly as possible.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): It's good to be back asking questions of the minister again.

So, in the public accounts documents on page 32, it shows that the government underspent their budget for Indigenous and Northern Relations by nearly \$5 million.

Could the minister explain which areas were underspent and why?

Ms. Clarke: Okay, four different streams here where there's changes that were not necessarily expected. First one, of course, being staffing. The second one being the Metis Economic Development Fund agreement—it expired and wasn't renewed—and the Winnipeg friendship centre, as we all know, was closed down, and we've been working on getting it up and running again but it has not been operating for several months, so hope to have that rectified in very short order. Number four would be the revamping of the discretionary grants. We're looking at restructuring that, and—so that it will meet our mandates, that we align with government on our mandates.

Mr. Lindsey: So, four revenue streams that are designed basically to help northern communities have seen a reduction in funding of almost \$5 million, so where did the staff get cut that you saved money on that front?

Ms. Clarke: Staff didn't necessarily get cut. I think you'll remember in our last discussion when you and I were discussing this, there was a lot of staffing shortages in our northern offices, that we were just having an impossible time to get people hired in those offices. Those positions are now being filled. We had a lengthy discussion about that previously.

Mr. Lindsey: So the Metis Economic Development Fund, it was cut in its entirety?

Ms. Clarke: It was not cut; it expired. And we have a new economic development strategy within our government, and all economic development will be streamlined and done through the new economic development committee.

Mr. Lindsey: So this economic development committee that you've structured as part of government, could you tell me who all's involved in that committee?

Ms. Clarke: We have a committee of Cabinet, of course, and then there are committees throughout the province. I think there's—how many different stakeholders, seven? Seven stakeholder groups, I

believe. I can get that exact number for you. Metro region is one of them; Winnipeg is—Winnipeg has their own entity. There is a list of stakeholders that form the economic development strategy for the province.

Mr. Lindsey: I would certainly appreciate if the minister would get us that list of who all's involved in this committee of stakeholders that's going to decide on funding, particularly if it's specific to funding for Metis economic development, or is it Indigenous economic development, or is it all rolled into some master plan of Manitoba economic development? In which case, then, how does it help those specific groups that perhaps the economic development fund, as it was envisioned before, was designed to specifically help targeted groups?

Ms. Clarke: I will get you the list of the seven groups, and northern of course has their own economic development group out in—for the northern part of the province. In the mandates that went to each of the individual groups, the Indigenous component is specifically included in all of those letters for the whole province. Every letter had that component in it.

Mr. Lindsey: I would be very interested to see all of those mandate letters, because it would be interesting to see, as part of the economic development strategy, I guess, what the makeup of those stakeholder groups are; to say that there's a northern group, does it take in all the various First Nations interest groups, communities? Does it take in the Northern Affairs communities and their interests? Does it take in the non-indigenous communities? Does it take in just specific industries?

* (15:40)

So it would really be helpful to see the makeup of all of those stakeholder groups, but I guess for my particular purposes, probably our particular purposes—well, maybe Ian's is a little bigger maybe in perspective—and to see what the makeup of those groups are because that may help us determine what the outcome might be expected to be.

So would the minister be able to share that with us today, or?

Ms. Clarke: Yes, I'm happy to share this with you. Again, all this information's on the web; it's not new news.

I'm going to first give you the different groups that I spoke of initially, and actually first on the list is the northern group, or northern Manitoba. Second one

is rural Manitoba. The third one is the Winnipeg capital region. The next one is Economic Development Winnipeg. The next is innovation, it's the North Forge Technology Exchange. The next is trade, which includes the World Trade Centre. Next is tourism, and it includes Travel Manitoba.

And I would be happy to read you the mandate letter for northern Manitoba.

Pleased to confirm that the Communities Economic Development Fund, CEDF, as the province's regional economic development partner for northern Manitoba, as well as the lead entity for co-ordinating implementation of the Look North strategy, the purpose of this mandate letter is to outline the ways that CEDF will collaborate to help Manitoba meet our communities in the following key areas: most improved job creation and economic growth; most improved in partnerships with business and industry; most approved in achieving outcomes for the delivery of quality services; and the most improved public finances.

Communities economic development mandate is as the province's regional development partner for northern Manitoba, they will: lead implementation of the Look North action plan; co-ordinate economic development services for northern companies and entrepreneurs in collaboration with all organizations providing business support in the region to avoid duplication and create clear pathways for companies; collaborate with Growth, Enterprise and Trade in Manitoba 'elgraculture'; and engage with northern municipalities, indigenous communities, businesses, training providers and other stakeholders to advance initiatives that grow local companies and industries, create jobs, attract talented investment and increase the economic competitiveness and prosperity of northern Manitoba; undertake a board-led review of its existing loan program to determine if it is meeting the needs of northern enterprise.

It's expected that CEDF will submit a robust analysis and recommendations to government in the first half of 2019-2020 fiscal year. We expect that CEDF to adopt a team Manitoba approach with other provincial partners and government to facilitate entrepreneurship, start-up and business innovation initiatives, trade and develop and market access initiatives and tourism initiatives across northern Manitoba.

Across the breadth of its activity, CEDF should strive to: advance reconciliation with indigenous Manitobans and foster the ongoing strength of

indigenous contribution to the Manitoba economy; engage with Manitoba's francophone community to further and promote its economic vitality to ensure that needs are addressed; foster the contributions of women, young people and newcomers to Manitoba and other priority groups as drivers of economic growth; encourage sustainable economic development in alignment with priorities articulated in the Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan.

And it goes on and on with other information that is included in all mandate letters.

Mr. Lindsey: So they were supposed to have an initial report ready by the first part of 2019-20 if I heard you correctly. Has that report been issued, seeing as it's now not the first part of 2019-20 anymore?

Ms. Clarke: I'm not aware if those reports had handed in. They wouldn't be coming to me; they would be going to Growth, Enterprise and Trade.

Mr. Lindsey: So you're the minister responsible for indigenous and northern affairs, and you've just explained to me about a group that's going to be looking after economic development for the North, but you don't get to see the reports that they produce to tell you what's happening in the North, or what the game plan is for the North? Is that correct?

Ms. Clarke: As I indicated, I didn't—I am not—I have not been handed a report at this time.

Mr. Lindsey: It just strikes me as odd that if you're the minister of northern and indigenous affairs and there's a report specifically, this report that's talking about the northern community economic development that you haven't seen the report that was supposed to be out early in 2019-20 reporting period. So either there is no report or whatever they reported is just not of concern to you and your ministry.

Ms. Clarke: The letters that went out were dated March of 2019, so it's been just about the six months' period now, so.

Mr. Lindsey: So the letters went out in March and it's been six months. So there's been no report on this yet? Is that what you're saying?

Ms. Clarke: As I indicated, I have not seen a report.

Mr. Lindsey: So, as part of your mandate is to make Manitoba the most improved and particularly because you look after indigenous and northern affairs, how can you fulfill your mandate without seeing these reports that talk about economic development or,

correct me if I'm wrong, even knowing if such a report has been generated yet, even though 2019 is quickly coming to an end? Either there is no report or you haven't seen it because your department isn't a part of economic development in the North, which doesn't make any sense to me.

Ms. Clarke: Actually, CEDF in the North, as you've touted in previous discussions we've had on this as well, is a very good entity for this strategy. They have done really great work. You've indicated that on many occasions and they certainly have.

This report is just due. We are at a six-month period, so we're not talking specific days or whatever, and I think as you clearly understand, we were interrupted by a provincial election. So we are up and running. Our economic development committee meets every two weeks and I would expect to see that very soon.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, that's very unfortunate that the business of government got interrupted by an unnecessary election, but it certainly wasn't us that decided to do that.

So I'm assuming that even though there was an election, that the work of these economic development committees carried on. Or did—that all—everybody just sit around twiddling their thumbs, waiting for the election to be done?

Ms. Clarke: Absolutely not. I'm sure their work was well completed and we look forward to that report.

Mr. Lindsey: So does the minister have any idea when that report will be ready for her to see or, as importantly, when it will be ready for the rest of the world?

* (15:50)

Ms. Clarke: We have a meeting as soon as Monday morning, so it could possibly be at that.

Mr. Lindsey: So it could possibly be at that meeting, but you're not sure of it. It could be December. It could—not 'til 2020—seem very vague on when this report will be ready. I mean, if we're talking about economic development in the North, your government had the previous three years to really get that kick-started, and they continued to have a plan to have a plan to have a plan. It's time for those plans to actually start kicking into gear.

But I haven't heard any commitment from the minister as to when these reports will actually be available, never mind when the actual action will start

from those reports, so finding out just when we can expect to see those reports.

Ms. Clarke: Well, you'll certainly hear about the reports when we receive them. As the letter indicates, the report's due the first half of 2019-2020; 2020's still around the corner. And I know that I receive meeting information—if I'm having a meeting on Monday, I get the information on Friday. And we continue—we're very excited about this strategy, as are the people of the North.

You maybe aren't aware, but I spent a great deal of time in the North this summer, and we've met with stakeholders and we've met with others—community people there, and we've discussed the possibilities of what can happen in the North and what will happen in the North, and they're very excited about it. It will all help them in due time, but we're going to make sure that we get it right.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, it may come as a surprise to the minister that I too spent a lot of time in the North this summer. And people are anxiously waiting for something from this government other than cuts, because that's basically what they've seen so far from the government is cuts to spending.

And clearly that's what started us down this whole conversation was the \$5 million that was left unspent from the budget. And so far we haven't progressed past the amount of money that wasn't spent on the Metis Economic Development Fund. And it was rolled into some other fund that also, other than having some meetings, I guess, hasn't really done anything to support growth of anything in the North.

Now, you talked a little bit about the Winnipeg friendship centre and funding there, so I'd ask the minister to expand on that. What exactly is taking place up front?

Ms. Clarke: In regards to the friendship centres across Manitoba, of course there's 11 of them, and I have to say most of them—they operate extremely well. I'm thrilled to have visited almost all of them except the one closest to my hometown, so that's shame on me and I'll get that done very soon.

But you have to understand that the funding relationship is with the Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres—with—our government is with the association; they actually make the decisions for them.

The issues at the Winnipeg centre have been long-standing, that's been very, very public. And because

of the issues, it was the association that decided to stop their relationship and pull the funding. So we had to hold our funding until they made a decision to move further as to what they were going to do.

They've had several options. They have selected a new entity to run the Winnipeg friendship centre, so we're looking forward to that. We'll be meeting with them probably within days or a week. They're coming to us. I believe there's a meeting already set up where we will be discussing the new entity, and at that time if everything's in order, we will be transferring the funds to them for *[inaudible]*. That should happen very, very soon.

Mr. Lindsey: So has there been any change in funding to any of the other friendship centres throughout the province?

Ms. Clarke: No change in funding.

Mr. Lindsey: Earlier the minister talked about revamp of discretionary grant programs. Well, what sort of grants are we talking about there, and has there still been grants given? And if so, for what kind of things and—or is that all under review and just basic *[inaudible]*.

* (16:00)

Ms. Clarke: I'm going to just give you a few examples of what we do fund through that. And part of the reason it—you know, like, you talk about being underspent, that's part of the reason we're doing this review because there has never been in the past a really good criteria going forward. And the other problem with this fund is that some people are aware but others aren't, so what we're hoping to achieve is a portal whereby they can actually apply once or twice a year, where everybody gets an equal opportunity to do that.

So some of the funding that has been provided has been to the circles of reconciliation, indigenous contributions to the economy, vision quest of course, keep the fires burning. Those are just a few examples of the events and processes that we've been funding up.

Mr. Lindsey: So there's things that have traditionally been funded through this discretionary grant program that you've talked a little bit about. Are those things still being funded or is the entire grant program kind of on hold while it's being reviewed?

Ms. Clarke: No, it's not on hold at all because we actually have some in the queue right now that are being decided upon.

This will just give more opportunity for more—like vision quest for instance, keep the fires burning, those have been kind of annual, but they're—they are not guaranteed annual. It's on application basis. So this will give out, I think, a broader opportunity for more, and there's different events that are being brought forward to us. So this will give an opportunity and we will have criteria that will be attached to it, which will make it easier when you're actually approving these grants, for everyone.

Mr. Lindsey: So is the funding for the grant still at 2016 levels or is there been an increase in funding to match inflation, or what kind of level is that looking at, even though it's been part of the underfunding?

Ms. Clarke: There's been no increase in the fund but there's been no decrease in the fund. So our goal is to ensure that that amount of money is expended annually, that there will not be a surplus there.

Mr. Lindsey: So how much of that grant fund has not been spent every year, like 2016, 2017, 2018? How much has been left unspent?

Ms. Clarke: There's about \$900,000 in that fund, and it typically has been underspent, sometimes as much as about two-thirds, in the past, and that's the challenge of this grant funding program, that it's not well known. It exists in the event that something comes up, that events pop up, which they have and they do, that there will be funds available to these organizations. I know one of the ones initially the first year I was here was the Fisher River National Cree Gathering. That was one of the ones that came—has come in annually since I've been here. They have to apply, so it goes without saying that, you know, this is not an advertised fund. It's there for the convenience, or for events that do come up within the indigenous communities. But that's one of the anticipated changes, that we will find a new avenue, a new way for them to actually apply so that they do know about it *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Lindsey: Then I'm curious if it's been two thirds underspent every year for the last few years, were there applications that were denied?

Ms. Clarke: Very few applications have ever been denied. The most recent one that I can think of was an application for an outdoor arena. We don't fund for infrastructure through that fund. It is basically more for single projects, events, those type of things that will *[inaudible]* funding that, you know, just will *[inaudible]* One of the things we're looking at too is the percentage of *[inaudible]*, how much *[inaudible]*

There's lots of questions in the [inaudible] is to be the same for every [inaudible]. We're well into the process of making [inaudible]

Mr. Lindsey: That just leaves me somewhat [inaudible], but grant money available, it's underspent year-over-year, [inaudible] advertised rather than just money in the bank and not actually helping communities [inaudible]

Ms. Clarke: And that's exactly the process we're entering into, is to finding the avenue where we can make it known to all communities and that they [inaudible] equal opportunities. And that's why we're talking about having a single portal where they can apply, and specific time of the year is whether it's once a year or twice a year where they can make application for their festivals or their events or whatever [inaudible], but we've got to have new criterion in place before we do that. There really wasn't criteria from the past in place with that [inaudible]

Mr. Lindsey: So maybe the minister could just explain quickly the concept of a single portal, as opposed to something that [inaudible] and exactly how someone would apply for those grants today as opposed to tomorrow. What do you see as being the difference in [inaudible]? How many ways to apply for these grants is there now that's somehow it's going to be more accessible by having a single portal as opposed to whatever's there now. I have [inaudible] what's there now that makes your concept seem [inaudible]

*(16:10)

Ms. Clarke: Well, this isn't a new concept. As you know, we're doing this with municipal relations now where the municipalities have a single portal for their different streams of funding. Any type of funding, it's done through a single portal and they can apply once or twice a year, whatever, I don't know what they've set out, but whether it's First Nations, the Metis, the Inuit, everybody will have an equal opportunity and they will know that they can submit an application. And that way we can expend all the money once a year, or we can expend it twice a year.

And—but then there will be many, many applications, it's a given, there—and I would expect that there should be lots of applications coming in, and then we'll have to have a selection committee that will actually look at these applications and decide who meets the criteria and who does not. And sometimes too the applications that we've had, the information provided is minimal and we can't, you know—we've

got to have—there's got to be a certain amount of documentation supporting the event going forward in order for them to get funding.

So we'll have that out in place. That will make it easier for everyone, it'll make it easier for our department, and it'll certainly make it easier for the communities that want to apply for a grant.

Mr. Lindsey: So will it be the same 2016 dollars that are available, or will that number increase so that there's more entities become aware that there is money there that they can access [inaudible] funding exists, or will that funding pot somehow be less now than it was for people trying to access it?

Ms. Clarke: Well, the number that we're looking at right now for 2019-2020 is the same; it has not been reduced in any way. And the amount for 2020-2021, of course, that budget is not completed yet so we would not know that. I would not, given that there hasn't been a reduction or an increase, I certainly would not expect a reduction at all.

Mr. Lindsey: So while amount available hasn't grown or been reduced, it's just been underspent. So are you saying that [inaudible] trying to ensure that that same amount of money is in the 2020 budget, or is it going to be a different number that?

Ms. Clarke: Well, I can't comment on what we submitted for Estimates, but I mean that part of the discussion when we're redoing a fund such as that, you know, looking at the funding is one of the criteria.

Mr. Lindsey: That was the first question.

So now hearing public accounts year over year for the past three years, it appears that there's been a sudden and somewhat unexplained decrease in funding of all the Northern Affairs communities. especially to the public accounts, funding for these communities divided between indigenous affairs and relations in 2017-18, but then goes back to being all in one department for 2019.

So could the minister explain what happened with funding to Northern Affairs communities in 2017-18, since there certainly appears to be a sudden drop for most communities?

Ms. Clarke: We need clarification on that, we don't—they don't know what you're talking about. Can you speak a little louder? I can barely hear you. Come on, Tom, you can speak louder.

Mr. Lindsey: When you look at the Public Accounts for the years 2016-17, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019, the

number that got expanded, for example, Barrows went from 367 in 2016-2017 down to 238. Cross Lake went from 643 in '16-17 down to 583 in '17-18, and down to 124 in '18-19, so can you explain those funding fluctuations? Now some of them did come back up in sections for 2018-2019, but certainly for '17-18, most got less funding than the previous years.

* (16:20)

Mr. Chairperson: Just while that answer is being prepared, is it the will of the committee to have a brief recess at about 4:30 p.m., which would be 12 minutes or so from now? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Clarke: Okay. As with any communities, having been a former mayor, there's no changes in the operation budget, per se, but what happens is they're—like, the operations budget is consistent and expenditures are consistent over the year. The changes that occur by community is because of capital projects. They come online and the expenditures to those communities come off the books. So it's a fluctuation of whatever projects are being expended or capital projects that'd be expended in those particular communities.

And, you know, you talked about municipal, well, a lot of those water services projects now in those communities are actually being managed now through water service.

Mr. Lindsey: It's part of the concerns, I guess, that I heard in some of the northern affairs communities that I was in this summer is actually the capital budget requirements that seem to have decreased, and leads to things like inability to buy water trucks when they need, because there's no money available. It's the inability to maintain some of the water systems, because it comes under a capital budget as opposed to operations budget, that then they land up with systems that are not operating, or not operating as they should.

And then when *[inaudible]* have to take money from somewhere else to try and maintain the systems better, there being more consistent capital budgets. That was really what some of the community councils wanted to drive home.

Looking at the dramatic increase from 643 down to 124, *[inaudible]* they finished a capital project but there's still ongoing capital expenditures that happen. It's not just, well, you built a water system, you're done with it now. There *[inaudible]* bought water truck this year doesn't mean you don't ever have to buy another water truck again, right?

Looks like some communities really went way down in 2017-18 and then have come back up, whereas other communities like Cross Lake, the funding is really dramatically decreased from 643 down to 124.

So maybe let's just focus on that a little bit and what's the reason—what was the big expenditure in 2016-17 that now there really is not significant expenditures anymore *[inaudible]* that particular community.

Ms. Clarke: Well, you've indicated you've been to some of these communities. I've actually visited a lot of them in the last two years and listened to a lot of their concerns, and it is, it's very complicated. These are very small communities for the most part. And it—you talk about complications for them, you know, operating a water plant or a waste water plant, and that's absolutely right. They really struggle with expenditures.

And you talk about fire trucks. Even having one tractor in these communities is extremely difficult. And we actually worked out some new ways of doing—you know, how they could purchase tractors and what they were doing after our visits. And we came up with solutions, and that's the whole idea.

But it's also why we're doing this transformation and this review on these Northern Affairs communities. Their populations are shrinking. They're to the point where they're not always—you know, they can't have all the services they need and they're struggling. So we're trying to figure out how we can maintain their services the best that we can for them. And sometimes it's a matter of regional services that we can incorporate, whether it's with the municipality or a First Nation. There's lots of different options that we can help them out with.

So we've been having a lot of discussions with them, and we'll continue that process because there's 52 of these small communities throughout the province. So they—there's a lot of issues that have to be addressed, there's no doubt about it. But we're working with them on it and we hope that the transformation review, and it will be done in consultation with the communities themselves, so they will all have the opportunity to put forward, you know, what their biggest concerns are and how they feel that they should be or could be handled. So we're looking forward to that, actually.

Mr. Lindsey: I'd—

An Honourable Member: No more questions.

Mr. Lindsey: Oh, I've got more questions.

An Honourable Member: Oh, you're not done? Oh, shucks.

Mr. Chairperson: Is it agreed to take a 10-minute recess at this time? *[Agreed]*

Seeing that it is agreed, we will have a brief recess for 10 minutes and return, according to my watch, at 4:37, or whatever 10 minutes is on your watch.

The committee recessed at 4:27 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:37 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The time being 4:37 p.m., we're going to resume the committee.

And the floor's open for questions.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, now where was I? I forget, so we'll just start somewhere new. We'll get back to where I was tomorrow.

Let's talk about an RFP that the member's referenced several times, the Northern Affairs program and service delivery review. So let's see, April 30th submission. May 27, provide consultant services to work with Northern Affairs branch, Indigenous Northern Relations review current program and service delivery.

So why did the minister feel the need to pay a consultant for this review?

* (16:40)

Ms. Clarke: Okay, the reason that we sought assistance in doing this modernization review is because everything has been status quo for many, many years in regards to the Northern Affairs communities, so it is time to modernize. As I indicated, there were communities back in the 2011 flood that I met with in 2016 that had lost a lot of their population, and they were—there was no provisions put in place that they could go back at that time. There housing was damaged, and so on and so forth. So there has been a lot of changes, even in the three years that I've gotten to know these communities.

So a consulting firm that actually has some expertise in these times of things—we're looking for best practices, we're looking for a third-party look at this and somebody that can actually with the expertise to go into these communities, meet with the communities and provide information to us that we can base decisions on as to how we can best serve them, provide the best services. It's very costly to

provide services now, so we want to ensure that they have the services that they need. In some places, some communities, the infrastructure's very old so, you know, we need to look at an analysis of what it's going to cost in the future to run these communities. So it's going to give us a look that will make these communities enable to upgrade them or whatever, and they're so different because some of them are just very small, remote communities. Some of there are actually cottage development and are looking for expansion and are looking to extend their services for these cottage owners, so they're very diverse. They're very different.

I was in Dawson Bay this summer, and I mean, there—it's a very unique, little fishing community unto itself. So very diverse, lots of need for discussion about how they operate and how we can best, as a government, and work with them to ensure that they have services that, for safety reasons, for infrastructure, for all the different aspects that make a community a community. So we just feel that it's important that, if we're going to do that kind of a research and provide information to get the best outcomes for the future, that we need to do it in a professional manner.

Mr. Lindsey: The minister alluded to hiring a outside consultant that has expertise on this, so who was awarded this contract?

Ms. Clarke: Meyers Norris Penny is the firm that will be conducting this *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Lindsey: So what exactly is it that gives them great expertise in these particularly northern communities that rely on government to provide funding for services? What makes Morris—Meyers Norris Penny experts in that particular area?

Ms. Clarke: As I indicated, we put out an RFP, so we selected the company that was best suited to do what the scope of work that we were needing done, so we would not have hired someone if we didn't feel confident that they were able to provide the information that we need and through the RFP in a way that we would be very satisfied *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Lindsey: So how much of Meyers Norris Penny is considered an indigenous business?

Ms. Clarke: Well, you ask what expertise they have in indigenous, we did not put out an RFP based on indigenous. Northern Affairs communities are certainly not all indigenous.

So we did find, though, that they do have a lot of experience, Meyers Norris Penny, with First Nations and especially with northern communities. They understand the project scope, and they clearly responded to the requirements that we set out for this RFP.

Mr. Lindsey: So one of the criteria that was in the RFP was to have, referred at least, an indigenous component of whoever was going to get awarded this, preferably a Manitoba indigenous component or at the very least a Canadian indigenous component. Does Meyers Norris Penny meet that criteria?

Ms. Clarke: They clearly indicate they have experience with First Nations and with northern communities. *[inaudible]* satisfy the *[inaudible]* in making the decision *[inaudible]* choose them over any over applicants.

Mr. Lindsey: I guess the criteria isn't that they have experience dealing with First Nations communities. The criteria was that they actually have part of their business component being made up of indigenous *[inaudible]*, not just that they had experience. So I would be loath to assume that just because they think they have experience, that they actually have the necessary requirements that were preferred in your RFP. So do they have an indigenous component or not, I guess.

Ms. Clarke: In regards to your question, I think it would be unrealistic that there weren't indigenous people that work within Meyers Norris Penny, but we are satisfied that one of the lead consultation persons is from Norway House. I would think that would satisfy that.

Mr. Lindsey: I guess you're assuming and you're saying you think that would, so did they actually meet that criteria that was set out in the RFP or not? A simple yes or no answer, I guess. They either—part of Meyers Norris Penny has an indigenous component or it doesn't.

Ms. Clarke: As I've indicated, one of the consultants on this project is from Norway House.

Mr. Lindsey: And are you at liberty to tell us who that consultant from Norway House is?

Ms. Clarke: The individual from Norway House is Rob Campbell, Rob Campbell.

* (16:50)

Mr. Lindsey: So has the proponent begun providing services?

Ms. Clarke: Okay, we have the work plan here and I will discuss phase one with you, which includes the project planning and the consultations which were set out to happen between August 19th and September 20th. They did reach that completion date.

That included to conduct project initiation workshop, to collect and review background information, to develop a project charter, to develop data collection instruments, to conduct interviews, to administer a questionnaire, to conduct other jurisdictional research, to consolidate and analyze information, and to develop and present the findings.

Mr. Lindsey: So is that document that the minister is reading from, is that part of the RFP, or is that something separate?

Ms. Clarke: This is the proposal from Meyers Norris Penny to our department for the work that they'll be doing. It is not a public document.

Mr. Lindsey: So when are they supposed to have their final report ready?

Ms. Clarke: We're expecting that final report by the end of December this year, or between December to January, but we're expecting it within that time frame.

Mr. Lindsey: So how was the \$500,000 budget for this review determined?

An Honourable Member: Pardon me?

Mr. Lindsey: How was the \$500,000 budget for this project determined?

Ms. Clarke: In regards to the request for the proposal, when the proposals are received, the lower offer was taken. So that was the lower offer cost completing this report.

Mr. Lindsey: How many entities submitted for this?

Ms. Clarke: I'm told the bidding process is confidential and that's not information that can be shared publicly.

Mr. Lindsey: So you're not at liberty to tell us. I don't want to know who, I'm just asking how many proposals you'd received. So you can't tell us even how many proposals were received. So this could have been a one-off only company that applied and set their own budget for this particular project. Kind of seems somewhat peculiar to say the least. So was there more than one entity applying for this?

Ms. Clarke: There were more than one, more than one *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Lindsey: Were there more than two?

An Honourable Member: Wow, you're hard up for questions.

Mr. Lindsey: These are legitimate questions.

Ms. Clarke: There was more than one.

Mr. Lindsey: So this was the cheapest proposal put forward, apparently. What did the minister already say or could she clarify what phase of the *[inaudible]* where we are currently at and what's the next step?

An Honourable Member: We've completed phase—

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, oh. The honourable minister.

Ms. Clarke: We've completed phase 1 and we're going into phase 2. And that will take place between September 23rd and November 29th, approximately. And that is—will be what we're calling the current state assessment which will include: confirm evaluation criteria, review documentation and system information, design and facilitate a working *[inaudible]* mapping session and consolidate and analyze the information as well as does—develop and present a comprehensive report of their *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Lindsey: Would the minister explain what has been identified thus far during the review since monthly presentations were to have been provided to them?

Ms. Clarke: Okay, current status report, MNP is currently working on reviewing the information that the department of INR provided to them. They're also working on developing a plan on engaging the communities and as well as staff members, and the first report is actually due later this week.

* (17:00)

Mr. Lindsey: So the phase 2 report was required to be submitted by September 24th, that's come and gone. At the three-month mark, that would have been September 24th for the phase 2 report. Has that been met or not?

Ms. Clarke: We're talking phase one was—the phase 1 report is due this week. We're just going into phase 2. We're just starting phase 2.

Mr. Lindsey: I'll get back to you on that. My information is that the phase two report was required to be submitted at the three-month mark, which is September 24th.

Ms. Clarke: No, your information is not correct. Phase 1 ran from August 19th to September 20th.

Phase 2 just started at the end of September and it runs 'til November 29th. So we're just waiting for the report for phase 1, and phase 2 has just been started.

Mr. Lindsey: Could the minister explain if she believes if there's any legislative changes that have thus far been recommended by the review, and if so, what they were?

Ms. Clarke: To this point after phase 1, there's no recommendations expected on that.

Mr. Lindsey: Okay, probably will have some more questions at another point in time on this particular RFP. Let's move on to the RFP for the northern mineral readiness plan, which is part of your *[inaudible]*.

Ms. Clarke: All right, moving to mineral development. Indigenous northern relations financially supported the development of the Manitoba-First Nations Mineral Development Protocol. Co-chairs' findings and recommendations, of course, were released in June of 2018. The co-chairs' report provides recommendations on seven priority areas that make up key 'conponements' of the proposed mineral development protocol. The protocol's meant to provide a clear path forward for rights holders and stakeholders on mineral development. It will help to improve certainty and better prepare First Nations to understand and actively take part in mineral development processes. Growth, Enterprise, and Trade remains the lead on this important initiative, and we work closely with them towards negotiations on a number of protocols and recommendations that included establishing a lead entity to co-ordinate implementation of the Look North strategy and we continue to work with the co-chairs and their recommendation.

In regards to an RFP, that would not be coming through this department. It would be coming through *[inaudible]*. We are just working collaboratively with them to ensure that First Nations are included in *[inaudible]* everything to do with that *[inaudible]* within our departments *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Lindsey: But, while this particular RFP deals very specifically with northern issues, be they First Nations or northern communities, is the minister saying that she really doesn't have any part, or her department doesn't have a part—it's strictly Growth, Enterprise, and Trade that is looking at this mineral readiness plan, and not the two departments together looking at implementing it or figuring it out?

Ms. Clarke: Growth, Enterprise and Trade is the lead. Of course, the RFP would go out from them. It is not joint. We are—we collaborate with them, but they are the lead on this.

Mr. Lindsey: So does that mean that the minister and her department are not prepared to answer questions about that specific RFP?

Ms. Clarke: No, I can't 'ancha' specific questions because that is—that goes out through his staff, and I don't have all the information. I *[inaudible]* some of the meetings and I have been involved to a degree, but *[inaudible]* for the inclusion. And that's again—that's part of our mandate letters that we work collaboratively. That doesn't mean we're a partner on every document that goes out. That means that information is exchanged and that we attend *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Lindsey: I can appreciate that, so we'll go back to the previous questioning about the previous RFP on the northern affairs service delivery review. So when I look at this, the following dates are targets and are subject to change. Completion of evaluations of proposals, May 31st, 2019, sign the agreement June 21st, and then start providing services by June 24th. So three months from that June 24th date is September 24th that there's supposed to be a report on phase 2 but that's not what the minister just indicated.

Ms. Clarke: Are you talking about northern affairs or mineral protocol? You're jumping back and forth here. Where are you going?

Mr. Lindsey: The minister's absolutely correct. I'm jumping back and forth because the minister said she wasn't going to answer any questions about the northern mineral readiness plan, so I made it very clear that I was going back to the northern affairs program delivery review.

So the documents clearly state that they were supposed to start providing services June 24th, so the reports should be ready in three months, which is September 24th.

Ms. Clarke: It appears that you're reading from the RFP document, we're assuming, and over the course of awarding the contract and that document, that those timelines have *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Lindsey: So what is the new timeline for reporting? Because it was supposed to be September 24th. What's the new date?

An Honourable Member: Going to have to speak up. I can't hear you.

* (17:10)

Mr. Lindsey: The original date for providing services was supposed to be—or reporting on was June 24th. So then three months made it September 24th, so what's the new date?

Ms. Clarke: Okay, just to clarify, what we were talking about phase one, and that it's just completed and we're expecting that report within this week at some point. And the deliverables that we're expecting from this report are project charter and a high level report of their findings. So, from that time frame until the end of December when we expect this project to be completed, we're actually going to get biweekly reports. From now until the end of December, biweekly reports, but we are within days of that first report.

Mr. Bushie: Does the minister agree that Metis are a rights-bearing group?

Ms. Clarke: The answer is yes, and we consult with them on all issues.

Mr. Bushie: So the minister agrees that it is then the duty to consult with the Metis people?

Ms. Clarke: We do meet with *[inaudible]*. I meet with President Chartrand on pretty much a regular basis.

Mr. Bushie: How many consultations were held with the Metis groups regarding the Manitoba-Minnesota transmission line?

Ms. Clarke: I can't answer that question since the inception on that was *[inaudible]* we're in government, and since then, that's under Crown's corporations so that—I wouldn't always necessarily be included in that. I can't *[inaudible]* specific numbers.

Mr. Bushie: How many consultations were you—was the minister part of?

Ms. Clarke: I'm assuming you're talking specifically the Manitoba-Minnesota? I have not—I don't believe I was involved in any of them because they have been originally specifically between President Chartrand or his ministers and Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Bushie: So were consultations held with Metis groups regarding arranged agreements prior to the government terminating them?

Ms. Clarke: Can I ask you to repeat that, please.

Mr. Bushie: Were consultations held with Metis groups regarding arranged agreements prior to the government terminating them?

Ms. Clarke: In regards to the Manitoba municipal transmission line, provincial steering committee of Indigenous and Northern Relations, as well as Sustainable Development, met with the Manitoba Metis Federation numerous times on this consultation.

Mr. Bushie: So can you define numerous consultations in terms of a number?

Ms. Clarke: We can provide that number for you, but we don't *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Bushie: You mention everybody that was a part of it. Did the minister take part?

Ms. Clarke: Typically the ministers are not included in these meetings. As indicated, it was a steering committee and would be staff that *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Bushie: Who developed the steering committee?

Ms. Clarke: Our provincial consultation policy provides for multiple departments' input into the assessment of potential impacts that could be with the treaties or Aboriginal rights. The result of that initial assessment determines the makeup of the steering committee.

Mr. Bushie: Did the minister advocate on behalf of the MMF in relation to pre-arranged agreements when the government was considering terminating them?

Ms. Clarke: I think probably at this point I have to advise you that this is before the courts. And that question goes a little beyond policy.

Mr. Bushie: Does the minister agree that reconciliation should be a priority for governments?

* (17:20)

Ms. Clarke: Reconciliation is a very high priority for our government. Reconciliation has been one of our top priorities since I took this Cabinet position three years ago, and we've come a long ways, but we know that there's a long ways to go, but we're going to certainly continue.

Mr. Bushie: In understanding it's before the courts, but the question is still relevant.

Does the minister feel that the current court case between MMF and our government is, in fact, working towards reconciliation?

Ms. Clarke: I'll choose not to answer that, but I'd sure like to spend some time talking about reconciliation if

you've got concerns about that. We talked earlier about the circle-of-for reconciliation, a group that we have partnered with financially, that is bringing together groups. Five indigenous individuals, five non-indigenous, and working to reconciliation. The outcomes that have happened in this province that—within our government and far beyond the government, whether it's in our schools and throughout the province.

We firmly believe that reconciliation has to happen. It has to happen with all people—all people involved. And we're certainly striving towards that. And, regardless of the departments within our government, we are all working towards reconciliation, and that will be ongoing for a very long time.

Mr. Bushie: Does the minister believe that the situation between MMF and the government could have been resolved without judiciary interference?

Ms. Clarke: Again, I'm not going to answer those types of questions when this is before the courts. It's not my decisions.

Mr. Bushie: Does the minister believe that the court case sends a poor message to other indigenous, Metis and Inuit stakeholders in the province?

Ms. Clarke: Well, again, that's kind of outside the scope. I work very closely with—whether it's First Nations, Metis Federation, the Inuit. We've had a really—I don't know if you'd call it good track record—but we've taken a different approach right from day one when I've met with chiefs and councils, President Chartrand.

Our course of conversation has been to sit down and work things out. And I can honestly say that we have not had a lot of confrontation, or anything beyond that. On a lot of our deliberations, we've done a lot of good work in the past three years, and my way of working with all these groups is to sit down and talk, and I think it's been really successful.

Mr. Bushie: Last year, you were confident that the issue between MMF and your government would be resolved by the Minister of Crowns. And I quote from Estimates on May 11, 2018, quote: I have the greatest confidence in our Crown's minister, as well as President Chartrand. They're both very capable of working through the issue, and this is what we do. Unquote.

Do you still hold that same confidence? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable minister.

Ms. Clarke: It's before the courts. Different time frame. Being hopeful is not a problem. We always hope to resolve without litigation.

Mr. Bushie: Could the minister explain why it hasn't resolved through discussions?

Ms. Clarke: No.

Mr. Bushie: Did the board of Manitoba Hydro ever contract—contact you personally regarding the MMF agreements?

Ms. Clarke: I don't deal with Manitoba Hydro direct.

Mr. Bushie: Does the minister agree with the lawyer representing the Province that Metis stakeholders had not explained how they would be detrimentally affected by the project?

Ms. Clarke: No comment.

Mr. Bushie: In the minister's opinion, does consultation also mean consent?

An Honourable Member: I didn't hear the last part.

Mr. Bushie: In the minister's opinion, does consultation also mean consent?

Ms. Clarke: All right. Consultation, of course, is a respectful two-way discussion and results in information sharing. We always seek to have the greatest understanding of perspectives from indigenous communities to inform our work. And thus, making decisions through these discussions, we seek appropriate mitigation and accommodation measures.

Mr. Bushie: Does the minister believe that consultation automatically means consent?

Ms. Clarke: Consultation is a discussion that doesn't result in an answer for a consensus. It's a discussion.

Mr. Bushie: In regards to the Minnesota transmission line, many indigenous communities have opposed the project largely due to lack of consultation by the provincial government. Does the minister believe that adequate consultation took place with indigenous communities and stakeholders prior to the Minnesota transmission line receiving its provincial environmental licence in April?

* (17:30)

Ms. Clarke: We sincerely feel that the consultation on this project was probably one of the most extensive processes to date. And I will 'reiterate' one more time

that this process is in the courts and it is really inappropriate to continue this line of questioning.

Mr. Bushie: Well, it is in the—before the courts from the MMF but there's still the indigenous component of consultation that goes along with this process. So who was consulted?

Ms. Clarke: Indigenous covers, in my department, covers First Nations, Metis and Inuit, and until this court issue is resolved, it really isn't appropriate for me to be making comments. A lot of the process or policy is *[inaudible]* until we get a final ruling *[inaudible]* in all fairness *[inaudible]*

Mr. Bushie: Well, there's still a number of questions that aren't specific to the court case. So another question, then, is: the National Energy Board put 28 conditions on the project, five of which were to be amended to accommodate concerns raised by indigenous groups. Would the minister explain what those five conditions were?

Ms. Clarke: The staff is looking that up online, which is available to the public, but they don't have it at their fingertips, so we can provide that information to you—or we will provide it.

Mr. Bushie: So are we to assume, then, those conditions have not been met since you don't know what they are off-hand?

Ms. Clarke: We don't assume anything.

Mr. Bushie: So have those conditions been met?

Ms. Clarke: That answer will be attached to the recommendations.

Mr. Bushie: Did the minister meet with stakeholders in the communities to discuss those conditions?

Ms. Clarke: Yes, in regards to the conditions, these conditions are set out for Manitoba Hydro to meet, not the Department of INR, as you might think. As we know, that line isn't built yet but we would certainly expect that Manitoba Hydro will comply with the recommendations that are set out. We wouldn't expect anything less.

Mr. Bushie: Following the federal approval in June, several First Nations issued that they were opposed to the project. Has the minister spoken with those affected communities?

Ms. Clarke: I haven't spoke to them directly, but again, they would be speaking with Manitoba Hydro on these issues.

Mr. Bushie: So has the minister spoken with Manitoba Hydro on these issues?

Ms. Clarke: No, I have not. That is a consultation process. It is between them and the First Nations.

Mr. Bushie: Does the minister and her government plan on rectifying the situations with these affected communities?

* (17:40)

Ms. Clarke: Well, I will reiterate that these are discussions between Manitoba and the First Nations, and not directly with INR. But there's no reason to believe that all the federal permitting conditions are not going to be complied with. Now, there's a distinction between federal and level-provincial and federal and First Nations when they're talking on a federal project such as—or, with the National Energy Board. We are not always privy to those conversations. They don't come to us with those conversations. And when I go into the communities, very often we discuss numerous issues. But typically this is *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Bushie: So how involved has the minister been in the consultation process relating to this project?

Ms. Clarke: As a provincial entity, I'm not involved in their discussions with the *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Bushie: So there has been an approval of accelerated construction schedule for this project. In the accelerated schedule, concrete foundations were to be built and ground clearing was set to begin all in September. Has this work begun?

Ms. Clarke: That's outside of the scope of this department. Again, you're going to Manitoba Hydro and Crown services. That is questions that should be asked of the other minister.

Mr. Bushie: So going back to the five specific indigenous group conditions laid out the 28 conditions by the National Energy Board, were all those conditions laid out and were they approved prior to construction being started?

Ms. Clarke: That is part of the question we told you we'd get back to you on.

Mr. Bushie: Has the minister met with the new Hydro board regarding the project?

Ms. Clarke: That would not be in the scope of my job.

Mr. Lindsey: Let's talk a little more about consultation. We won't talk specifically about the

Hydro transmission or necessarily Hydro at all but let's talk about the Lake St. Martin outlet.

What has the minister's involvement been with consultations on that project and how it affects First Nations?

Ms. Clarke: On behalf of the Crown, Manitoba Infrastructure is leading section 35 Crown indigenous consultations with the First Nations, Metis and other indigenous communities regarding the proposed Lake Manitoba's, Lake St. Martin outlet channel. As the project proponent, Manitoba is also required to meet detailed provincial and federal environment regulations that have significant indigenous engagement requirements.

Manitoba proposes to consult outlet channels from Lake Manitoba to Lake St. Martin and from Lake St. Martin to Lake Winnipeg, to better control water levels and increase flood protection. Thirty-one indigenous communities are involved in the consultation process, and a further eight are involved only on the engagement process.

Manitoba Infrastructure is the lead department for both consultation and engagement with this project and is in—currently focusing on the engagement aspect for the environmental approvals process. Following this process, Manitoba Infrastructure will refocus on fulfilling any outstanding section 35 consultation requirements. Indigenous and Northern Relations will continue to support Manitoba Infrastructure in fulfilling outstanding consultation requirements, post the environmental approvals process in order to meet Manitoba's legal obligations.

Mr. Lindsey: So how many consultations has the minister participated in on this particular project?

Ms. Clarke: The minister does not participate in these consultations. We have very high-level staff that look after these consultations.

Mr. Lindsey: How many consultations has the minister's staff participated in on this?

* (17:50)

Ms. Clarke: The department actually maintains a contact log of all meetings, and *[inaudible]* a low-impact community like, in regards to this would have one meeting, whereas the high-impact meeting—or the high-impact communities would have as many as four meetings. So Manitoba Infrastructure is following up with all 31 communities on the recently submitted environmental assessment. This includes detailed, in-person meetings between the consultation team and

the six high-potentially high-risk impact communities.

Mr. Lindsey: Could the minister clarify how they've determined low-risk communities and high-risk communities?

Ms. Clarke: Okay, you talked about determining what's high-risk, what's low-risk, I think it goes without saying the four First Nations communities—Island Lake—or Lake St. Martin, Pinaymootang and Dauphin River, Little Saskatchewan and then we have Northern Affairs communities of Dauphin River and Peguis First Nation. Those definitely are high risk because they're the ones that were impacted most significantly. They—in 2011. They were the high risk. As for the others, how we determine whether they're high risk or low, it's however it has impacted on treaty and Aboriginal rights, it's on the previous knowledge of the use of the land. It's determined by the engagement by a project proponents and information about the licensing process such as clean environment hearings, et cetera.

So that's how you determine high risk/low risk. And also just to add to all of that, although consultation occurs specifically in those meetings, there are also a lot of other outside meetings that have been happening throughout the whole process, where the First Nations, they can submit information at any time and there's a back and forth dialogue. We've actually met with—we've had all the communities in—that we have met with Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler), myself, where we sat as a whole group, and we discussed and those were really meaningful meetings because it not only includes the channel and what's happening with the channel, but lots of discussion on Operation Return Home because they of course wanted to ensure that everything was in place for Operation Return Home to get all the communities back to where they needed to be and where the federal and provincial governments had determined, you know, that—when the funding would be there for them to achieve *[inaudible]* so that they could go home. So it's all part and parcel and it's been an ongoing process, and there have been meetings, like I said, with the—all of us at one table, all chiefs and councils for each community as well as ministers and staff.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister previously said that a high-risk community was entitled to four meetings and a low-risk community was only entitled to one meeting. What if all their concerns either haven't been addressed or haven't had the opportunity to *[inaudible]* voiced after just one meeting? Issues that

are outstanding—and how do those get captured, and is there provisions that they can have more meetings to actually get issues addressed, to come to some kind of resolve?

Ms. Clarke: Indications were that there—one meeting for low-impact, four meetings, that it is not restricted in any means that they will only get one meeting. They will have as many meetings as they deem necessary. They can call in at any time. There's absolutely no restrictions on numbers of meetings or who they meet with, whether they choose to meet with myself, they choose to meet with the Minister of Infrastructure. We try and co-ordinate our meetings actually when they're coming in that we do all meet at one time so that, you know, they have to drive in a considerable distance. So that's actually become a process in our government that we're doing, whether it's to do with the channel or actually a lot of other issues within other departments. We tend to try to accommodate for meetings.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 6 p.m., committee rise.

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (14:30)

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

In accordance with a sessional order we recently passed in the House, this section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for Health, Seniors and Active Living.

For the committee's information, these Estimates are being reinstated at the same stage they were during the previous Legislature when the committee met on April 23rd, 2019, for a total of one hour and 48 minutes. As previously agreed, discussion of this Estimates will proceed in a global manner.

I will now ask the ministerial and the opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

As the staff are getting ready to get themselves settled, I'll ask the minister if he can introduce his staff.

The honourable Minister of Health. The honourable minister, if you can introduce your staff?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): It is my pleasure to invite to the Chamber this afternoon Deputy Minister Karen Herd; resources and performance assistant, Deputy Minister and CFO Dan Skwarchuk; and my special assistant, Nathan Clark.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, thank you, Minister.

Does the opposition member of the—honourable member for Union Station, do you have—can you introduce your staff member in presence here?

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Sure. Our staff member is Chris Anderson [*phonetic*], and he is one of our policy analysts.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much. Okay.

Now the floor is open for questions.

MLA Asagwara: So first I'd like to express my excitement of being here today and want to congratulate the other members on being—some re-elected, some newly elected. It's an honour to be able to be involved in this capacity with all of my colleagues.

As some may already be aware, maybe not, I'm a registered psychiatric nurse by profession. I'm also an addictions specialist. I've been working as a psychiatric nurse for over a decade, and my career started, actually, in acute brain injury, ABI program, out at Selkirk Mental Health Centre, and shortly thereafter, I started practising in acute adult mental health services and youth addictions stabilization and mental health services.

*(14:40)

And so, you know, my work as a front-line service worker, as a community organizer as well, has been such that the changes, and cuts, and you know, a lot of what's going on in health care over the last, you know, recent months, recent years, has been something that I've seen impact many communities. It's, you know, what I've been hearing from a lot of folks in my communities, a lot of folks that I've provided service for as a health-care professional, certainly make asking the questions that hopefully we'll be able to get through today very important to get answers to. I've been very fortunate to be able to work in community and in hospital. I have family members who are also health-care providers and been working in addictions and mental health in a capacity where we certainly see the urgency of whether or not folks can access health-care resources in a dignified and adequate timeframe is critically important.

And so, I suppose with that, I'll jump right into asking a question in regards to the vacancy rate. So I'm wondering if the Minister of Health can share with us what the current vacancy rate for the Department of Health is—the most current vacancy rate, that is, for the Department of Health.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question, and I welcome the member and all the new members to the Chamber, as well as returning members, into this place.

This is at least a very interesting day, if not a historic one, where we have actually seen the Committee of Supply hours, through a sessional agreement, recognize, counted down from that last session, and then starting off where the clock had stopped from the previous session. So we're pleased to be back in the Committee of Supply for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

I thank the member for the question about current vacancy rate. I believe it behooves us to speak about the context for vacancy rate. Certainly, our government has been very open with Manitobans about the need to realign our health-care system. We are, in Manitoba, in a middle of a very massive transformation of our health-care system.

Our government has said we inherited a mess from the previous government: some of the highest per capita spending for health-care costs in Canada, but some of the worst results in areas like wait times for procedures, wait times to see a physician. And we know that because we have done the research and accepted the evidence and looked at other jurisdictions.

This is because, in our system, we have a lot of overlap and duplication between entities. Indeed, the Peachey report said that our system was marked by duplication and overlap. The KPMG report said the same thing about Manitoba. One particular expert said, a system of health far too complex for the size of jurisdiction.

And we know that Manitobans deserve better. We've said that what they deserve is better health care sooner in this province. And so the goal of this transformation is faster care, better care, regardless where you live in Manitoba. And to that end, the Department of Health is undergoing a transformation of its own. It's a transformation of its role, function and structure, in line with the health-care transformation blueprint. And in order to accomplish that, we—this redesign, is applying targeted spans and layers to the management structure. I would want to stress that this redesign does not involve job losses, but it does mean a sharpened role for the Department of Health.

When we inherited government, we had a system in which regional health authorities were in tandem

with the department developing policy and implementing on that basis. We had a system wherein the Department of Health was directly delivering services across the health-care system. And that may sound like business as usual in Manitoba, but I assure all members that is not business as usual when you compare our health-care system to other systems across the country, and it would not be good design were an individual starting with a pen and paper and developing a good system.

* (14:50)

To that end, the goal of this transformation of the department is to align its function to the areas of policy, planning, funding and oversight. And we are on that path. Since January the 7th of this year, when we kicked off that work, we are nine months into this work. We're four divisions, and 19 branches are created.

I would actually indicate for all members in the Chamber who have an SILR—their supplementary information for Legislative review—in front of them, that that is why in this particular SILR you actually see two organizational charts—one on page 10 and one on page 147. It explains how we are realigning the actual areas of responsibility in the department. And you can see a streamlining going on whereby activities and agencies are placed in a more logical way. Oversight is provided, governance is provided. And, of course, this is significant work. I can provide an update to all members and say that we are now recruiting into the open positions that we have.

But as I mentioned, the new design very intentionally shifts the activities of Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living away from the work of direct service delivery—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister, time is up.

The honourable member for Union Station, on a question.

MLA Asagwara: So over the past few years, we've seen wait times increase. We've seen less front-line service resources. We've seen—and I know this as a front-line service worker and as somebody who's been knocking a lot of doors recently—we've been hearing from many front-line service workers, health-care aides, nurses that there are actually less opportunities for them, less hours to be worked, less shifts available. And, in fact, we know that nurses have left this province due to working conditions and chaos in their environments.

Manitobans deserve to know what the status of staffing looks like in their health-care facilities, and having a clear understanding of what the current vacancy rate for the Department of Health—is critically important for Manitobans, and being able to know why their services are in the chaos that they are. And it's also important for front-line service workers to know why their working conditions continue to be very challenging. You know, it's been described as not manageable by many front-line service workers.

So, again, I ask the Minister of Health to please provide the current vacancy rate for the Department of Health. And if you don't have that number readily available at this moment, when can we expect that information?

Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: I'm a bit rusty on the game, Mr. Chair, I forgot that the opening statements are 10 minutes but then the time allotted to members after that is five minutes. So I'll endeavour to watch the clock more carefully.

I do want to address an inconsistency in the member's question. The member refers to the department and is seeking the vacancy rate, which I'll be happy to provide. But then she talks about—they talk about delivering services. And I want to make clear to the member, and to all members, that it is exactly this move away from the Department of Health directly delivering services—in the desired state—in the end state of these changes, we will have more clearly the regional health authorities and other entities delivering the services being held accountability for the manner and form and efficacy with which those services are delivered—but the department itself will not deliver services directly.

And, as I said, the department will be responsible in this end state for policy, for planning, for funding and for oversight. I can indicate to the member that the current vacancy rate, as I said, as we shift from the organizational chart in the department from page 10 to page 147, is currently at 18 per cent.

But I would want all members to bear in mind that there is no direct service delivery, in the end state, that would be done by the department. Rather, those functions in our system would be entrusted to delivery agencies.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you for providing that number, that 18 per cent vacancy rate for the Department of Health.

Can the minister indicate how that vacancy rate will be—how those vacancies will be filled? And what the plan is, in order to see that number dramatically reduced, 18 per cent is quite high. Thank you.

* (15:00)

Mr. Friesen: In answer to the member's question, I want to make clear that this is by no means business as usual. This is a very significant reorganization of the way health care is done. It's a move away from the overlap and duplication and confusion of the—under the past—confusion and duplication and overlap that the previous government never addressed. They were happy to allow health care to churn along with all of its complexities.

But, of course, we know that at the end of the day, the failure to address those inefficiencies in our system was robbing Manitobans. It was robbing Manitobans of access to the system. It was robbing Manitobans of shorter wait times. Manitoba, we know, under the NDP, led the nation many years when it came to ER wait times.

And it was an overcomplexity that was making us at odds with other jurisdictions who were making progress on this file because that ability to decomplexify the health-care system makes it more responsive. And the amount saved as a result is an amount that can be reinvested for a stronger health-care system that can provide more services because we have a population that needs those services. We have an aging population, and we have many needs throughout the system.

The member asks, how is that process going and when will it be done? I would want to say first, of course, that the process continues in tandem with the rules of how hiring takes place within the Manitoba civil service, and that means that positions are posted and there is a notice period and a posting period. When applications are received, there is an adjudication process and a measurement process and then the awarding of those positions.

I can also indicate to the member that this process, of course, is sequential in nature because when we're flipping back and forth between those two organizational charts in the SILR, you can clearly see how you would begin with the higher levels, and then those individuals hired into those positions would have some say over guiding the processes to populate the open positions in their area. So there's a cascading effect that is happening.

But let's be clear about the reasons for this. Right now in Manitoba, under the old state, we have, for instance, the Selkirk Mental Health Centre. And Selkirk is a front-line service that has, in Manitoba, been directly operated by the Department of Health, which is not ideal and no one would design a system in that way, and accountability becomes confused. And that is why, under our system—and it's no secret, we've shared it with Manitobans for some considerable time now—in the end state, Selkirk Mental Health Centre will have its home in Shared Health. In the same way, Cadham lab will have its home in Shared Health.

I remind that member that it was just in the election period weeks ago when the NDP party went out into the hallway and tried to agitate and tried to create fear among Manitobans with an assertion that somehow Cadham lab was being privatized when, had they read any of the documents this last year, they would've understood clearly that the information they were reading had to do exactly with making a new home for Cadham lab in Shared Health. But imagine, then, how this process simply results in people identifying a different entity as their employer because Selkirk right now—someone would say their employer was the Department of Health. In the end state, Selkirk will be under Shared Health and that individual will be transferred and work directly for Shared Health in the same manner people who work for Cadham lab would be working under Shared Health.

I can tell that individual that those changes we're talking about in respect of Selkirk and Cadham lab are expected to occur as 2020 ensues and toward the end of 2020. The result of all these changes, of course, is a simplified organizational structure, better services for Manitobans, clarify roles and responsibilities on the part of the department. Page 15 clearly shows the FTE count at the bottom of the page in the end state for what the department would look like at the end—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up.

MLA Asagwara: So I'd just like to bring the minister back to my question, which is addressing the 18 per cent vacancy rate for the Department of Health and how that vacancy rate would be filled.

We know that there are currently only four positions posted on the Manitoba government job bank for Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living, so there are certainly far more vacancies currently available. So again, and I'm very familiar, again as,

you know, someone who worked front-line service work for a long time, very familiar with the sequential process in regards to vacancies being filled. I've spoke with many front-line service workers who, unfortunately, were subject to a lot of that process in the chaos that was a result of a lot of these cuts in health care.

But going back to the question, just so that I can have a clear understanding of exactly what the plan is in order to have that 18 per cent vacancy rate filled, and knowing there are only four positions currently posted, if the minister could please clarify what the plan is to fill those, that number, which is quite high at 18 per cent, that would be great, thank you.

*(15:10)

Mr. Friesen: I just want to address, first of all, the assertion the member has made three times already in the last half hour. I know that she's—I know they are working with the NDP party that has built much of its last time in government on the hypothesis of widespread cuts in our system and widespread chaos. These are the hypotheses of the NDP party.

But I would refer that member to page 92 of the annual report of Health, which shows that since the time the NDP was last in office—at that point in time, Manitoba Health Services Insurance Plan had a total expenditure of \$5.616 billion. And in 2018-19, the year just concluded, the report is now showing a total expenditure of \$5.938916 billion. So this is an increase of more than \$320 million since this PC government took office a short three years and some months ago.

So while it might be a hypothesis that the NDP still finds favourable to advance, it increasingly falls on the deaf ears of Manitobans who understand that more money invested into the health-care system is not less money, it is indeed the \$320 million more. So I would want to make that clarification.

On the comment about chaos in the system, I too had the opportunity—as did my colleagues—to go to the doors. And we are as a government incredibly grateful to Manitobans who have awarded this government with a historic victory—the two largest back-to-back victories of any government in the history of Manitoba. Even Duff Roblin's government did not return with 40 and 36 seats respectively, as we have done.

I went to the doors, as did my colleagues, not just in my constituency of Morden-Winkler, but I assure that member across Winnipeg, in neighbourhoods

where I helped candidates here to also become re-elected. I heard a very different thing at the door than that member is suggesting today. I heard anecdotally from a nurse only four days ago who said that she, along with four nurse friends, had all come to say that they all voted for a PC government because the changes that are taking place in the health-care system, in her words, were overdue and having positive effect at this time.

So if the member wants to trade anecdotal evidence, I am very happy to do so because I also spent a lot of time at the doors and I heard from a lot of people in our system. Doctors, nurses, allied health workers who do not buy what that member is selling today.

On the subject of positions posted, yes, positions are currently posted. Of course, we want to delineate between positions in the department and then positions in the regional health authorities. I assure that member, when it comes to positions that we are filling in the regional health authorities and across the province, there are many, including the 80 additional rural EMS positions that we committed to fill. We're very proud about those positions, including 150 new EMS positions rurally that have been added.

When it comes to nurses, we have committed to hiring more nurses. And, indeed, the hiring of nurses continues in our system. As a matter of fact, I would point that member to the fact of a net increase of 201 new nurses in just the WRHA in just the past year alone. Again, it was only a few short weeks ago that the NDP was obfuscating and trying to re-represent those numbers as something of a cut until they were actually chastised for their treatment of the data and Manitobans were informed, in fact, that up is not down and that there were more nurses working in Manitoba now than before.

I can tell that member, as well, that when it comes to the how—because the member is inquiring as to how these positions will be filled—by program area. So projects are put in place and then, by program area, that move is made to finalize position descriptions, to receive the appropriate classification assignment for each of those positions—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister's time is up.

MLA Asagwara: Still not getting a clear response on how that 18 per cent vacancy rate would be filled. We're still hearing from front-line service workers, including nurses, that they are understaffed, working

overtime, resources stretched. It's affecting individuals, families, communities wanting to access resources in health care in Manitoba.

But back to the 18 per cent vacancy rate. The Department of Health, the minister has indicated that—and we all know we're in a transition period, and moving toward Shared Health services—and I'm wondering if the minister could provide the expected percentage of these vacancy rates that, or will these—will this percentage of vacancy rate for the Department of Health, as it transitions over, will it exist when it is fully amalgamated into Shared Health? *[inaudible]*

So what percentage of that 18 per cent, after the transitional period, what percentage of those vacancies, if any, will exist after that period is complete?

* (15:20)

Mr. Friesen: I can recall from my time when I was still minister of Finance and the minister responsible for the Civil Service Commission, that even at the outset in 2016, it was referred to publicly on a regular basis that at any time in the civil service across the spans and layers of government, that the historical vacancy rate in a steady state sits at around 8 per cent. And 8 per cent reflects the size of the actual workforce and the fact there is always that flux, that there is churn within a workforce. And that churn is owing to factors like people leaving for other positions, people retiring after a lifetime of service, people perhaps moving to a different level of government to serve in the civil service, there's many reasons for which people come and people depart from employment. So the short answer to the member's question would be that we would expect that we would be fully staffed at the end of this very significant reorganization of the Department of Health, Seniors, and Active Living. Fully staffed would be our goal. I would never commit to be to zero per cent because that simply wouldn't be realistic. There isn't a workforce, whether you across the street to Great West Life, or down the street to New Flyer Industries, or across the city to Versatile industries, you won't find a workplace with zero per cent, otherwise we wouldn't need human resource officers and we wouldn't need that expertise that we do have.

People move and people seek new challenges and new opportunities. I say that in order to say that during this reorganization, people within Health are doing exactly this. That this also is an opportunity for people to reinvent themselves in the system. There are, on an

accelerated basis, positions being advertised. People are able to say within the Department of the Health, so I've worked in Health, look at this position that's just become vacant here. I want to apply for that position. And that's a very important part of all of this. Our goal is reorganization, our goal is to be fully staffed.

Now, I do want to clarify for that member, because at times she oscillated between asking a question about the department and then asking about front-line services in the regional health authorities, and I do not want the opposition to conflate these two things. If the member is talking about nurses, the member is welcome to ask questions about that category, but the member was asking specifically about the department's reorganization, and I want to be clear the answers that I'm providing now are in regard to the department's own reorganization, and I can name those categories, being transition, population health, policy and accountability, resources and performance, and insurance under, of course, the deputy minister with the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, of course, outside of that. And all of that information is available in the SILR on page 147.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you for that. I thank the minister, for that response. I think we've established that 18 per cent is very high.

And I would like to ask the minister a question specifically in regards to the vacancy rate overall for the WRHA, if the minister could please provide the most current vacancy rate overall.

Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: We don't have at the table this afternoon a comprehensive global numbers respective of the combined RHAs. It is something we could endeavour to get for the member if they would like to have that number. It was under our understanding that we were going to be discussing transformation today, but if there's a desire to have a global number respective of the regional health authorities in respect of current workforce and vacancy numbers, it can be provided.

MLA Asagwara: So I'm just, specifically, as I've mentioned, looking for the overall vacancy rate for the specifics of the WRHA.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Union Station.

Sorry, your mic was already off, so I had to call you back again.

MLA Asagwara: Just specifics of the WRHA, the overall vacancy rate, please.

Mr. Friesen: Thank the member for the question.

Again, we can endeavour to get that information for the member. We do not—while we have considerable resources available to us here at the table and considerable human resource capacity, we do not have a global number for the WRHA. But we can commit to get that number.

MLA Asagwara: So if we could have that information tomorrow, and if we could also, actually, request the vacancy rates—most recent vacancy rates at the emergency rooms at HSC, St. Boniface, Grace, and the overall vacancy rates as well at Concordia, Seven Oaks, and Victoria.

* (15:30)

The minister—if the minister could provide the most recent quarter the minister might have available, how much overtime the nurses in the WRHA are working, and can the minister provide that information? I shall be able to leave it there. If the minister—sorry, clarify—can provide the most recent information on how much overtime the nurses in the WRHA are working, please.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question. I want to provide some context for this line of questioning, and the context is this: that we are in the middle of very large-scale changes within our health-care system. Changes, as I said before, are designed to coordinate our system better, to make it more consistent.

To that end, we know that we are doing things like standardizing the way nurses work on ward and within the system. We had a very siloed system previously and now a much more coordinated system throughout. And that's all part of that healing our health system plan that we launched in 2017. New nurse staffing models, new nurse rotations introduced throughout the system.

That has meant some complex changes to accommodate both our labour agreements, because we must be consistent with our obligations under labour agreements and that has meant changes. And we thank all the people who have worked in our system as these changes have taken place.

I would also want to indicate that the move to new nurse staffing rotations at Seven Oaks just weeks ago, and the adjustments to emergency department schedules at St. Boniface that are upcoming now,

really mark the end of those wide-scale changes and internal movements within the health-care system.

And that means what our focus is, on a go-forward basis, is the stabilization of the system, is that ability to—where there are vacancies—to recruit into those vacancies. And it has been our observation—the observation of nurses and of administrators and even labour—that this process takes some time. There are obligations we have that the member knows about, as well.

They mentioned the fact earlier on about minimum-posting periods and the ability of nurses to bump or to indicate that they want to be considered for certain positions because of their seniority within the system. We respect all of that. We must work with labour and by the same token, we are trying to find ways to use creativity and to collaborate well with all the partners because nurses want to work.

We often say on this side that nurses want to work in a system that works; a system that works for themselves and for their patients. And we are confident that the changes we're bringing, this alignment in our systems, will actually have ameliorating effect on the overall system.

The member asked, as well, to provide global numbers of vacancies for the emergency departments in HSC, St. Boniface, Grace, Concordia, Victoria, Misericordia. We will endeavour to get that information back to them and also overtime for the nurses at the WRHA. We'll endeavour to get that information back.

MLA Asagwara: Okay, thank you. I will table that question again then tomorrow in the hopes that we'll have a clear response from the minister on how much overtime nurses in the WRHA are working. We know that they're working a lot of overtime. We know that nurses have reported that their confidence and morale is declining and low, and that nurses in our WRHA are stretched beyond their capacity.

We know this because nurses have shared their concerns quite openly, in the hopes that they will not be stretched beyond capacity and that they will have the ability to provide the care that they know all Manitobans deserve and that currently some nurses have expressed they don't have the resources to provide.

So I'd like to go back. If the minister could please clarify—and I'm going back to my earlier question regarding the 18 per cent vacancy rate in the Department of Health. If the minister could please

provide a breakdown per division on that vacancy at 18 per cent vacancy rate, that would be wonderful. Thank you.

* (15:40)

Mr. Friesen: I want to preface my comments by saying that, while the member is making comments about overtime—and this government cares about the overtime that nurses work, I would want to be clear on the record that in January of 2016, just before our government took office, the wait time—or, the monthly overtime within the WRHA was 38,102 hours under the NDP.

I would want to secondarily indicate that in the time since, the nurse overtime has not exceeded that level that we inherited by the NDP. Keep in mind, everyone, that that was in a state in which the NDP was not attending to any effort to improve this system, to align this system, to make it more efficient, to make it more consistent from workplace to workplace to workplace. That was simply a monthly stat of the NDP; 38,102 hours of overtime in January of 2016.

That was the comment that I know I heard at the doors again and again. And I know that colleagues of mine attested to later, that at the door when they would engage an individual in the health-care system—and it's a good exercise to go to the doors and listen to the people who work in the system—oftentimes people would say to us, I work in the health-care system. And then a candidate would engage the individual and ask them more—where do you work? How long have you worked? And oftentimes, people would remark about the changes taking place in the system. And oftentimes, the candidate would thank them for the service and their patience as we're stabilizing the system.

But often the next comment by an individual who worked in the health-care system said, it's been challenging for a long, long time in the health-care system. It's been challenging for a long, long time.

And so it is that we say very clearly: There was not a golden age in which somehow things were not challenging. I think that that member would have to admit today that an NDP nurse overtime statistic of 38,102 hours in a single month—recorded in January of 2016—is a very significant hurdle. One that we are determined as a government to address and drive down. You only do that by system reorganization. So I just want to make that comment on the record.

In response to the member's question about the breakdown in the Department of Health, which again

I underscore is not front-line services, this is not the regional health authorities. This is the Department of Health that will be responsible in future state for policy, for budgeting, for finance, for holding groups accountable.

Those FTE vacancies in 21.1, resources and performance: 25.5; in 21.2, policy and accountability: 22.30; in 21.3, insurance: 36.8; in 21.4 population health: 35.2; and in transition: 21.5. That would be 10.1.

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, the mic is still on for the minister.

The honourable member for Union Station, do you—are you ready for a question?

MLA Asagwara: Not—he's not done.

Are you done? Is the minister done?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, he's done.

MLA Asagwara: Oh, okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Union Station.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you for that, for those numbers, for those statistics on the divisions.

You know, again, I'll go back to speaking about the overtime. I do find it interesting that the minister is able to provide January 2016 overtime averages but is unable to provide the average current overtime rates, but it's fine.

So, in speaking to the current state of what the nurses are experiencing in—as a result of this health transformation, we know that Dr. Peachey's progress report released earlier this year has found, as I've mentioned, that the confidence and morale is declining among Winnipeg nurses as a result of this health transformation.

We know that nurses are saying for themselves, a number of nurses are reporting, that they're stretched beyond their capacity. They're working mandated overtime that is not allowing them to provide the level of health care and service that they know their patients deserve. In fact, nurses are calling some working situations unsafe.

Now, Dr. Peachey recommended that a pause was needed on phase 2 of these changes in health transformation, and it was stated that the pause would be for six months. So my question for the minister is, is this being followed?

Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: Thank the member for the question about the quality assurance review by Dr. David Peachey.

* (15:50)

Just to remind all members in the Assembly, we had undertaken to invite Dr. Peachey back to jurisdiction. I was asked publicly why that decision was undertaken. I say it's—it was the right thing to do because the time was right for a re-examination of where the system was at. We felt like having the original author of that provincial clinical and preventative services plan for Manitoba to come back was the appropriate thing to do. And I would say, at a high level, that the report that Dr. David Peachey gave, while it was unvarnished in its honesty—it was essentially saying the following. I don't think Dr. Peachey would mind me paraphrasing this way.

He said, upon further examination the plan for the transformation of the Manitoba health-care system was the right plan. He also indicated that, at the current time, that snapshot he took—that while it was the right plan—the execution was in trouble, that it was running into troubles in terms of being to clearly communicate and move towards the clear implementation and transition in certain areas. We accepted that observation of the system.

I can tell this member and all members that we received that report and went straight to work. And I can tell that member that behind the scenes, there was tremendous effort made at that time to attend to the governance weaknesses in that health-care transformation set of activities. And I can tell you that the system is greatly improved; that people in the system, who are working at that high 'administrativial' level, say the sharing of information is better, the timeliness of information is better, the reporting of actions that need to go better up the chain is better.

As a matter of fact, as one example, I can say to all members here that at first there was information sequentially delivered. We found a way to put site leadership at the same table as the WRHA and Shared Health and deliver that information all at the same time. I would also say that Dr. Peachey made the comment and the observation that Shared Health needed to have a bigger role when it came to guiding those processes. I can tell that member that that, indeed, now is the case—that Shared Health is taking a bigger role when it comes to these planned changes,

the careful preparation of those changes and the execution of those changes.

Here is what else David Peachey said when he came back to the jurisdiction. He said that the government's plan has already seen significant successes in a number of areas—and we don't get to talk about this enough—including emergency wait times, historic lows in waits for personal-care-home placement in Winnipeg. We've almost eliminated the wait times for placement in PCH. Wait times under the NDP stayed stubbornly high. But also, he cited areas like mental health, surgery, indigenous health; all that were showing signs of marked improvement in the system. He also said at this time that the consolidation of clinical services in a manner done in other cities of comparable sizes to Winnipeg was showing that there was improvement.

We know that for years in Manitoba we had a complex system that got inferior results. That's the reason why we're changing our system. It's also the reason that we invited David Peachey back. Because if something wasn't going right, we wanted to know about it.

And I want to leave all members with this understanding that David Peachey said that the plan that we were undertaking for the improvement of health services in Manitoba was the right plan. I imagine that is the reason why the NDP former government hired Dr. David Peachey. We should not lose sight of the fact that it was an NDP government that gave the sole-source contract to David Peachey back in 2015.

MLA Asagwara: To—thank you to the minister for all of that information.

It didn't specifically address my question, but I'll move on from that and I guess I'd like some clarification if the minister wouldn't mind in regards to—in the pause that was recommended by Dr. Peachey. And, again, the pause was recommended because it was clearly identified that the changes that were being implemented in health transformation were rushed and that they were causing a tremendous amount of disruption to frontline-service providers being able to do their jobs in a manner that provided best care to individuals and families wanting to access health-care services.

And as I'd mentioned before, we can't understate the fact that health-care providers and front-line service workers expressing that is something that everyone needs to take very, very seriously in terms

of, you know, how these transformations get implemented.

So I suppose I'd like some clarification, if the minister could please provide, in regards to this pause that was stated would be for six months. Still not clear on it—whether or not it's being followed—but if the minister could indicate when the pause actually took place, that would be great. So, specifically, the pause that Dr. Peachey recommended was needed in order to stop the chaos that's taking place in the health-care transformation.

Mr. Friesen: Rejecting the member's conjecture, once again, with the use of the term chaos. Chaos might describe better the former NDP's health-care system. KPMG, others, the Peachey report essentially spoke about the chaos of a system that had not evolved over time.

As a matter of fact, there was an editorial in a Winnipeg newspaper no more than about three weeks ago that talked about the failure of our health-care system to evolve for years and years and years. It's actually a good piece and perhaps we'll try to retrieve it to submit certain parts of it for discussion in these proceedings because it's helpful to understand why it was that all other jurisdictions in Canada proceeded with more courage and conviction and timeliness before the NDP in this province to change their systems, to align their systems, understanding that the delivery of health-care systems was changing dramatically because of things like the ageing population, because of the place of pharmacy in our system, because of technology and because of the challenge of delivering services over large expanses and large geographies, as we have the case here in Manitoba.

Certainly, we are not unique in that way, but there were—but they are challenges to be dealt with. And the NDP did not deal with those challenges. And so we did inherit a system that many might characterize as chaos.

So I submit to the member, chaos might well describe instead the state of the system under the former NDP. Certainly, the most expensive system in Canada—or, one of the most—and yet one of the most ineffective in terms of driving down wait times.

To the member's point about pause, if the member has read that quality assurance report by David Peachey—and I would assume she has—she would understand that pause was never to be conflated with stop. It was never the intention of the author of that

report that the planned changes would stop. Indeed, the author of that quality assurance report said it is the right plan for Manitoba at this time. And what was needed is that time to pause.

Why? A number of specific things were pointed out. One was the need to do a better job of assembling the governance over this project. I can report to that member and all members, we did that.

We paused in order to reconstitute our governance structures. We found a way to align much better, like I said when I referred to the fact that we found a way to put clinical and system leaders right at the same table as those planning for the actual architectural changes that would see better alignment in our system. But once we had paused and accomplished that goal, we resumed.

Another pause that David Peachey talked about was a need to come to a more clearer, system-wide understanding on the concept of subacute care. We paused until we could speak with more consistency across the system about what was meant by the role intended for community hospitals in respect of subacute care.

* (16:00)

I can tell that member that even in the space of the last eight to 12 weeks, there is a better understanding of what that subacute role looks like, and I'm encouraged by the amount of learning that has taken place within our system as a result of that. But clearly, again, in this case we paused in order to do the thing that the evidence was pointing to the need to fix. Once we had fixed the thing identified, we were able to resume.

And I will underscore again, the intention of Dr. Peachey in the QA—the quality assurance report—when he said pause was never a hard stop. He indicated again and again this was the right plan for Manitoba to modernize our health-care system, to finally get a hold of the better results and the shorter wait times and the more consistency from hospital to hospital, and more assurance by people of the public that would know where to go in a time of health-care trouble—emergency or acute need for health care or an emergent need for health care. And those things are being done now because of the fact that we have paid close attention to the opinions expressed by Peachey in the review.

MLA Asagwara: If the minister could just clarify specifically when the pause was lifted. When did the transformation resume? That's still a little murky for

me, so if the minister could please clarify that—specifically when that timeline was resumed please. Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: To be clear, again, I want to reinforce that there was never a general top-down pause on the transformation of the health-care system. But there was, in accordance with the recommendation made by Dr. Peachey, in areas of that transformation that were identified as needing further work—areas that were falling short of the goals—in those areas, there was indeed a pause.

I mentioned the pause on the—on a system-wide understanding of the idea of subacute provision of care. Certainly, the pause when it came to re-examining our governance structures, which led into a reformed advisory committee or group that was centrally responsible for meeting, for planning changes, for identifying challenges along the way and then for re-examining the effectiveness of those changes as they are implemented.

And also, of course, for the area of Dr. Peachey's recommendation that Shared Health take a more direct role in these planned changes. And to that end, I can tell you that the nurse lead in Shared Health now works very closely with the nurse leader at the WRHA.

Those are all evidence of the way the government did, indeed, pause on transformation in order to repair that which needed repair and then proceed on from there.

But certainly, in terms of the overall, Dr. Peachey said very clearly in this same review that indigenous health, surgery, mental health and addictions, personal-care-home placement and other areas were all going not just according to plan but showing real, demonstrable improvement in the system.

And surely the member would not suggest that those areas should have been paused that were outperforming against benchmark. No, we would want to encourage those involved with areas of the transformation going well to continue to get those better results that they were seeing.

I would say the following, though: of course, the overall planned called for the transition of certain emergency departments to urgent-care centres. Dr. Peachey's quality assurance review, of course, very importantly called for an urgent-care centre to be located at Concordia Hospital where previously a walk-in connected-care model was contemplated.

Now, this was a more robust provision of care and—I am reflecting now—I believe it would have been consistent with Dr. Peachey's original recommendation in the original report given to the previous government. So in that case, we did continue with those planned changes according to the overall plan, according to the advice given in the quality assurance review.

However, as we've continued to see that new role for community hospitals, as we've continued to see that staff is coalescing around these new models—the urgent-care model—I could also indicate to the member that there is a lot of work going on to stabilize the system. And that is something that Dr. Peachey talked about, this—the need to stabilize the system and not have it to proceed so quickly that it would cause destabilization.

And I can say to that member, that is being observed by the new government structures: a very good sharing of information back and forth between the chief medical officers, between the COOs for the various community hospitals—this ongoing commitment to measure as we move, a continuous monitoring of the performance of the system. And it is working.

I can tell you that where similar changes went on in Victoria hospital, we know that in—since the time of those changes, wait times have decreased 47 per cent since the healing our health-care system was announced. And that is even while activities and volume has increased 30 per cent. Volume's up 30 per cent, wait times at the Victoria EDUC down 47 per cent.

Now, by anyone's definition, that is indication of system performance and system improvement: getting better health care sooner for all Manitobans.

* (16:10)

MLA Asagwara: So, what I will say in regards to wait times is that we know, since emergency rooms—since the minister's government's started closing emergency rooms, we know that the wait times have gone up. Wait times continue to increase, the level of access to emergency room resources that folks are able to access are declining. And, again, we know that front-line service workers are sounding the alarms in regards to what's going on with wait times in emergency rooms and resources that are available to folks in health care.

It is concerning that I can't seem to get a really clear indication of when the pause was started and, you know, when it resumed, but that's fine.

I have a specific question in regards to section A.3 on page 72 of Dr. Peachey's progress report. It was released in June and it was noted that the data compendium would be provided, and I quote: The underpinning data for this assessment provided in a compendium—as a companion document.

I'm wondering if the minister can please indicate where this companion document is currently. Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: I'm waiting on information right now to answer the member's question, but I can answer a partial part of that member's question while we're waiting for the arrival of that information.

The member made the assertion that wait times continue to go up. I'm referring to a chart that shows wait times in the current operating year, showing a wait time in the month of February approximately 2.17 hours—these are median hours wait time at emergency department and urgent care. Now, the first observation I would like to make is that this 2.17 wait time is lower than the NDP's wait time in 2014-2015. It is also lower than the NDP's same measured median hour wait time in 2015-2016.

Our wait times in the first year of government were lower than the NDP's. Our wait times in second year of government were lower than the NDP's. And our wait times in the third year of government were lower than the NDP's.

The point I am making, Mr. Chair, is that if measured annually by peak monthly median wait times, our numbers are falling from the NDP. However, I'll go further, because starting in February the wait times across the WRHA emergency rooms and urgent care times fell from February to March. Then the wait times fell from March to April. Then the wait times fell from April to May. The wait times fell from May to June. The wait times fell from June to July.

Mr. Chair, it's becoming quite obvious that it will be very difficult for that member to argue either on an annual basis or on a rolling basis that somehow things are getting worse. Unless she's holding the chart upside down, I assure her these charts are showing over time that wait times are improving.

Now, we know that these wait times bounce around, and we know that there will be another flu season starting up this fall and winter. It happens. And I know that the Leader of the Opposition gleefully seized on small, incremental changes in the data, when it suited his purposes. And he was so quiet the

moment those numbers turned around, as they invariably do.

What really should concern all of us at a high level, as we both observe and guide these system changes, is the direction, is the overall direction measured in a scientific way. And I can say with confidence that wait times are falling when measured in that way, shape and form. Small changes month over month for—to be sure, but still, times in a PC government have never been as high as they were in the last two years of the NDP's government.

In conjunction with that, the member asked a question about the data compendium. That was a part of the Peachey report, and I can look into that answer for her more fully. However, I would say this, to be very clear: We were completely transparent with Manitobans, stood in the hallway, took responsibility for the transformation—and this was probably, I'm thinking, around March—and stated on the very first day that Dr. Peachey would be coming back to do a quality assurance exercise.

At that time, the government indicated how long it would take for such an exercise to be conducted. We also committed that we'd be completely transparent with the release of that report. And I can say that his work was undertaken, that the report was returned. We went into the hall. Many people would even scratch their head and wonder why we were so transparent when there were some pretty bumpy things that were said in that report. One of the very first assertions made against our government was made by the Manitoba's nurses union that said this report would be absolutely of no value because it wouldn't involve nurses. Well, I think their heads spun when they found out that the very first, or one of the very first meetings had by Dr. Peachey was with an entire group of nurses.

We published the whole thing. We have remained accountable for the recommendations. We have made progress. And all Manitobans benefit from the fact that we undertook that review. Health care in Manitoba is getting better. And it's getting better for all Manitobans.

MLA Asagwara: The progress report—Dr. Peachey's progress report stated that it is entirely predictable that the quality of nursing care to patients is and will be compromised. We know that this government rushed in cutting health-care services, rushed in making changes in the health-care transformation that has caused a tremendous amount of stress for front-line service workers, a tremendous amount of stress for

families and individuals wanting to access health-care resources, including in emergency rooms.

We—the minister just mentioned that flu season is approaching. We all know that flu season can be very, very challenging for a number of populations, including the very young and also senior populations, and that this can also be very taxing on the system.

So my question to the minister is: Given that we know, in Dr. Peachey's report, that the challenges in the health-care system and the quality of nursing, the patients will be compromised based on the rushed nature of the health transformation, how is this—how is the minister preparing for flu season? How is the minister preparing for what will be issues arising in the health-care system that will put additional stress on an already stressed health-care services and system? Thank you.

* (16:20)

Mr. Friesen: Rejecting the preamble offered by the member that somehow care across the system is compromised, if that member is suggesting that somehow this year should buck the normal trend that all doctors and nurses and system analysts would point to every single season tipping into a fall-winter season that would see an increase in activities and volumes in our emergency and urgent-care wards, let her say—let them say so. But to be clear, this is why we do trend analysis. This is why we analyze statistics. This is why we actually review the data in order that we can make good decisions about what we know to be natural times of activity and increased activity in the system.

The member has asked what we are doing to prepare in the system. I want to re-read for that member the second recommendation of that quality assurance report by Dr. Peachey. It says it is recommended that the current bed mapping be reviewed at the hospital sites as an interim measure and be re-established according to the regional risk assessment. I can indicate that that work has gone on. It was the recommendation of Dr. Peachey to actually create this new advisory team that would locate site leadership along with the architects of the system transformation.

That shared table has resulted, for instance, in the recommendation that we're putting into place to add system beds. There are 42 beds coming online at HSC, St. Boniface, Grace, Concordia. These beds are being staffed as they are coming online in the system. It was a joint recommendation of the exact advisory team

that Dr. Peachey called for the creation of. It is an excellent—it's an excellent example of how this—these changes that we've brought about as a result of that Q and A examination to our system is getting better results. So the member asks what is being done to prepare for a busy fall and winter season. I would say to them: system beds coming online that did not exist within the system before. But more than that, on the basis of the evidence, on the basis of the data, pointing to the trends about where we think those volumes will be seen, understanding that there will be different behaviour by patients with these new urgent cares as they take their proper place across our health-care system in the WRHA during these phase 1 changes that are currently under way.

MLA Asagwara: The minister has indicated that there will be a—further beds created to meet the needs of folks needing health-care services, especially going into flu season. Given that there are front-line service staffing shortages and that there are the nursing front-line service providers, rather, are already stretched and have indicated as such, can the minister identify how they plan on staffing all of the resources they're saying will be developed in terms of beds, or is that staffing—what is the strategy in order to make sure that staffing levels are adequate in order to service these beds that will be developed?

Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: Our government is committed through the WRHA and the hard work going on at Shared Health to staff those beds. The member should understand that throughout our system, beds would've been opened during flu season at hospitals in the past, but they would've been done in a more ad hoc and disjointed way. Beds would've been added, and there would've been a scramble to allocate resources to those beds. So I understand why they're asking that question about how these beds are going to function.

So all members can take consolation in the fact that this is being done in a planned and co-ordinated way in exactly the manner as David Peachey described when he gave that recommendation that throughout the system we should be focused on those hospital operations and understanding the challenges at those particular sites. It's because of this that we have the confidence that those positions will be hired, not just beds opening in a knee-jerk way, in an ad hoc way by the WRHA. But, again, think back to one of those key recommendations by David Peachey in that quality assurance review. He said that the Shared Health should take a more central role in planning

with the WRHA for the system improvements. I would assure all members that that work is being done.

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Chair, I'm wondering if this would be an opportunity to take a few minutes of break if that'd be permissible.

* (16:30)

Mr. Chairperson: Is there will of the committee to take a few minutes' break, for? Yes? Okay.

What is the will of the committee to how many minutes? Two? Three minutes? Five minutes? Ten minutes? *[interjection]* Okay. Is it agreed? *[Agreed]*

So 10 minutes.

The committee recessed at 4:30 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:45 p.m.

Mr. James Teitsma, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. *[interjection]*

The member for Union Station.

MLA Asagwara: My question for the minister is in regards to section 21(4), specifically the division for active living, indigenous relations, population and public health—the Department of Health.

Last year, there was a vacancy rate in that division of 14 per cent. This year we're seeing a vacancy rate of 35 per cent. That's approximately 90 vacancies within that division. And if we're looking at the aspect that is population and public health, we're—what we're seeing is that—that would mean that the folks addressing issues in public health, like STIs, for example, there's a tremendous amount of vacancies there. And we're seeing an increase in STIs and concerns around transmission of STIs in our city. We're seeing those numbers increase in a way that is really challenging public health. It is extremely concerning when you look at the issues surrounding—issues around mental health and addictions, and other health-related issues.

And so, my question for the minister is: Why the increase in—from 14 to 35 per cent since last year is quite the increase in vacancy in that division, and what is the minister's plan to address this? Thank you.

* (16:50)

Mr. Friesen: I'm looking for a clarification from the member, so that we can endeavour to answer the member's question accurately, where in the SILR they're pulling that number that's indicating the level of vacancy as they've described it. So I'm just looking for that clarification.

In the meantime, though, I would say the following, that in pages 67, 68 and 69, where the member was citing the kinds of activities that this area undertakes and of course, those are the responsibilities they have, they were indicating that somehow this change in the level of staff would impact at the community level how these activities were taking place.

But again, this belies a failure to understand that the department does not directly deliver the services. So, the services that that member is referring to would be delivered by public health employees who are employed by regional health authorities who are delivering those services in an urban capacity, in a rural capacity, but those individuals who undertake to provide the services that they named would not be individuals employed by the department in the area of active living, population and public health.

I want to make that delineation, and then, seeking from them that clarification about this change in FTE level.

MLA Asagwara: So, to the minister's comment, what we're talking about are those who would be responsible for providing the co-ordination of these efforts to address what's going on in communities, in regards to sexually transmitted and blood-borne infectious—infections and strategies.

So I think that it's important to recognize that those positions are critical in ensuring that folks are able to access the resources and services they need to address these issues. And the—that who is providing funding and oversight to regional health authorities, you know, the department making the co-ordinating efforts and the decisions in order to make sure that these needs are being addressed is critically important to these issues that we're seeing increasing on a ground level.

So I'd also like to—so I'll go back to that and ask the minister—and maybe I've missed it, the minister may have addressed it at the beginning of his point, but my question, in regards to that vacancy rate, that 35 per cent, if the minister could please clarify how that will be addressed. And again, if I missed that in

the beginning of his response, I apologize, but I don't think that I did.

Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question. I'm endeavouring to understand the—where the data is being cited in the records. If the member could indicate where they are seeing a 35 per cent change in staffing levels in the area of active living, population and public health, I'm asking for that clarification. There might be a need to clarify. Information may have been misinterpreted when I provided it.

MLA Asagwara: So, to clarify, in last year's proceedings, the previous minister had indicated that it was at 14 per cent. Now it's indicated that it's 35 per cent, which is a dramatic increase in a vacancy rate. It is more than double, and that is, I think, certainly worthy of a clear response in regards to how that has occurred.

Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: So, as I suspected, the member is confusing some data.

I had, earlier this afternoon, provided as the number of FT—the FTE number in this area of operation at 35. So 35 is the full-time equivalent in the area of active living, public population and public health. That is 35 FTE in this area.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): So could the minister—the or the Premier (Mr. Pallister) rolled out a plan, a 100-day plan. Nowhere in there did he make reference to how he's going to address the meth crisis that is happening here in our city, that is not only, you know, taking lives but it's also put communities at risk; families are left without any supports.

Health-care providers at the hospital have no idea what to do when people are coming in that are on methamphetamines. The police have talked about having to drive around for up to eight hours with someone in psychosis in the back of their car because they have nowhere to take them. Main Street Project has talked about not having the infrastructure to be able to deal with someone who is in psychosis.

They've also talked about having a plan on the minister and the Premier's desk for over a year now that would address the meth crisis and would open up some beds to people who are wanting to get addictions treatment, methamphetamine treatment, but also would provide some supports to families who are

seeing their loved ones as young as 12 years old become addicted to meth.

So I want to ask the minister what is his plan to address the methamphetamine crisis here in Manitoba. If it wasn't included in the 100-day plan, when do they plan to address it, and what is their plan?

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

As a matter of fact, our party was the only party to talk in the election about a comprehensive suite of investments based on the evidence, based on the VIRGO report, based on the work of the illicit drugs 'tast' force, these—the nation's first municipal, provincial, and federal co-working group, to grapple with the very significant—the significant challenge and scourge of the increase of drug use in our community, including that of methamphetamines.

And we were the only party to comprehensively unveil our strategy. We did so in August. We were at the behavioural health institute. I believe the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) was there that day. And it was our Safer Streets, Safer Lives Action Plan, based, as I said, on the VIRGO report, the Illicit Drug Task Force, and even the Community Wellness and Public Safety Alliance report. In respect of the investments for mental health and addictions, these include a new acute medical sobering facility, the first of its kind in this jurisdiction, staffed with mental-health and other health professionals that would be able to treat between 20 and 30 patients at a time.

I heard on CJOB just five days ago an interview with an expert in the field who said this is desperately needed, that Main Street Project, of course, for all the good work that is done there, doesn't have the capacity or the mandate or the framework to be able to detain or safely hold anyone for longer than an evening.

Now, I have toured the Main Street Project. I've had a chance to meet with the leadership, the board and the executive director there, and we know the good work they do. But clearly something more is needed on the landscape.

This response to methamphetamines—as a matter of fact, this expert who was cited just days ago in the provincial media, was expressing the fact that, especially with meth, where a longer duration is needed in order to help that individual stabilize so that they can, in a clear-minded way, make good decisions about potential next steps for their treatment, for their stabilization, for the need for additional interventions, that, we cannot do when we're giving someone a bus

pass and sending them out the door from the Main Street Project after just 12 hours.

But in addition to that, we've talked about the need for recovery and drop-in centres, safe spaces for people to go, appropriate places for them to go. And I'm thinking back specifically right now to the alliance report that talked about exactly this kind of place, a flex place, more than just a drop-in centre, somewhere with people—where people with expertise can intervene, come alongside, ask questions about where they're at, provide medicine, provide clean supplies and to help that person make next steps.

* (17:00)

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

In addition to that, we announced that same day the enhancement of our flexible-length withdrawal services in Winnipeg and in Brandon, and these flexible-length services are tailored to methamphetamine addiction. Because currently in the system now, we mandatorily release from treatment anyone after 28 days, and what is desperately needed is that flexible ability to determine that a person should stay longer, that they are not at the place where they should be released.

In addition to this, we announced the expansion of RAAM. Not just the operating hours for RAAM, but also for a new RAAM clinic for Southern Health-Santé Sud. We also announced our intention to build more supportive recovery housing units.

I'm thinking back now just a number of months ago to a visit to Manitoba by a parliamentary committee on social services. They visited Morberg House at the time. I believe it was the executive director of Morberg House who said, you can save your study, we know what we need right now and it is housing supports. And we're bringing those housing supports.

Also, though, in addition to this anti-drug youth initiative, such as our expanded street reach—outreach programs, there's a suite of investments that we need to connect the dots. Because what is it that VIRGO said? That for years and years under the NDP what we had in Manitoba was disjointed. It was disconnected and people fell between the cracks.

These meaningful investments will ensure that people don't fall through the cracks.

Mrs. Smith: So the minister talked about Morberg House. He talked about federal, you know, ministers coming to visit Manitoba.

I wonder if he can talk about how much money the provincial government is committed to spending on these very beds to make sure that people who are wanting to exit addictions, that need long-term treatment beds—tell us how much money the government is willing to put in to making sure that those beds are accessible to Manitobans.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question, and I can tell that I must have been compelling in my argument on the first question because she seems to have no further questions about our Safer Streets, Safer Lives Action Plan. So I'll take that as a tacit and wholehearted endorsement of the government's approach on that.

Look, we all know that grappling with mental health and addictions and the challenges we're seeing is very, very real. It's very significant. I did a ride-along with the Winnipeg Police Services just recently. I know that others in this Chamber have done the same. It's important learning that I believe we, as members of the Assembly, must make.

We have had an opportunity to walk with the Bear Clan and other community-based organizations as they deliver services really on the front line in our neighbourhoods, on our streets right here in Winnipeg. And we all know that the need to make these investments is compelling.

When I talk to ministers of health and ministers of mental health and addictions in other jurisdictions, I constantly ask them, if you've got a very significant and, you know, meaningful way for us to immediately address what we are seeing in Manitoba, please don't hesitate to share it.

And I'm always met with the same response, which is, in whatever jurisdiction you are in, these are complex matters where governments need to be at the table and governments need to be meaningfully engaged and our government is doing that work.

To the member's question about investments, there are a lot of investments we're making. I mean, I could indicate that we reserved, in the 2018-19 budget, \$20 million because of the fact that we signed that addictions and mental health bilat-agreement with the federal government.

And it was exactly the holding out that Manitoba did for a fairer and better negotiated settlement that we were able to do things like our flexible withdrawal management beds. Because the federal government said over and over that they saw in the larger centres like Vancouver and Toronto and Montreal a focus on

opioids, and we had continued to insist with the federal government that they had to acknowledge that opioid investment monies had to be re-profiled to accommodate what we were seeing on the Prairies.

And I'm happy to say that because of our advocacy, we got that admission from the federal government and we got that ability to re-profile those investments in a way that made sense for Manitoba.

A million dollars was the initial amount that we gave to addressing mental health services in community for children and youth through our Bell Let's Talk investment with the Strongest Families Institute.

If we had more time, and I'd invite the member to ask more questions about this, I could talk about what we've learned about the necessity to intervene early. We know that in mental health and addictions, waitlists are the bane of people's existence. And while we wait, conditions continue to become more severe. A mental health indication becomes more galvanized.

And in this way, with these investments, we're reaching hundreds of families—700 families in the first year alone—in a telephone and video-based format where they are connected to professionals where they can intervene early. This has been very effective across Canada. We're very happy to be bringing this investment here to help mental health services for children and youth.

Seven million dollars was the amount of money we invested toward the 75-bed mental health unit at Victoria hospital, for the consolidation, for the renovation, for bringing all those professionals, all those allied health, all those nurse workers under one roof to offer those services, not across the system, but in one co-ordinated way. And what a success story that has been, and I would invite the member to ask more questions about how that's working.

But look, there's so much more. A million dollars we invested to just increase the number of beds at AFM from 24 to 36, and yet in the campaign we promised another 12 beds because we know the VIRGO report says that, especially when it comes to women's access to mental health and addictions capacity, it was lacking. We're making investments there.

I know my time will run out before I'm allowed to go on, but if the member wants to ask for more, I'll ask her to write down this number: \$1.237 million for the expansion of our Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine throughout the province. Much, much more

to talk about, in terms of the meaningful investments our government is making in the area of mental health and addictions.

Mrs. Smith: So the RAAM clinics are only open certain hours of the day, certain days of the week. They weren't designed to work with people who are dealing with methamphetamine addictions.

So can the minister tell us how many actual people that have visited these RAAM clinics have been referred to a treatment centre such as a bed he's talking about, 24 to 36 they've increased at AFM.

He talked about, you know, creating this 20 to 30 patient bed place that who knows when that's going to be made, but can he tell us how many people from that RAAM clinic, any of those RAAM clinics, have been sent to treatment for methamphetamine use?

*(17:10)

Mr. Friesen: I want to correct the record for the member because she is incorrect when she asserts that somehow the Rapid Access for Addictions Medicine model isn't appropriate for methamphetamine addiction.

I will inform her that in the first year of operation of the RAAM clinic services, more than 1,400 people have registered for services. Of those registrants, 25 per cent of them presented with a meth addiction or a meth substance use. I can tell her that since opening the first RAAM clinic, an average of 220 people return per month for follow-up service. I can attest anecdotally, because I heard it from a service worker in Thompson, that on one occasion a woman with a methamphetamine addiction presented at RAAM and the same day was checked into a withdrawal management services placement, the same day.

What is the purpose of the RAAM model? The RAAM model is built to coalesce the mental health and addictions and health services around the individual rather than making the individual hunt out those services in a highly complex system. I have had people working in the system tell me that if services are on two sides of the street, it is with some risk they will point across the street, because a lot can happen when you're trying to navigate those services, even from one side of the street to the next, to no fault of that individual. That is why this model works.

So while I can appreciate that from her party's perspective she has to be seen to be somewhat

disapproving of the investment, I can say to all members of this House that this model is working.

So why is it starting smaller and working up? We borrowed this model from the same idea in Ontario where it was seen to be tremendously effective. And we said immediately that on seeing the success here, it would be necessary to contemplate the expansion of the model. And that is why our government, just weeks ago in the provincial election, committed to expand the Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine model by creating a brand new clinic for southern region, as I stated, the only remaining health region in Manitoba without a Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinic, but in addition to that, to expanding the hours of operation in the WRHA and expanding the resources for these clinics across the province.

Now, the work that is done at the RAAM clinics—and yes, I have visited them and I've spoken to the professionals who practise out of here—it's a complex assortment, an array of services that we bring to bear at these centres. And that means the work must be done to solicit from doctors in our system that willingness to work in the area of addictions medicine. The work must be done to find nurse practitioners and public health nurses and counsellors. In the Brandon model, they even use people who have specialization in things like accounting to help individuals to be able to do things as practical as pay bills along the way while they're seeking treatment. And for every one of these clinics, the array of services could look slightly different, but it's for them to make those—the determinations about what will be best.

So we're committed to RAAM. We brought RAAM where there was no provision of service of its kind here in Manitoba before. We're proud of its success. We're building on those early successes, and we're enhancing the model by starting a new RAAM clinic for Southern Health, by expanding the hours of operation in the WHRA and by expanding the resources throughout the province.

Mrs. Smith: So, the minister said there was 1,400 people refer-registered. Twenty-five per cent of those came in with a meth addiction. That would mean 350 people.

How many of those 350 people were actually referred to long-term treatment beds in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Friesen: So I want to clarify for the member that yes, when people are presenting at RAAM clinic and those services, the first year of data is showing that

25 per cent of those registrants are registering with meth. Now that's not to say that those individuals may not also have other disorders. Alcohol use, could be opiate use. It could be other drug—as a drug of choice.

But also I want to clarify for the member, and while I'm not an addictions specialist, I know from the reports that I've read and I know from speaking to people within the system that the goal of presenting is not always in facility treatment. Now I don't make those determinations, but system experts do. And for some, the goal will be to place them in a facility where they can receive treatment. For others, there is in-community supports, and in-community treatment. So it should not be assumed that the goal of every presentation at a RAAM clinic is somehow that they will be placed into a facility for treatment.

However, I would follow up with that statement by saying the following: We inherited government in 2016, and at that time, the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba had 12 beds for women in Winnipeg, and we doubled that to 24, and have committed now to quickly move to increase that again to 36. So the answer to the member's question about how soon people could get to treatment—far faster under a PC government than under a former NDP government. We have tripled the capacity for women's treatment beds in Winnipeg and in this province. Why? Because the VIRGO report said it was sadly lacking after years of neglect.

We also added four more beds at Behavioural Health Foundation. And only recently myself and other colleagues visited that St. Norbert location to see the tremendous facility, the tremendous resources that they have there for people with addictions.

So increases are meaning that these investments will support up to 176 women requiring treatment per year, and that is simply in the area of women's treatment beds. Not talking about the overall expansion in capacity that is taking place.

Do we need more capacity? Absolutely. Are we moving to provide it as a government? Absolutely.

* (17:20)

Mrs. Smith: So the minister talked about 28 days not being long enough for people who are dealing with methamphetamine 'addiction', but then he just cited he's increased beds at Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, which is a 28 day treatment centre. So he's increased it from 12 to 24 to 36.

But what about the women and, you know, men and children who are dealing with methamphetamine addictions here today in Manitoba. Where are they supposed to go? What plan does this minister have and this government have to address these numbers?

Main Street Project has cited over 25,000 Manitobans are dealing with methamphetamine 'addiction' here in our province today. We see tent camps going up where people are homeless—they have nowhere to live. You see syphilis cases increasing—congenital syphilis, which affects children, babies. Babies are being born with this. This province has no plan to address these high numbers. They talk about Main Street Project not having the capacity or framework to deal with people who are on methamphetamine.

In fact, if he's actually gone and he's visited Main Street Project and he's spoken to the executive director there and he's spoken to Tahl, she would tell him that they have had a plan on that minister's desk for over a year and the government's desk for over a year. So the Premier (Mr. Pallister)—I don't know if he's shared it with the minister or not or the past minister passed it onto this minister—but clearly there's a communication breakdown. And this province, this government needs to figure out what they're going to do to address these high numbers.

You see crime rates in Manitoba rising. How many more people are going to have to lose their life because of people who are dealing with meth and this government's inaction?

So I'm going to ask the minister again—and he failed again to even give a straight answer of how many refer—were referred from these RAAM access clinics. He said there were 350 people who presented with meth addictions at these clinics, but he wouldn't tell us that even one of those people were referred to long-term treatment. Are these clinics even, you know, referring people to long-term beds? Is there even long-term beds in this province? I haven't heard of a long-term bed in this province that this government has funded, and this government's clearly said—this minister has said—28 days is not long enough to treat a person who is dealing with meth addiction.

So, again, I'm going to ask this minister, what is his plan, what is his government's plan to address the meth crisis that is going on here in Manitoba—with concrete actions, in terms of long-term beds, making sure that people that are working at these RAAM clinics are—they have the capacity to deal with people who are coming in with, you know, these addictions—

that they actually have somewhere to send them. Because simply telling them to come back tomorrow for a med to help them for one day is not long-term treatment.

And like I said, over 25,000 Manitobans are struggling. And you cite there is no capacity or framework for Manitoba. There is. Main Street Project has it.

They—also, Dr. Peachey, in his report, talked about a safe consumption site. Did this minister, you know, even have the inkling to maybe even do a study; to maybe go to Calgary to look at their safe injection or safe consumption site and to see how successful other provinces have been?

Our own Bear Clan, James Favel, just came back from Vancouver. He actually went to go visit safe consumption sites to see because he knows from first-hand experience—and the minister says, oh, I've gone and walked with Bear Clan. That's great all and dandy but you know what? I live in the North End. I live amongst all of that that's going on—that chaos. You drive through it. Come visit and actually see and talk to people who are dealing with it.

So what is the government's plan to address these high numbers of methamphetamine addiction in Manitoba?

Mr. Friesen: Well, I'll start and I'll endeavour to answer questions, but there were many, many areas of potential exploration, so I have every confidence that we'll be here for a number of days. And so these all form good areas of further exploration for discussion.

A few clarifications first: it is not me, per se, who is indicating that 28 days as a conventional model is insufficient for the purposes of dealing with meth; those are addiction specialists who are saying that 28 days as a conventional model really largely configured on the needs of insurance industries years and years ago, that this is what we'll pay for, 28 days.

And we've kind of reverse-engineered an entire industry on the basis of insurance policy requirements. So that obviously has to be revisited. Some of that work is going on now.

The need to increase that length of stay is because the effects of methamphetamines, as others and professionals related to me, is so lasting and durable on that system that in many cases, the psychotic state has not even stopped after 28 days in entirety. It's a tremendously huge challenge to deal with.

So we are responding to that with flexible withdrawal-management services. I can assure that member that those services have come online in Winnipeg and in Brandon and are continuing to scale up. I went out in the hall in February, expressed my dissatisfaction that the process had taken longer, but it is complex work that is building something that was never available in Manitoba. We redoubled our efforts. We brought it online.

The member talks about where is the capacity for youth. It is important to be investing in this area of youth. I can indicate to that member that we have a good news story to report that the Compass centre, which is at Southport in Portage la Prairie, has finally filled its latent capacity this summer.

For the first time, all 13 beds are filled. The VIRGO report reflected on the fact that for years this Compass capacity for complex needs in addictions and mental health for youth was going without having the proper staffing; beds left unused, the vast majority of the capacity was underused. And finally, we have that facility using its full complement of staff to fill those beds. That's a good news story.

Safe injection site—it's interesting to me that the member says to me, where is this comprehensive plan for dealing with mental health and addictions? And I just shared with her a comprehensive continuum, an array of services: acute medical sobering unit, safe spaces, the increase of flexible length withdrawal-management beds, the increase of women's conventional bed capacity at AFM, the increase of services at behavioural health, the expansion of the RAAM model across the province, the increase of appropriate housing units for people with supports and accountability. All these indicate an arc of services that we're bringing.

* (17:30)

What has the NDP said success looks like? A safe injection site. And yet even the chief of police for Winnipeg has said, don't bring a safe injection site to Winnipeg.

As a matter of fact, he is not the only chief of police saying don't bring a safe injection site. I understand that in Calgary and Lethbridge, the instance of violence and violent crime went up 400 per cent within a 200-metre radius and it has become a hotspot for police such that they do not feel that anyone is safe near those centres, including the intended targets.

And where is the NDP on other ideas? Nowhere. It is the only idea that they've thought at all about doing. There is no plan. There is no reflection on VIRGO because it is an indictment of their 17 years in government. There is no articulation of a suite of services that would improve capacity or outcomes. We've brought that. And it is Manitobans who will benefit.

Mrs. Smith: So let me just clarify that it's not a safe injection site, it's a safe consumption site. So it's a place—I visited the safe consumption site in Calgary last summer. The member from St. Johns and I flew out there and we wanted to really look at what kind of long-term services do they have out there. Where are their service providers? The member talked about, you know, there being services, but they're in the south end. In Calgary, they're in a bunch of different places within Calgary. So they're not, you know, kind of centralized in one space. They're all over.

And when we visited the site, the site was amazing. It had nurses there. It had mental health experts. It had doctors there. And it had people that were willing to go into treatment on the day that they came in. They said, you know what, today's the day that I'm going to stop using.

And I spoke to two people who were visiting the safe consumption site and gave praise to this site for changing their life, for saving their life, because they were able to go there and say, you know what, today is the day I don't want to use anymore. You know, I'm done endless—I stopped using, you know, I'm going to be dead. And what that safe consumption site was able to do, to get that person, both those persons into a long-term treatment centre—not a 28-day bed, but a six-month long treatment facility that also worked on transitioning these two people into housing. So it wasn't just, oh, you go into treatment, you know, you get your treatment and then you're gone, but you actually go live in this apartment with five other people and then you have, like, a house person that kind of takes care of whatever it is you need, whether you're struggling, you know, today.

Because addiction isn't something that, you know, is gone tomorrow. It's a lifelong, you know, struggle for people. You know, you decide one day, I'm going to stop using, but the next day you may decide, you know, I'm really contemplating, you know, picking up that needle and putting that meth in—back into my arm. And you need someone there to help you, to walk you through, to support you.

And that's exactly what this safe consumption site does. They walk you through what are the resources out there, what are the supports, you know, what can potentially happen. They even have their clinic inside this building, so every service you could think of is in this building. It's almost like a one-stop shop. They have their urgent-care centre, so if I need to go and see, you know, a doctor immediately, it's there.

So, you know, I think about what has happened in Manitoba in the last year since I visited that site and—to address, you know, what's happening here in Manitoba, because I see so many people, you know, being murdered. We've had quite a few in the North End with people who were on methamphetamine. You know, I think of, you know, so many young people who are losing their lives to this drug.

And what is our government's response to it is, you know, really nothing. You know, I don't see a change, I don't see people having hope. I don't see, you know, someone going to a treatment centre and saying, oh, after 28 days maybe I'll stop using meth.

If you understand meth, meth takes away the serotonin in your brain, which gives you hope, which helps you to feel good. And when you do meth, that depletes that serotonin. And it takes six months for that serotonin to come back, for you to start feeling hope, for you to start feeling good about yourself and to feel like you can really kick this and really change, you know, your direction in life.

So, again, I'm going to ask the minister—and, you know, 25,000 Manitobans—and this is a number from last session when I went to visit Main Street Project, that I was given. And Main Street Project actually drives to Brandon to pick people up to come here to go to get treatment, 28-day treatment, mind you.

So what is the minister going to do to address the methamphetamine crisis in Manitoba in a long-term, you know, sustainable way that is really going to impact, you know, the safety and the lives of Manitobans here in our province?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member's time is up.

Mr. Friesen: Yes, I thank the member for the question. And she and I can certainly agree on the fact that meth is a horrific drug. It doesn't matter if you're talking to police or public health nurses or addictions specialists, psychologists, doctors who specialize in the area of mental health and addictions, it's a horrific drug.

And I've actually had individuals in the police service say they long to go back to the days of crack. And it seems like such an obscene statement. I say, well why would you say that? They said, because that's how horrific meth is in our system for everyone who deals with it. And I think about even in terms of our first responders, I think about it in terms of our EMS staff that we just recently hosted in the province of Manitoba just a week ago the Macy Conference. And I want to signal to the paramedics and the Manitoba—the Paramedic Association of Manitoba that hosted this national conference that maybe some Manitobans don't know just went on right here. I had a chance to address that group and talk about the very significant place that paramedicine is playing in the transformation of our health-care system here in Manitoba. And even these individuals talked about what that means for their members to be responding to someone who is exhibiting psychosis because of the effect of methamphetamines.

And I think that the stories that professionals tell are just mind-boggling. So I know the member and I agree on the fact that more is necessary to do.

She asked where the comprehensive strategy is to address meth, and I gave it to her. As we unveiled it to Manitobans in early August we said, if elected, we will execute on this. We will implement this suite of investments that is based on research, that is based on the experience of other jurisdictions, that is based on the evidence and that is also based on the uniqueness of Manitoba, because we are unique and we know we cannot just copy-paste what we see entirely in other jurisdictions.

But it would be naïve for us not to also pay attention to the challenges that other jurisdictions have experienced. And I think about Calgary's safe consumption site, a meth consumption site that shows a 276 per cent increase in drug-related calls to police in a 250-metre buffer zone around the consumption site, a 29 per cent rise in the overall number of calls for police compared to the previous three years average, violence in the area up 50 per cent, vehicle crime up 63 per cent, break and enters up 60 per cent, and total number of calls to police up 36 per cent in one year compared to the year previous.

We spoke before about that federal committee that visited Winnipeg in early April this year. It was the federal health standing committee, an all-party committee that came to study injection sites. Marion Willis was quoted, the founder of Morberg House, as saying, right now, there is a big focus on the opiate

crisis. We don't meet those criteria, but there is no safe way to use meth. And that is why Willis said she would not support a safe injection site for meth. Instead, she talked about investments in things like housing and acute medical sobering that they referred to as drug stabilization unit.

* (17:40)

And Manitoba now has a government that is focused exactly on this. It is significant and it will involve changes to even things as basic as The Intoxicated Persons Detention Act. We will have to change it if it's meaning that we can additionally detain someone for a longer time to help them stabilize to the point where someone can speak to them about perhaps taking that next step.

So there are many things going on in the system. I wish I could share a list of all the ways in which we are now having our AFM workers work directly in nine agencies across Winnipeg to do exactly the kind of interventions and activities that the member spoke of. Those things are going on, I assure her, and we're finding ways to place our workers where the people are, and there is more success to come as we continue to put our plan into place.

Mrs. Smith: So the member spoke about crime rate. In Manitoba, the crime rate has skyrocketed. The chief of police has asked for more support for their policing unit. There's been more deaths in Manitoba than there was in the previous five years, and this is attributed directly to meth use. People on meth are killing other people, and I don't think the minister fully understands, you know, the model of a safe consumption site.

A safe consumption site is somewhere for someone to go to consume their drugs, you know, in a safe way, so they're not dying, but it's not only for that use. It's to help people get connected to the services that they need. You know, today might not be the day that I'm going to decide to stop using drugs, but tomorrow might be. And those places need to be accessible to Manitobans so that they're not discarding their needles in playgrounds.

The Bear Clan as you've said, you've walked with them. I'm sure you watched them safely pick up needles from the streets of Manitoba. That is not their job. If there was a safe consumption site, that would limit the amount of needles that you would find in places where children are playing, where Manitobans are walking, where they have the potential of, you

know, getting pricked by a needle that could be—you know, have syphilis or have HIV.

This is about prevention. This is about helping people to get the supports and help that they need, but it's also about giving them hope, that they have someone that actually believes in them. Because when I visited the safe consumption site, these workers knew these people by name. They had relationships with them.

It wasn't about someone coming in and taking the safe needle and going into the corner and using this needle. It was about giving them a safe, non-judgmental space that was meant to help them see that someone cared about them, that someone cared enough about them to give them a space to be able to use in a safe way but also to let them know that this isn't the only way.

You know, I realize you're hurting. You know, you've probably had some trauma in your life, because we know trauma is an underlying issue of people using meth and, you know, other substances. And unless we start to address those root causes and really start to delve in with counselling services, which were also available there. So if I went in, I could easily, you know, be slotted in to go and speak to someone. I didn't have to get put on a list to wait. There were beds that were long-term beds that were available specifically for clients that were coming to these safe consumption sites, so they were streamlined into these long-term beds, long-term treatment.

So it's not only about, you know, the dollars. It's not only about, you know, thinking about what's best for people. What do people need? Well I'd say here in Manitoba, from talking to people, from, you know, visiting hospitals, that people need access to not only safe consumption sites, but they need access to long-term treatment centres, and that's something that this government isn't doing.

They're not talking about long-term facilities. They're not talking about transitional housing for people who are, you know, dealing with coming out of meth addictions. They're not talking about supporting and training more workers to work with people who are dealing with meth. Instead, you know, the minister's talking about incarcerating people for longer periods of time until they can get off meth—meth and then maybe make a decision that they'll get put into a treatment centre. We can't police our way out of people using meth. We have to look at the root causes.

So, again, I'm going to give the minister an opportunity, and I hope he's really thinking about, you know, some of what I'm talking about because I'm speaking from experience, from talking to people, from actually seeing this in my community and from actually seeing people in my own life struggle with this.

So, again, I'm going to ask the minister, you know, besides what he's talked about, in the next 100 days, what is his government committed to doing to address the methamphetamine crisis here in Manitoba?

Mr. Friesen: I assure that member that mental health and addictions don't respect in any way boundaries that we can draw around neighbourhoods or urban-rural divides. I assure her that these issues affect all of us, and all of us have lived experiences in these things.

And I know she feels strongly about these things, and we do, too. There's a lot that just two years ago I wasn't thinking about in terms of mental health and addictions, and now I carry the weight of this role, and I'm happy to do it for my government. And we believe we're making good and meaningful investments that will help. We've never pretended to have all the answers.

We continue to engage with other jurisdictions. We ask other ministers responsible for mental health and addictions. I had a chance to visit in the US with a few US urban centres, major centres, to talk about what they're doing that we could adopt here in Canada, to talk about what success looks like, to talk about how to measure and hold accountable service delivery agencies for the services they're providing, and that was easy. But it's all worthwhile and it's all very necessary to do now.

So I did indicate to her a number of times a very significant suite of services that we will implement, and implement shortly, and I'll ask all Manitobans to be patient for just a very little while longer before we publicly announce the rollout of this suite of investments that we will make.

I want to remind that member. She asked before about youth counsellors or what was out there for youth. And I can tell her that since June of this year we have moved to place youth counsellors from Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, where they can be accessible to clients now. She talked about the burden of wait times; they're having to wait for services, and I agree with her that we should make every effort to diminish wait times.

So in Winnipeg that means that we're placing counsellors now. Instead of at an AFM building where clients need to go to, we're placing them at places like the Access Fort Garry; we're placing them at Aikins Street Community Health Centre; we're placing them at the Centre de santé Saint-Boniface; we're placing at Eagle Urban Transition, at Macdonald Youth Services, at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, at New Directions, at StreetReach program. We're placing those workers where they can reach those youth clients better, and that, we believe, will have effect.

She says there's a lot that I don't understand about safe injection sites. I'm sure that there's a lot that I don't understand about meth injection sites, but I do know this: no one in North America has opened a site for the injection of methamphetamines. I know that when the opiates injection site was opened in Vancouver, it was done with this understanding that there was a very unique community there and that naloxone could be administered to keep people from dying. That member knows that there is no naloxone kit for methamphetamines; there is no equivalent for methamphetamines. I can tell her that we did undertake in April of this year to move naltrexone and acamprosate from part 3 exceptional drug status to a part 1 open benefit in Manitoba. And that means that a physician prescribing these drugs for a patient no longer has to go through that complicated series of steps to get special permission from the Manitoba Pharmacare program. Instead, patients can immediately take that prescription and have those costs covered.

* (17:50)

Why did we do that? It was the right thing to do. VIRGO recommended those steps, and it has made it easier for people misusing substances to access treatment.

So I want to tell the member that while she and I ideologically may not be aligned on this issue, I think we must acknowledge that lessons are being learned about the complications and dangers, the real dangers to people that come with a meth injection site.

And I believe that the best evidence that we have approval for our plan is that Manitobans just elected 36 members of this government. They've put their faith and their confidence in the plan that we articulated in August, and we plan to put that plan into effect to help the greatest number of Manitobans who require those services.

Mrs. Smith: So I've asked twice now what the government's commitment is to address methamphetamine addiction in the first 100 days, and, you know, again, the minister talks around it but doesn't give any specifics.

So I don't sense any commitment to addressing, you know, the high numbers of methamphetamine addiction here in Manitoba from this government, you know, which is unfortunate because, you know, this minister said he's happy to do it for his government, to serve as the Health Minister, but he actually is serving as Health Minister for Manitobans.

So I just want to remind him of that. He's not doing it for his government. He's actually doing it for Manitobans. And it is—his job is to, you know, provide the services to Manitobans that they need, and I would even go further to say that, you know, this minister is failing to provide the services to Manitobans, in terms of, you know, getting methamphetamine treatment in this province.

He references 28-day addiction, and he talked also about, you know, getting the expert's opinion and that that came from the expert opinion that, you know, it's longer than 28 days. And I agree that it takes longer than 28 days for someone who is dealing with methamphetamine to get the treatment that they need. But this government is not committing to, you know, spending any dollars to address long-term treatment for people who are dealing with methamphetamine addiction, which is only, you know, raising the crime rate in Manitoba.

People have lost their lives. Children—and he spoke about youth, and you know, he's talking putting people in places where they're needed and that's great, but there's also children right now that are addicted to meth, as young as 12 years old, that have no plan in place to help address what they're dealing with, and to help them get the supports that they need.

And, you know, it really disheartens me that, you know, I work in a place where, you know, this isn't a priority to help kids, to help children, to help families, to help parents. Parents who are struggling to support their children that have no supports of their own, that, you know—they're watching their children be sexually exploited to feed their drug addiction.

And you know, there's nowhere for these kids to go. There's, you know, no services for them, and it's daunting, actually, to—I can see, you know, to be someone who would be tasked with this, but you

know, it is our job as legislators to be in this place, to be providing the supports and needs of Manitobans.

And this certainly is a huge area, and I'm sure the minister would agree that it just continues to grow, and unless we start to work around prevention and really providing long-term services to people that are dealing with meth addiction, that it's only going to continue to grow and more people are going to continue to get addicted to it and we're going to see a rise in more crime, you know, more blood-borne illnesses.

And our mayor here in Manitoba has, you know, even asked and pleaded with this government to open a safe consumption site, to do something more around long-term treatment to really address this and not just put a Band-Aid on it because a Band-Aid simply is, you know, not going to work.

And, you know, so I'm just—yes, I'm a little frustrated, I guess, to say the least, in terms of this government's plan to address this when we see, you know, children being born with, you know, acute congenital syphilis. You know, babies—12-year-olds on the street, you know, having to sell themselves to pay for their addiction. And it's—and this government's plan to address that isn't there.

So I want the minister to really think about this and really start—think about how he's going to address this. And you have 100 days. You had a 100-day plan. You could have rolled something out in there.

So the minister can tell me, again, how is he going to address it.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the conversation we've been able to have. I continue to outline the very robust and significant measures based on evidence, based on expertise, based on the experience of other jurisdictions that we will implement and have already implemented: both the series of significant investments and system improvements that we've been able to talk about this afternoon.

And the member doesn't dispute any of that. She just continues to reiterate that something—somehow nothing's been done, when that's so far from the truth.

I want to just, for the end of today, provide the following numbers. We were able to pull numbers today for an earlier question that the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) had asked about September numbers and vacancy rates.

Overall, this is comprehensive vacancy rates in the WRHA: 14.1 per cent; Grace, 16.4 per cent; HSC—oh, this is ERs, ERs now—Grace ER, 16.4 per cent; HSC ER, 9 per cent; St. Boniface general hospital ER, 25 per cent; Victoria ER, 15.4 per cent. The most recent data for nurse overtime, July 2019, indicating 35,800 hours.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide the data surrounding nurse overtime, as well—again, please? I missed the first part there. Thank you.

Mr. Friesen: The nurse overtime data, most recently July 2019: 35,800 hours.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister please just repeat the St. Boniface stats again, please, for overtime? *[interjection]* For vacancy rates, sorry.

Mr. Friesen: The St. Boniface general hospital ER current vacancy rate: 25.8 per cent.

MLA Asagwara: Does the minister have a plan to deal with that 25.8 per cent vacancy rate at St. Boniface?

Mr. Friesen: Yes.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide a bit more detail in regards to your plan to deal with the vacancy rate please?

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 6 p.m., the committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Speaker: The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, September 30, 2019

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