

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-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, Hon.	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, Hon.	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	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
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Woleseley	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

Tuesday, June 1, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill 238—The Apprenticeship and Certification
Amendment Act
(Apprenticeship Supervision)**

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I move, seconded by the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey), that The Apprenticeship and Certification Amendment Act (Apprenticeship Supervision); Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'apprentissage et la reconnaissance professionnelle (supervision des apprentis), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Kinew: Well, I'm very happy to rise today to introduce this important bill, Bill 238. Currently, the number of apprentices that a journey person can supervise is set by regulation. Unfortunately, the government changed those regulations to make it less safe for apprentices on the workplace.

This bill will remedy that situation by making it law and return the ratio from two to one to one to one. This will ensure that apprentices are safe on the job during their training period at all times, but hopefully during this economic recovery as well.

I look forward to debate on Bill 238 to help keep Manitoba tradespeople safe.

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

Now we'll go on to committee reports? Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We have a statement from the honourable Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations. The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance of rule 26(2).

Would the honourable Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations please continue with your statement.

MMIWG2S National Inquiry Final Report

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): This Thursday marks two years since the release of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls on June 3rd, 2019. I wish to honour the memory of women and girls, 2SLGBTQQIA+ people who have been lost, and to acknowledge the pain felt by their families and their communities.

I also want to acknowledge that June is Indigenous history month. This is an opportunity for all of us to listen to the stories of Indigenous Manitobans, to learn about their accomplishments and their contributions to Canada and to learn about the challenges and tragedies they faced from residential schools to the current crisis, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

The MMIWG final report listed 231 calls for justice which were directed to governments, to businesses and to all Canadians. It will take action from all of us to better protect Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ persons and to advance reconciliation in Manitoba and Canada.

In Manitoba, we're working closely with First Nation, Métis and the Inuit partners to develop and implement improved protections for Manitoba's Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

In February 2020, Manitoba established a new Gender-Based Violence Committee of Cabinet. This Cabinet committee takes a whole-of-government approach to co-ordinate policies, legislation and initiatives aimed at addressing intimate partner and sexual violence.

We can see the results of this work in Budget 2021, which invested in protecting Manitobans and advancing reconciliation. I was proud to work with the Minister of Justice (Mr. Friesen) and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women (Mrs. Cox) to invest over \$800,000 in new supports for victims and the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

This is one example of how government's departments working together to address issues raised in the MMIWG report and an example of the kind of

co-ordination that was previously missing from government. This is the path we must continue on and we will continue on to keep making progress on protecting our 'pellow' Manitobans.

We recognize that the calls for justice call for meaningful engagement. The voices of survivors and families must be heard. We will work together with Indigenous-led organizations to develop and implement solutions that will save lives.

We look forward to the establishment of regular meetings with federal, provincial and territorial partners that specifically address issues. This kind of intergovernment co-operation is long overdue. By combining our efforts and focusing our actions, we will build safer communities for all Indigenous women and girls, men and boys and two-spirit people.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Thursday marks two years since the presentation of the final report, Reclaiming Power and Place, from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and LGBTTQ2S peoples.

It's important to acknowledge that the national inquiry's final report is the culmination of over 50 years of work and struggle by MMIWG2S families and by Indigenous women across our territories. The final report comes from the courage, the trauma, the tears, the pain of MMIWG2S families and for the fight for their loved ones, to have their loved ones recognized and honoured and to have justice for their loved ones.

The existence of the national inquiry's final report is because of MMIWG2S and Indigenous women. The final report is a living testament to the incredible strength and perseverance of MMIWG2S families and Indigenous women.

The final report includes 231 calls for justice, which is essentially and basically a road map all laid out for governments, settlers, social service agencies, NGOs, policing institutions, health-care providers, educators and Indigenous communities to realize on behalf of Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit. It's all there.

Ma Mawi, MKO, the MMIWG Manitoba coalition and others are also working with the development on this national plan with our community members, and this is also being led by community women like Diane Redsky, Sandra DeLaronde, Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, just to name a few.

Indigenous families and communities across our territories expect a national plan that fully commits to the calls for justice as well as meaningful, tangible supports for MMIWG2S families.

It is critical to recognize, as signatories to the national inquiry, it is incumbent on Manitoba to act in a significant, tangible and urgent way in realizing the 231 calls to justice, which includes how this current PC government plans on addressing the finding of genocide.

Will the PC government centre the voices and expertise of MMIWG2S families and survivors in designing the way forward based on the pathways for change? What concrete steps is the PC government taking to change policies and procedures to ensure safe spaces for MMIWG2S families, Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit?

As I have said many times in this House, we as Indigenous women our are own liberators and, as such, any plans this PC government has is nothing for us without us.

When released, the MMIWG Manitoba coalition will ensure families and community members in our territory are provided with culturally safe and trauma-informed opportunities to connect with one another.

The coalition will host three events on June 3rd, and the coalition is calling on financial support from this PC government to increase public education and opportunities developed by and for the community through trauma-informed lens. Events will include a virtual sunrise ceremony, an education session, a review and a virtual press conference.

I know that in anticipation to Canada's release of their national plan on MMIWG families, we'll be anxious to hear what the national plan will include.

Please know that I and all of our colleagues—

* (13:40)

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

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to have the member continue? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Fontaine: Please know that as the national plan is rolled out and disseminated I, alongside our colleagues here at the NDP, stand with each and every one of MMIWG families across the territories.

Miigwech.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask for leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for River Heights have leave to reply to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the national report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls entitled Reclaiming Power and Place released two years ago revealed the tragic and unsettling details of what had long been suspected in relation to the many missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

I join others in acknowledging these tragedies and in dedicating myself and our Liberal team to ensuring that issues raised are followed through and that the recommendations in the report, which are directed at all governments, including our provincial government, are followed to the extent that they possibly can.

As chief commissioner Marion Buller said in the report, it is about beautiful Indigenous people and the systemic factors that led to their losses of dignity, humanity and, in too many cases, losses of life.

Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people in Canada have been the targets of violence for far too long. There are many voices in the final report. Indeed, more than 2,380 participated in the national inquiry and its truth-gathering process. The report itself insists on self-determined solutions distinctive to the needs of those most effective as rights-bearers and issues 231 calls for justice from all governments.

I look forward to the national plan. I also look forward to a provincial plan because many of the actions which are needed are, in fact, under provincial jurisdiction. The report deals with health and wellness, human security, justice, police services, attorneys, law societies, education, child welfare and many, many more, and many of these issues are dealt with at a provincial level, at least in part, and in many cases to a large extent.

We need a full provincial plan, and we hope that the minister will bring it forward. It is really important. This was probably one of the most extensive commissions that we have had nationally, and the ramifications at the provincial level are very large.

An Ontario study of gender diverse and two-spirited Indigenous people found that 73 per cent had

experienced some form of violence due to transphobia, with 43 per cent having experienced physical and/or sexual violence.

It is time to end this violence. It is time to implement all the 231 recommendations. It is time for a full provincial plan, as well as the national plan, which we are expecting shortly.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Our next ministerial statement is the honourable Minister of Conservation and Climate. The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Environment Officer Recognition Day

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am happy to announce today that the Manitoba government hereby declares June 1st, 2021 as environment officer recognition day in Manitoba to honour the work done every day by environment officers in the province. This proclamation comes in advance of celebrations that will begin for World Environment Day.

Environment officers are responsible for the delivery of provincial, environmental and public health protection programs across Manitoba. They ensure Manitobans have safe drinking water, protect Manitoba's surface water by ensuring wastewater is treated and disposed of properly and that there is compliance with a variety of other laws ranging from livestock manure management to landfills and litter. They do this through issuing licences and permits, conducting inspections, monitoring for compliance to the laws and taking enforcement action when needed.

Additionally, and on top of their multitude of responsibility, they continue to assist with COVID-19 public health order enforcement across the province. Enforcing legislation that is often complicated is not an easy job. Their professionalism and devotion to their jobs is always present, even in difficult times.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, environment officers have not yet received recognition for the dedication and vital service they provide to Manitobans, and they deserve our thanks. To all the environment officers currently serving and who have served in the past, we acknowledge and appreciate your commitment and dedication to protecting Manitoba's environment and human health.

As the Minister of Conservation and Climate, I will be providing individual letters of thanks to our environment officers, to commemorate the very first environment officer recognition day in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I am very happy to put a few words on the record today in support of the important work done by Manitoba's environment officers. Environment officers work in all areas of our province from north to south and east to west. There are multiple different classifications of environment officers, each performing their own distinct duties.

Environment officers perform a wide variety of tasks. More junior EOs work under the direction of senior environment officers; they conduct or assist with routine inspections, enforcement or monitoring projects. This designation can also be used for training and development purposes.

Many EOs are involved in the implementation and delivery of environment or public health programs. They're responsible for conducting investigations and inspections, enforcement of the acts and regulations, incident response, carrying out monitoring, licensing and assessment activities, and providing technical advice. They may also conduct monitoring of research activities in support of environmental quality studies or the development of guidelines and standards.

Some senior EOs work at a supervisory level and are responsible for the planning, organizing, implementing and reporting on the programs for an assigned district, and in addition to performing all functions of the full working-level financial management and the supervision of other EOs is also part of the role.

Some officers work in land use, waste management and energy. Others work with drinking water standards and industrial pollution enforcement. Officers do very important work to assess and license proposals under The Environment Act, such as in forestry, transportation, mining, recreation and other sectors.

Being an environment officer is an excellent career choice for young Manitobans who may be interested in helping enforce environmental standards. So today, on behalf of myself, of my colleagues, I would like to thank all of Manitoba's environment officers for their ongoing dedication to protecting our environment through inspections, monitoring and enforcement. We appreciate you and want to wish you

a good and safe summer as you continue your important work.

Thank you.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I ask for leave to respond to the ministerial statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for St. Boniface have leave to reply to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamont: It's always an honour to recognize members of Manitoba's civil service, at this time environment officers who work hard to ensure that Manitobans are following safe practices, whether it's to protect our water, land, species at risk and, indeed, health and safety.

Environment officers are often placed in risky situations. In St. Boniface, they are extremely important because of the large-scale manufacturing and industrial activity in the industrial park. Many of my constituents live close to these facilities and they've shared with me their concerns and experiences of metal flying hundreds of metres outside of some of these facilities posing a threat because these materials have come close to moving traffic, to workplaces and to homes.

I'm sure everyone is familiar with fires that have broken out in the St. Boniface Industrial Park over the years. The damage done in such an event is a—has a terrible impact on everyone because to respond properly it requires a significant crew response, and it's our duty to always make sure we're trying to prevent accidents like the Speedway International and fires that occurred in 2018.

And as members of the Legislature, we must use our voices to call out for the government to assist environment officers with proper resources and staffing allocations to allow them to do their jobs to the fullest extent possible. We do hope that the government will back up today's recognition with action and protect environment officers by passing recommendations made by the Manitoba Law Reform Commission six years ago, in 2015.

* (13:50)

Again, thank you to environment officers for serving Manitobans in potentially risky and dangerous situations. We've heard many times from members of this government that safety is the government's No. 1 priority. I urge all members to follow through on their words with the necessary action to ensure that all Manitobans who make it to work—who go to work

every day make it home safe at the end of the every day.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to the next ministerial statement. It's the honourable member—Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage. The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Pride Month

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I'm honoured and proud to recognize today as the start of Pride month.

Pride is part of our global movement for everyone to come together in solidarity, raise awareness and express support of diversity and 'individuality' in our 2SLGBTQ+ community in our province and beyond. Pride is a celebration of identity and a call for awareness and acceptance, as well as an acknowledgement of the accomplishments of our 2SLGBTQ+ individuals throughout our history.

In previous years, Pride celebrations would attract millions of participants across the globe to celebrate and support our 2SLGBTQ+ communities through parades, workshops, parties, picnics, lectures, concerts and much more. It's also a time to acknowledge the struggles the community has faced and advocate for equality worldwide.

And although we can't gather for Pride month as we hoped to this year, the celebration is as strong as ever. There are still many ways to participate in Pride this month, from learning the history of the movement to supporting an array of diverse voices, businesses and charities.

Winnipeg Pride week, this year, has been postponed, but will take place virtually from September 3rd to the 12th, 2021. Organizing events such as Pride takes a tremendous amount of planning and countless volunteer hours, and I'd like to congratulate Pride Winnipeg, their organizing committee, volunteers and sponsors for their ongoing work and dedication, especially during these challenging times.

I look forward to the day when we can all gather together in person to celebrate Pride right outside our beautiful Manitoba Legislature and join to walk proudly in the parade.

In the meantime, let's show our compassion and support for one another by staying apart, and remember that diversity is at the heart of Manitoba's strength. Love is love. Wishing everyone a very happy Pride month.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Mr. Deputy Speaker, every June we celebrate Pride month, not only here, but in countries across the world. Pride month is meant to celebrate and to acknowledge the 2SLGBTQIA+ community's historical and ongoing fight against discrimination in all of its forms.

Pride month's origins can be traced back to the Stonewall uprising in New York City in June of 1969, where black trans women, trans women of colour and queer people fought back against discriminatory police raids.

Here in Manitoba we've celebrated Pride for over 30 years. The first over two-spirit—first-ever two-spirit powwow was during the 30th anniversary of Pride in 2017, and the creation of the two-spirit name—30th anniversary of the creation of the two-spirit name was celebrated just last year.

Now, it's important to acknowledge that binary gender roles our society largely follows today didn't exist in many cultures before colonialism and imperialism.

For example, it's been well documented that over 150 precolonial Indigenous tribes in the Americas acknowledged third genders in their communities, and in precolonial West Africa, non-gender-conforming folks were highly regarded as spiritual leaders. Other examples include the bakla from the Philippines, hijra in South Asia and sipiniq in the Canadian Arctic.

We still have a long way to go before we can move away from the non-inclusive and harmful gender binary and heteronormativity that is so pervasive in our society. I mean, in the early days of Pride, some people attended with bags over their heads for fear of losing their jobs. And in this Chamber, there are members opposite who have actively worked against advancing the rights of 2SLGBTQIA Manitobans.

Now, as members of the two-spirit and LGBTQIA community, the member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor) and I are proud to be part of a team that works to advance the dignity and humanity of those who would otherwise be left behind by this government.

And this year, the annual Pride festival in Manitoba will occur virtually from September 3rd to 12th. And I encourage everyone to attend the events that you can and find ways to celebrate Pride month during this month.

I want to end by thanking all LGBTQIA2S peoples, to let them know that they are loved and respected and that each and every one of you absolutely belong.

And to all cisgender folks and those who would call themselves allies, I encourage you to find space to show support by observing, listening, educating, learning, unlearning and—

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

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for Tyndall Park have leave to reply to the ministerial statement? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Lamoureux: I'd like to start off by saying happy Pride.

Pride is very important to recognize here in Manitoba because it is a time where our two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary and more community celebrates the achievements and barriers that have been overcome and as a time to raise awareness of issues that still need to be addressed as we move forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our Province has helped the community with changes and awareness. However, there is still a lot more that needs to be done. For example, we know that acceptance of a person being trans or non-binary goes a lot further than just a gender marker on a piece of identification. We must work hard to educate all Manitobans to be accepting, understanding and inclusive of all 2SLGBTQ+ people in our province.

In addition to this, we must remain aware that different countries in the world have beliefs, laws and systems that discriminate against or can cause potential harm to the community, including arrests, death, stoning or an indifference to violence or other crimes by citizens or by authorities. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are people even in Canada that continue to feel unsafe.

We must be conscious of the need for 2SLGBTQ+ people here in Manitoba to know that

diversity and acceptance are welcome, and we all have a role to play in creating safety and support in our society so everyone can live free and openly.

In closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even though we cannot celebrate Pride in person this month, a virtual Pride is being planned from September 3rd to September 12th, with plans for events, performances and a virtual parade. I hope that everyone will join and celebrate Pride here in Manitoba.

Thank you.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

End of Session Acknowledgements

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs): As this most unusual spring session comes to an end, I want to recognize a few people.

And the first, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is you. Due to the unexpected absence of Madam Speaker, you have been thrust into the full-time job of keeping MLAs in line and keeping things moving in a positive direction in this Legislature.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me join my colleagues in saying that you have done a tremendous job. Even as we wish Madam Speaker a full recovery and look forward to welcoming her back in the fall, we thank you for your great work.

I'd also like to recognize a retiring member of the media gallery. This Friday will be the last day on the news beat for Larry Kusch, long-time Free Press reporter and legislative gallery member and president.

I am sure that there are many stories that Larry wrote that I may have rolled my eyes at. And I am sure, in the countless interviews that we did together, some of my answers made him roll his eyes too, but such is the nature of the relationship between media and politicians.

But I am grateful that through all these years we've—could always have a friendly exchange in the hallway to talk about our kids or talk about our summers. I know that this has been a tough year for Larry, but we wish him nothing but the best in the years and the days ahead. He is a true gentleman.

And finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank my House leader counterparts. There are always many difficult and divided matters before the Legislature, but behind the scenes negotiations happen to make this place work. And this session was especially tricky as the number of members was adjusted a few times based on the pandemic conditions and who could be

in the House, and it has been done by unanimous agreement.

* (14:00)

But in all these discussions, the member for St. Johns and the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) have always put public health first and political considerations second. It is a demonstration that there is still much to be said for our democracy and those who serve within it. And I thank them both.

Mr. Speaker, I wish everyone in the Assembly well during this summer, and I look forward to seeing all of you in the fall back here together.

Thank you.

Legislative Session—Premier's Record

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Deputy Speaker, let's review the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) greatest hits just this last sitting: advised it doesn't bother him at all to have teachers pay for supplies out of pocket; advanced the colonial project with Bill 56, infringing on Indigenous sovereignty; suppressed the rights of peaceful protestors with Bill 57; covered up \$5 billion in Hydro contracts while freezing workers' wages, forcing a strike; received amnesty on his Costa Rican taxes through an application-only program, then he said he didn't know anything about it; cut Children's disABILITY Services; cut Healthy Baby Prenatal Benefit, the healthy baby milk program and budgets for Parent Child Coalitions; renamed eight wildlife management areas, all after white men, disrespecting centuries of conservation work done by Indigenous peoples and women; increased the number of special permits for Churchill Wildlife Management Area to give extras to a Conservative donor and a former federal candidate; still no contract for nurses and health-care professionals; cut health-care funding below the rate of inflation for the fifth row—in a row—fifth year in a row; outsourced staffing for vaccine supersites; left ICUs dangerously understaffed during the third wave, with up to 15 unfilled nursing shifts at the Grace Hospital ICU and a 21 per cent vacancy rate for nurses across the 'pairie' mountain health region and left home care vacancies increase to up to 26 per cent; sent citizens to Ontario to access critical care; wanted to send teachers to North Dakota to get vaccines; blamed Biden, blamed Manitobans, blamed ICU patients.

Deputy Speaker, these lists aren't fun. There are real Manitobans dealing with the consequences of that man over there. I, for one, hope that this is the last time

I have to get up in the Chamber and do the Premier's greatest hits.

Miigwech.

Preservation of Historic Steam Locomotive

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): Today I want to speak about a weighty matter—a very weighty matter, indeed. In fact, it clocks in at 394,160 pounds. I'm speaking, of course, of the steam locomotive engine CN 2747, located on Plessis avenue just north of Transcona Boulevard.

This beautiful engine is part of the collection of the Transcona Museum. I like to joke with the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare) that while his constituency has a greater number of museum artifacts in it, Radisson constituency has the most by weight.

Now, the community of Transcona was built because of the railway shop, so the very first locomotive engine it ever built rightfully holds a special place in our community. This significant part of Transcona's history deserves to be preserved.

Thankfully, many volunteers and professionals, supported by donors and grants, including from our provincial government, have already made significant strides in making it bright, shiny and durable once again. Now government and community members are stepping up with efforts to build a \$493,000 enclosure over and around the engine to protect it from the elements, increase security and provide more opportunities for the public to see, interact and appreciate the engine.

The Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mrs. Cox) and myself have already helped kick off the campaign—the capital campaign with a \$15,000 contribution from the provincial government, and I'm hopeful that additional grants will flow from provincial, federal and municipal governments.

Government grants alone will not be enough. Businesses, individuals and community organizations will also need to get on board and make this plan a reality.

Now, before my dad passed away, few years back, he donated a painting of CN 2747 to the Transcona Museum, and the museum is using post-card prints of this painting to help raise funds. My parents and my own family, as well, have contributed to this project, and I encourage every other Manitoban to do the same.

Details about how to donate to the project are available at transconamuseum.mb.ca, so I encourage all Manitobans to get on board and to ensure this important reminder of Transcona's history remains visible and present in our community for generations to come.

Thank you.

Community Group Acknowledgements

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Mr. Deputy Speaker, throughout this pandemic we've seen the Premier (Mr. Pallister) put false statements on the record, misrepresent the facts in the media and do everything he can to distract from his failings as a premier. And during this health crisis of our lifetime, not a single member of the PC caucus has stood up for Manitobans and done what's needed to ensure that everyone gets through this time.

But do you know who has? The very Manitobans we're elected to represent and serve.

While the member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) doesn't think we should feed hungry children, the Mutual Aid Society, Food 4 All, CommUNITY.204 and Union Station businesses have provided hampers and healthy meals to thousands of community members in need.

While the Premier sows racist seeds of division and the Minister of Health brings forward anti-Indigenous legislation with Bill 56, the First Nations pandemic response team exemplify compassionate leadership during a collective time of need and communities lovingly share their vaccines.

While all three former, current and acting failed ministers of Health attack doctors, have no plan for nurses and gaslight front-line workers, our health-care heroes work double and triple shifts to keep Manitobans alive and provide care by the bedside.

And the Minister of Education (Mr. Cullen) wants to suppress democracy in schools and silence local voices with Bill 64. We 'teas'— we see teachers, staff, parents and students lining their lawns and apartment windows with NDP signs and organizing against him and his out-of-touch government.

I send care and thanks to all Union Station constituents and Manitoba residents. Know that although we rise from the House today, we're going to continue fighting just as hard for you to make sure that you have access to vaccines, supports for your businesses,

resources in health care, education and for your families and all of our communities.

Miigwech.

Société de la francophonie manitobaine— Prix Riel Recipients

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Je tiens à mentionner ceux qui ont gagné les Prix Riel 2020-2021. Depuis 1983, la Société de la francophonie manitobaine rend hommage à des francophones du Manitoba qui, de façon remarquable, ont contribué, surtout bénévolement, au développement de la collectivité, tout en suscitant chez les nôtres le goût de vivre en français.

La remise des prix virtuelle a eu lieu le jeudi 20 mai sur les comptes Facebook et YouTube de la SFM. Les gagnants sont : pour développement communautaire : Crystal Desrosiers. Crystal Desrosiers a fait preuve d'un dévouement exceptionnel en tant que bénévole pendant 20 ans au sein de l'Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba; pour le patrimoine : Doris Lemoine. Passionnée du patrimoine et de l'histoire, Doris Lemoine a 'bénévolé' à la Maison Gabrielle-Roy depuis sa création en 1995; pour la communication : Marc Marion. Cet avocat très engagé a été nommé pour son travail bénévole au sein du CA de Presse-Ouest Ltée, la société éditrice du journal La Liberté, dont il est le président depuis 2013; et pour la politique : Justin Johnson. Il est chef de la direction à l'Association des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba, AMBM. Justin Johnson attribue à son passage au Conseil jeunesse provincial le mérite de l'avoir motivé à s'engager dans la communauté.

Félicitations.

Translation

I want to highlight the winners of the 2020-21 Prix Riel awards. Since 1983, the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, SFM, has been honouring French-speaking Manitobans who have remarkably contributed, mostly through volunteering, to the development of the community while promoting a taste for living in French.

The awards ceremony was held virtually on May 20th on the SFM's Facebook and YouTube page, with the following winners: the Community Development award went to Crystal Desrosiers, who demonstrated exceptional commitment as a volunteer in the Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba for 20 years; the Heritage award went to Doris Lemoine,

a history buff who has been volunteering at La Maison Gabrielle-Roy since its establishment in 1995; the Communication award went to Marc Marion, a lawyer recognized for his commitment to and volunteer work with the board of directors—as president since 2013—of Presse-Ouest Ltée, which publishes the French newspaper La Liberté; and the Policy award went to Justin Johnson, Chief Executive Officer of the Association of Manitoba's Bilingual Municipalities (AMBM), who credited his time at the Conseil jeunesse provincial for spurring him into working for the community.

Congratulations.

English

I did want to mention I discovered in a newspaper clipping that my grandfather, J.S. Lamont, and Justin Johnson's grandfather met together 84 years ago in 1937 when a medal featuring Louis Riel was presented to a Métis couple on their 50th wedding anniversary. There's a real joy to finding these old connections.

And since this is the last day before we break, I want to thank the Speaker, clerk staff and other members. There's a saying that even a stopped clock can be right twice a day, so I hope people will remember that even I can be right twice a day.

And I also want to wish the very best to Larry Kusch, who will be retiring shortly. I've always appreciated his no-nonsense, calm demeanour, his dedication to his profession and the fact that he pretended to laugh at my jokes. Well played, Mr. Kusch. It's been a very difficult year, and, on behalf of my colleagues and myself, best to you for a very well-earned retirement.

Merci. Miigwech. Thank you.

Deputy Speaker's Statement

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I have a statement for the House. Four of our pages are serving their last day in the Chamber, and I want to share a comment with the House.

First comments are from Maggie Rodger:

I am in the 11th grade of Oak Park High School. I will be graduating from June 2022, and I'm hoping to continue my education with a bachelor of arts of—in psychology at Dalhousie University.

Being a page in this past year has given me the heightened respect and gratitude, not only for our MLAs, but for everyone in the sidelines making this

process possible. Seeing that person—the legislative process and details—our democratic system has been insightful and inspiring. It has been—it has cemented in my interests in politics and current events.

* (14:10)

Working with the Legislature during the pandemic, when the responsibilities of governments were so crucial to the people of Manitoba, was a once-in-a-lifetime experience—hopefully. That being said, I'm very happy that I've been vaccinated on May 27th, and I am anxious for life to return to somewhat normal state. I'm externally grateful for the opportunity to support all of you and to get to know you a little bit this past year, and it was a privilege and is—this year I will never forget.

Next, comments from Ruofan Lin:

Experiencing my entire senior year in the midst of this pandemic was tough, but I appreciate myself and my class of 2021 for getting me through it together.

I'm graduating from Fort Richmond Collegiate and entering the faculty of arts and science at the University of Toronto with a focus on social science. I hope that—to pursue a career in law, applying what I have learned here at the Manitoba Legislature. So, all the best there.

Being the page for the Legislative Assembly was definitely one of the highlights of my year and I cannot believe it's ending so soon. Working with the other pages, Dave, Ray, Cam, MLAs and other legislative staff have been an opportunity of a lifetime.

With the now—newfound experiences acknowledged, I will continue helping people with developmental disabilities, while sharing my passion for art and writing with new people I meet.

Thank you for a wonderful year and stay safe and healthy.

Next comments are from Jordan Glaspey:

I really enjoyed the time here at the legislative—Legislature—Manitoba Legislature. It was a—far one of the best experiences of my life. I really enjoyed learning about the legislative process, learning the—meeting the MLAs and getting to know the staff.

My favourite memory from the year here is definitely the night that I called over 10 votes. This experience has been enjoyable and I hope to see you all again.

Last, comments from Taryn Klippenstein:

I am grateful for the opportunity to work as a page in the Page Program. It gave me an insight of our political system and—I would not have otherwise experienced.

Next year, I will be attending the University of Winnipeg and explore faculties and programs—offered courses focusing on social issues and needs. Because of my experience in the program, I have decided to pursue an education and career in helping people.

Maggie, Ruofan, Jordan and Taryn, on behalf of the Manitoba Legislature, I wish you all the best in your future endeavours, and it has been a delight to have you all here working and get to know you, and with your—the abilities to do the votes and—10 or more, sometimes, a night—it was extremely impressive.

So, all the best from all the MLAs, the clerk staff and all the legislative staff. I wish you all the best.

Thank you.

Now for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government's Pandemic Response Second and Third Wave Preparation

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, let me say to Maggie, Ruofan, Jordan and Taryn that we certainly appreciate all your hard work here. I hope that it's been a meaningful learning experience and that you'll take some of the positives that happened here forward with you, and all the best in what's next. So thank you so much.

In March of 2020, Manitoba faced a challenge like no other: the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, Manitoba did not have the numbers that were as severe as in other provinces during that first wave. It was the hard work of Manitobans that gave this Province time and space to plan ahead to address the challenges that we saw in other parts of Canada.

But did we prepare? No. Did we plan ahead? No, this government did not. We now have some of the worst outcomes of anywhere in Canada.

Why did the Premier squander the head start that Manitobans gave him after the first wave?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Maggie, to you and to—also to Ruofan and Jordan and Taryn, I wish you all the very, very best on behalf of our government in your—all your endeavours, not exclusively your academic ones, but of course we're excited to hear that

you're pursuing your education, that you're going to be going forward to career development paths that you're going to enjoy, I'm sure.

And I hope that you take with you a valuable experience here and use it as you move forward in other ways. You've served here at a different time than any other pages have ever served, with additional stresses on you and on all those around you, too. And so I hope that you've learned through that how to face challenges together and to work as part of team, as you have.

And I also want to say a thank-you to the rest of the team here who are serving in a time of COVID, in a time that is trying. It is undoubtedly a demanding time that we will all remember, and not necessarily treasure. But I hope we can treasure the lessons we've learned about working together and preparing, most certainly that's what this government has been focused on since the outset.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: Last summer, experts warned that we needed to prepare for a second wave. But this government didn't do that. Instead, the Premier launched his ill-fated ready-set-go ad campaign.

At the same time, the Premier then went on to shut down the health incident command centre. The Premier and his Cabinet refused to hire more health-care workers. Instead, they turned around and demanded that those jobs be cut.

It was a failure of focus and a failure of leadership, and it led to great costs and hardships borne by the people of Manitoba. It meant the second wave was worse here than anywhere else in Canada.

Why did the Premier fail to prepare Manitoba for the second wave?

Mr. Pallister: I know that the member is anxious to exploit COVID for political gain. He should not pay disrespect to the preparatory work done by thousands of people throughout the government, the hard work that was done by people throughout our province and the private sector as well. And the volunteer sector deserves mention. And I would like to today pay special mention and again say, as I know all members of the House would agree, that we owe a special debt of gratitude to all our front-line workers in the health sector.

This pandemic has placed incredible stresses on all of us, incredible stresses on families and on

individuals, but also on those who serve our needs in the health-care sector. And so, to our physicians, our nurses, our respiratory therapists, our first responders, all our medical workers and all the staff who support them in the institutional care they provide, I want to say a special thank-you for working together as part of team Manitoba throughout this entire pandemic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: Well, then give nurses a fair deal.

We all saw the tragedies happening in long-term care in Ontario and Quebec. This Premier and this Cabinet didn't seem to learn those lessons. Instead of listening or learning, the Premier's failed Health minister claimed the deaths of seniors was unavoidable. Premier and his government, that same minister, they attacked doctors who tried to raise the alarm, and the Premier himself refused to call in the military even as seniors died in personal-care homes. A shameful tragedy at Maples and other care homes was the result.

Now, this government still hasn't learned these lessons. In the budget that they brought forward after the second wave this year there was no new money for long-term care in Manitoba.

Why did the Premier fail to protect seniors living in personal-care homes?

Mr. Pallister: Well, again, what the pages will note is the willingness to exploit an opportunity on the part of an opposition politician, and they'll also note that it's very easy to be right in every one of your opinions when you're not on the field of play, you're not actually the ones in charge of the decision-making. That's the hard job.

This is why there are no statues of critics around the world. It's easy to do. You don't have to have any expertise; you just simply look at things and then complain, and this is what the opposition does. It's part of their job and, I think, defensible in some ways.

However, when it goes further, to disrespect our health-care leaders, it's not defensible. When it goes further, to disrespect our vaccination team—over 4,200 immunization staff—an incredible 4,200 immunization staff vaccinating all over the province; 733,000 first doses alone to date. Think about that and think about the incredible work those folks have done and say thank you to them for that wonderful dedication to team Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a different question.

Mr. Kinew: Seven more intensive-care-unit patients transferred out of the province yesterday alone, which brings the total number to 43—incredible, indeed. Think about that.

The second wave of the pandemic revealed holes in our health-care system that were created and then made worse by this PC Cabinet. Staffing shortages in the intensive-care units. Not only did the Premier fail to address these challenges, this Cabinet went and made things worse. There were fewer critical-care nurses in Manitoba in January of 2021 than there were two years before.

* (14:20)

That means this Cabinet saw the second wave and decided we needed even less ICU capacity after we made it through that. These are holes that this government should've filled.

Why did the Premier fail to address any of the gaps in our health-care system revealed by the second wave?

Mr. Pallister: Again, just piling up on the false assertions today, sadly.

The reality is that the NDP commissioned a report on ICUs and emergency rooms by a Dr. David Peachey when they were in government and then didn't adopt any of the recommendations, which we acted upon in our first four years of government.

Luckily, this pandemic didn't happen in 2016, because we increased the number of equipped, staffed ICU beds 40 per cent in that first four-year period. And now we've doubled it again during COVID. This is an incredible accomplishment. Our health-care leadership deserves credit, not criticism, for accomplishing this.

I would also say thank you to our contact tracers. We have almost 1,000 contact tracers that have been working throughout this pandemic to notify folks, to help protect them when they've come into contact with someone diagnosed with COVID. That's tremendously important work. Over 200,000 calls have been made by those contact tracers. And we're talking about a significant amount of effort at a stressful time by a lot of dedicated people.

So I want to say a special thank-you to them for being part of team Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: Thirteen hundred nurse vacancies in Winnipeg alone, hundreds of more nurse positions empty across the province: Brandon, Dauphin, Thompson, everywhere. These are the results of cuts that this government has made.

You can measure the accuracy of these figures in the amount of patients sent out of province, the only province that has had to ship ICU patients to other jurisdictions. That's because of the cuts that were uniquely severe under Manitoba's PC government.

It is a failure to serve the people of Manitoba. It's a failure to learn the lessons laid bare by the pandemic. The Premier should be accountable.

Will he apologize today for cutting ICU nurses in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Doubling the ICU capacity from the start of the pandemic and increasing it by 40 per cent over what the NDP left behind after two decades of power is nothing for our health-care leadership to apologize for. They should be proud of their actions.

No one could've anticipated the needs. We're happy to be in the Confederation, happy to have offered support to others throughout our time as a province here.

And now that we need assistance, I say thank you to the government of Ontario, thank you to the government of Saskatchewan, for offering that assistance. Just as we would to them in their time of need, they are doing now.

I also want to say thank you to the federal government.

But I especially want to say thank you to our small-business community and tell them that we know how valuable—and how appreciative we are of their work, their community contributions, their creation of jobs and opportunities for summer students, for people, for full-time positions.

That's why we've offered three quarters of a billion dollars of support as a government. No province has done more for their small-business population. We value you and we say thank you for being part of team Manitoba.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a final supplementary question.

Mr. Kinew: No province has failed harder at the government level than Manitoba. The cuts that this Premier and his Cabinet instituted in the health-care system are part of the reason that those small businesses were hit so hard. One lesson we've all learned during the pandemic is that a health-care investment is an investment in the economy as well, and yet there appear to be 30-some Manitobans who have failed to learn that lesson; they're all members of the PC caucus.

This is the Premier's legacy: the worst outcomes in COVID across Canada, a failure when it comes to the COVID response. It hurt Manitobans. It made life worse in this province.

Does the Premier accept responsibility for his and his government's failure to respond to the pandemic?

Mr. Pallister: I'm excited to accept the responsibility of leading a government that is made up of people dedicated to the service of Manitobans and that will never shirk in that responsibility: steady, united and focused. The member opposite hasn't had that experience, but I have.

We're experiencing challenging times. We don't quit in challenging times, not here in Manitoba. We don't quit in challenging times in Manitoba because we stand up to those challenges and we face them head-on.

And we'll continue to face them head-on, not by running away, not by lying about our record in a book, not by running on false pretences and hiding our record from the public, not by doing any of those things. That's what a coward would do. Standing up and facing the challenges head on, that's what Manitobans do because Manitobans aren't shamers. They see through the member's tactics. They're people who rise to the challenge, and Manitobans will rise to this one, just as they have throughout their proud history.

Thank you very much for your service, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Former Manitoba Residential Schools Request to Search for Burial Sites

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Indigenous families cannot heal until the full extent of a system designed to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children into Canadian society is understood—work that all levels of government must take on.

When asked about systemic racism, the Premier has said, and I quote, actions matter at least as much

as adjectives. End quote. But this same Premier was slow to respond to the discovery of 215 Indigenous children. And when asked—the Premier and the provincial government—yesterday to support the investigation of all Manitoba former residential schools, they deferred to the federal government.

Will this government support in all ways the efforts to investigate Manitoba's former residential schools for unmarked graves of Indigenous children?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): I thank the member opposite for the question.

It has indeed been a difficult few days since we heard in the media of these 215 graves that were uncovered in BC. And I met this morning with many of our visitors out front of the Legislature building, talking about their experiences.

And some of them are residential school survivors. They talked about how this is affecting them. And we also talked about the sites in Manitoba, and it was interesting to learn where some of the additional sites are, beyond the 14 that are acknowledged. And we look forward to 'fither'—further dialogue with these individuals and moving forward to do more on behalf of their families.

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

Ms. Fontaine: When the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) asked the Premier to explain how he planned to support sections 71 to 76 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission yesterday, the Premier said to the member, and I quote, probably has more information on this specific piece than I do. End quote.

It is not the responsibility of Indigenous peoples to continue to educate over and over again that this work needs to happen. It is the responsibility of all peoples and, obviously, all levels of government to do this work.

Deputy Speaker, it was disappointing that the Premier did not put any official words on the record yesterday when we debated our MUPI.

And so, you know, I would ask the Premier to get up today and ask—to commit the resources towards investigating all former Manitoba residential schools for graves of Indigenous children.

Ms. Clarke: I thank the member opposite for this discussion.

The truth and reconciliation Call to Action No. 75 calls on the federal government to work with provincial, territorial, municipal governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students and current landowners to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children have been buried.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a final supplementary question.

Ms. Fontaine: I don't think that was an answer, and we know what that recommendation is.

Provinces must do better than just deferring to the federal government on these issues. They must take this seriously and make a firm commitment to implementing all of the TRC's calls to action and work collaboratively and respectfully with Indigenous peoples and with all levels of government to investigate all of Manitoba's former residential schools.

The Alberta government has announced its intention to fund research into undocumented deaths and burials of Indigenous children who were killed in residential schools. Members opposite must do the same.

Words are simply not enough, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Will the Premier get up right now and commit to funding this important work and ensuring that children get back to their families?

* (14:30)

Miigwech.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Ensuring the lessons that should be learned and must be relearned by all of us about the tragedy of residential schools is a critical part of our commitment to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I can only say to the member, who was an Indigenous activist, an Indigenous adviser, I understand, a paid Indigenous staffer giving advice on Indigenous policy to the previous government for many, many years, that none of this happened—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: And so when the member gets up and tries to score political points on this issue, that is

unseemly; it's inappropriate; it's just simply shameful and wrong.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: I will say—I'm answering the member's question, if she would be still long enough to listen. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: We're committing to act where it wasn't happening when the member was in government, and we're committed to act seriously in conjunction with partnerships, leaderships in the federal level, at the Indigenous level, to make sure that these failures—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pallister: —over many, many years, do not continue. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Manitoba Bridge Grant Program Expansion of Eligibility Criteria

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Manitoba small businesses are struggling during this third wave. Many business owners have continued to operate throughout the pandemic, just barely getting by. Now they've reached their limit and the Manitoba Bridge Grant program is not accepting any new applications.

Businesses have been incurring all kinds of expenses to keep their customers and staff safe for the past 15 months. Far too many of them are ineligible for supports.

Will the minister reopen the Bridge Grant program to new applicants today?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): We know that the member's no friend of business, trust me. What our government has done is we've invested over \$657 million—sorry, \$671 million in supports to businesses. Along the way there's been over 70,000 individual payments that have gone out to businesses. That includes 15,000 supports for businesses in the Bridge Grant program.

We've also made additional investments in sick leave program that will benefit businesses—just in the last month alone we're upwards of \$60 million—as well as additional supports to restaurants, some of the businesses that had been dramatically impacted by Manitobans.

Our government is very much committed to support local businesses to get through the pandemic, and that's exactly what we've done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wasyliv: I think all you have to do is drive around downtown Winnipeg and see all the closed storefronts to get a real visual idea just how much this government and this minister respects and supports small business.

Now, the Bridge Grant program is overly complicated and its undersubscribed. It's not giving business owners the relief that they need. It has restrictive eligibility criteria and has left too many small-business owners out in the cold entirely.

After 15 months, new businesses have started to spring up; however, they've been hit with the third lockdown, and they're not getting any help from this government.

Will the minister do the right thing and revamp and reopen Bridge Grant eligibility today? *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Fielding: We know how much of a hypocrite the member opposite is, as he usually uses his class 'warfare'-fare approach and tax businesses, so it's kind of ironic that he comes in to somehow support them.

What this government has done is they put more money to support businesses than most governments and some of the most generous supports in the country. As I mentioned, just over the last number of weeks alone we've invested over \$71 million in third supports—fourth supports, rather, for the Bridge Grant program, over \$60 million of supports for sick leave program to make sure employers and employees are supported. We've invested more than 30—\$3.6 million to support business or—of things like restaurants above and beyond that. All total, over \$671 million in supports.

We're going to do what it takes to support businesses—

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

The honourable member for Fort Garry, on his final supplementary question.

BITSA Legislation Tabling Timeline

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitoba small businesses deserve support, not childish name-calling.

Now, the minister is leaving far too many small businesses out in the cold, and for the rest of the province, he prefers to keep them in the dark. The budget implementation bill has yet to be tabled. They began this session hiding 19 bills, and now the session's about to end and the details of the budget have been hidden from view.

In previous years, BITSA cut funding to transit and to the City of Winnipeg, and last year it included a 3 per cent hydro rate hike. This is a government that runs away from transparency and accountability.

Why is this minister hiding away this important legislation?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): We know what the Leader of the Opposition—the leader from Fort Garry does—do—decided do during the pandemic. He decided to 'filibust' major supports for things like the pandemic. When Manitoba needs it most, what did they do? They 'filibusted' the Legislative Assembly in the last year for close to one third of the session. It, quite frankly, is shameful activity.

We ministers, as well as the Premier (Mr. Pallister), have been out daily in terms of briefing people in terms of what needs to happen for the pandemic to make sure we're protecting Manitobans. Our last budget provided \$1.1 billion of supports to protect Manitobans and make sure we're advancing Manitoba past this pandemic to get businesses back on the road to recovery.

Grace Hospital ER Staffing and Wait Times

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I recently shared the experience of a community member whose 93-year-old mother was left in the Grace ER hallway for a total of five nights in a row. This story touched many people in west Winnipeg, and others have since reached out to share their own stories.

What's become clear is that the Grace ER is in a state of crisis. Patients are being left to sleep in hallways, many are not receiving their medications on time, and there are issues with severe overcrowding and understaffing. The minister needs to intervene to protect staff and patients.

What is the minister doing to address the crisis happening in the Grace Hospital ER today?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health and Seniors Care): Each and every day, our health-care workers are dealing with an unprecedented, historic challenge, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And they're doing so under difficult circumstances, under trying circumstances. But they are doing so in a way that I think all Manitobans should be proud.

We know that these are challenging times for all of those who are in the health-care system. We also know that they are stepping up and doing the job that not only they were trained to do but we know that they love to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Regardless of the hospital that they're in, despite the challenges that they're facing, we also know that we will be better on the other side of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because that is how Manitobans react to a crisis: they step up, they do what needs to be done, and they improve after that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Sala: They are dealing with an incredibly difficult situation that's been made infinitely worse by the cuts that have been made by this government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the third wave of the pandemic, Manitobans want to know and trust that our hospitals are the safest place they could go. The Pallister government's own wait times task force warned them that consolidation would put real pressure on remaining emergency rooms, such as Grace, but they did not listen to calls for more capacity. The result is a deteriorating situation with backed-up patient flow and a lower quality of care.

What steps is the minister taking to address the long-term staffing crisis at the Grace Hospital today?

Mr. Goertzen: In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the very report that the NDP commissioned outlined the fact that there were historic wait times in Manitoba—more than any other province in Canada. Those wait times are reduced by the measures that were taken by this government.

In terms of investment, not only are there \$750 million more annually that are invested through operations in the health-care system, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but a new emergency room was opened at the Grace. There's been new capital investments in St. Boniface. There's new capital investments in Flin Flon and all places around Manitoba.

Where the NDP spent their time closing ERs, we are opening and staffing emergency rooms, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James, on a final supplementary question. *[interjection]* Order.

Mr. Sala: The Grace is effectively a community hospital that has been thrown into the deep end without the necessary investments to support tertiary care. That's what the wait times task force warned this government. Now, predictably and unfortunately, the Grace Hospital is overwhelmed.

The Pallister government's rushed consolidation is having a real and negative impact on those seeking care in my community.

Why isn't the minister taking action to solve these issues immediately?

* (14:40)

Mr. Goertzen: Well, there's no question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the pandemic is having an impact when it comes to care, but those care providers have stepped up in remarkable ways, not only in the hospitals but ensuring that new vaccines, which didn't even exist a year ago, are being distributed throughout the province. Thousands of individuals have joined that team to distribute vaccinations. More than 870,000 doses have been administered in the province just in the last few months. That is the hope that's being provided to the entire health-care system, to Manitobans.

I know that that member is trying to raise these issues, either try to scare people or to fear monger, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are real challenges, but there's also real hope. I hope he sees that hope and demonstrates it.

Addiction Treatment Supports RAAM Clinic Opening Hours

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): The moment a Manitoban struggling with addictions makes a decision to seek help, they need immediate access to supports in order to make a change. That moment doesn't necessarily happen on weekdays or during business hours.

I'll table a document for this House which shows that, in the past four months, RAAM clinics have only been open an average of 1.8 hours a day. This is simply not enough to meet the need for immediate, accessible care to fight their addiction.

Will the minister commit today to funding clinics and organizations who are ready to do this work so they can support Manitobans battling addictions around the clock, or does the minister think that 1.8 hours a day is adequate support?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery): I would like to thank the member for Point Douglas for her question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was so pleased to announce yesterday more than \$819,000 being invested by our government to expand capacity at our two Winnipeg RAAM clinics.

And I also want to just thank all the physicians and health-care staff that work at not just the Winnipeg clinics but our—all our RAAM clinics across the province for the tremendous work that they're doing during this difficult time to support individuals that are struggling with mental health and addictions and substance use.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope the member opposite will join me in thanking those health-care professionals as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a supplementary question.

Medically Assisted Treatment Beds

Mrs. Smith: The VIRGO report called for greatly enhanced funding for addiction supports. The minister is talking about a drop in the ocean of what is needed. Three hundred and seventy-two—and I'll repeat that number—372 people lost their lives this past year because they couldn't access the resources and supports they needed.

To make matters worse, families trying to desperately get their loved ones care are facing long waits because there are less detox and medically assisted treatment beds since this government came to power.

Will the minister commit to reversing her government's cuts and to opening more detox and medically assisted treatment beds, or will she continue to use the pandemic as a human shield for failing to do her job?

Ms. Gordon: I do want to say it's unfortunate that the member for Point Douglas continues to rise in the House and put inaccurate information on the record, disrespecting the health-care workers and all the fine individuals that are working during this difficult time to provide services to individuals that are struggling.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, since the VIRGO report was released in 2018, our government has invested \$50 million in 33 initiatives. And I would like the member for Point Douglas to apologize to all the RAAM clinic individuals that work every day for bringing forward a resolution on May 12th—

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

The honourable member for Point Douglas, on a final supplementary question.

Safe Consumption Site

Mrs. Smith: Researchers, advocates and folks with lived experiences have long called for safe consumption sites because they know that they save lives. We are the only province in western Canada without a safe consumption site.

The minister likes to reference the VIRGO report. Well, Deputy Speaker, the VIRGO report recommends a safe consumption site, but this government deliberately removed it from the final copy.

We need consumption—safe consumption sites to support folks now.

Will the minister listen to the research, follow the lead of other provinces and commit to opening a safe consumption site today, or does she believe—as the Premier, her boss, does—that addictions is a moral failing?

Ms. Gordon: The member for Point Douglas continues to increase the volume of her voice, but the information that is not being increased is the accurate information that needs to be placed on the record and the thanks that needs to be sent out from the member for—to all the health-care workers and service delivery organizations, of which there's over 40, that are working so hard during this difficult time to provide services to individuals that are struggling with addictions and substance use.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, since April of last year, over 2,268 individuals have been helped by our RAAM clinics. Will the member for Point Douglas thank the health-care workers and all the individuals that—

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

COVID-19 Pandemic Third Wave Request for Safe Reopening Plan

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): This government has routinely ignored warning after warning on the pandemic, and we're concerned the same is happening with the economy because we've seen a ton of pre-pandemic legislation that was rammed through with a COVID stamp stuck on the side to justify it, but it's legislation that often undermines public institutions and won't help the vast majority of Manitobans or their businesses.

Now, today's the last day to directly ask questions 'til October, and we don't even have a glimmer of a post-pandemic opening plan.

When, if ever, will Manitobans be able to get a recovery plan from this government?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, in due course. But of course in the immediate present we live in, we are the hotspot of COVID cases in North America and of course we're going to continue to focus on having good enforcement. And so I want to say thank you to all of our enforcement people. We have more than 3,250 people who helped with that, and sadly, that's necessary.

But I wanted to say a special thank-you to all Manitobans who have followed the public health orders and continue to follow the public health orders. It's important to do that. It's important to do that to stop the spread of COVID and its variants. And so I want to say a special thank-you to all the Manitobans out there that are making the sacrifice of doing the right thing and respecting those public health orders.

The longer that we do that, the shorter the period of recovery will be.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Boniface, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Lamont: We're very concerned because this government's track record on risk management has been a disaster. We are deeply concerned that, as we face a fragile recovery, that the government is basically gambling everything on a housing bubble that many banks are projecting could burst.

There's a difference between optimism and wishful thinking, and this government for a year has seemed to have based just about every decision on ignoring reality instead of coping with it.

In the pandemic, good planners have set out best, worst and expected scenarios. The failure to prepare

the third wave we're enduring right now meant we had a worse than worst case scenario.

But when it comes to the economy, is the government going to release a plan and can it be reality-based for a change?

Mr. Pallister: I'll ask the member to consider what this country would've looked like if we had a lot more vaccines a lot sooner, like dozens of countries around the world, and then ask himself if that's not the sad reality of the situation we face today. And if it is, then perhaps the federal government does bear some responsibility for procuring vaccines later rather than sooner.

That being said, I want to say a special thank-you to the young people of this province. We have 18,000—approximately 18,600 grade 12 students who'll be graduating this year. Congratulations to them. And this should be a moment to revere and to celebrate for them and their families. It's a moment, like last year's grad, that's kind of tinged by the nature of COVID.

So I want to say to them: We're proud of you. You're our future. Thank you, thank you, thank you. We celebrate you for everything you've done and everything you've learned and everything you're going to do to contribute to a better world, a better Manitoba, a better planet.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary question.

*(14:50)

The honourable member for River Heights, if you could unmute?

Physical Activity Programs and Team Sports Participation of Vaccinated Population

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'm sorry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, physical fitness and athletic activities are important to good health, especially in young people.

Once hospitalizations and ICU cases are down, will the government allow full participation in fitness and athletic activity, including team sports, in communities and regions which reach a specific proportion of the population vaccinated as, for example, in communities with 80 per cent of Manitobans 12 years of age or older having had at least one of their vaccine doses?

And will the government also use rapid testing, as Utah has shown works, to keep team sports safe? I table a copy of the Utah studies.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I know that public health, led by Dr. Roussin, has often indicated that, whether it's schools, which he believes should be the last things to close and the first things to open, or youth activity is extremely, extremely important and they've done everything they can during this pandemic to keep those opportunities going for youth. But we also know that there's been a disruption and that has been hard on young people. We hear that from many young people.

So I do know that, in the planning for reopening—and we all hope that can be sooner than later; we have a fight right now when it comes to the third wave, but when we look at reopening that is one of the priorities that public health has placed: ensuring that young people can have that activity that they so desire and that they so need for their physical and mental health, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Manitoba Teachers' Society Partisan Politics in the Classroom

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): Now, Mr. Speaker, the leadership of the Manitoba Teachers' Society wrote an opinion editorial in the Winnipeg Free Press stating partisan politics do not belong in the classroom. Our government agrees with this statement. However, we are seeing MTS do the exact opposite.

Can the minister shed light on recent activities in the classroom with the Chamber?

Thank you.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): Clearly, opposition parties have lost their moral compass when it comes to partisan political classroom visits. We've seen from the Manitoba MTS president, and I quote, our province's teachers need many things in the classrooms, but partisan politics isn't one of them. End quote.

We know MTS is now affiliated with the Manitoba Federation of Labour. The Manitoba Federation of Labour is affiliated with the NDP. Manitoba federation policy says that union-affiliated union members are encouraged to take out personal memberships. I table supporting documents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, does the NDP believe that teachers should be asked to purchase political memberships?

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Calls to Action for Education System**

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I wish I had time to respond to that, but I got to get to this very important question here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the extreme centralization and control spelled out in Bill 64 means a less responsive school system. The truth and reconciliation's calls to action were released five years ago. It called for the establishment of senior Indigenous educational leadership at the assistant deputy level or above. That hasn't happened.

It likewise calls for a—denominational schools to foster an understanding of other cultures and religions, including Aboriginal spiritual beliefs. This, too, is not accomplished.

It's time for action and action now.

When will the minister implement the TRC's calls to action for schools in Manitoba?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): We continue to implement the recommendations of the missing and murdered inquiry and the previous reports done by informed individuals of RCAP and of the TRC. We'll continue to focus on implementing these and making what wasn't happening happen: a recovery, a real healing, a real reconciliation.

I want to say a special thank-you to all of our government employees throughout government service, the Crown corporations, the so-called MUSH sector. This has been a challenging and difficult time for all of us, for our families and for the work environment, in particular. And so I think it would be wise for all of us to say a thank-you and an appreciative word to them.

I also want to say a special thank-you to all our staff here. We know that this has been a challenging time for you, as well, and for your families. The sacrifices you've made do not go unnoticed and we say thank you. We appreciate the opportunity to work here. You create an opportunity for us to do so.

And, also, to all my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, wish you the best as we depart. I know the work will continue and I look forward to seeing you again, hopefully in an Assembly where we can all gather together safely, in the October—early part of October.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Deputy Speaker's Statement

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And I have a—just a statement to—for the House.

As adjournment time for the summer is today, I would encourage that members of the Chamber remove all contents of the desks now. I would further encourage members to recycle as much as material as possible. The blue bins are—in the Chamber—designated in the recycling of the Hansard only. The—only the other materials could be—like, the recycle—may be placed in the large recycling containers in the message rooms located outside the Chamber.

And since I'm up here already, I would like—I just had the greatest time of my political career, actually, being in this Chair. There's been some trials and tribulations, but I actually got through and I just want to thank all the members. I want to thank the clerk staff and the legislative staff and all the pages for making this opportunity for me the—one of the best I've had in this Chamber. And I want to thank the Speaker to give me the opportunity to do this in the last six weeks.

And, like I said, this was great, and you guys were all—been good to me and I really appreciate everybody. And I just want to wish everybody a great summer, have the time with your constituents and be there for your families and all stay safe.

Thank you very much.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition?

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): On a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. Kinew: I have to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's very heart-warming to hear you share those words, and I think there's nothing partisan about your service, and so there's nothing partisan about me saying this.

It's been a pleasure having you in the Chair, and you've certainly answered the call of duty by doing a great job. And, of course, we expect the Speaker to return and we wish her well. But, of course, real pat on the back to you for your service here.

Want to thank also the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Clerk, the legislative staff, the pages, Hansard, translation, everybody for doing an amazing job. It's been a session to remember so far, and the session isn't even done yet, so how about that.

But I do hope that everyone gets an opportunity to enjoy the summer, once it's safe for us to do so. And, once again, just want to pass on our thanks on behalf of our team.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on the same point of order.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't think it's a point of order, but I do think it's a good point that the member opposite raises, and I would echo my comments to you as I echoed before.

And you mentioned to me during the royal assent ceremony after the long list of bills was done, you said to me that you couldn't have imagined doing what you're doing in high school, but I think your high school class—which was only, I'm sure, a few years ago—would be very, very proud of the efforts that you've put in here, acting as our Speaker.

And, you know, it's hard to believe that it was a little bit more than a year ago when we shut this place down because we had no idea how we would function in the way that we were being asked to function. And since then, it is remarkable to see the changes in this Assembly; of course, the few number of members and the number who are joining us virtually.

And that has been very important because it allows the voices of constituents to come into this place. There was a time for a while where MLAs couldn't—they could listen, they could be online, but they couldn't actually voice the concerns or views of their constituents, and that's not how an Assembly or democracy is supposed to function.

So thank you to all the clerk staff, all of the Assembly staff, our pages, everyone who made this function in the way that it did. We certainly hope that in the fall we can all be here as 57. It'll be a little strange, but I think it would also be a welcome thing to all come back together.

So, I wish you all a safe summer, everyone, and thank you for your great and dedicated service to this Assembly, to the democracy of Manitoba and to the people of Manitoba. They all appreciate it.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I guess it really wasn't a point of order, but thank you for the kind words.

And one—couple people I need to also remind myself to remember here, is I want to thank my co-chairs: the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson) and the honourable member for La Rivière for helping me out here. They were of great assistance to me and that's—we worked as a great team and so I want to thank them too, especially too.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Want to follow up and personally, and on behalf of our team, congratulate you as Deputy Speaker. You've done an admirable job and with a good sense of humour. We certainly appreciate that.

I also want to thank the Clerk's office and the Assembly staff and the Chamber staff for everything that's been done to make this session—which combines real in-person and virtual people, MLAs who are working hard to do their best for the province of Manitoba.

It's been quite an experience and quite a session, and we owe a lot to all those in the Assembly staff who made it possible. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, I want to thank everybody for the kind words, and it wasn't a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: But we'll move on to petitions.

* (15:00)

PETITIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And—the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara)? [*interjection*] Oh, okay.

The honourable member for River Heights, you might as well continue.

Menstrual Product Availability

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

Many individuals have faced challenges in obtaining and affording period necessities.

In Manitoba, women, non-binary individuals and trans people have been denied free access to essential

period necessities, such as pads, tampons, menstrual cups and reusable options.

The lack of free access to period items results in the perpetuation of poverty and deprives individuals of reasonable access to a basic health necessity.

This petition aims to ensure that these items are free to access in public schools and within Manitoba's health-care system, and that no individual who requests them can be denied on the basis of gender or sex identity.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to implement free access to period necessities within public schools and Manitoba's health-care system.

To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to acknowledge the prevalence of people within Manitoba who are unable to afford essential period items.

Signed by: Michayla Carlson, Debbie Martyniuk, Krista Marjorie Reguay [*phonetic*] and many, many others.

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

Right to Repair

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba consumers believe products should last longer, be repaired when broken, and that planned obsolescence has environmental consequences that threaten a sustainable future.

(2) In 2021, the European Union set minimum design requirements for many electronic devices with new right-to-repair legislation.

(3) The right to repair enables consumers access to the resources necessary to fix and modify their products, appliances, including cellphones, washing machines and refrigerators.

(4) The right to repair also allows consumers and electronic repair businesses access to the most recent versions of repair manuals, replacement parts,

software and other tools the manufacturer uses for diagnosis—diagnosing, maintaining or repairing its branded electronic products.

(5) The right to repair further allows consumers to reset an electronic security function of its branded electronic products if the function is disabled during diagnosis, maintenance or repair.

(6) In addition, the right to repair ensures manufacturers replace electronic products at no cost, or refund the amount paid by the consumer to purchase the electronic product, where they refuse or are unable to provide manuals or replacement parts.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to adopt right-to-repair legislation requiring manufacturers of electronic devices and appliances, including washing machines and fridges, to make information, parts and tools necessary for repairs available to consumers and independent repair shops.

And this petition is signed by many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any further petitions? Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please canvass the House for leave to alter the Estimates sequence for today only so that in room 254, section—the section of Executive Council be replaced by Enabling Appropriations, followed by Finance?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to alter the Estimates sequence for today only so that in room 254, section Executive Council will be replaced by Enabling Appropriations, followed by Finance? Is there leave? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Goertzen: And then, for the last time this spring, could you please resolve into Committee of Supply?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As stated by the Government House Leader, we're going to resolve into the Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

ROOM 254

ENABLING APPROPRIATIONS

* (15:10)

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

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I'm wondering if the minister can tell us, in the 2020-2021 budget, \$100 million was set aside for emergency contingencies.

I'm wondering if he can advise whether any of that money was spent, and if so, on what?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I think I was asked that same question earlier on, on Friday, on that.

So, no, we haven't tapped into the \$100-million fund for emergency expenditures as of yet. There is an appropriation in climate and—the climate department that deals with, kind of, you know, forest fires and what have you. I think it's a 49- or 50-million-dollar fund that's there.

Obviously, those are one—probably one of the areas that we would go to for it. But no, we have not tapped into the \$100-million fund as of yet.

Generally, what happens through the Estimates process, again, is, you know, departments have, you know, budget lines in their department and so they utilize kind of those things, and once, you know, those budgets are expended already, then we would tap into certain things like the emergency budget, the \$100 million that we're talking about here.

So, yes, I'll refer them back to the previous answer, but that's essentially the answer again.

Mr. Wasyliw: Yes, maybe it was confusing the way I asked the question. I'm not talking about the current budget year. I'm talking about the previous year—in the previous year, whether or not that \$100 million was touched, and if so, in what way.

* (15:20)

Mr. Fielding: I'm going to get you to turn to page 13 of our budget document; it identifies the summary of expenditures. And if you look at the—closer to the bottom—emergency expenditures, as I mentioned, was allocated for \$100 million. So far we're allocated—so far after third quarter now—the real numbers come in at Public Accounts in September—but after third quarter, \$47 million of that \$100 million had been allocated. Again, that doesn't include the last quarter.

If you do flip the page to page 14, you know, the page—just—the number that I quoted does not include any of the COVID expenditures—so on page 14 of the document to go through our COVID expenditures. Not sure if that's where the member, you know, that's the information he's looking for, but that \$1.977 billion is what we anticipate spending for the year-end.

But again, of that \$100 million specifically, after third quarter this year, it's \$47 million, and the final number will come out after the fourth quarter's done in Public Accounts, which is tabled at the end of September.

Mr. Wasyliw: Those are our questions on the Enabling Appropriation section.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions. At this point, we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the question.

I will now call resolution 26.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,770,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Enabling Vote, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,303,476,000 for Enabling Appropriations—*[interjection]*—I'll just repeat that: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,303,467,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Internal Service Adjustments, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$40,000,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Green and Carbon Reduction Fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$178,306,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Capital Assets-Internal Service Adjustments for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the department of Enabling Appropriations—*[interjection]*

The member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) needs to mute himself.

This completes the Estimates of the department—for Enabling Appropriations.

FINANCE

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Finance.

Shall we briefly recess to allow—*[interjection]* no, the minister is—we don't want to—critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next department?

An Honourable Member: No, let's proceed.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, there—we will proceed.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

An Honourable Member: Mr. Chair, I don't—sorry, Mr. Chair, I don't have an opening statement, but I do have some additional information I think the member asked on Friday that I could maybe table for the member.

Is that—is the will of the committee to table that information? It was on the made-in-Manitoba climate and green fund.

An Honourable Member: Yes.

An Honourable Member: Okay. Mr. Chair, it sounds like there's a will to do that.

So, the question was by the member—it was about the made-in-Manitoba climate and green—

Mr. Chairperson: Could I just—I need to recognize the honourable minister before he can continue there. *[interjection]* And could you also confirm the leave for—request because I didn't recognize you so it's not on record.

So if you could please repeat that so that we can ask the question.

What we'll do is we'll do the opening statements first and then when we get into questions, that'll be the time for you to provide us that information.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I don't, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement?

Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry): I don't.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no opening statements, under Manitoba practice, debate of the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer considerations of line item 7.1(a), contained in resolution 7.1.

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

Mr. Wasyliw: Global, please.

Mr. Chairperson: Is it agreed that we will proceed globally? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wasyliw: I would certainly invite the minister to share the information that he's brought today.

Mr. Fielding: Thank you to the member.

So just—the question was—the made-in-Manitoba climate and green fund, I think the question was how much money was allocated and expended in previous years.

So, I have the numbers here: in the 2018-19 year, there was \$142 million allocated. Now, that made up \$102 million of the Conservation Trust and then also—and out of the green funds, I guess, if you will. And of that \$142 million, \$136,185,000 was allocated of that \$142 million.

And then in 2019-20, the amount authorized, it dropped because we didn't have the \$102-million trust from 2018, so it was \$40 million authorized, and of that expended was \$33,305,000.

* (15:30)

So just wanted to put that information on the record. And that's pulled from our Public Accounts document for 2018-19, I don't know the

page numbers, but that's right from our Public Accounts document, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wasyliw: Now, the number of FTEs in consumer protection and business services increased from 184 to 229, and I'm wondering if the minister could explain what the 45 additional positions are.

Mr. Fielding: The positions are as such: there was 44 positions for the Vital Statistics that came within the department now and one from the Funeral Board. So that made up the 45 additional positions—44 for Vital Statistics, same amount as last year, and then one for the Funeral Board.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can tell us how many of the 44 Vital Statistics positions are vacant currently.

Mr. Fielding: There's nine and a half positions that are vacant right now. We are hiring, this week and next week, three positions over the next—this week and next week—the next two weeks.

There is also six and a half positions that will be hired later on in summer or later on the summer, so in June and July. And there is also five summer students that have been hired on that are part of the, you know, the staffing requirements right now.

Mr. Wasyliw: Has the minister outsourced any work from Vital Statistics to a third party?

Mr. Fielding: No, we haven't.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister could explain why Vital Statistics was removed as a special operating agency

Mr. Fielding: So, we initially had them—or for a long period of time was operated as special operating agency. But we've moved away from that role. We feel if we can move it into the department you can benefit from greater efficiencies, kind of reducing red tape and benefiting from having it kind of a part of the department. So you're able to kind of move a little bit quicker to deal with issues as they come up.

Mr. Wasyliw: We've been hearing that there's a backlog to August 2020, especially for birth certificates. I'm wondering if the minister could explain why there's such a delay and what's being done to address it.

Mr. Fielding: So we do recognize—and I think the member did ask me this in the House—we do recognize that there has been delays, and so we—our officials are ensuring that there's improvement in these areas. The department's taking a multi-pronged approach to

improving operations to service delivery, which includes renovating the existing historical office space to improve the client services and incorporating modern best practice information technology—so IT solutions, I guess, if you will—and balancing improvements to service delivery times and security and privacy concerns.

Vital Statistics continues to maintain its three-day turnaround time to process rush applications for birth and marriage and death certificates for registry under life events. So, again, you are able to get the enhanced—you know, if you need it more in a speedier process.

Today, the Vital Statistics branch has registered over 11,500 deaths that have occurred in 2020, and just with some of the stats, I guess, if you will, they have made—our department has made important improvements. Vital 'sasistics'—statistics—sorry, having a hard time pronouncing this, the last day of the session—has started to reduce the current backlog.

Since our—since instating the backlog reduction plan in March 2021, the backlog for birth certificates to be issued has been reduced by about 18 per cent. So, again, 18 per cent reduction of the birth certificates; death certificates have gone down by 61 per cent, that's the wait times; and marriage certificate issuance by 49 per cent. So there has been some improvements.

We—as I mentioned earlier on, there has been additional hires—recently hired four additional clerks and five STEP students, as I mentioned earlier, to assist with operations. Additional recruitment, as I mentioned, is happening right now with, I guess, it's three and a half positions and then the six and a half positions to be hired later on this summer. So those are the efforts that are under way right now.

I know there was—maybe I'll just address this right now—there was an issue in the media, I think it was raised in the House, too, of a lady that was having a hard time getting, I believe it was her birth certificate, if I'm not mistaken, because she needed some sort of benefits. I did ask our officials to reach out to that individual to ensure that they realized to get the federal benefits, you just need to be registered with us. So whether you have the official, you know, birth certificate or not, you just need to be registered and you should be able to have access to the federal benefits.

* (15:40)

Mr. Wasyliw: The minister had indicated that they have a standard of three-day turnaround for expedited process, but which costs an extra fee, but the regular process for birth certificates, marriage certificates and death certificates, what is the department's standard? What's supposed to be the regular turnaround and when are we getting back to it?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Finance.

Not ready yet? Okay, we will hold off.

Mr. Fielding: I'll get better with my hand signals here. It's—so the standard in place is to have turnaround for six to eight weeks. That's the standard our department has and we should be back to those levels by the end of June.

And again, kind of the game plan, I guess, if you will, through kind of a pronged approach, you know, fixing the IT systems there, kind of the structural physical nature of it; we've hired additional staff; I guess it's the five staff we got—or no, we got five additional STEP students. They've hired additional staff and they're in the midst of hiring further staff. And again, just the number that I mentioned before, I guess, is three and a half and the other six staff would be hired later on, so.

Mr. Wasyliw: In the 2019-2020 Vital Statistics report, page 14, they talk about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action No. 17: to allow residential school survivors and families to reclaim names changed by the residential school system by waiving administration costs for a period of five years. There's some discussion in that report about a legislation change being made.

I'm wondering if the minister can say what is the status of this? Is this something that's going forward? Does it need a legislation change? Are you considering fee waivers for this initiative?

Mr. Fielding: Our government is very committed to doing this. There has been some delays with the COVID, you know, issues that we've dealt with. Our department is still working with Indigenous communities. We do anticipate this happening later on, potentially at the end of summer or into fall, where this will be able to meet the commitment the government has made.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can tell us what the current backlog wait times are for birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates.

Given that if some of these things go back to August 2020, how is he going to be able to clear up the backlog by the end of June, which is just a matter of weeks away?

So how much time does it currently take right now without all the staff in place?

Mr. Fielding: Yes, I'm going to get the answer, just, in terms of the current wait times—respect to that.

I guess to answer the global question while I'm just waiting for officials to get the real answer, you know, I guess the plan—it's a three-pronged plan, for the most part.

Number one is hiring more staff. I've gone through, kind of, the staffing that we have hired or in the process of hiring over the next two weeks. We have five STEP students; that's a part of it.

We've made upgrades to, kind of, the IT types of systems, I guess, if you will, and the physical, like, structure of the actual building, if you will.

You know, there is overtime that's being—that our staff is utilizing right now to get caught up on things. There's also training that has happened.

And as I mentioned, there has been some good progress—not good enough for me to make sure that we're doing a better job, but there has been some progress in terms of an 18 per cent reduction in the waits for things like birth certificates, death certificates by 61 per cent and marriage licences by 49 per cent.

* (15:50)

And I will work—and my officials, just kind of get the current wait time, and so I could probably get back to you over the next question or two if you want to maybe move on and I can revert back to that once I do get the actual answer from our officials.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister could provide the current number of positions in the department and how many are actually filled.

Mr. Fielding: There is 820.5 FTEs in the department, there is 186 vacancies, and right now our department is hiring or in the process—the lead-up for the process of hiring of close to two to three dozen staff.

Mr. Wasyliw: Wondering if the minister can tell us what the vacancy rate is in Compliance and Enforcement?

Mr. Fielding: There is 246.7 positions and there's 32 vacancies. Now part of that 32 vacancies, there's

a good portion of these that are—the ones that I mentioned—that are either in the process or being hired.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can tell us which units in his department have the highest vacancy rates.

* (16:00)

Mr. Fielding: You know, we're just running a kind of report from our administration right now. So I will have that probably in a minute or two, but just in the essence of our time, if the member would like to ask another question, I can most certainly come back to that issue once we do have the report and I can give him all the information on that.

I just—again, it's just taking a few minutes. I want to make sure we're using the time effectively.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can tell us what the vacancy rate is in audits as well as in Collections?

Mr. Fielding: You know, we are running this kind of report so I'll have a little bit more details.

Maybe just in, again, the essence of time, while we're waiting for this report to come out, which should be any minute, is there some other areas that the member would like some question—some answers on? And I'm assuming we're going kind of maybe down a vacancy rate.

Is there certain other areas that you'd like some answers to? And then I can maybe provide them all at the same time once I get the report from our administration.

Mr. Wasyliw: While I'm looking at the supplemental Estimates book for Workplace Safety and Health, it was budgeted last year for \$8,599,000, it's been dropped to 8,293,000.

I'm wondering if you could explain that reduction, is that position eliminations, and if so how many and what were the job classifications for that?

Mr. Fielding: Okay. Getting some results here back. So, there's three kind of answers I'll answer, I guess, overall.

The Workplace, Safety and Health, the budget did go down. Now, everything is related to salary adjustments, so there has been a change in FTEs. Now, what that really means is, you know, maybe someone retires, they may be at a higher salary level than a new person that may come in to fill these

positions, so there isn't any less FTEs, but the salary has gone down. So all that total budget is related to kind of reductions in salaries as people retire, all that sorts of stuff.

The next—one of the others is—the member asked for was Collections. And so there is 20 people in 20 FTEs. There's no vacancies there. So no vacancies there.

In audit, there are 79 FTEs in audit and there is 40.8 vacancies.

Mr. Wasyliw: What's going on with audits that half your staff are missing?

Mr. Fielding: So a number of factors.

* (16:10)

Number one, there is a normal attrition level. For the most part, we were just looking at previous years. There generally tends to be at least a couple dozen. So it is higher, for sure, with 40 as opposed to maybe a 24, you know, you'd have it. There is hiring—ongoing challenges, I guess I would say, in that area, and that sector, I guess I'll call it. For the most part, you know, they're—seem to be a little bit older. So people are closer to retirement age, so I think there is some turnover. A little higher workforce turnover, I guess, would make up the reasons for the higher turnover than previous years.

Mr. Wasyliw: How has that affected the number of audits that have been happening on a yearly basis? And what would be the average number that we would normally do and what is it currently?

Mr. Fielding: Yes. So there is less on-site audits, and that's kind of more of a, you know, kind of a by-product, like, I guess, of COVID, obviously, you know, trying to keep people out of the work—you know, kind of workforce—not workforce, but the work area, right.

So, same thing with kind of all our inspections and stuff like that. Obviously we don't want people spreading COVID, so there's more desk audits that are going on right now.

There is a number of the staff—as I mentioned there's upwards—between two to three dozen, kind of, you know, staffing types of jobs that are either in the process of being hired or, you know, actively being sought out after. And really, you know, what I'm hearing from our staff is what's impacting more isn't necessarily the staffing levels; it's the fact it's COVID, right. COVID is having an impact, for the most part.

Mr. Wasyliw: In the last year's budget, Manitoba Labour Board had \$1.6 million allocated for staff. It's now down to \$1.4 million.

And again, is that position reductions, and if so, how many? And what were those positions doing?

Mr. Fielding: So, there is no position reductions in the Labour Board; the salary—the difference is just related to salary adjustments. So, kind of the same thing: when you have people retiring, you may have someone new that works into that role that may not be at the same salary level, I guess, if you will.

So, there's 14.5 positions; so that's unchanged from previous years.

Mr. Wasyliw: The Employment Standards has gone down from almost \$3.5 million to 3.2.

And, again, I'm wondering if the minister can confirm: is that any position reductions or is that just salary adjustment because of a younger workforce?

Mr. Fielding: So, yes, to answer the question, there's no change in FTEs, which is 37.6, which is in the previous years. It is all related to salary adjustments, so kind of the same kind of, you know, reasons why, I guess, if you got other people that are moving in.

There is vacancies—that might be the next question for the member—6.8 positions are vacant.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister could provide the committee with how many above-guideline rent increase applications were made in 2020 and 2021, and how many were approved.

* (16:20)

Mr. Fielding: So, our officials are just getting kind of the answers about the rent guidelines. I will provide that.

Just to go back, the member asked a question about the highest vacancy rate for the department. So, I do have some information on that. I do have a whole listing, but I guess I narrowed it down to maybe the top three—I'm not sure if that is appropriate for the member.

But the first will be Treasury Board Secretariat, which is a 39 per cent vacancy in Treasury Board Secretariat. The second is intergovernmental; there's 35 per cent vacancy in intergovernmental. And the third is finance, policy and planning, which is at 33 per cent. Now, some of these departments are bigger than others, but I think the member had asked for the highest vacancy rate. So those are the top three.

Again, I guess we could, you know, if the member wants, you know, a few other, you know, kind of, whatever—number four, five, six or seven, I can provide that as well. And we are looking for the other information, so I'll—maybe I'll stop here and I'll wait for the answer if that's appropriate for the—Mr. Chair. If that's appropriate for you, Mr. Chair, I'm just waiting for the answer. I think I've got some additional questions coming. One sec.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister could provide how much money Hydro has made from the sale of Teshmont, and as well how much did the government make in the sale of its Tesmont [*phonetic*] shares?

Mr. Fielding: Still looking for the above-rent guidelines, so we're going to get back to you once I have that information.

Just to deal with the current issue about—in terms of how much revenue we gained. So, just with the company, I believe it was an engineering company, where the government—or Hydro, rather, owned a portion of that—those shares and then they essentially cashed those in when the situation was different.

Now, that would go onto the net income of the corporation, so I am going to refer that to the Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Wharton) and he can respond, because it will go on that balance sheet, essentially, of Hydro and it would—incorporated in their net income.

Mr. Wasyliw: Now, the minister had mentioned in some earlier discussions that the government took out two 100-year bonds for Hydro.

And I'm wondering if you could tell us how much were those bonds, who is the bond holders, what is the interest rate, and basically are we able to get out of them early and how do they basically work?

I believe, I think, that the minister's own comments, it's unprecedented; we've never done bonds like that in Manitoba.

* (16:30)

Mr. Fielding: To answer the bond question, you're right.

As it was reported earlier on, there was two century bonds. And so that's something that isn't a usual for a government—for the most part, kind of long-term bonds, maybe a 30 year.

So it was an opportunity with extremely low interest rates. It was in the tune of about \$600 million, and I believe the interest rate was around

2.95 per cent. So obviously we know that it's cheaper right now than pretty much any time in the recent past. And so if you can access money for 100 years at 2.9 per cent, you're doing well.

Now, this was a private fund, and so, you know, we don't have permission essentially to release who that is. This wasn't done through the normal course where you're going to the public markets. Sometimes we get—do get approached by—whether it be private pension funds or other things like that, in respect to agreements or other—lending some money, that's a part of it.

So, that is an opportunity the government had taken: two century bonds for upwards of \$600 million at 2.95 per cent for a century.

Mr. Wasyliw: What would be the going rate at this time for a 30-year bond?

Mr. Fielding: A 30-year bond goes for about 2.87 per cent right now.

Now, with that being said, you know, I think probably everyone would realize that this is a historically low interest rate. So if you're able to secure a 2.9 per cent century bond for 100 years, it's only going to go up, right?

Mr. Wasyliw: Now, last budget—COVID budget, you had allocated \$498 million on PPE.

How much was actually spent last year?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Finance. Minister, could you unmute yourself. I believe you may be muted.

Mr. Fielding: Oh, thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Finance.

Mr. Fielding: Thank you. It's probably the most effective I've spoken all day, with the mute on there. So, anyways, there you go.

But anyways, I'm going to refer the member to the budget document, on page 43, and so it's under fiscal summary of the COVID-19 response in Manitoba, and if you look at the subsection in the middle—you may or may not have it to that page—but it talks about public health response, PPE and related goods and services. So, it doesn't break it down specifically, but it talks about \$936,743,000. So that's part of the budget document, again on page 43.

But if you do look and you want a further breakdown, the mid-year report on page—what page is

this—page 13 of the mid-year report, it does break it down, in terms of the PPE expenditures, under personal protection equipment and pandemic response, so it kind of gives you, you know, what we spent on gowns, what we spent on coveralls, nasal swabs. At that point, it was \$82 million for nasal swabs, test kits, services. For ventilators and other equipment, there's \$29 million; for gloves and hand sanitizers, \$23 million; miscellaneous and other charges, \$17,000; face shields and masks, \$258 million; and I think I mentioned gowns. So that breaks down a little bit further.

But just to—I mean it's complicated, but what happens is—the way you account for this is it—we're working with an accounting firm, so the real number will come out—or the audited financial statements should—audits generally come out in Public Accounts, which is in September. So that will identify, you know, all the dollars and cents.

What actually happens a lot of times is you buy the product, right, and the way you're expensing it, we're working with, kind of, the authorities on how you expense it. For the most part, you're not expensing it until you actually use it.

So you may have it on—in your inventory, but you're not able to expense it until it's used, and so the definitions of what's being used, of how, you know, is it physically used or is it in a warehouse, is kind of being worked out with officials, but we will have a full breakdown in the Public Accounts domain come September.

Mr. Wasyliw: Can the minister tell us what value of PPE has actually been stockpiled and is currently sitting unused in our stockpile?

Mr. Fielding: I've got the numbers here, actually, from the minister for procurement services—or Central Services, as of March 28th.

So that's, you know, a good amount—obviously there's two more months since then, so I could probably get them. I don't have it off—in my hands, but I can tell you, as of March 26th, 2021, personal protective equipment in Manitoba emergency response warehouse, so the product, the days on hand.

So, we had—N95 masks: we had 235 days on hand of N95 masks; so, you know, three-quarters of the year. Procedural masks: 48 days on hand and 2 million on order from Precision ADM, so that's probably already in our system. For gloves, there is 521 days on hand of surgical gloves and that sort. Gowns for disposal: there was 454 days of—days on

hand for the gowns, the disposable gowns. And gowns that are reusable: there was 452 days on hand.

* (16:40)

Now, again, this information, as of March 26, which I used for the budget to—document. I don't have, you know, over the last two months. But I guess what I'm saying is there's quite bit of supply on hand. For most of it it's upwards to a year for some of the PPE that we have on hand to address any, you know, all the issues as it relates to COVID.

Mr. Wasyliw: So if we have a year's stockpile, is there any money set aside in this current budget for even more PPE?

Mr. Fielding: This was identified on Friday, you know—this was Enabling Appropriations—but, you know, we had \$1.18 billion identified, so there was about \$230 million and that was a COVID response, and some of it, again, is carried over, kind of related to PPE and these types of things.

Now, some numbers that I had for my budget—so again, this is maybe a month old or a month and a half old since the budget—but we had spent for, like, testing last year for instance, I think it was 82 million; that was numbers from our mid-year report; \$522 million in mid-year report over six months for PPE. We have \$100 million, you know, kind of identified for vaccine—that's vaccine site and hiring staff and all that sort of stuff. So again, it's—it categorizes the \$230 million.

And it gets a little complicated in the weeds because, again, you may have bought it last year and may have it on, you know, in your warehouse, type of the thing, but until you actually technically use it, it's not considered an expense. So it's an accounting rule that, I think, a lot of jurisdictions are, you know, kind of understanding with auditor generals and others to kind of identify, you know, how you actually expense it.

So it gets a little complicated through the accounting rules, but those are some of the numbers that we've identified through some of the reports we made public. And again, the last numbers I gave you were, you know, as of the budget day which was April 7th.

Mr. Wasyliw: Just want to compare our numbers with Saskatchewan—very similar population size. We're spending a hundred times more on PPE than Saskatchewan is and I'm wondering how you can reconcile that.

Why do we need so much PPE, or is this, in fact, just being used as an internal adjustment? And, as you said, because there—the way it's accounted for you can claim a big amount of money and not actually use the PPE and you can shift money around that way.

Mr. Fielding: Yes. You know, I can't really comment on Saskatchewan, although I do speak to the minister of finance quite a bit in Saskatchewan; he's actually become a good friend. I know they didn't build in anywhere near what we did in terms of COVID expenditures. I don't know what—where they landed on their budget, but we had about \$1.1 billion expenditures, you know. I've gone through, kind of, the subcategories for the most part.

Like, at the end of the day, you know, again, I don't know what they expensed last year, what they're expensing this year and how they're treating the 'canigrals'. I know what we did. What we did is we hired some external consultants to make sure we were doing it right, and then we also used Manitoba Health.

You know, at the end of the day, you know, I think what you need to make sure—and probably the member, you know, is going after as well—you got to make sure that you got, you know, stuff on hand, right.

So, you know, the fact that we do have, for the most part, you know, all these areas, you know, close to a year's supply of these types of products or protective equipment, you know, I guess that Manitobans can be reassured that we have enough to support our health-care providers. And, again, they—Saskatchewan may be accounting for theirs differently. They may have spent more or less in certain areas, but I can tell you that's really what we have spent and what we have on hand.

Again, I don't know what Saskatchewan's built in—the future. You know, do they buy it monthly, do they buy whatever, but we've got, you know, pretty close to a year's supply of most of those important PPE that we have in our warehouse, and really depends on, kind of, when you utilize it for the counting treatment, so.

Mr. Wasyliw: The minister's well aware of the impact of Bill 28.

School boards had, for four years, operated as if it was law and did not pay their staff cost-of-living increases. So, after four years, the back pay involved in that is in the tens of millions of dollars.

We're hearing from the Winnipeg School Division that they need to eliminate 130 positions.

Pembina Trails, fastest growing school division in Manitoba, has 350 more students this year. They cannot hire the 19 teachers they need to actually teach in those classrooms because of this Bill 28 problem. We're hearing out of Louis Riel it's about a \$10-million deficit there. Seven Oaks, it's up and down the province. Every single school board cannot run a deficit and is running a deficit because of Bill 28.

And you also know that your government prevented school boards from fixing their own problems by backfilling the cuts to education with property tax increases.

So, given that this government has now created a fiscal crisis for schools, which will directly impact quality of classroom teaching, including the amount of students per classroom, does this minister have a plan? Are you planning to replace that money, or are you happy with the, you know, several hundred teacher reductions that are going to have to happen as a result?

Mr. Fielding: Mr. Chair, I'm going to unpack a few things here.

So, No. 1, with our budget that—we allocated about—I think it's—I don't have the exact numbers in front of me, but, for the most part, it was around \$20 million—that kind of 0.5 per cent increase. What we did also allocate to the school division was around \$23 million, and that was the equivalent of, like a 2 per cent increase in, kind of, the taxes, I guess, if you will, that went to the school divisions. So that, you know, is money that did flow to school divisions this year.

You know, I'm going to be honest here. I think there's a bit of politics that's being played, probably from the school divisions, because they did go to the media and, you know, quoted some of these things that, you know, we're going to have to cut these teachers and that teachers, before there is even a discussion with the Minister of Education.

So, I know the Minister of Education and his officials will be meeting with each of these divisions, so I'm not sure what they're putting out right now is actually going to be the end product. I don't think it will be, quite frankly, but we do recognize the fact that there is arbitration awards that are there and there's discussions that are ongoing with our officials and the minister and the divisions.

Mr. Wasyliw: I don't know if the minister understands how school board budgeting works, but now's the time when they hire staff for September, and

all, sort of, young teachers on term positions have been let go and there are absolutely no jobs out there for young teachers to get hired because the divisions don't have a budget. They're running deficits, which they can't do.

* (16:50)

So when—this is a crisis now, so when is this minister actually going to deal with this, because the hiring takes place in June of every year for September? So, what is the ministry doing and when is this going to happen, and is this government actually taking this crisis seriously?

Mr. Fielding: Yes. You know, again, I'm going to just recognize the fact that, you know, we have allocated, again, the \$23 million; that was the equivalent of a 2 per cent increase to the divisions. We do recognize, obviously, now's the time when divisions are making decisions on it.

To be quite frank with you, you know, the divisions did go to the media before they met with the minister to have any discussions and the minister certainly is willing to have those discussions with each of the divisions.

So, you know, I'm not sure how they can come up with their final numbers without any further discussions with the minister in terms of, you know, coming to the table for further discussions on it. You know, so again, maybe that's a political decision by some of the divisions. I don't know. But I know the minister is very much willing and able and is interested in meeting with each of the divisions.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm wondering if the minister can tell us when we will see a BITSA bill this year?

Mr. Fielding: And so historically we do table it obviously before the session ends. Different years are different. Obviously, last year and years prior, you know, we did table it later on, and so we are tabling this—it will be tabled obviously before the end of the session.

Couple years ago—I think it was my first year I became—back as Minister of Finance, when I got appointed, the first thing we dealt with was BITSA, right, because it was—been delayed in the fall—and this was before the member was probably—I think it was before the elections. But we were dealing with that in 2018.

And so, there was a delay, I guess, in terms of the BITSA. We were waiting for additional information from Ottawa and it led to kind of a further delay within

the session, lifting I guess, if you will, for summer. But it is our intent to table it in fall.

Mr. Wasyliw: The Premier's (Mr. Pallister) made comments in the media in regards to having a referendum with large infrastructure projects and the potential for legislation in that regard.

I'm wondering if the minister could provide details on this and does he expect there to be legislation coming in the future. And whatever he can provide to the committee would be appreciated.

Mr. Fielding: Yes, the Premier did speak to that, of some major capital projects for referendum. You know, I think there's ongoing discussions that's happening right now, but there isn't anything conclusive that I can relay to the committee at this point.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm looking at the supplemental Estimates books, page 10 on your strategic priorities.

And on the Private Capital Investments in Manitoba section, I'm wondering if the minister could elaborate if this objective is basically fostering private investment and economic growth, which essentially means that the government's going to expand P3s?

Mr. Fielding: Our government is always interested in saving taxpayers money and stretching specially needed infrastructure dollars further.

You know, we haven't been ideological, I guess, on this issue.

I'll give you an example. We were essentially looking at P3s for some of the schools, the additional builds for the schools. We did an analysis and when the analysis came back, at least for those particular projects, it didn't necessarily make sense to use a P3.

Some of the savings are generally through—with P3s, you know, it kind of ranges, but for the most part, there's been pretty—some pretty successful P3s in the past, some, I guess I would suggest Chief Peguis is probably a good one, where I think you'd save upwards to 10 to 15 per cent long-term costs. And some of the savings are kind of related to—kind of the maintenance; that would be a part of it.

So, we're not taking a position one way or the other. Again, we did a review through the building of schools and we found out that the build-operate model, or the traditional model, I guess I would say, came out, at least in that experience, to be better off. So we decided not to go through the P3 route for those means.

But we certainly would take a look at that if we think that we could stretch our infrastructure dollars further and there would be a way to get more dollars—infrastructure dollars—allocated, because we know that there's a huge infrastructure deficit, not just in the city, but all over the province. And so if we can stretch the dollars further that could benefit taxpayers, we absolutely would look at it, but we haven't really made a decision or we haven't taken an ideological approach for this project. We're going to do it or that, and come high or hell water—what were sort of—what the expression is, Mr. Chair—that we're going to go ahead and do it. But we will evaluate everything to make sure that it's effective for taxpayers.

Mr. Wasyliw: Will the Province allow Investing in Canada program funds to be used for the North End treatment plant program even if it's not a P3 program?

Mr. Fielding: Well, that's probably more a question that the Minister for Central Services can answer, as he administers those types of funds.

I can say I know, with some of the dialogue that has gone on with the City, it sounds like there's kind of a P3-lite model, I guess, which they're looking at that—maybe it would strike out the operating component, but it would, you know, have a P3 for the other means.

And so there'll be ongoing discussions with the City and the Province. At the end of the day we want to make sure we can stretch our dollars as far as we can, especially on important infrastructure dollars. So we haven't made a final decision on that.

Mr. Wasyliw: When will that decision be made?

Mr. Fielding: I'm going to refer that to Central Services. They are more directly involved in that file. I do understand that decisions need to be made with a lot of these projects by year end. My hope is that we do it a lot quicker than that, but ongoing discussions will be had with the City and municipalities and other means as we go forward. But, you know, all of this to get the dollars out the door as quickly as we can.

Mr. Wasyliw: Can the minister indicate if there are any other federal cost-matching programs the Province has declined to participate in?

Mr. Fielding: You know, we have ongoing dialogue with the City officials—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

The hour being 5 p.m., I'd like to wish everybody a great summer, and committee rise.

ROOM 255**FAMILIES**

* (15:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Families. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): I—just let me put my questions.

In November, we heard concerns from EIA recipients about the long wait times and lack of communication.

The minister—can the minister indicate what is the processing time of—between people applying for EIA and receiving EIA?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I want to thank the member for the question.

And as I'd explained to her in last Estimates period, we do not have a wait-list on EIA for income—employment and income assistance or disability income support assistance. We assess each applicant immediately and at time—if all the documentation and all the application—if the application is complete, then the individual can receive assistance immediately upon intake.

When there is future information to be garnered and the applicant needs to return with particular information, we are able to provide that applicant with emergency assistance to help bridge that gap between the time in which they're making application and the time in which they start to receive those benefits.

And I can also update the table with information about a new call centre that we have which is helping expedite applications for individuals and then we've also set up some information and a portal on our website to assist clients who are preparing to make an application to help them ensure that they have all the information that they need so that they can be assessed and approved immediately.

Ms. Adams: My colleague from The Pas-Kameesak is going to ask a few questions now.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): I would like to ask a question on the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth report.

When the act was proclaimed in March 2018, two sections were left in limbo. One would expand the advocate's ability to investigate deaths of children who are not in the care of the Child and Family Services system. The second would empower the advocate to investigate serious injuries of children who have had contact with the mental health, addictions and justice systems.

* (15:20)

The first part of the act was finally proclaimed weeks ago.

Can the minister provide a timeline as to when the second part of the act will be proclaimed?

Ekosi.

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the question regarding the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth and our government's commitment to working collaboratively with that office to ensure better protection for children and youth in the province of Manitoba.

As the table will recall, our government had introduced the legislation, which certainly did respond to calls to action on the Phoenix Sinclair report and the recommendations that followed from the tragic death of Phoenix Sinclair, and Justice Hughes' recommendations to expand the office of the advocate.

And so, we did that in 2018. And then, as the House will know, last Monday I was very pleased to announce, jointly with the acting advocate, the expansion of the authority that the advocate's office has to investigate and review services relating to any child who—child or youth who has received services through the child—family services division, mental health, addictions or justice involvement.

And, as of now—or, as of June 1st, which is today, the advocate has the authority to investigate and review any services pertaining to any youth or children involved in these four systems. The final standard to proclaim in the legislation is being worked on in conjunction with the advocate and it is something that we are doing very collaboratively and ensuring that the advocate's office has the capacity to take on this final piece of work that our government had introduced in the legislation that we passed a few years ago.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Lathlin. Ms. Lathlin we cannot hear you. You might want to check to see if you're muted or not.

Ms. Lathlin: I was muted, thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Lathlin, go ahead.

Ms. Lathlin: Okay. The 2021-22 budget has the combined spending for child protection and block funding to CFS agencies at \$497 million. That's 1 per cent lower than the previous fiscal year, and well below the \$519 million spent at the end of the 2018-19 fiscal year.

Can the minister explain the \$1.6 million to child protection under financial assistance?

* (15:30)

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the question from the member about some of the things that our government is doing to reform CFS and provide better outcomes for families.

Along with going toward single-envelope funding, our government has also reduced significantly the number of emergency placements, which is significantly—not only is it better for children and youth, it's also cost efficient, and by that I mean it costs a lot more money to be placing kids and youth in hotels and other emergency placement services than it is to have kids in an actual care home.

So, for example, under—in 2014, a statistic from that year—we have 432 children in emergency placement, and the total number of children in emergency placement for this past year was 148, which included 85 in an emergency shelter and 63 in a foster-care home. And of course, we do not use hotels.

And so, there are not only better outcomes for children and youth but more efficient delivery of service.

Ms. Lathlin: I just want to focus on that same budget—'21-22—where the combined spending for child protection and block funding to CFS agencies at \$497 million. That's 1 per cent lower than the previous fiscal year and well below the 519 dollars—I mean, \$519 million spent at the end of 2018 and 2019 fiscal year, same as before.

My question is: Can the minister explain the \$1.5 million cut to Child and Family Services authorities under Financial Assistance?

Ms. Squires: I can confirm for the House that, under the former NDP government, there were 11,000 kids in care, and today, there are roughly 9,800 kids in care this year. That is a decrease in 4 per cent of kids in care from the previous year and a total of

approximately 11 per cent reduction in the number of kids in care from when the NDP were in office.

In regards to the \$1.5 million that the member is referencing, I can also confirm for the House that our government was not comfortable with a for-profit agency contracted by the members opposite. When the NDP were in government, they had contracted with a for-profit agency to deliver care.

Our government was not comfortable with the care provided by this for-profit agency, and we terminated the service purchase agreement with B & L, and that resulted in a reduction in administrative costs of \$1.6 million.

Ms. Lathlin: I have another question for our minister. We're hearing from CFS workers and social workers about unsustainable CFS caseloads. The Phoenix Sinclair report recommends no more than 20 per caseworker, but some are reporting caseloads as high as 30.

Can the minister provide the average caseload for Manitoba—for Manitoban CFS workers right now?

Ekosi.

* (15:40)

Ms. Squires: I can say that our government is very proud to support the work of our CFS workers and our social workers, who do incredible work on—each and every day to help keep children in our province safe.

One of the things that we know—and it was certainly brought to light by the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry and the following reports—was that caseloads were, in many cases, too high, and that put an incredible strain on the CFS agencies and their workers, which also meant kids were potentially not receiving the utmost care that they deserve to stay safe and to get the help and the support and the nurturing that all children in our province deserve.

And so those are lessons that we learned from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry, and some of the actions that our government has taken is on the preventative side, undoubtedly. That is key in any initiative, to not only help the sector but to also ensure children are better cared for. And by preventative, we mean by—we have invested in a variety of projects, such as the Granny's House.

We've opened up—or, are funding the second respite home, which is to help prevent kids coming into the system by offering that much-needed respite

for parents. We've also invested in an Indigenous doula program, the Mothering Project, super dads program, community helpers program, as well as ending the practice of birth alerts so that we are keeping more kids at home with their families and more kids in their own home.

And that is why we're seeing the reductions that we've got: down from 11,000 kids in care under the NDP to 9,800 today. And yet, we maintain that funding for the authorities to flow to their agencies and to provide the services for the children and youth under their care.

So our government is making more investments and are working on preventing more children from coming into the system. And we know that this is getting results. When we keep families together and provide parents with the skills and the tools to make—create that loving safe home, that it is definitely the goal for any agency, any authority and definitely for this government.

Ms. Lathlin: I didn't really hear anything about numbers of caseloads for our CFS workers, so let me talk about the workers.

Can the minister tell us how many CFS workers are there currently and how many CFS files and—broken down by region, please?

Ekosi.

Ms. Squires: And I would hope that the member opposite is aware of the devolution in the system that unfolded as a result of devolution under her government, whereby we have agencies that are able to determine their own staffing levels and that they receive funding from an autonomous authority.

And our role is to provide the authorities with funding and they have the autonomy to make those decisions, independent of government. They are arm's length and therefore we continue to flow funding to the authorities, which then work with the individual agencies on determining appropriate levels of resources and staffing.

And if the member is unsatisfied with a particular authority or agency, she's certainly welcome to discuss that with that authority; they have a mechanism for receiving input. Or if she would like to share information about a particular case with me that she's aware of or a particular agency that she's aware of, but ultimately she needs to know that, under devolution, the authorities are operating at arm's length from government.

Ms. Lathlin: My next question is: In 2017, the Province changed the way they count children in care. We stopped counting children who live with a designated guardian or family member, even though they are legal wards of CFS. That meant a 4 to 8 per cent reduction in the reported number, compared with statistics provided by CFS agencies.

*(15:50)

Can the minister provide a total number of how many children are legal wards of CFS, including children who live with a designated guardian or family members? Lots of cases here in the North here.

Ekosi.

Ms. Squires: As the member knows, that many experts have agreed, that keeping children together with family, whether that be in their own home or with extended family members, is ultimately in the best interests of children, in most cases. That is the expert recommendation. That is also best practices that are being used in this jurisdiction and many other jurisdictions across the country. And that is something that we know is a recommendation of many inquiries and reviews that have been conducted throughout the province.

And so we're—and the member also knows that each year, in the annual report, the number of home placements is reported, and I can confirm for the member that as March of 2020, that number was 527. When the new number is *[inaudible]* the fiscal year ending March of '21, that will be reported in the annual report in September. And I certainly look forward to having future discussions with her about it at that time or *[inaudible]* next year's Estimates.

But we certainly know that keeping families together and having children living with relatives or guardians is certainly better for the children. There's better outcomes for the children in most cases, and it follows best practices.

And that is something that we're going to continue to work with, whenever possible, is reunification and not—lower apprehensions and just keeping families together will get us better results than was received when the NDP were in government and they were apprehending average of one newborn a day under the archaic birth alert system and they were housing kids in care.

And in one case, in one extreme case, the minister of Families admitted to having delayed—children and youth who were incarcerated were staying in their

incarcerated facility longer than they needed to, according to a CBC report in 2015, because there was no place for the kid to go as required by the Province at that time. And so the answer was to keep these kids in emergency placements, in hotels, and in the worst cases, incarcerated.

We think that there's a better approach, and we're going to continue to follow that better approach so that children are with family and loved ones.

Ms. Lathlin: I have a really important question here to ask, including in part of my family too.

During the pandemic, family visits stopped in Manitoba in October 2020. It's now June 2021, so that's eight months ago that we have not been able to see our nieces; my daughter hasn't been able to see her two younger sisters.

I could see a lot of money being saved through respite. I could see a lot of money being saved for dollars that are given to families for groceries, activities. All that, I can just see it sitting.

What is going to be done with this expenses that are not being spent for children and families for their mental health? They haven't seen each other in eight months. What is going on there? What are going to be the consequences of that separation, right? Separation. You're talking about keeping families together.

Explain to me: What's going to happen to all those dollars? Are they going to be well spent to try to make a connection with families and, you know, and their birth parents? Even foster parents; there's really good ones out there, you know. Just what are the connections that are going to be made for our children to survive this? Never mind trying to go to school, what about seeing their siblings? What about those kids that are in those horrible foster homes that we all know exist?

Ekosi.

* (16:00)

Ms. Squires: I do want to take a moment to acknowledge some of the supportive work that everyone has done throughout this pandemic, whether they worked for government directly, were CFS workers working for an agency or someone within the authority.

I do want to make clear that public health never issued a directive that respite or family visits needed to end and, in fact, our government has supported the continuation of all these services by providing PPE

and continuing the funding—through single-envelope funding—to the authorities for all of these services.

We know that there have been some instances where agencies themselves have put an end to the respite or the family visits, and we know that it did not come from a recommendation from the department or from public health.

We also know that if—in cases of surpluses, that the agency—or, the authorities, pardon me, have the ability to invest their surpluses that they—might have occurred during this year because of fewer—offering fewer services throughout the pandemic.

They certainly have the autonomy to reinvest those services in enhanced supports for their families. Our government will be encouraging authorities to be reinvesting any surplus they have towards that end, as what the member had elaborated on in her question.

We will be strongly encouraging those authorities to look at investments in those areas, and if the member would also like to make that encouragement upon the authorities, it would be greatly appreciated, because I certainly am in agreement with her that if there were any savings—if there was any surplus obtained during the COVID-19 pandemic that resulted from fewer services being delivered to our most vulnerable youth in the province, that those dollars need to be reinvested in those children and their families.

Ms. Lathlin: My next question is, more than 10,700 children were in care in Manitoba as of March 31st, 2018—almost 90 per cent were Indigenous. The Province had the highest per capita rate of children in care in Canada and apprehended about one newborn a day.

However, right around this time is when the department decided to move ahead to implement block funding for CFS agencies. Our concern with this change is that there leaves the potential for deficits with certain agencies which see higher case loads than others, leading to potentially unsafe levels of staffing and care.

One of the things that was mentioned in the pilot project for this was a contingency fund, which would provide agencies with funding if they were spending over the amount they received through block funding.

Can the minister share if this contingency fund is being developed, and what the timeline is on this?

* (16:10)

Ms. Squires: So I do want to remind the committee that in two thousand—in fiscal '17-18, we had increased the funding by \$15 million to the authorities as we moved to single-envelope funding. And since then, we have seen a reduction in kids in care at each of the authorities, and we have maintained those—that level of funding.

The member will also know that under devolution, we have three out of the four authorities that are led by and governed by Indigenous leaders, and our government is—has empowered the Indigenous leadership at each of the authorities and—communities to have the autonomy to govern the authorities and the agencies appropriately in the best interest of the care of their children and their communities and their families.

Ms. Lathlin: Next question is, in the—in last year's Poverty Reduction Strategy budget paper, the Manitoba government committee to investing \$250,000 in 2020-21 to recruit, train and employ community helpers to provide services that reduce the risk of Child and Family Services apprehension or placement breakdown.

Can the minister share any results she has on this program so far?

Ms. Squires: Our government was very proud to invest the \$250,000 in the Community Helpers Initiative. And while the work of that program and the formal evaluation is still under way, we have heard anecdotally from many of our community partners that it has been—that there were successful outcomes.

And really want to thank them for their involvement and their partnership, and I look forward to the formal evaluation being complete.

Ms. Lathlin: My next question is, can the minister provide any updates on the Province's partnership with the Métis Child and Family Services Authority on a new pilot project that will provide mental health and addictions services to families at risk of child apprehension?

How much has been invested into this program so far and how many staff employed—that are employed with this project?

*(16:20)

Ms. Squires: Our government thinks that this program is incredibly vital to helping parents who are at risk or experiencing addictions and other challenges, that they are getting the help and the

support that they need. And this is, of course, an effort to keep families together.

And, as the member knows, our government is—has provided a total of \$1.8 million to the Manitoba Metis Federation to run this program, and she'll note that we're only two months into this current fiscal year in which the program is still under way; it is still being—it's an active program right now. We will have an evaluation program at the end, as we do with all of our programs that are being run as a, quote unquote, pilot, and certainly hopeful and optimistic that there are good outcomes from this program that is being run by the MMF.

I do also know that there are other authorities that are interested in the—learning about the success of this program and wanting to potentially expand it. So we're making those evaluations right now and we'll certainly look to expanding it if there are good outcomes that have been obtained by this initial three-year program.

But if the member wants to know specifically what the outcomes are to date, she would be better to pose her question to the leadership at the MMF, as they are the ones running the program.

Ms. Lathlin: I have no further questions. I'm going to pass this on to the member for Point Douglas.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I want to thank my colleagues for giving me the opportunity to ask a couple of questions.

So I just wanted to go back to the 9,800 kids in care and ask how many of those kids in care are with family members, how many of them are only receiving medical benefits, and what is the minister doing to ensure that when kids comes into care that there are actually—families are asked to take them first before anyone else?

Ms. Squires: I can confirm for the committee that all children in care are eligible for health, dental and optical care.

And in regards to the other question the member asked, CFS agencies, as the member likely knows, must follow national standards, which allow that Indigenous children should be placed with family first as a priority. That is a national standard; that is a standard that the Manitoba government upholds, and we certainly continue to practise following those national standards.

Mrs. Smith: Well, the minister didn't answer my question.

I get that all kids in care receive health benefits, but I asked how many specifically were only receiving health-care benefits and not financial support, because I know a lot of families get care of the—their family member, but they're not given support by CFS. I know of some families who have had to move in with other family members because they're not being supported by agencies, and that's unfair for families because they want what's best for their family member as well. But then it's putting them into poverty and putting them into situations where they have to choose whether they want to take—whether they take their family member or not based on financial situations, and that puts kids into care by their families.

So I'll give the minister one other opportunity to answer the question. How many kids are only receiving medical benefits and not financial support from CFS agencies out of the 9,800 kids that the minister had prefaced?

* (16:30)

Ms. Squires: The member should know that under devolution and then the single-envelope funding, that we have given the authority to the agencies—the authority—the autonomy to the authorities and the agencies to determine and provide financial supports to the children who are in care and in the care of relatives. And we are certainly not making those decisions in the Department of Families; that is the autonomy of the authorities to work with their agencies in determining better outcomes for their children and their families.

They are provided the single-envelope funding, which is annual amounts that they are provided to then work with their agencies in ways to best support the families in—under their care.

Mrs. Smith: Well, it's unfortunate that there's no oversight because this is happening in a lot of the agencies and there's a lot of families that are being left without any financial support and a lot of children that are living in poverty as a result of this, and families trying to do the right thing in taking care of their kids so that, you know, they're not ending up missing or murdered or in jail or, you know, dying by suicide, as we know it happens when kids are in care.

So I hope the minister will look into that. And that's all the questions that I have.

Ms. Squires: I don't think there was a question there, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Adams: Rent Assist and EIA assistance recipients will receive an increase in—to their benefits

between 2.4 and 11 per cent. However, many have argued this change will not make a significant difference unless their thresholds are changed.

This threshold has been lowered by previous governments in previous years, excluding Manitobans from the program. There are also concerns that single-member households are being treated unfairly under the current Rent Assist program.

Has the department considered increasing the threshold for Rent Assist recipients, and how many Rent Assistant recipients are currently on the Province's—both or EIA?

Ms. Squires: As the member knows, annually, we increase the EIA Rent Assist budget every July, and it is based on the median market rent, and currently we have an average of 24,000 renters in the private market or owning their own home receiving the EIA Rent Assist benefit.

We also have an average of 7,709 non-EIA Rent Assist clients and, as the member knows, we have quadrupled the budget to \$54.4 million since our government took office so that we could have more individuals who are, you know, facing housing insecurity or precariously housed, with opportunities to maintain stability in their housing accommodations. And that is why we've quadrupled that budget and will continue to make investments so that all Manitobans can have an affordable place to live.

Ms. Adams: With the government choosing to have CERB be counted as income, how many Manitobans are at risk of losing their Rent Assist because this has bumped them up above the allowable—above the threshold?

And is the minister willing to consider increasing the threshold, given that her government made the decision to include CERB as income?

* (16:40)

Ms. Squires: Effective July 1st, as the committee may know, and very proud to announce that our government has increased the threshold to 80 per cent, and that means that for the first time there will be families and households who are potentially earning higher income still eligible for the Rent Assist benefits because we have increased that threshold to 80 per cent, and we anticipate having more people than ever coming into this program and receiving benefits.

And, as the member knows, we also review the program each year to ensure that we are meeting the outcomes based on the community need.

Ms. Adams: We are going to be closing out Families today; however, I will have my colleague, the MLA for River Heights, ask a few 'remainder' questions before we officially close out.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Gerrard.

Mr. Gerrard, I believe you're muted.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I had asked three questions the other day at the end, but wasn't able to get an answer because we ran out of time. I don't know if the minister remembers those questions and can provide answers or whether I need to repeat them again.

Ms. Squires: I appreciate MLA—the MLA's patience in receiving the answers to this.

Last night I was very pleased to meet with the subcommittee of the ministerial consultation table on early learning and child care, and one of the tasks that this subcommittee had is looking at that very issue regarding retaining and recruiting people and having a strong strategy for workforce retention.

And so they are tasked with that and will be working in collaboration with our government and other sector partners as well as other levels of government to ensure that we have a workforce strategy to ensure that ELCC is a robust sector that people want to work in and that they can stay in that sector and do the work that they love, as I find that most people who are working in that sector are attracted to the sector because they absolutely love the work.

And so I look forward to the work of this subcommittee. I look forward to receiving their report and acting on those recommendations.

In regards to the lead in drinking water in our child-care centres, I can confirm for the member that the Department of Conservation and Climate as well as Health are the lead in regards to the Auditor General's report on lead in drinking water.

But I can confirm for the member that we have had 29 per cent of our child-care centres participate in the voluntary testing program and we are working to ensure that we've got greater uptake from all of our child-care centres to get the testing for lead in drinking water and that there are only preliminary results coming in from the 29 per cent of the centres that have received the testing.

But I can confirm that there is a—there is going to be work that Conservation and Climate, and Health, will be the lead to not only increase the uptake but also to work with any centre that may have potentially higher than allowable amounts of lead in their drinking water to assist in those remediation efforts, and that he should watch for those announcements very soon.

Mr. Gerrard: I'd also asked about the length of time for people to get EI, and although there's a two-week wait for people to get an intake, sometimes things can take much longer because people need to get information—identification, for example, through Vital Statistics and there can be a several months' delay in getting that.

And the other problem is that people who call in for intake appointments may give a phone number, but somebody who's homeless or inadequately housed often doesn't have a phone, so that about a third of the time, I understand, when people call back for—to do the intake, that the person is not available to answer the phone for one reason or another. Maybe there's a way of addressing this.

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the member's patience; once again, I did forget; I was remiss in remembering his third question.

I can confirm for the member that we do expedite our intakes, that there isn't a wait-list per se, that as soon as an individual makes an application, if they are eligible they receive benefits right away. We do understand that there is sometimes a delay. We're trying to reduce those barriers for individuals so that they can get their benefits immediately when they need them.

I can also confirm that any delay—or there is never a delay regarding the delay in getting information from the Vital Statistics bureau. We understand that there are sometimes applicants who are requiring documentation and that there is a lag time or a wait time in getting those necessary documents from Vital Statistics, but that is not—that does not preclude them from receiving benefits. We will bring them into the benefits program and start providing them with those benefits, and then we will work with them individually so that they can make application to the bureau to get whatever documentation that they need.

And we are—we've opened up a call centre and trying to make it more easily available for applicants to talk to someone and make that application, and we've also kept our offices open and many of our employees, while they're seeing others across our

province and across our country, have worked from home accommodations to keep themselves and their offices safe throughout the pandemic.

We know that that wouldn't work in many of our EIA offices, and so we had implemented some measures to ensure that our staff and our clients could be kept safe when they're in working in the office, but we've kept those front-facing offices open wherever possible, as much as possible, so that people who certainly may not have ready access to a telephone or other challenges, that they are getting that service that they need as quickly as possible.

But if the member has a specific incident or instance where he has—is working with an individual that is experiencing a delay, I'd be certainly more than willing to take a look at that and do a case review of that incident because we know that, now more than ever, we just need to lower our barriers and to provide services for individuals when they need them.

Mr. Gerrard: In the view of time, thank you, but I understand we now have to close out. So thank you for those answers, and I'll let us proceed with closing out the Families Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any further questions?

Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions. At this point, I would invite all virtual members to unmute their mics so that they can respond to the questions.

I will now call resolution 9.2: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,302,857,000 for Families, Community Service Delivery, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

* (16:50)

Resolution 9.3: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding thirty million six hundred and sixty thousand for Families, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.4: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$686,648,000 for Families, Child and Youth Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

[interjection] If I could get everybody to please mute themselves, that would be great. Thank you.

Resolution 9.5: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$134,187,000 for Families, Housing, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.6: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$67,000 for Families, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.7: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,000,000 for Families, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.8: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$67,274,000 for Families, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

So the last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 9.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Adams: I move, seconded by the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin), that line item 9.1.(a) be amended so that the Minister of Families' (Ms. Squires) salary be reduced to \$33,600.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the resolution—of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

The motion has been defeated.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, if there are no further questions we'll move on to the resolution.

Resolution 9.1: be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,532,000 for Families, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

So this completes the Estimate for the Department of Families.

The hour being 4:55, what is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Rise.

An Honourable Member: Call it 5 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The time being 4:55, committee rise.

CHAMBER

CROWN SERVICES

* (15:10)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume to—consideration for the Estimates for the Department of Crown Services. As previously agreed, questioning for the department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Good to be back. Yesterday, when we left off, the minister was midstream, offering a response to a question that I'd asked. So maybe I'll just restate the question and let us just start back there.

The question that I'd asked the minister was regarding the Hydro 20-year strategy. And the strategy—as I'd mentioned yesterday—seems to speak to a language or uses a language of decentralization, and points to a future for Hydro that is an unbundled

future, where distribution, transmission and generation are all broken apart.

And so, what I was hoping for yesterday was some commentary from the minister about whether or not he and his government support that view of Hydro's future.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and again, welcome back to day four of Crown's Estimates, and again, always good to be back and share some time with you and of course the Clerk's office as well and the member from St. James and my team, of course, without saying—it's always great to be with them during this process as well.

So, to the member's question—certainly, we talked about—over the last four days in particular—about new, emerging energy coming to Manitoba and to, actually to, well, North America, to the world when it comes to geothermal, solar, wind power—we talked about that. And hydrogen of course, we talked a lot about too.

And certainly, in the 20-year plan, Hydro would be moving forward to ensure they're managing the emergence of these new technologies and new power supply sources—'crean'—clean energy, as well, in a way that protects, obviously, Manitobans and ensures that, you know, they're preparing for these new emerging sources of electricity coming to the province.

So, certainly, government is there; we'll continue to consult with Manitoba Hydro as they go through their process; 20-year strategy's a great strategy to plan for. It could be—20 years is a long way out, but it's amazing how quickly it goes. I know we were talking just before we got on about how long we've been dealing with this pandemic, and 14, 15 months is—it seems like just yesterday, but it's been a long time.

So, certainly, we encourage Manitoba Hydro to continue down that road, and good for them, being proactive and ensuring that they're protecting Manitoban's interests on a go-forward basis.

Mr. Sala: I guess the major concern with this strategy and what I was referencing is that it seems as though the Manitoba Hydro 20-year strategy references a future where Hydro is no longer a vertically integrated monopoly that serves Manitobans in a way that ensures that we have the greatest reliability and the lowest cost. So that actual strategy document says the word decentralization; it speaks to a breaking apart of Hydro.

Can the minister provide any commentary on whether or not his government supports that aspect of what the strategy seems to outline?

* (15:20)

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Wharton: Sorry about that. I clicked—I thought I clicked the wrong button. Can you hear me now?

Mr. Chairperson: You heard me, okay.

Mr. Wharton: Yes, okay, thank you, yes.

And thank you, Mr. Chair. And certainly, the member from St. James, you know, talks about and agrees that there are obviously new entrants that will be coming to Manitoba and—like solar and wind that have been here, but other areas as well.

So, you know, currently we have—even individual operations—I know, for instance, my colony—the Hutterite colony in my riding that partnered with Manitoba Hydro on their solar project when that opportunity was there, and it was a really good initiative for them, and certainly, it was a partnership between them and Manitoba Hydro where these entrants, of course, and these folks that are essentially working to—essentially behind the meter for their own power, they know that they're not always going to be—have a supply of power on a go-forward basis.

So, to the member's point, Manitoba Hydro is protecting, again, on a long—on the long game to ensure that, you know, Manitoba Hydro is sustainable as they go forward. And again, that's the key and that will continue to be the key to keep Manitoba healthy—Manitoba Hydro healthy and strong for generations to come.

So, this isn't new, but kudos to Manitoba Hydro for really having an eye on what's coming down the road and incorporating this plan into their 20-year strategy to ensure that, again, they're plugged in—pardon the pun—as they go forward with these new entrants coming to market and how they'll play a role.

Certainly, I believe, anyways, based on what's happened the last few years, are—these are smaller commercial outfits that are coming in that perhaps they're looking at new technology, and certainly, Manitoba Hydro, being a good partner and obviously wanting to grow the economy, too, as well, are continuing to have eyes on that over the next 15 to 20 years.

So, good for them. And I think the member from St. James would agree that that's good business, and

certainly protecting Manitoba Hydro is the right thing to do for Manitobans.

Mr. Sala: The strategy document also suggests that there may be a potential use of surge pricing in the future. We know what happened with the use of surge pricing in Texas; we all saw that—what happened only a matter of months ago.

Does the minister and his government support what's identified in the—again, the 20-year Hydro strategic document—this suggestion that we will be potentially looking at surge pricing in Manitoba?

Mr. Wharton: And, certainly, comparing Texas to Manitoba Hydro probably isn't really an apples-to-apples comparison, but, you know, our—of course, we know that there is no direct mention of actually surge pricing.

As a matter of fact, that's—there's no reference, but also, that's something that I think that Manitoba Hydro would be protecting Manitobans on as they go forward because, you know, the bottom line is to keep Manitoba Hydro strong and publicly owned by Manitobans, and that's exactly what they're going to be doing, knowing and—full well that, you know, emergences of new energy are coming. They're here already, they're already dealing with it, but they know that there's going to be a growing requirement for it.

So, again, you know, I don't know where the member's going with this. I understand that, you know, he claims that, you know, he's concerned about Manitoba Hydro being privatized, which we know is simply fear mongering. And, you know, I wish the member would get on to something that's really important—Manitobans and talk about the Wall report and talk about how we can move forward to ensure that these type of fiascos never happen again under any government.

And that's what we're going to be focusing on and we continue to focus on, is going forward to ensure that processes are in place to protect Manitobans, proper stage gates are set up for large capital projects that will send a red flag up to ensure that we don't ever put sunk costs of a billion two into a project that should never have gotten started.

So, with that, you know, I hope the member's ready to move on to another line of questioning. I see the member from Maples is on, as well. I'm happy to talk about MPI and MBL as well. There are three great Crowns here that we have the pleasure of working with and working for the betterment of

Manitobans and we're looking forward to continuing discussing them today as well.

And, again, I thank the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) for asking those questions and I really appreciate the time we've had. And if he wants to continue, I'm ready to go.

So, thank you again and, certainly, we're looking for the betterment of all Manitobans.

Mr. Sala: I would like to ensure that it's made clear that I think Manitobans do care deeply about the future of Hydro and the potential unbundling and the separation into various components, as had happened in jurisdictions like Texas. And the strategic document does explicitly reference time-of-use pricing but I will not pursue that any further.

I'm going to ask one more question relating to Hydro before ceding in to my colleague from The Maples: Is the minister aware of any proposals for small modular reactors here in Manitoba?

Mr. Wharton: And I thank the member from St. James for that question. And, again, that just leads into exactly what we've been talking about, is the emergence of new technology that are coming to Manitoba.

* (15:30)

And, as a matter of fact, I do believe the member and I talked about this when we talked about his idea with the—that he floated to us on hydrogen. And we had a great conversation about that, and I could be mistaken, but certainly I'll remind the member—and Manitobans on the call today or on the line today—that, again, there's new technology coming.

And, as a matter of fact, SMRs are on the horizon, and we know there's a lot of interest growing right across Canada. Other jurisdictions have signed MOUs with other firms and I'm looking forward to continuing to grow that. And I know that Manitoba's open for business and certainly, if anybody wants to set up a business here in Manitoba—whether it be in the SMR field or the agriculture field or you name it—we're open for business, and certainly we're more than willing to take the time and do the work to ensure that Manitobans are the benefits and—the benefactors of new technology and new investments coming right here to Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Burrows—[*interjection*]-The Maples.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I'd like to ask—actually, I would like to thank the Leg. Clerk, Leg. staff and IT; this is—making possible us to meet virtually. You know, it's—even though we all want to be in person in the Leg., but this is the safest way we can do it at this moment. And I'd also like to thank the minister and his staff, making available for today and also, you know what, whenever I had any questions or emails, returning those emails in a timely manner is really appreciated. Thank you.

And I'll probably just go into the questions from there.

Could the minister update the committee on whether he anticipates MPI will also see a profit this year again due to the pandemic? If yes, how much?

Mr. Wharton: I would like to also welcome the member from The Maples to the conversation and again, like to thank him as well for his ability to communicate in a fashion that, unfortunately, is devoid of some of his colleagues, but certainly, he does a wonderful job.

And I am more than happy and I continue to be more than happy to be—make myself and my staff available for all members of the opposition when they have a question or a concern, particularly surrounding a constituent issue. And we're, of course—we're—that's what we do; that's what we're elected to do and we'll continue to do that in an—in a very non-partisan way to ensure Manitobans are protected.

So, thank you to the member for Maples for those comments and I appreciate the work the does for his constituents, too.

On a go-forward this year, '21-22, Manitoba Public Insurance—and these documents are public, their reports are public, so certainly, they are available to Manitobans and the opposition as well—were—they're looking at '21-22 of a profit of \$61 million.

And to that too, as well, it would be a great opportunity just to put, again, on the record the work that the board and the executive have done during these very difficult times with COVID and the pandemic over the last several months and, in turn, recognizing that not as many vehicles were on the road during that time with the, of course, work from home and, certainly, some of the restrictions that we've all been living through over the last several months has also provided the corporation with excess funds on their basic side—line as well.

And I'm certainly pleased that they were able to provide Manitobans during these difficult times over an excess of \$200 million in rebates to get back on the kitchen tables to help families get through these tough times.

So, with that rather long-winded response, Mr. Chair, again, I thank the member from The Maples and I look forward to his next question.

Mr. Sandhu: Just—when I see the minister said that there's a profit of \$61 million, I'm just wondering, why are we asking for a base freeze for the employees?

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu) for that question and certainly, members know and Manitobans know and business owners know, if you don't make money and show a profit, chances are you're not going to be around for a long time.

So, it's very—obviously, very good news that the Crown corporation, particularly MPI, is able to do that. There are so many fluctuations in their business, as the member knows, being the critic. He knows that one hailstorm can erode about \$150 million in profit in the matter of an overnight thunderstorm.

So, certainly, what's face value can erode very quickly, and businesses have to protect themselves for the—those devastating and catastrophic events. They happen every day across the world and they certainly—we're not devoid of it here in Manitoba and we know that when it comes to serious storms, and we're entering the storm season, as they are calling for a risk of a thunderstorm tonight.

But again, certainly, it's great that they have that—we'll call it that rainy day fund available if they do need it in their profit margins, so.

And certainly, we talked about this with the colleague from St. James as well—the member from St. James—with respect to mandates. Government sets mandates, and certainly, our government has done it; other governments have done it; the NDP have done it for years as well, and that's what governments do. And then the negotiations and the bargaining begins between the employer and the employee.

* (15:40)

And certainly, we know that negotiations have gone on in our Crowns. We know IBEW was on strike for 60 days and now they've gone to conciliation through the Labour Board. So that's the process. We respect it and we'll continue to respect the same

process at MPI and MBLL, for that matter, as they go through and work with their employees to ensure that they can bargain in good faith without government interference.

And that's exactly what we'll do is ensure that we are not involved, other than setting the mandate, and that's what we'll continue to do with MPI.

Mr. Sandhu: Could the minister tell us if any layoffs have taken place at MPI since last June due to the pandemic?

Mr. Wharton: Again, I thank the member for that question. And, again, I will answer the question, but before I do that I just wanted to go through again quickly with the supports that Manitoba Public Insurance have provided during these difficult times, during COVID—unprecedented contributions and support for Manitobans and I just want to get a few of them on the record, Mr. Chair—and certainly, thank you for indulging me—including turning over multiple service centres to support Manitoba's COVID-19 testing efforts.

We know that early on there was a lack of the ability to have space to do drive-through testing, and Manitoba Public Insurance stepped up. They were well positioned and their infrastructure was well aligned with the needs of public health in order to provide testing—drive-through testing. And that's exactly what they did, which was wonderful. As a matter of fact, we still have a centre in service today, as well.

And also, in respect to offering International Registration Plan relief is a form of extended renewal period. So what they did was, the IRP, which is due annually to the large and small trucking organizations, they actually put in some relief and extended the payment and helped them mitigate their cash flow concerns as they went through the tough six months in the industry, especially in the beginning of the pandemic.

Also, temporary suspended insurance of—cancellation notices and collection processes to all Manitobans.

So, great stuff provided by Manitoba Public Insurance. And let's not discount the human factor—almost redeployed over 70 staff to support provincial responses, including vaccine and contact tracing efforts. So, really good support—unprecedented support from Manitoba Public Insurance.

And we're happy to also—to provide an answer on the question from the member from The Maples, and that would be a resounding no.

Mr. Sandhu: What—when does the minister expect that the claim dispute tribunal to be up and running—the Bill 15, the one we just recently passed?

Mr. Wharton: I want to thank the member for Maples for the question.

As the member knows, the bill received royal assent on May 20th, so just received royal assent, which was good news.

Again, now it's subject to the 45-day consultation process, which is a public process. Manitobans now have 45 days to weigh in on the tribunal. And certainly, as we go forward, all of Manitobans' input is going to be factored in to how they—how MPI will eventually move forward to establishing the independent tribunal along with the help from Manitobans because that's who asked for the independent tribunal and that's who is going to be directly involved.

Mr. Sandhu: So after 45 days, what do you think? How long is going to take after 45 days? So is there any timeline on this? Or there's no timeline?

Mr. Wharton: Thank you to the member from The Maples for that question.

And, certainly, the process will continue to evolve now that royal assent has been given; also, again as I mentioned, the 45-day public consultation. So we know for sure that we're talking, you know, likely after the 45 days of the other processes.

But what I will do for the member—and certainly I've done it in the past and I'll continue to—is, as it winds through the process, certainly we'll keep the member informed so that certainly he is up to speed, so that if he needs to share any information with any of his constituents on when this will be up and running, we'll be more than happy to provide him with that information on a go-forward basis.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Minister, on this. Please do keep me in the loop so we can share the information with Manitobans.

Could the minister comment on whether he foresees MPI entering into a new contract with the Manitoba Motor Dealers Association or ATA? I'll just go in short form, ATA.

* (15:50)

Mr. Wharton: Thank you so much. I'm sure you're having a discussion about the Jets game tomorrow night with Patricia, but that's okay. It's going to be a good game. Go Jets go.

Thank you, thank the member as well for that question. ATA and MMDA, as the member knows, have been in negotiations—contractual negotiations—with MPI. Certainly we respect that process; we'll continue to. And we fully anticipate that, you know, an agreement will be reached for the betterment of all Manitobans. And certainly if anything changes on that, be more than happy to fill the member in, but we're of the mindset that the negotiations are continuing and we hope that things come to a conclusion sooner than later.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you for that. And also, is there any—can you share anything about what their ask is, what the MMDA and ATA's ask is?

We know that Saskatchewan is paying around \$92.68 per hour; our rates are \$74.43; and is there any—can the minister share any ask by the—those two, MMDA and ATA?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, you know, I wouldn't be privy to—other than what has been obviously made public, as the member knows—the rates. But I can tell the member, though, that Manitoba is the second highest in the country next to—we'll call an outlier—Saskatchewan.

Certainly we know that negotiations are continuing in a very collaborative way as we go forward. Certainly, with any negotiation, there's times where parties don't agree all the time, and certainly when it's a large Crown corporation, sometimes those issues become more public, and we really thank the members of M-M-T—MMDA and ATA and Manitoba Public Insurance for mitigating that process and keeping their discussions where they should be, and that's at the bargaining table, when it comes to what's the best for not only the parties involved but for Manitobans and Manitoba ratepayers.

So, being the second highest right now—closer to first and further from third—so certainly we're looking forward to ensuring that, you know, the Manitoba trades are back at work with a new contract very soon.

Mr. Sandhu: How many independent contracts has MPI entered into the—into with individual repair shops? Like, how many contracts they have signed with individual shops?

Mr. Wharton: Well, certainly, you know, those are negotiations between MPI and the shops. And certainly we hope all of them are going to be signed up soon, but we wouldn't be a-privy to, nor would we be getting directly involved in, those down-the-rabbit-hole negotiations that, quite frankly, are between the two players—the three players: MMDA and MTA and MPI. One thing we'll take away from being elected officials: a lot of acronyms will be definitely thrown around for years to come, I'm sure.

But—and for the—for-of course, for the member, we wouldn't be, obviously, get deeply involved in those numbers at this point, but, again, we're really optimistic that things are going to come to a conclusion. They've been—we know that they've been talking on a regular basis and certainly as recently as over the weekend. So that's good news that they're back at the table and they're talking, and certainly we encourage that for the betterment of Manitobans.

And certainly, the only disturbing part is—and I'll backtrack a bit on the royal assent of the independent dispute tribunal, Bill 15—I—you know, the member is advocating for it. I'm sure the member has constituents that may be looking for another avenue other than going to the courts or going to a non-independent tribunal, but my question would be: why would the member opposite vote against Bill 15?

Mr. Sandhu: Maybe the minister knows on this: I have raised a couple issues with—regarding to Bill 15, such as people who can't read or write. What is the solution for those people and how come there is no appeal process? After one person made the decision, there's no appeal process. And to the—go to the course, you can go only up to \$10,000 too, so.

Those were the concerns that I have asked the minister, I think, in the committees. So, even I asked minister to see if he wants to have an amendment done on those ones; he said no.

So I'll just go to my next question: We have seen the reports, I think it was provided by, actually, MPI in the media, that there's a certain number of shops who have signed individual contracts.

Can the minister share those numbers that MPI, even though it was in the media, is—or, minister can maybe take—undertake to provide those lists to us—how many people have signed individual contracts?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, would appreciate—the member said that he'd picked up something in the media. If he would provide—if he could provide us with that information, that'd be—would be helpful for

us because, you know, certainly we would be more than happy to do a fact check if it's appropriate.

But, again, we wouldn't deal into the negotiations on who's signed, who hasn't signed—you know, those kind of dealings. That's between MPI and the trades, and certainly, the member would respect that. I know that we do as a government and I would suspect that the member for The Maples (Mr. Sandhu) would respect that process as well.

So, if the member has that information, whether it be an article in the local paper or somewhere else, please—happy to get a copy over to us and, certainly, we'll fact check, if appropriate.

Mr. Sandhu: Maybe I'll—I will provide that information. I think it was in the news; I have to go through and look. Maybe I'll communicate with the minister staff through the email on this.

Could the minister provide the committee with a general update on how things generally with the Project NOVA as progressing?

* (16:00)

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, thank the member again, from the Maples. Now Project NOVA, again, is at the very early—the first steps of a multi-year project to bring MPI into, I guess, actually to bring it into line with other publicly owned insurance companies with respect to their ability to provide online services for Manitobans.

Certainly these are areas that should have been done years ago, but we certainly commend leadership of Manitoba Public Insurance, and again the support of our government to move forward to, again, provide a better, stronger and more relevant service for Manitoba ratepayers on a go-forward basis.

And the online services is important, but also getting out of manual spreadsheets. Can you believe, Mr. Chair—and maybe the member from The Maples didn't know this either but MPI was still using manual spreadsheets, you know, essentially to do some calculations. So we know that that's probably gone by the way of the dodo bird a few years ago. So, again, early stages. The member I'm sure will be along for the ride, at least for the next two years, again, until the next election cycle. But if we're still here at the table in this multi-year project, we'll be more than happy to continue to update the member from The Maples as it goes forward.

Mr. Sandhu: I'm going to actually give back the floor to member from St. James. He had a quick question for the minister.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the willingness to be flexible on the part of the minister, so thank you for this. Just had an important question that we wanted to ensure we got on the record today. Can the minister explain or help us understand what the impacts of Bill 40 will be in terms of revenues for MBL?

Mr. Wharton: Again, always want to ensure that we're providing information to members from the opposition on a regular basis. And we're very flexible and we've proven to be that way and I appreciate the comments from the member from St. James; we will continue to be.

As the member knows, his government—his government, his party; bite my tongue—his party held Bill 40 until the fall session. We know that Bill 40 is part of our mandate in Crown Services to provide more choice, more convenience and lower pricing for Manitoba consumers. And certainly as we go forward over the fall session, we're looking forward to engaging more and more on those discussions with Manitobans.

But certainly, delaying the bill will delay all the processes that are surrounding that particular bill, and again we'll look forward to bringing—bring this back to the discussion table in the early fall.

Mr. Sandhu: Could the minister tell the committee when online services, especially for those offered by brokers will begin to be online?

Mr. Wharton: And, again, this, the ask for the member from The Maples, is about the online services. Again, that's tied to Project NOVA, which is a multi-year project and—as I mentioned in another, previous answer. But certainly the upgrades that we also talked about will ensure service improvements for customers, in service delivery and partners alike. So, again, we look forward to continuing again to work in—with MPI, of course, through this process, with brokers. And, really, this is a real collaborative effort, in the sense that Project NOVA, with Project NOVA, a broker-liason working group was established.

So, this working group will involve, again, our brokers, MPI, to ensure that the offerings are much, much superior than what we've been accustomed to. And, again, Project NOVA will steer that ship, and again, certainly, the outcome of that likely, in a multi-year, the online is important. Obviously, a good

first step and probably—would probably have a window of anywhere from maybe two to three years by the time it's working and through Project NOVA. As I say, it's a multi-year project at Project NOVA, so just to give you, the member from The Maples, some window of—with respect, a window in or a look into a window with respect to online services improving. I think that's a fair assessment.

Mr. Sandhu: I'm sure probably the minister gets the update on this. Like, what stage are they at right now? I know it's a multi-year—are we at—completed 25 per cent, 50 per cent, 100 per cent? And I just wanted to know if the minister have a quick timeline, what per cent is completed, or anything like that?

Mr. Wharton: And, again, I just mentioned that the window is two to three years probably, because the project is a multi-year project but that is information that certainly the member—what—I just provided to. It's not 100 per cent, it's not 75, it's not 50, it's not 25. Again, we're in the early stages of implementing Project NOVA, MPI is. And, certainly, again lots of work to do. But you know Internet and this working group that was established with MPI through Project NOVA with the brokers, is a great step in order to ensure that Manitobans are going to be provided a service, that, bar none, will be one of the best in Canada.

Mr. Sandhu: Does the minister have a breakdown of how the new contract will affect the customer rate for the next five years?

* (16:10)

Mr. Wharton: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and, again, thank the member for The Maples for that question.

And, certainly, information in the contracts that were signed between the brokers and MPI is information that is obviously not public. I mean that we know that false narrative that the members from—the members of the opposition put on the record, of a loss of \$23 million, was clearly false information, and I don't know where, like, unless they're picking up a local paper and reading it in there, we know that it was very clear that the hard work done by the brokers and the conciliation process, the conciliator and MPI and their team, the board and the executive worked hard to ensure that Manitobans were also the benefactors of a multi-year contract with our brokers.

Brokers play an integral role. Brokers are going to be around for a long time, and they are really the front lines of MPI, an extension of, and certainly that's an asset that pays dividends for Manitoba ratepayers when they want to insure their vehicle or in turn, maybe purchase other insurance through their broker, that's great. And in saving over \$20 million in five years is wonderful because that also helps keeps rates low for Manitobans, and certainly we're proud of the teams for ensuring that Manitoba ratepayers were protected during this process.

Mr. Sandhu: I just heard the minister said a \$20-million saving. Can the minister undertake to provide that information to us, where the \$20-million saving the minister is talking about? And also, \$23 million extra for five years, it is in the news, so the minister looks like he's saying that's fake news, as being—we have heard so much in south of us, fake news. So, is the minister saying that all was fake news?

Well, I'll also ask the next question, maybe. Could the minister provide the final total cost paid to—I'll probably announce the last name wrong—Doug Finkinveiner [*phonetic*] for facilitating a conciliator—conciliation.

Mr. Wharton: You know, the member from The Maples mentions fake news. Well, you know, again, certainly—we'll certainly take information that's provided by MPI and the brokers as factual over what a local paper would write and also the fact that one of the local unions misrepresented the outcomes of the negotiations.

So, you know, I would certainly—and I'd hope the member would agree that if they're looking for facts, they should actually go to the source, and that source is, again, sourced through MPI and the brokers. And they were very clear: MPI estimates that essentially—approximately \$20 million in savings to ratepayers over the term of the agreement would be recognized.

So does the member have an issue with MPI and their management and their board and their executive? I would hope not, but it sounds like—that the member from The Maples is more trusting of the local media and the union, MGEU in this case, than he is the actual corporation—the Crown corporation—at MPI. Certainly, that doesn't send a good message to the hard-working folks at MPI that have gone through the most difficult time in history. And certainly I would expect the member would either retract those comments and apologize for throwing under the bus MPI board, MPI executive and brokers of Manitoba

when he is relying on a single source like a local newspaper.

Mr. Sandhu: I'm directly coming to the source now. The source is the minister right now. I'm asking to see if he will take—undertake to provide that \$20-million savings, where it is coming from. This is, like, directly the source, so this is on the top, where I'm going right now. I'm not going to the newspaper, I'm not going to anywhere other, as the minister is saying, and the newspapers are fake news. So I'm just coming directly to the source.

And also, like, could the minister undertake to provide a copy of the conciliator report to the committee so we all can read it to see what is in there? This is the information—Manitobans' information, and it's between IBAM and MPI, so ratepayers, Manitobans, have the right to know what is in that report.

Mr. Wharton: Again, just be able to put some facts on the record again for the member.

The IBAM and MPI successfully negotiated an agreement, a five-year agreement, saving Manitobans roughly \$20 million, to ratepayers of Manitoba Public Insurance. So, again, they reached an agreement. We thank the conciliator for their time, and there is no report other than the fact that MPI and IBAM—again, MPI has reported that there'll be approximately \$20 million in savings to the ratepayers of Manitoba over the term of the agreement.

* (16:20)

So I hope the member now accepts that. I've provided him the information that he's asked for. MPI has provided the information that he is looking for. And now we can move on to another line of question.

Mr. Sandhu: Does the minister plan on publicly releasing the conciliator report?

Mr. Wharton: There is no report.

Mr. Sandhu: So we hired a conciliator to have the report made for MPI or a contract they were negotiating. Is the minister going to release that report to the rightful owners, the ratepayers, the Manitobans? I'm sure they have the right to know what was discussed, how their—how much money is going to the IBAM from MPI. They have the right to know.

Mr. Wharton: Again, I'll see if we can help the member from The Maples. And, you know, of course recognizing that the member is fairly new to this House, and certainly we—again, I appreciate working

with the member and I continue to work with the member and certainly provide information when asked on a timely basis. And there's no difference here.

We know that in particular the minister, myself, issued a directive to have a conciliator essentially work with the parties to negotiate an agreement, and that's exactly what happened. The agreement was negotiated and the conciliator—essentially, his job was done. There's no report. He did exactly what he was hired to do. And the directive was given to Manitoba Public Insurance and IBAM to deal with the conciliator to negotiate an agreement. That's what they did. It's been reported and all the information is public and published publicly.

So if the member wants he can certainly find all the information related to the outcome of the agreement that was negotiated between IBAM and MPI online anytime, same as the rest of Manitobans.

Mr. Sandhu: I also asked the minister a question earlier, how much is—I'll say the first name only—Doug Finkbeiner—is—like, how much is the cost to the ratepayers and how much is the total conciliation process cost? And if the minister can provide those ones—those costs to Manitobans.

And I'll probably also move to the next question because there's quite a few questions. There's not much time left. MPI has recently moved their auto auction to be online. Could the minister tell the committee how much the Crown corporation anticipates in saving as a result of this?

Mr. Wharton: I apologize for the delay getting back to the member from The Maples.

And I know there were multiple FIPPA requests on the contract with Mr. Finkbinder [*phonetic*], the conciliator, and certainly we want to make sure that that number is accurate. So we'll endeavour to get that number for the member with respect to the cost of the conciliation.

And we know MPI will continue to monitor the new online auction—auto auction online, as they move forward, and certainly we look forward to—as Manitobans we look forward to recognizing and seeing the savings as they continue to report publicly to Manitobans.

Mr. Sandhu: Was this contract tendered?

* (16:30)

Mr. Wharton: Just, again, is the member asking about the conciliator, Mr. Finkbeiner? Just wanted to be clear.

Mr. Sandhu: This is about auto auction.

Mr. Wharton: Actually I do have some information on the conciliator. The cost was \$218,000. So, the member from The Maples, I did get that information. And how's that for timely? Quick, really quick.

And certainly, under the question regarding the auto auction, I certainly will take that under advisement and report back.

Mr. Sandhu: Sorry, I muted. Okay.

Impact Auto Auctions appeared to be opening the service. Could the minister tell us how much they have been contracted for?

Mr. Wharton: And I thank the member again. Again, I mentioned that we're going to take this under advisement and certainly endeavour to get the question answered for the member.

Mr. Sandhu: Could the minister tell the committee if Impact is an American-owned company?

Mr. Wharton: And again, certainly, you know, the member has some questions about this auto auction online. We'll certainly, again, as I said, we would look into this matter and get back to him. So if he has any other further line of questioning with respect to auto auction, certainly, just maybe in the matter of trying to get some time and ensuring the member has the opportunity to ask other questions, certainly, again, we'll endeavour, if he would like to get us that information that he's looking for with respect to auto auction, we'll certainly endeavour to get him the answers.

Mr. Sandhu: So the minister is taking under advisement to tell us if this company is American company and all the other details that we have asked earlier?

Mr. Wharton: Exactly. We're going to get the details, as the member has asked, and we will look into it.

Mr. Sandhu: Does Impact Auto has any offices in Manitoba? Or our minister can take this also under advisement.

Mr. Wharton: Correct.

Mr. Sandhu: I'm going to pass the floor over to my friend from Tyndall Park for the next 15 minutes. After that, the member from St. James will be taking over.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Okay, I thank you, colleague from Maples, for allowing me 15 minutes here just to ask some questions, and just before I get started, I, too, just wanted to sort of recognize and pay a big thank-you for how grateful I'm feeling as long—along with my colleagues, I'm sure, for all of the clerks and everyone who has been making it so the Legislative Assembly can function the way it has been throughout the entire pandemic, sort of creating the opportunities for us to be able to work safely from our offices and from our homes, and just always ensuring that we have felt safe when we come into the Legislature when we're working from home. So just a big thank-you for creating that for us.

I want to get started. I want to sort of take a different line of questioning and then I will fall into some Hydro and MPI, but the first question and topic that I wanted to touch on were taxi drivers. We've heard a little bit about taxicab owners throughout the pandemic, but we haven't heard anything about programs for taxicab drivers.

And we know that our taxicab drivers have worked non-stop throughout the pandemic. They have been risking their own health, their own safety throughout the pandemic, and to this very day, every single day, they're driving people, they're enabling people to go and get vaccinated.

So, my question for the minister is, up until this point, there hasn't been any recognition or any form of compensation for taxicab drivers. Is the minister planning to formally acknowledge, recognize or compensate in any sort of way?

Mr. Chairperson: The minister's going to be getting his answer—the clerks at the desk just said that he appreciates your acknowledgement for the member from Tyndall Park.

Mr. Wharton: I welcome the member from Tyndall Park. Great to have the opportunity to work with the member as well and have a discussion today on Crown corporations, and I appreciate the work that the member does for her constituents in the Tyndall Park area.

Again, that was a newer area from—similar to me. We got kind of moved over a little bit, and so we had the opportunity, and I always look at that as an opportunity as well, because we have an opportunity to meet new people and expand, you know, our relationships with our constituents in a whole new riding, which provides diversity and different relationships and cultures. So I'm sure the member is

experiencing that and continues to. And I know the member serves her constituents very well, so—and I appreciate the work she does in the Legislature every day and through these difficult COVID times.

So the member asked about taxicab drivers. Certainly we know, and I don't want to speak for the member—the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), but we know that we have some of the most generous programs available for Manitobans in Canada. We're very proud of that and we'll continue to support Manitobans.

And, in particular, at MPI's support, again providing over \$180 million in rebates, we know that those rebates were applicable to all registered owners in Manitoba; so we know our friends, our cab drivers and ride-share companies and other ones also were able to take advantage of that rebate, and again in excess of \$180 million from MPI.

So certainly there's been some work done. There's always more work to do, and certainly appreciate the question from the member from Tyndall Park and what she does.

Ms. Lamoureux: I'd like to thank the minister for taking the time to answer some of these questions, and I was just hoping to, I suppose, have a clearer answer on that first question. I say this because people who have worked throughout the pandemic, whether it's in retail stores, grocery stores, but who have continued to work, a lot of them have been eligible for programs such as the Risk Recognition Program or for the Manitoba Bridge Grant app. But when it comes to taxicab drivers, they haven't been eligible for any of these resources. They haven't even been acknowledged within the House, within the Chamber.

* (16:40)

And so maybe this can be used as an opportunity for the minister to properly acknowledge cab drivers—taxicab drivers—or explain or consider, maybe share with us if the department is considering any formal eligibility or program for them to be able to apply to.

Mr. Wharton: Again, I appreciate the advocacy the member from Tyndall Park is putting on the record for cab drivers and owners who have also gone through a very difficult time with reduced—obviously—traffic on the road; there's reduced—restaurants are closed and hotels are closed and other venues are closed, so definitely been a difficult time and certainly we recognize that. And again, I appreciate the advocacy the member's bringing forward today.

This would be something that would be best looked at through my colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), and certainly with her advocacy today, I'd be more than happy to, obviously, speak with my colleague and ensure that—again, we're not—you know, the bottom line is these are unprecedented times and, you know, there is no road map; there is no playbook on COVID, and certainly, you know, we're not going to get it right all the time, and we're a government that listens and we're a government that's transparent and open and certainly appreciate her advocacy today and certainly have those discussions.

Ms. Lamoureux: Okay. Last question on this topic. Just, would the minister and his department be willing to meet with me virtually over the next two or three weeks just to discuss the opportunity for a program?

Mr. Wharton: Absolutely. I welcome the member from Tyndall Park to reach out to my office; more than happy to engage in a discussion with her. I really appreciate the advocacy she's putting forward today here on the record.

And, certainly, that's why we ran for office; that's why we put our name on a ballot, is to ensure that we take care of our constituents; we take care of Manitobans. And, certainly, listening is part of that, and learning is part of that and I'd be more than happy to take a virtual meeting with the member from Tyndall Park, and I welcome her to reach out to our office, as I have with the member from Maples and as I have with the member from St. James that is also joining us on the line today.

I continue to do that; that's an area that I picked up in my private-sector life, you know. You've got to be there; you've got to be open and honest with customers and colleagues and that's exactly what we'll continue to do, and I appreciate the member reaching out and we'll certainly look forward to meeting with her virtually.

Ms. Lamoureux: Thank you, Minister, and we will follow up on that meeting.

Just wondering, is the minister considering some incentives for people who are switching over to environmentally friendly resources such as solar panels, for example? And if so, could he elaborate on them a little bit?

Mr. Wharton: Again, I thank the member from Tyndall Park for that question and—just for the record—Efficiency Manitoba, through Conservation and Climate, is now the responsible ministry when it

comes to those programs. Certainly, there was a time where it fell under Crown Services, but during the re-org, the—more emphasis now on that program through Efficiency Manitoba—formerly Power Smart—would be probably best to relate those questions to my colleague, member from—the Minister of Conservation and Climate (Mrs. Guillemard)—I apologize for that—and certainly I'm sure that she will endeavour to help her with that question.

Ms. Lamoureux: Okay, I appreciate it. I've got about five more minutes left, so I'm jumping around a little bit. I'm going to jump into talking about MPI—my colleague from St. Boniface asked about this about a week ago in question period, we [*inaudible*], so I was hoping the minister could help clarify this here.

We're under the impression that on June 13th, hundreds of Manitoba businesses and thousands of workers could be out of work. If this happens, Manitobans will have no place to get their cars fixed because MPI cancelled its agreement with over 230 Manitoba collision shops. Is this accurate?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, we had this discussion earlier on. For the benefit of the member from Tyndall Park and—currently, ATA and MMDA are in negotiations—have been in negotiations with MPI—continue to be in negotiations.

And we're, again, not directly involved in those negotiations, unlike the former government, where they stuck their nose into everything. We respect the process and we'll continue to do that.

Certainly, we know that there's been some good communication over the last several days between the parties and we respect that process and we will, again, expect that there'll be a deal coming, hopefully soon, that's in the betterment of all Manitoba ratepayers, and again, support not only our trades but also MPI as well as we go forward.

Negotiations, as I mentioned earlier, are challenging. Sometimes we agree and sometimes we don't, but I can share with the member from Tyndall Park, as I did with members earlier, that those negotiations are continuing. They are at the table and I can ensure the member that discussions are ongoing as we speak.

Ms. Lamoureux: Could the minister share with us or confirm if MPI did or did not cancel its agreement with over 230 Manitoba collision shops?

Mr. Wharton: We know that, obviously, this is a—we take all these issues very seriously, and this is one of

them, as I mentioned earlier in my preamble. But, you know, MPI and the larger LVAA group, of course, M-D-A-M-D-MMDA and ATA—their contract was coming to a close. We know that negotiations were ongoing and they were at a stalemate.

So I know that the member would know that MPI exercised their ability to continue to negotiate individually with shops and shop owners and that's what they continue to do and they've continued to do, but also engaging the MMDA and ATA through the process.

So, a broad communication going forward. Certainly, we respect that process, as I mentioned earlier. And good—we feel that some good in-ground is—incursions have been made and we're looking forward to, hopefully, having something presented soon to Manitoba ratepayers.

* (16:50)

Ms. Lamoureux: I'm just looking at the member from St. James. If he gives me the thumbs up, I can ask one more or does he want me to cede the floor?

An Honourable Member: You can ask one more, Cindy. Go ahead.

Ms. Lamoureux: Okay, I appreciate that—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Tyndall Park.

Ms. Lamoureux: Different topic. Just moving forward. Hydro deals with Xplornet. Will the government commit to supporting made-in-Manitoba companies such as Clear Sky Communications and Broadband Communications North for future deals between the Province and private companies to expand access to broadband?

Thank you.

Mr. Wharton: I really appreciate the question from the member from Tyndall Park. It gives me an opportunity to put some facts on the record.

And certainly, we know that over the last two decades, the speed of Internet was far from the speed it needed to be, pardon the pun. But the bottom line is that for far too long, Internet connectivity was piecemealed out throughout the province, and, unfortunately, it didn't serve greater Manitobans; we like to call it, essentially, to the farm. And there were so many thousands of Manitobans that have been underserved for many years.

So we recognized that. And COVID brought this to light even more so. During COVID, we realized, again, that more students were working from home, as they are today; more families, men and women, are working from home today, and they rely on good, fast, quality Internet and cellphone service.

So, certainly, seeing this taking place and COVID really shining a light on the issue, particularly in northern and rural communities in Manitoba, we moved forward with an RFQ. And all Manitoba companies, all companies related to Internet supply, had the opportunity to work in—within the RFQ.

And at that point, once they decided whether they wanted to play ball, an RFP was also put out, again, providing the opportunity for all sectors to be involved in the RFP process and to bid on the broader supply of currently dark fibre supplied by Manitoba Hydro—it's been in the ground for many, many years, underutilized—and provide Internet service and advanced cell service in many areas, as well, to Manitobans throughout the province, particularly, again, in rural and northern and First Nation communities.

So, exciting times coming. As we know, the Minister of Central Services (Mr. Helwer) made the announcement that the signing of an MOU with Xplornet—and it's going to be a very quick process. We're excited about the time frames that Xplornet had put forward in their RFP and the MOU stating that they'll have Manitobans connected and the ones that are underserved served better in the very near future, as a matter of fact, within the next two to three years.

So, great question. I appreciate the question from the member from Tyndall Park. Certainly hope—I believe this answers it. There's obviously a fair and open transparent process, and we're pleased that Xplornet was successful, of course. And moving forward with better connectivity for all Manitobans, whether you be in rural and northern communities or southern communities of Manitoba, we're looking forward to that.

So with that, again, I thank the member from Tyndall Park in taking part in this process and look forward to seeing her again in the fall. And stay well and stay safe.

Mr. Sala: No further questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing that there's no further questions, we will now turn to the resolutions, beginning with the second resolution as we referred

this consideration of the first resolution containing the minister's salary.

At this point, we will now virtually—members be unmuted, their mics, so that they can respond to the questions of each—so—resolution.

Resolution 5.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,170,000 for Crown Services, Crown Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 5.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,418,715,000 for Crown Services, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered in the Estimates of the Department is item 5.1(a), the minister's salary contained in resolution 5.1.

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to make a motion, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Go ahead.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to motion that line item 5.1(a)—

Mr. Chairperson: Sorry, you're going to have to say I move.

Mr. Sala: Apologies.

I move that line 5.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Crown Services' (Mr. Wharton) salary be reduced to \$33,600.

Mr. Chairperson: Did you mean to say line item 5.1(a)?

Mr. Sala: That's correct.

Mr. Chairperson: I'll get you do it again just to—exactly what it's—how it's scripted.

Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Sala: Gladly. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I apologize for this.

I move that line item 5.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Crown Services' salary be reduced to \$33,600.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion's in order. Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

The honourable member for St. James? No?

Mr. Sala: No. No further comments.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there—any other comments or questions?

Is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the resolution—shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: In my—

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

I—the motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Now we'll go to resolution one point—5.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$662,000 for Crown Services, Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Crown Services.

The next set of Estimates to be considered in this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration.

But we have what—one minute left.

What is the will—do we have—should we have a recess until 5 p.m. and then we'll—[*interjection*]

An Honourable Member: Can we just call it 5 o'clock?

Mr. Chairperson: No, we can't because we're in the Chamber and we have to make sure that this goes until 5 because the other ones are going in the other committee rooms. So we have to go to five.

An Honourable Member: Recess.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, recess? Okay.

Recess until 5 p.m.

Thanks everyone, appreciate it.

The committee recessed at 4:59 p.m.

The committee resumed at 5 p.m.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until October 6—Wednesday, October 6, unless the Speaker calls the House to come in earlier, but for now, it's October 6, 2021.

So, everybody have a great break, and we'll see everybody on October 6.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, June 1, 2021

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