

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

| Member | Constituency | Political Affiliation |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| AL TOMARE, Nello | Transcona | NDP |
| ASAGWARA, Uzoma | Union Station | NDP |
| BRAR, Diljeet | Burrows | NDP |
| BUSHIE, Ian | Keewatinook | NDP |
| CLARKE, Eileen, Hon. | Agassiz | PC |
| COX, Cathy | Kildonan-River East | PC |
| CULLEN, Cliff, Hon. | Spruce Woods | PC |
| DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon. | Roblin | PC |
| EICHLER, Ralph | 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, Hon. | Assiniboia | PC |
| KHAN, Obby | Fort Whyte | PC |
| KINEW, Wab | Fort Rouge | NDP |
| LAGASSÉ, Bob | Dawson Trail | PC |
| LAGIMODIERE, Alan, Hon. | 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 | Wolseley | NDP |
| NESBITT, Greg | Riding Mountain | PC |
| PEDERSEN, Blaine | Midland | PC |
| PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon. | Turtle Mountain | PC |
| REYES, Jon, Hon. | Waverley | PC |
| SALA, Adrien | St. James | NDP |
| SANDHU, Mintu | The Maples | NDP |
| SCHULER, Ron | Springfield-Ritchot | PC |
| SMITH, Andrew, Hon. | 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 |
| <i>Vacant</i> | Thompson | |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

We acknowledge we are gathering—we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishiniknewuk [*phonetic*], Dakota Oyate, Denesuli-suline [*phonetic*], Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Please be seated. Good afternoon. Let me just get organized.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Fifth Report

Mr. Len Isleifson (Chairperson): I wish to present the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development presents the following as its Fifth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on May 24, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 16)** – *The Financial Administration Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la gestion des finances publiques*
- **Bill (No. 29)** – *The Mennonite College Federation Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Fédération des collèges mennonites*
- **Bill (No. 33)** – *The Municipal Assessment Amendment and Municipal Board Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation municipale et la Loi sur la Commission municipale*
- **Bill (No. 34)** – *The City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment and Planning Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Charte de la ville de Winnipeg et la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire*
- **Bill (No. 37)** – *The International Child Support and Family Maintenance (Hague Convention) Act / Loi sur le recouvrement international des aliments destinés aux enfants et à d'autres membres de la famille (Convention de La Haye)*
- **Bill (No. 228)** – *The Eating Disorders Awareness Week Act / Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation aux troubles de l'alimentation*

Committee Membership

As per the Sessional Order passed by the House on October 7, 2020, and subsequently amended, Rule 82(2) was waived for the May 24, 2022 meeting, reducing the membership to six Members (4 Government and 2 Official Opposition).

- Hon. Ms. CLARKE
- Hon. Mr. FRIESEN
- Mr. ISLEIFSON
- Ms. MORLEY-LECOMTE (Vice-Chairperson)
- Ms. NAYLOR
- Mr. WASYLIW

Your Committee elected Mr. ISLEIFSON as the Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Ms. LAMOUREUX
- Hon. Mr. REYES
- Hon. Mr. GOERTZEN

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 29)** – *The Mennonite College Federation Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Fédération des collèges mennonites*:

Cheryl Pauls, Canadian Mennonite University

Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 33)** – *The Municipal Assessment Amendment and Municipal Board Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation municipale et la Loi sur la Commission municipale*:

Kam Blight, Association of Manitoba Municipalities

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 34)** – *The City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment and Planning Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Charte de la ville de Winnipeg et la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire*:

Marc Pittet, City of Winnipeg Planning, Property and Development Department
James Platt, Private citizen

Your Committee heard the following three presentations on **Bill (No. 228)** – *The Eating Disorders Awareness Week Act / Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation aux troubles de l'alimentation*:

Elaine Stevenson, Alyssa Stevenson Eating Disorder Memorial Trust
Lea Neufeld La Rue, Women's Health Clinic
Kristen Bauman, Private citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 16)** – *The Financial Administration Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la gestion des finances publiques*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 29)** – *The Mennonite College Federation Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Fédération des collèges mennonites*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 33)** – *The Municipal Assessment Amendment and Municipal Board Amendment*

Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation municipale et la Loi sur la Commission municipale

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill with the following amendment:

THAT Clause 10(2) of the Bill be amended in the proposed clause 64.1(1)(b) by striking out "third day" and substituting "fifth day".

- **Bill (No. 34)** – *The City of Winnipeg Charter Amendment and Planning Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Charte de la ville de Winnipeg et la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 37)** – *The International Child Support and Family Maintenance (Hague Convention) Act / Loi sur le recouvrement international des aliments destinés aux enfants et à d'autres membres de la famille (Convention de La Haye)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 228)** – *The Eating Disorders Awareness Week Act / Loi sur la Semaine de sensibilisation aux troubles de l'alimentation*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Tabling of reports—*[interjection]* Oh, my apologies.

The honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson).

Mr. Isleifson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker

I move, seconded by the honourable member from Seine River, that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to table a revision to the Estimates of expenditure for Manitoba Budget 2022 and accompanying notice.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And I should indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

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

Paramedic Services Week

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I would like to acknowledge our heroes in paramedicine for the incredible work they do for all Manitobans. From May 22nd to 28th Manitoba celebrates Paramedic Services Week.

The theme of Paramedic Services Week is Faces of Paramedicine, which highlights the specialized roles within the paramedic profession.

In many cases, paramedics are the first contact that patients have in their health-care journey. You provide life-saving assistance in medical emergencies and have an indisputably important role in health care.

You are the professionals who keep patients calm on the other end of a dispatch call. You are the drivers rushing ambulances through our streets and the pilots careening through our prairie skies. You are the first knock at the door and the first sign of hope for individuals and their families. You have stepped into positions on vaccination teams, in emergency rooms and on research teams in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

That is why, in Budget 2022, we have included a historic investment of \$812 million, which demonstrates our government's dedication to support Emergency Medical Services. Within Budget 2022, we purchased 65 new ambulances, which will refresh one third of the Province's fleet.

Our government is also investing \$4 million to hire 35 full-time primary-care paramedics and \$3.5 million to increase dispatch call bandwidth. Recently, \$3.8 million went towards developing new EMS stations in Portage la Prairie and Crystal City.

Our government will continue to invest and support these heroes who put their health and safety on the line to care for Manitobans. You work selflessly, but it is paramount to recognize how you also require care and compassion.

We recognize the immense stress that you face due to emotional calls and challenging work days. We would like to applaud Shared Health's colleague-to-colleague mental wellness team and their efforts to listen to first responders and help them explore healthy coping mechanisms.

* (13:40)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen recently the tragic circumstances that our paramedics and first responders are asked to respond to. The tragedies in Texas and Buffalo are both horrific for the loss of life but also for the toll it takes on emergency responders.

I would ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after members have responded, for a moment of silence to remember those who have died in mass shootings in recent days, and the paramedics and first responders in Manitoba and around the world who are called to save lives and comfort families.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Paramedic Services Week, we commend those in paramedicine who dedicate their lives to saving the lives of others. Our paramedics work day in and day out, often at great personal risk, to provide expert care when we need it. Everyone in Manitoba is fortunate to know that when they're in emergency, help is on the way.

Unfortunately, after years of PC cuts, this help is taking much too long to arrive. Paramedic arrival times are up to 35 per cent longer in rural Manitoba than they were just a few years ago. In Winnipeg in January, there were a cumulative 28 hours in which zero ambulances were available to respond to emergencies.

Now, of course, these delays are not the fault of our paramedics; they're the fault of a government that consistently chooses cuts over care.

So today, as we thank paramedics for their service, we also pause to acknowledge the burden they're under and the challenges that they face. Recent media reports shifts as long as 23 hours for paramedics. They need relief and they need our support. In an emergency, every moment matters, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nobody knows that more than those in health care providing emergency medical services.

It's about time that the PC government appreciated not only the critical work that paramedics do, but acknowledge the understaffing crisis that continues to make their work exponentially harder. They've been working for over four years with an expired contract, and it's long overdue that they got a contract too.

That's why during Paramedic Services Week, the Manitoba NDP reiterates our commitment to invest in paramedics and support their work-life balance, while they care for us and Manitobans across the province.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for River Heights have leave to respond to the minister's statement? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Deputy Speaker, first and foremost, a big thank you to all paramedics in Manitoba on this week, Paramedic Services Week, and indeed, on every week.

Paramedics do incredible work, often under very challenging circumstances. This is true for all paramedics, but is particularly true for paramedics working in rural areas, where the longer distances mean more active involvement in care during transport, and sporadic emergency room closures add to the problems.

The development of community paramedicine has been positive, but it still has some way to go. For example, there is still no access to community paramedicine in Camperville, in spite of the need.

There is a province-wide shortage of paramedics which has not been addressed, despite the present government having had seven years to act.

Medicine, and in particular paramedicine, is not a static discipline. Treatments and supports, including social supports, are changing all the time, and ongoing continuing education and training is essential to providing optimal help to individuals in difficulty. Training for work in rural areas has additional challenges.

There are opportunities to improve, such as enabling quicker handover of patients when paramedics arrive in emergency rooms and addressing communication gaps for existing communication systems in some rural areas. Better training in handling those who are elderly, especially those who have some level of dementia, is also important, as many who are being transported and require special care are elderly.

To sum it up: thank you, thank you, thank you, all paramedics in Manitoba. The work you do every day is essential. We thank you for your ability to be emergency responders in very tragic and difficult circumstances and we appreciate your efforts.

Merci. Miigwech. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As per the Minister of Health's (Ms. Gordon) request, is there leave for a moment of silence? [*Agreed*]

A moment of silence was observed.

The honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure—and I would, again, reiterate the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with the statement.

Flooding Update

Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Mr. Deputy Speaker, our hydrologic forecasting team has indicated there is no significant precipitation in the forecast for southern and central Manitoba over the next three days.

With the exception of the Winnipeg River and the Souris River, all locations north and south of Winnipeg along the Red River are declining slowly but are expected to remain high until early June, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Water levels in the—most drains, creeks and tributaries are also declining.

The Winnipeg River is expecting very high flows and water levels are—significant water volumes upstream of Lake of the Woods and Lac Seuli [*phonetic*], which is impacting many locations within the Whiteshell Provincial Park. The Winnipeg River is expected to crest in early June, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mandatory evacuation notices have been issued to parts of the Whiteshell area, and some roads have been deemed unsafe. Manitobans have been advised not to travel into the Whiteshell Provincial Park area.

Our provincial staff will continue to identify critical infrastructure within the Whiteshell Provincial Park and develop a mitigation plan to ensure continuous operations and provide all necessary flood prevention support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, 33 local authorities, four northern affairs communities, seven First Nation communities and one provincial park has declared states of local emergency.

Our provincial staff will continue to update the—update Manitoba 511 app with the latest road reopening information across the province as well as closures within the Whiteshell Provincial Park.

To all provincial staff, municipal officials and volunteers: we thank you. Our government and

Manitobans across the province deem your dedication in fighting this historical flood—we commend you all.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, all Manitobans continue to be concerned about the rising water levels in the Whiteshell and news that there's not much additional that can be done to reduce the flow on the Winnipeg River. Inflow levels are at their highest levels since we began recording them in 1907 and there's a lot more water still to come from Ontario. A mandatory evacuation notice is now in effect in the northern portion of the Whiteshell Provincial Park.

Manitobans and all—and organizations in the region, including lodges and outfitters, need help now, and we commend all those on the ground who are helping to sandbag and mitigate further damage. But as the crest is still weeks away, they'll also need help rebuilding when the flood waters recede later this summer. Many are already asking for information on plans for financial support programs for those impacted in the Whiteshell and surrounding areas, including lodges and outfitters, as well as those who have primary and secondary properties. Whiteshell residents and business owners are desperate to know that compensation is on the way as soon as possible.

Many Whiteshell residents are also expressing frustration about the lack of warning that they were given about the severity of the situation heading their way. Local resident Amy Vereb told the press yesterday that, quote: What I'm hearing from local people is just the frustration. They're not getting enough help. We're doing the best we can here with our family and friends and the support from the guys across the road. They should have told us, listen, in two weeks there's a lot more water coming. End quote.

* (13:50)

As always, our thanks goes out to the countless provincial staff, firefighters, Hydro employees and, of course, the volunteers on the ground who are working around the clock to protect lives and property.

We look forward to further information from the government on medium- and long-term plans for support, rebuilding and mitigation across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the member have leave to speak to the minister's statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamont: A great thanks to everybody who's been working so hard, everybody in the department as well as people on the ground who've been struggling to keep flood waters at bay.

There have been a number of—this is, of course, a very large flood that affects communities, that often our focus in Winnipeg is Winnipeg, and we're seeing flooding in places which is much worse than usual.

We've—I just wanted to touch on a few. There's been St. Pierre Jolys, St. Laurent, Powerview-Pine Falls and, of course, the city of Winnipeg. The thing that all three of these have in common, in addition to a total of 15 municipalities, is they're all part of the Association des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba who are French-speaking, and I just wanted to flag for the minister that there's been a lot of stuff that has not been translated on the website which probably should be.

This is an issue that also came up in COVID where there were emergency situations. People were being asked to vaccinate or ask for help, and there was no French translation. There are many people who live outside of St. Boniface, who live in rural areas, who speak French. But just as an indication, when you click over from the flood information from English to French, the last press release that was put up there was the 16th of April 2019. So we're well behind both on—and that was in English as well.

So if the minister could just communicate and ensure that we're making sure that forms—DFA forms—and that information is being communicated in the language that these communities speak, it'll actually go a long way to helping them out, both in terms of their flood assistance but also, certainly, when people are looking to recover.

Thank you very much.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Return of In-Person High School Graduations

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a very special month ahead in June.

After two years that included remote learning, hybrid classes, class cohorts, cancelled sports and cancelled school trips, young Manitobans this year will celebrate together, in person, the milestone of high school graduations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my daughter was part of the class of the first cancelled grads in 2020. She and her friends had to deal with the sense of loss and disappointment, as did hundreds of other graduates over the last two years.

We as MLAs have missed attending the in-'persing,' exciting assemblies that signal the achievements of bright young leaders in our communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that I very much look forward to being present at high school graduations this June in my own constituency of Fort Richmond. Schools had to get creative for their graduation ceremonies during the last two years, but this year it will be great to see all these young and eager, smiling faces complete an important chapter of their life.

I am very happy to join Southeast Collegiate and Fort Richmond Collegiate graduation ceremonies this year, and I know that it will include strong feelings of gratefulness. Like all my colleagues here in the House, we welcome the return to in-person celebrations.

I want to congratulate all students graduating in Manitoba this year, including some of our pages with in the Chamber. Well done.

Thank you.

Krystal Mousseau

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): One year ago today, Krystal Mousseau died. She was 31 years old.

Krystal was born in Winnipeg and grew up on the Ebb and Flow First Nation alongside her siblings. She always had an outgoing and bubbly personality and loved spending time with her family. Some of these favourite moments came around a late-night bonfire, or perhaps on a Lake Manitoba beach during a hot summer day, or even just yard-saling with her mom, Elaine.

Krystal had a sweet tooth and loved to unwind with some gummies or NERDS and watch a favourite movie after a long day. Some of her favourite films that she watched most often were *The Devil Wears Prada* and *She's All That*.

Last spring, Krystal contracted COVID-19 and thereafter required hospitalization. The systems that should've helped her instead failed her, and Krystal ended up passing away as a result.

Like all of us, Krystal had dreams for the future. Some of these were pretty humble: she wanted to take a trip to British Columbia. She also hoped to one day watch her two daughters graduate from school.

Krystal joined her partner, Michael, who passed away a few years earlier. Her daughters are now growing up with their extended family, who are all very close. Krystal's kids today are now 13 and 14 years old.

To her two girls: your mom did everything for you and she loved you so very much. To her family—Elaine, Karen, Kristy, Renee, Theresa, Agnes, Clifford and Kevin: you honour Krystal with the work you do on her behalf. And to Krystal: your family tells me you were the piece of the puzzle that kept them all together.

And to the people of Manitoba: let us never forget who Krystal Mousseau was.

International Peace Gardens

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I rise today to pay tribute to the International Peace Garden, the only garden in the world that straddles an international boundary.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, 90 years ago, in 1932, 50,000 people from Manitoba and North Dakota travelled to—by foot, by horse and buggy and by Model T to pledge and celebrate the everlasting peace between Canada and in the United States. What better place to do it than in a garden, in touch with the natural world and calm of the beauty around us. In 1932, this was the—only a dream. Today, it's a reality.

The International Peace Garden is a mix of beautiful floral gardens nestled in 2,300 acres in the heart of Turtle Mountain. A stream runs through a formal garden where people love to photograph themselves with a foot on each of the—each country. There are lakes and trails and wildflowers and waterfalls and one world's finest collection of succulents and cactus in the conservatory which is under construction for an expansion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this summer, we will open a children's playground that pays tribute to Indigenous partners. We are working with our further plans with our Indigenous board members to celebrate the fact that in millennia, the Turtle Mountain was a place for First Nations that would gather for peace talks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have some special guests in the gallery here today, and they're my fellow board members and friends. And in the gallery we have the

president, Dorothy Dobbie, and we have board members Judy Saxby and Charlie Thomsen, who's also our capital campaign co-chair.

We invite all Manitobans to come to the garden to celebrate with us on July 30th, the long weekend, IPG's 90th anniversary.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let's give them a round of applause.

Catalytic Converter Theft

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): It's time for this government to stand up for Manitoba consumers.

More measures are needed to prevent catalytic converter thefts. In the past two reporting years, in 2020 and 2021, MPI reports a 450 per cent increase in these claims. And 2022 promises to be worse, and many claims actually go unreported.

Just a few weeks ago, a seniors block in my riding had their parking lot targeted. Residents in northeast Winnipeg are reporting catalytic converter thefts even while they shop at Kildonan Place.

As long as precious metals like rhodium, palladium and platinum are worth thousands of dollars an ounce, these thefts will continue. Organized groups of criminals have a shopping list of vehicle types. It's not uncommon for one to fetch up to \$800. Manitoba drivers aren't fully protected against these thefts because Manitoba Public Insurance charges a betterment fee.

There are ways we can combat catalytic converter theft. I've introduced Bill 232, The Catalytic Converter Identification Act, which would require motor vehicle dealers in the province to mark the vehicle identification number, the VIN number, on the catalytic converters of every vehicle sold by a dealership, including new and used cars. The purpose of the marking or etching would be to identify the catalytic converter to a specific vehicle, something that's currently not possible.

The provincial government should order MPI to offer substantial discounts to Manitoba drivers who have their catalytic converters engraved with the VIN numbers to incentivize people to get it done. Legislation like Bill 232 would be a meaningful step in catalytic converter theft prevention and one more tool in the fight against thefts occurring across the province.

* (14:00)

We also need to improve the current bill—government Bill 9—legislation before the House by requiring proper documentation and record keeping to be increased to five years from the two years proposed—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Ask for leave.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leave has been denied.

St. James Assiniboia 55+ Centre

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development): Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I rise to recognize the 30th anniversary of the St. James Assiniboine 55-plus centre.

West Winnipeg is the home to one of the highest seniors population in Manitoba. In the fall of 1998, the St. James Assiniboine seniors centre was in the formative stages and a public meeting was held at the Deer Lodge Centre. At this meeting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a steering committee was established to research and develop a plan for the centre that will meet the needs of the growing 55-plus populations in St. James.

By the fall of 1991, a board of directors had been established and a founding meeting had taken place. Next, they needed to secure a home space. The following summer, in a temporary space, a mailing address would be attained at the St. James Civic Centre.

On June 19th, 1992, the St. James Assiniboine seniors centre was officially incorporated. By the fall of 1993, the centre had settled at its current location at the Deer Lodge Centre and maintains its reputation as an independently operated, charitable non-profit organization that offers a variety of different programs and services that benefit seniors around the community, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Over the past 30 years, the centre has evolved into a place where their members have come to see in themselves and the location as a second home. Now known as the St. James Assiniboine 55-plus centre, they look forward to moving back to the St. James Civic Centre once the renovations are completed.

In honour of their 30th anniversary, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they've invited you and others to—and all Manitobans to celebrate with them on June 16th

with a three-course dinner, live entertainment at the Holiday Inn. You can visit them online for more information at stjamescentre.com as well as celebrating 30 years of outstanding support for seniors in our local community.

I also want to recognize board president, Janet Jackmann, and welcome Sarah Buchan to her new role as executive director of the 55+ Centre. The efforts of the many volunteers that have made this happen, Mr. Deputy Speaker—again, I want to congratulate them on 30 years.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before proceeding to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's gallery, where we have with us today Mr. Vilhjálmur Wíium, the consul general of Iceland in Winnipeg, who arrived this month to commence his diplomatic posting in Manitoba.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

* * *

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I also wish to inform the House this afternoon that one of our pages, Ethan, is serving his last day in the Chamber today—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

And I wanted to share some comments with the House. I think, Ethan, you wrote this. Am I right? [*interjection*] Okay, good, because I was a little confused on the grammar, here. So this—these are Ethan's words, just to make that plain.

It has been my honour to serve as a page during this session. From my first day to today I always have a feeling of excitement, anticipation and pride when I walk up the Grand Staircase of this building. It makes me feel like a boss.

Having an opportunity like this at my age has been one of the highlights of my life, and it will have a lasting, positive impact for my future.

I would like to thank my grade 10 geography teacher Mr. Martin Riley at Miles Mac Collegiate for referring and inspiring me to apply to this program.

I have been very fortunate to have worked with my two bosses, Cam and Dave, and to build a friendship with them as well as forming relationships with many of our MLAs.

Before this opportunity, I have always said that I want to become a doctor. Walking out, I could see myself sitting in one of the blue chairs as an MLA. This will hopefully not be the last time you see Ethan De Brincat in this Chamber. Perhaps, he says, my political journey has just begun.

Ethan, we wish you the best—the best, and thank you for your service.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And we 'alf—we also welcome Ethan's mom in the gallery, as well. Give us a wave.

And we also have in the gallery, from Poplar Grove School, eight grade 7 to 9 students under the direction of Darwin Froese. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski).

We welcome you here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

School Shooting in Uvalde, Texas Condolences to Family

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Yesterday, Manitobans, Canadians and Americans alike had our hearts shattered by the absolute tragedy that unfolded in Uvalde, Texas. The idea that 19 children and two teachers could be killed in an act of senseless violence and murder, I think, defies what we want to believe about human nature but confirms the fact that we have to respond, both by showing outpourings of public support and solidarity with our American relatives, but also in assisting them in putting an end to this senseless gun violence.

Nine years ago, I had a chance to visit Uvalde, Texas, when I was doing some reporting on the agricultural industry. I don't know what that gives me the licence to say today, other than those are hard-working, blue-collar folks who I don't think are very different from us here in Manitoba. So, my heart goes out to them.

I do have a question on universities and colleges, but I wanted to put those record—those words on the permanent record.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his comments.

What happened to these children in Texas, these 19 children, is absolutely horrific. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a mother myself, I can only imagine what those mothers are going through right now, what the

parents are going through, what those family members are going through as a result of this senseless act of violence.

So, our hearts and our thoughts and our prayers go out to each one of those family members and to all of those children which—it must have been just horrific to experience that themselves. It's going to be very traumatic for those individuals, as well, for those other children. And we pray that they get the help that they need to help them through this, because they would have lost a friend and a loved one, as well.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, our thoughts and prayers go out to all of those family members and friends and teachers and all of those who were negatively impacted as a result of this senseless act of violence.

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

Post-Secondary Education Tuition Increase

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Tuition is going up in Manitoba. I'll table the documents which illustrate that college tuition is set to rise \$250 this year. Students at universities will be paying some \$200 more this year.

Now, of course, the Premier and her Cabinet didn't tell the people of Manitoba during their budget announcement that tuition was going to get a lot more expensive this year. But here it is, in black and white: tuition is going up at a time of record inflation.

Why is the Premier increasing tuition by hundreds of dollars for thousands of students across Manitoba?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question.

I think the important thing here is that we are making investments in our post-secondary education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ensure that those students get the education that they need in order to enter the workforce. So we will continue to make those investments here in Manitoba.

* (14:10)

We will continue to also offer Student Aid for those individuals who need to have access to those—education, and they need to have access to the money to ensure that they can afford that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We'll continue to make those investments in our students.

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

Mr. Kinew: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Premier's decision here means it is going to cost more for Manitobans to go to school to become a nurse, to do a pre-med program, to become an electrician: \$250 more per year for those headed to colleges like Red River, and about \$200 more for those who are enrolling in a university program.

At a time of record inflation where the cost of living just keeps going up and up and up, the PC government is making you pay more. Life is getting more expensive and that ticket to education that would help empower you and increase your earning potential to respond is now slipping further and further out of reach.

Why is the PC government increasing tuition on hard-working families and students across Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition continues to put false information on the record.

The fact is that we are spending \$33 million more—investing \$33 million more in Student Aid programs for Manitoba students, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's more, not less like the Leader of the Opposition just put factually incorrect information on the record in this Chamber.

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

Orange Shirt Day Statutory Holiday Inquiry

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): College tuition's going up \$250. University tuition's going up \$200. I tabled the documents from the ministry that proves it.

What is the Premier referring to? It's factual. It's getting more expensive to go to university in Manitoba. I have to point out what was just said on the record simply does not line up with the facts.

Looking ahead to the next school year, we know that one of the important dates that educators will circle on their calendars is September 30th.

I'd like to ask the Premier directly whether she plans to make Orange Shirt Day a provincial statutory holiday in Manitoba this year?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will refer to the beginning part

of the Leader of the Opposition's question, where he continued to go along the lines of putting false information on the record.

The facts of the matter are that we are investing more than \$33 million more in student bursaries and aid for those students who really need that help in order to allow them the privilege of going to our post-secondary education institutions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We are also investing more than \$20 million more this year in post-secondary education. That's, again, more, not less, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: So, we recently marked the one-year anniversary of when the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation disclosed some 215 unmarked graves at the site of a former residential school. This House was united in mourning, and this province was brought together over that ensuing year to stand together to advance reconciliation.

That meant that, last September 30th, we saw an outpouring around Orange Shirt Day far beyond any that we had seen in previous years. Stood with the premier of the day on some of those occasions—in fact, inviting him to stand beside me in the grand entry of the powwow at St. Johns Park.

Folks across Manitoba deserve the opportunity to mark this occasion with their families. That could be accomplished by making this a provincial stat holiday.

Does the Premier intend to do so in time for this September 30th?

Mrs. Stefanson: Certainly, Orange Shirt Day is a very important day that is already recognized in the province of Manitoba.

We are in the process of consulting with First Nations, with Métis, with Inuit, with employers and employees to ensure that we get this right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think it's very important that those consultations take place. That is what we're in the process of doing.

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

Mr. Kinew: Indigenous organizations and leadership are united behind making this a provincial stat holiday. The right thing to do is to make September 30th a provincial stat this year.

The reason why it's important for it to be a provincial stat, and not just a federal stat holiday, is because so many workplaces are provincially regulated. If we want the average worker out there who works in a manufacturing centre or works on a shop floor somewhere to be able to mark September 30th with their kids and to learn together about the true history of Canada, it needs to be a provincial statutory holiday.

In order for legislation to be passed in time for September 30th of this year to be designated such, we need to pass legislation before the House rises June 1st. On this side of the House, we are prepared to do the right thing.

Will the Premier stand with us?

Mrs. Stefanson: The fact of the matter is we do recognize how important Orange Shirt Day is in the province of Manitoba. That's why it is recognized by the—in provincial government. As well, teachers and students also get—recognize those days, as well, and get that off, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, again, we are moving forward with recognizing this as a very important day in Manitoba. But it's very important to also ensure that we do adequate consultation with First Nations communities, with Métis, with Inuk communities, with businesses, with employees and employers, Mr. Deputy Speaker—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —to ensure that we get this right. We will do the consultation process that is required.

Thank you.

Poplar River Barge Explosion Request for Provincial Assistance

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): The residents of the Poplar River First Nation are concerned after their barge suffered an explosion and is now out of commission.

The barge is the only way that heavier goods, such as bulk foods, gas, lumber and much-needed necessities, can be transported in and out of the community during these warmer months. Chief Vera Mitchell has called it a crisis, and we agree. They want the provincial government to step up and help solve this issue.

Can the minister tell us what they are doing to rectify this situation?

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we actually—our department is in talks with the First Nation community to make sure that, when it comes to any ferry services, that we actually do it right. We make sure that we consult with the First Nation community and work together to make sure that we have solutions and be able to make sure that we do the right thing by looking at 'replacin' with the ferry going forward here.

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

Mr. Bushie: The barge is the main way Poplar River First Nation's commercial fishers transport their catches out of the community to sell in the market. At least 10 per cent of the community of 1,200 residents fish commercially.

Without the barge, these community members are worried about how they will make a living. As of today, there is still no timeline for when this situation will be rectified.

Can the minister tell us when the community can expect a solution, and when will they have the support and transportation up—back in place?

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, I want to thank—member for the question.

And when it comes to First Nation communities, we are—our department is making sure that, when it comes to ice roads, to—when it comes to highways going up to the First Nation communities, that we're always in—working with the First Nation communities to make sure that the transportation—we know the importance of getting supplies and goods and services in through the communities and the importance of—when it comes to fisheries, to make sure that they—their—the income is generated in that community, and that's a priority for our department, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Keewatinook, with a final supplementary.

Mr. Bushie: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the barge situation in Poplar River First Nation highlights how precarious the transportation system really is for this community. The community wants to see long-term solutions, such as relocating the airstrip so it can accommodate larger planes, an all-weather road and a freighting barge system.

These measures could make the community more resilient to events such as the barge explosion. The minister could work collaboratively with the community to implement long-term solutions.

Can the minister commit to doing that today?

Mr. Piwniuk: I want to tell the member that when it comes to—when it—with our Department of Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure, we're here, always, to make sure that—the transportation within communities, First Nation communities, are very vital.

* (14:20)

We make sure that the—when it comes to investments, we will invest into the communities to make sure whatever form of transportation is necessary for that community to thrive. And we'll continue looking at that and making sure that we work with the First Nation community to come up with solutions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Public Servants Participating in By-Election Conflict of Interest Declaration

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): The PC government is attempting to cast a chill over the civil service and their right to engage in the political process. In March, during the Fort Whyte by-election, a directive was issued that public servants participating in political activities must make a conflict of interest declaration. And I'll table a copy of that directive.

This is not what is required by law or the government's conflict of interest policy.

Why is this government interfering with the rights of workers to participate in the democratic process?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): Certainly, it is very important to participate in the election process in Canada. It is everybody's right.

We want to make sure that members of the civil service are aware of what they're able to do and make sure that there is no conflict there. This is opposed to when I was in opposition and the then-minister of the Crown of the NDP asked his department to check out the time sheets of individuals that were involved in my campaign, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MLA Lindsey: Civil servants have a right to freedom of association, and if they want to attend a nomination meeting or deliver flyers for a political candidate, they should not be—that should not be any of the government's business. Any directive about declarations is

going to have a chilling effect on democratic participation.

Will this government, will this minister, ensure that public workers are allowed to exercise their rights to participate, as has been the case for quite some time?

Mr. Helwer: It is ensuring those rights that the Public Service Commission has endeavoured to do, to make sure that people know what they can do and how they can involve themselves, where potential conflicts may exist, as opposed to that NDP minister that had a direct conflict and a direct attack on an individual employed by the Province that was involved in my campaign, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

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

MLA Lindsey: Unfortunate that the minister's answers don't actually answer the question.

Workers within the government of Manitoba have the right to volunteer on political campaigns, and this House should be encouraging them. They shouldn't be trying to get even with somebody.

When public servants are not at work, it's their business what they do, not that government's and not that minister's. Any directive about declarations will have a chilling effect and limit people's desire and willingness to participate in the democratic process.

So the minister has an opportunity to do the right thing today. I doubt if he will, but will he rescind these directives about the need for—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Helwer: Well, the opportunity's there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we want to make sure that all Manitobans participate in the election process. It's clear how they can do so, cautions on what might be potential conflicts people need to be aware of, as members opposite need to be 'emare' of—aware of. Obviously, the minister of the NDP government, the minister of the Crown, didn't care about those conflicts and directly intervened in that election, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to intimidate a member of the provincial 'civis'—civil service.

We've cleared that up, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That doesn't happen under our watch. That happened under their watch.

Congenital Syphilis Cases Need for Public Health Initiative

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): The addictions crisis has taken a toll in Manitoba.

Over the last few years, we have shown in this House how rates of blood-borne illnesses are exploding. Defenseless babies are getting congenital syphilis. With proper prenatal care, this could be avoided, and yet the problem is getting much worse.

Through freedom of information, which I'll table, we found that there were 47 babies born with congenital syphilis last year.

What, if anything, is the minister doing to address this crisis?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): I appreciate the question coming from the member opposite.

Indeed, we have been addressing the growing number of addictions issues that have risen in Manitoba. We have invested over \$58.1 million in preventative aspects for mental health, addictions, including programs to help prenatal programs identify those who are at risk. And we continue to monitor the situation and address the needs within that community.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mrs. Smith: There should be zero cases of congenital syphilis. That's according to internal documents with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. But there was not zero cases. In fact, there was 47 here in the province of Manitoba. That's as many cases as there was in all of Canada in 2020.

This issue is showing no signs of slowing down. Congenital syphilis is entirely preventable with proper prenatal care.

What steps is the minister taking to address this public health crisis?

Mrs. Guillemard: Again, I'll indicate that we are investing in programs to help with the prenatal aspects.

And the member is right; it is concerning to see any babies that are born with congenital preventable illnesses, and our government is determined to address the issue, to speak with the front-line workers and to implement programs that can help reduce those numbers back to historical lows.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mrs. Smith: Half the congenital syphilis cases in all of Canada are happening here in Manitoba. Last year, there were 47 cases of congenital syphilis cases in Manitoba. That's as many cases as there were in the entire country in 2020.

This is preventable, Deputy Speaker, and with proper prenatal care, which this government has a responsibility to provide, these cases could be decreased. One concrete step that needs to be taken is they need to hire more public health nurses.

The minister needs to tell this House how many public health nurses have been hired this year to address this crisis: Will she do so today?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Mr. Deputy Speaker, always a pleasure to rise in the House to talk about our government's commitment and investments in nurses.

Again, \$19.5 million to increase nursing seats across our province, heading to an expansion of 400 seats, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We will continue to look across the health system at the needs, whether it's in public health, whether it's in acute care or community, in terms of the needs of—for nurses, and we will support through record investments, as we've done in the past. We will do it in the future.

Thank you.

Nurse Paycheque Error Request to Rectify

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Deputy Speaker, our front-line health workers deserve to be treated with respect. Unfortunately, it's been reported to us that hundreds of nurses were sent incorrect paycheques and that they're now being forced to pay that money back.

Can the minister confirm this, and can she explain what her government is doing to ensure that this doesn't happen again?

* (14:30)

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I thank the member for Union Station for bringing this matter forward.

I would welcome the opportunity to receive that information in my department, and we will have the various regions or health facilities look into the matter. I'd be pleased to take that forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station, on a supplementary question.

MLA Asagwara: Deputy Speaker, front-line health workers deserve our respect and they deserve our support.

It was nurse appreciation week earlier this month. Not only did the PC government not show any appreciation for nurses by way of action, they can't manage simple things like ensuring proper paycheques are given to the nurses who are doing the work on behalf of all Manitoba families. This is going to hurt morale amongst nurses, who are already going through incredible challenges as they've endured terrible crisis in our hospitals.

How did this happen, and what is the minister doing to make sure this doesn't happen again?

Ms. Gordon: Again, the member for Union Station continues to put inaccurate information on the record.

Our government is committed to nurses, cares about nurses, values and appreciates all their efforts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is why we were pleased to support the work of Shared Health, as well as the negotiators that negotiated a five-year contract with nurses, and we continue to sit at the table and listen to their concerns and respond.

I look forward to the, in the next month or so, many convocation ceremonies for nursing, welcoming new nurses to our system and showing them—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

The honourable member for Union Station, on a final supplementary.

Health-Care Support Workers Bargaining Contract and Pandemic Pay

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Deputy Speaker, this government froze nurses wages and mistreated them for years. Improper paycheques is just the latest in a long line of mistakes this government has made. The PCs have broken trust with health

workers. Health-support workers have now had their wages frozen for years.

Deputy Speaker, it's time for a fair deal for all health workers, and that includes all health support staff. They deserve new contracts and top-ups that recognize their service on the front lines of this pandemic.

When will this government recognize the service of our front-line health professionals with a new contract and top-up for their service during this pandemic? Will the minister commit to doing so today?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): That is why we supported the work of Shared Health and the negotiators to ensure that a fair contract was negotiated and finalized for nurses.

And now, the member for Union Station is asking us to interfere in negotiations that are taking place for health-care workers and other levels of health professionals within the system.

We trust the negotiators, we trust the individuals that are bargaining in good faith on behalf of their members and we look forward to the—to a fair and equitable contract being negotiated for all of those health professionals.

Thank you.

Addictions and Mental Health Harm Reduction Strategy

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Every single one of us knows someone whose life has been derailed or lost due to an addiction. Every one of us knows someone whose addiction and intoxication kept them from thinking straight. And, as a principle, everyone in this Chamber should be able to agree that anyone struggling with addiction is better off if they are being protected from getting sick or dying.

That is harm reduction, and those words do not appear at all in the 2022 PC budget.

We know people are dying and getting sick from IV needles, and it is a human tragedy for them and a massive cost for our health-care system.

Given the suffering and money we could save, why isn't this government putting prevention and harm reduction at the heart of its addictions and mental health strategy?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): I can appreciate

the concern in the member's question that he's raised today.

We are indeed investing in harm reduction investments here in Manitoba. And just to list a few: \$2.8 million for a sobering centre in Thompson; we have de-scheduled naloxone; we invested \$428,000 in Klinik Community Health mobile withdrawal unit, and that's a pioneering form of community medicine, expanding our detox capabilities and allowing patients to detox while staying in the community.

We have a 'reshent'—recent partnership with United Way of \$4.9 million. We have implemented the Métis CART pilot program that pairs case workers and a family mentor and addictions and mental—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Drug Use Illnesses Public Health Reporting

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We're concerned that people are getting sick in Manitoba, and this government isn't properly keeping track.

IV drug use can cause a heart infection that costs millions of dollars to treat, in just one case. We know there are instances where syphilis and other infectious diseases like HIV are being spread through dirty needles. But when we tried to check the Public Health website, there's no reporting—and there hasn't been for five years, since 2017.

I first raised this issue in December 2018, and nothing has been done. This government has a legal responsibility to release reports, but there is nothing but broken links.

Where are the reports of outbreaks? Is the government covering them up on purpose, or is this just more negligence?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): I know that the member opposite really wants to point out negativity, but there's a lot to celebrate.

We are on the path to progress. The—and in an area that really has been neglected for decades previously.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for instance, this year we have increased—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard:—our budget in mental health for—\$17.1 million to support our new five-year road map.

We also have increased a—\$500,000 to add six crisis-stabilization-unit beds at the Crisis Response Centre; an additional \$830,000 to support expansion of the Winnipeg RAAM clinics, and telepsychiatry expansion as well, in our mental health field.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd be happy to sit down with the member opposite about some of these—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Safe Consumption Site Request for Facility

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the failure of the government to engage in harm reduction and establish safe consumption sites to decrease the use of unsafe needles for drug injection is leading to harm and to extra costs and other demands on our health-care system.

For example, a person who gets endocarditis from using an unsafe needle may end up in hospital for months. Establishing a safe consumption site saves dollars.

Liberals are so concerned about the government operating a low-quality, high-cost health-care system that we've asked the Auditor General to audit the extra costs from the government's failure to provide a safe consumption site or sites in Manitoba, as I table.

Will the government support our request to the Auditor General?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): It really is unfortunate that, for decades, the mental health field and harm reduction strategies were ignored. Our government is committed to actually addressing the issues at hand.

I'd be happy, again, to sit down with the member opposite and have a further discussion. We are investing in harm reduction strategies here in Manitoba. We are enhancing core services that have been neglected and underfunded for decades.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going to give hope to Manitobans—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —where it was lacking in the previous NDP government.

Thank you. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Healing Lodge in Thompson Program for Indigenous Youth

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government has expressed our commitment to advancing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, in part through our criminal justice modernization strategy.

Part of this included addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in our justice system.

Can the Minister of Justice please share with the House how our government has committed to decreasing the number of youth incarcerated in Manitoba and addressing the overrepresentation of youth?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I want to thank the member for Dawson Trail, who has a strong heart for families and for all those who need healing.

Our government, because of his advocacy and others', was very pleased to partner with MKO and invest \$2 million in a healing lodge—a youth healing lodge—in Thompson, the first of its kind in Manitoba.

This will help to not only keep youth closer to home, but provide them the support that they need when it comes to addictions, mental health and reduce recidivism, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

* (14:40)

I want to thank the mayor of Thompson, Colleen Smook. I want to thank Grand Chief Settee for his partnership. We are there to work with the people of Thompson to better Thompson, the North and build a stronger Manitoba.

Federal Child-Care Subsidies Equitable Distribution

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Child-care centres in Manitoba are saying that bureaucratic red tape is preventing them from distributing daycare subsidies to families in need. Rather than directly cut costs, as is happening in other provinces, this government is forcing parents and child-care centres to determine who is eligible for subsidized care, yet child-care centres and families haven't been given the clear information they need to make those determinations.

The result has been mass confusion, with many eligible low-income parents not knowing about the benefits that they're missing out on.

Why has the province taken such a failed approach to child care?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I appreciate the question coming from the member opposite on child-care affordability, working with the child-care sector, making sure that we've got a sustainable child-care program right here in Manitoba for more and more and many, many, many years to come and generations to come, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That's why we provided \$75 million to improve the affordability of child care through an advance of subsidy payments to facilities. It's too bad that the member opposite is against that; wanted to put it on the record that he is against subsidized daycare spaces right here in Manitoba, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. James [*phonetic*] on-James, on a supplemental question.

Mr. Sala: Rather than taking responsibility for a failing approach to child care, the province has effectively off-loaded it onto child-care centres and parents, and this has resulted in many eligible parents missing out on subsidies, and it's allowed higher income families to collect the subsidy, even though they don't need it.

This makes no sense, and it raises questions about a lack of responsibility that this government seems to have with federal funding. There's been clearly a lack of communication on the Province's end.

What is this government going to do today to ensure these federal child-care supports are distributed equitably?

Mr. Ewasko: Again, I appreciate the opportunity to put some facts on the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It was great to be joined by the Prime Minister, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), Minister Gould from the federal government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to announce the fact that we are taking subsidized child-care spaces here in Manitoba from 6,000 to 18,000 subsidized spaces, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And it's unfortunate that the member across, the member for St. James, had voted against the budget. It's unfortunate, but he's putting it on the record today that he's against subsidies going to those families that need it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Sala: If the minister spoke with even a single child-care centre, he would know that what I'm bringing forward here today is important and that his government should be paying attention to it.

A CCPA report shows that Manitoba will miss its federal fee targets by hundreds of dollars this year. The Province's confusing subsidy approach is clearly part of the the reason why. Many eligible parents are missing out on hundreds, if not thousands, in child-care supports, while at the same time many who shouldn't be receiving it are receiving it.

Rather than directly cutting costs, they've put responsibility on child-care centres and parents, and that's completely counterintuitive.

Why has the Province off-loaded responsibility to child-care centres and parents?

Mr. Ewasko: It's interesting that the member stands up today and is asking myself and our government to interfere with the boards of child-care centres. [*interjection*] I know that the member from St. Johns is wanting interference with the boards of child-care centres.

But it's unfortunate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the fact is that Manitoba has—[*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —all along had low, low subsidized child-care spaces already. We're going to make it even lower. We're taking it to \$10 a day. [*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: Matter of fact, even the federal minister, Minister Gould—who is a Liberal—is even commending the great work that Manitoba's doing.

I'm not going to take any lessons from the members opposite—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired.

Support for Children with Epilepsy Inquiry into Purchase of ROSA Machine

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): In 2017, CEO Michael Schlater donated \$2 million to a program for children with epilepsy, and part of this money was to purchase a robotic 'stereotatic' assistant machine, commonly known as ROSA.

ROSA machines can help those living with epilepsy by providing safer and less invasive surgeries. It changes the lives for children with epilepsy. Yet, in

the five years that have passed since this donation was made, no machine has been purchased.

Can the minister tell us why a ROSA machine has not been purchased and when this will be corrected?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I thank the member opposite for the question.

Our government announced a \$4-million investment in support of a four-adult-bed epilepsy monitoring unit, which underscores our commitment to improving neurology services in our province. *[interjection]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know they're going to shout me down again.

This investment allows the epilepsy monitoring unit—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —still shouting me down, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to expand to—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —four beds from two, and the purchase of new state-of-the-art monitoring equipment. And I understand from Shared Health that this equipment is being—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —requested.

As the members opposite know, we've come through a two-year pandemic. There have been supply chain disruptions and issues and we are working—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —into a long-term plan to develop and expand our epilepsy program here—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The minister's time has expired. *[interjection]*

Order, please.

The time for oral questions is over.

PETITIONS

Drug Overdose Reporting

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Across the province, many Manitobans continue to struggle with addictions, and the

pandemic has led to even more death and worsened the ongoing public health crisis of opioid overdoses.

(2) Three hundred and seventy-two Manitobans died from an overdose in 2020, and that's over one a day and 87 per cent higher than in 2019.

(3) Manitoba is expected to exceed over 400 overdose deaths in 2021, but the data is not publicly available since the last public reporting of opioid deaths was published in 2019.

(4) The data for drug overdose deaths from 2020 to 2021 was compiled through media inquiries, and this needs to change.

(5) Access to timely data on the harms of drugs helps to inform both government and stakeholders on where to take action and target resources needed in various communities.

(6) Manitoba is the only province not providing regular, timely data on the federal government opioid information portal.

(7) Manitobans deserve a government that takes the growing drug crisis seriously and will report the data publicly in a timely manner to target actions and allow for accountability.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to enact Bill 217, The Fatalities Inquiries Amendment Act (Overdose Death Reporting), to require the Province to publish the number of drug overdose deaths, as well as the type of drug, on a government website in a timely fashion.

And this has been signed by many Manitobans.

* (14:50)

Afghan Refugees in Manitoba

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Since the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August of 2021, Afghan citizens and their families have been subjected to persecution and human rights atrocities because of their faith, gender and former associations with organizations thought to be friendly with the previous government and its allies. This abuse has taken the form of public assaults, kidnappings and killings.

Many Afghans have left or are attempting to leave Afghanistan to find safe refuge in neighbouring countries. This undertaking is difficult due to the Taliban's activities and their presence in countries like Pakistan.

Many Afghans who are looking to leave Afghanistan and come to Canada are educated and experienced and, as such, would prove to be valuable assets to Manitoba considering its current labour shortages and challenges to its economy.

Educated Afghans have usually studied for four to six years in a specific field of study and spent a significant amount of time and money for that education. However, these people still face barriers to obtaining employment in their field of expertise, as Canada has very strict rules regarding the use of that education and experience.

Many Afghans are refugees in other countries and are currently jobless, which is an added barrier for them under the current criteria of the Provincial Nominee Program.

Some Afghan newcomers who face literacy issues because they came from a non-developed country would benefit from an in-depth informational course to assist them with acclimation into Canadian lifestyle.

The Interim Federal Health Program provides limited temporary coverage of health-care benefits to refugees who aren't eligible for provincial or territorial health insurance. However, the refugee must apply for discretionary coverage and provide a list of compelling personal circumstances in order to qualify for urgent medical circumstances, such as urgent root canals, unanticipated life-threatening and emergency medical conditions.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to work with the federal government to prioritize the evacuation of the immediate and extended family of Afghans who now call Canada home and to facilitate their coming to Manitoba, including helping Afghan refugees in other countries such as Pakistan.

(2) To urge the provincial government to expand the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program and re-evaluate the accreditation of education and jobs to ensure all immigrants and refugees can utilize their skills more easily and readily in Manitoba for work.

(3) To urge the provincial government to have fewer rigid criteria for Afghans under the Provincial

Nominee Program and have a connection to Manitoba—family members or friend—should be a key criteria.

To urge the provincial government to enhance adequate acclimation services for newcomers through community-based support programs and increase their health-care coverage to meet their urgent health-care necessities.

Signed by Karin [phonetic] Strong, Karin Gordon, Daniel Awshen [phonetic] and many other Manitobans.

Speed Reduction on PR 392

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) On October 26th, 2020, a 51-year-old driver was killed when a cement truck overturned on provincial road PR 392 just outside the town of Snow Lake, Manitoba.

(2) The HudBay company will be trucking gold ore in 40-ton B-trains from its Lalor deposit into the town of Snow Lake for processing starting next year.

(3) This large truck traffic will be competing with local vehicle traffic between the turnoff to the Lalor mine on PR 395 and the town of Snow Lake on PR 392.

(4) Similar vehicular traffic already competes with these 40-ton trucks between the turnoff to Lalor at PR 395 and the turnoff to the Stall Lake mill at PR 393.

(5) Residents of Snow Lake have suggested that the speed limit on PR 392 between Snow Lake and the intersection with provincial road PR 393 be lowered from 90 kilometres an hour to 70 kilometres per hour.

(6) Residents also propose that on PR 392, from Berry Bay-Taylor Bay entrance to the Wekusko Falls park north entrance, speeds be reduced to 70 kilometres an hour; Wekusko Falls park north entrance to the helitac base entrance, speeds be reduced to 50 kilometres an hour; and from the helitac base entrance to the entrance of the fish dump, speeds be reduced to 70 kilometres per hour.

(7) Reducing speed limits on dangerous stretches of highways is a simple and effective measure to protect the safety of all drivers.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to adopt the proposed speed reductions on Provincial Road 392 set out above.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Catalytic Converter Engraving Credit

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1)—[*interjection*] I'm getting that half of 30 seconds back. [*interjection*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

The member for Elmwood is struggling to be heard, I think, and perhaps we could—thank you.

Mr. Maloway: (1) The spike in catalytic converter thefts occurring across North America has hit Winnipeg. The price of precious metals in catalytic converters like rhodium, palladium and platinum are worth thousands of dollars an ounce. Scrap metal recyclers have catalytic converters priced to the vehicle, with some catalytic converters worth \$800.

(2) Organized groups of criminals are climbing under vehicles and cutting catalytic converters, selling them to scrap metal recyclers for cash without any record of these transactions.

(3) Catalytic converter thefts cost consumers about \$2,000 for each replacement. Manitoba Public Insurance charges a betterment fee for new replacements, so insurance doesn't cover the full cost.

(4) Catalytic converters do not have any part number or vehicle identification number, VIN, and the inability to tie a catalytic converter to a specific vehicle is a major enforcement issue.

(5) Engraving of a vehicle's VIN on its catalytic converter would be a major deterrent to theft by tying the vehicle to the part and making enforcement possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to bring in consumer protection legislation directing Manitoba Public Insurance to initiate credits to Manitobans for

engraving vehicle identification numbers on their catalytic converters.

And this petition is signed by many, many, many Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are there any more petitions?

Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the honourable Government House Leader that the House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

HEALTH

* (15:00)

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 Health. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

Before I open the floor to questions, I am just wondering if there would be leave to allow the opposition to sit on the left side—instead of me reading this long script—in order so that it would be easier for us to look at the cameras.

Is it agreed? [*Agreed*]

Floor is open for questions.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I'd just like to welcome folks back. I know we just had a long weekend, and hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable long weekend.

I'd like to start by asking the minister some questions in regards to the Estimates document that we all had access to and I certainly went through after receiving it.

So the supplement to Estimates document identifies a series of risks that's a risk is identified in that

document, and a series of treatment plans are proposed in relation to those identified risks.

Can the minister give us a clearer idea of what these treatment plans are and when they might be complete, and whether they'll be released to the public when they are complete?

*(15:10)

Mr. Chairperson: Before I recognize the minister, I'm just wondering if the minister could get her staff to get her a set of headsets. It would make it easier for the recorders here to hear what the minister has to say.

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I don't know if we have headsets for this particular machine; I don't see that, but we can look into that for future Estimate sittings.

Mr. Chairperson, I thank the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the questions. We—I have found the section the member is referring to.

I would like to take the member's question under advisement and provide a response to each of those categories as laid out on the pages at a later time, please.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for being willing to take that under advisement. I look forward to receiving those documents.

I'd like to ask the minister if she can provide me the budget and the actual amounts of dollars spent for community health over the last few years.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for Union Station for that question. I would like to seek further clarification from the member.

Can the member be specific about which years they are seeking this—the budget and actual information for? Please be specific about the years.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: If the minister could provide the budget and the actual amounts spent for years 2021—sorry—2020/2021, 2018/2019—I think I missed a year, there—and so—and then 2019-2020. So, for those three years, please.

*(15:20)

Ms. Gordon: I'm pleased to respond to the honourable member for Union Station's question.

In 2018-2019, the budget was 348,422 and the actual was 332, eight, nine, two.

In 2019-2020, the budget was 347,472 and the actual was 357,422.

In Budget 2021, I do want to flag for the member that this was the year that community health and mental health were separated. The new ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery was created on January 5th of 2021, so there's a change there.

In 2021, the budget for community health was 180,611 and the actual for 2020-2021 is \$237,799.

So if the member is wondering why the decrease in the budget amount for one hundred—for 2020-2021 to \$180,611, it's because we—*[interjection]* Oh, it's because we separated that department—the departments.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide—thank you for—thank you to the minister for that response.

Can the minister provide clarity, then, that \$180,000 actual, can the minister—does the minister have access to the information that would tell us how much additional dollars as a result of the change in departments were redirected? So is there any way for the minister to provide what the number would have been, had it not been for that addition of the department, or the funds that were redirected into the additional department as a result?

Ms. Gordon: While we are obtaining the information the honourable member has asked for, I just want to flag for the member that in the supplement it does show that the dollar amounts that I quoted have three zeroes. So when I was saying thousands, it's million dollars. I apologize for that oversight. So I just wanted to make you aware of that.

Thank you.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that clarification. I did presume that that was the case, otherwise I would've been shouting and alarmed at the amounts provided.

But I am wondering, while we wait for the minister to get the answer to the previous question I asked—looking at these numbers that have been budgeted for community health and also understanding—and the minister is very well aware—that rates of congenital syphilis here in Manitoba in Winnipeg have skyrocketed and steadily increased over the last several years.

So, you know, beginning in about, I believe, 2018, we've seen the numbers increase from under 10

to a number, for last year, 47, which is—I mean, any number above zero is high. There shouldn't be a single baby born in Manitoba with congenital syphilis. It is preventable. But certainly, Manitoba having 47 cases, which matches the numbers for congenital syphilis for the rest of the country, is deeply concerning. It is astronomically high.

And it begs the question, as these numbers increase over the years—have increased over the last few years, we've also—we also know that the rates of HIV have also increased. They are also astronomically high. I've heard from many community health providers that they're quite frankly terrified for what this means for folks in our communities who are not only being diagnosed with HIV, babies being born with congenital syphilis, but also they're finding, due to lack of resources, it incredibly difficult to make sure that people are receiving the care that they need to improve their health outcome.

So when I look at these numbers allocated to community health, and we also reflect on the increased rates of preventable diseases, does the minister look at this information and wonder whether or not these funds are adequate? For me, as somebody looking at this and seeing what's going on, certainly, it flags, for me, that no, the investments are inadequate, that they're not addressing the acute concerns we see in community health.

So I'm wondering if the minister can provide her thoughts on that. Does she think that the funding her government has provided to community health has been adequate and is going to address the alarming rise in congenital syphilis that we see and the alarming rise in rates of HIV that we see and other challenges like overdoses in our communities?

* (15:30)

Ms. Gordon: I'm pleased to respond to the honourable member for Union Station's (MLA Asagwara) question.

Our government, of course, is always monitoring the cases of congenital syphilis. I know that back in February of 2019, under the previous provincial public health officer, we were informed about an outbreak and we implemented and took under advisement the recommendations that came forward from the chief provincial public health officer at that time regarding the need for more testing. The Department of Health increased the amount of testing that was done, that is being done. There's also treatments available to the baby when it is born with syphilis:

antibiotics for up to 10 days and other treatments may be provided.

So we've worked with our current Chief Provincial Public Health Officer in terms of addressing the requirements they have sought regarding communicable disease control and continue to have those discussions, Mr. Chairperson, with regard to HIV/AIDS. Of course, our government takes this disease very, very seriously and we're always actively working with Public Health to improve the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS.

And I just want to state for the record that that is why we added coverage for pre-exposure 'prophylactic,' also known as PrEP, to the provincial Pharmacare formulary; allocating \$2.3 million over three years to support the development and implementation of an Indigenous-led S-T-B-B-U testing; and contact-tracing strategy as well; and extending coverage for HIV post-exposure treatment; and, of course, enhancing coverage for HIV treatment for those experiencing financial or administrative barriers.

Mr. Chairperson, we will continue to have discussions, as I said before, with Public Health regarding communicable diseases and how to control those.

In terms of overdoses, my honourable colleague, Sarah Guillemard, in the Ministry of Mental Health and Community Wellness, now oversees that particular file. But, of course, the two departments work very closely together in terms of ensuring that the needs of those who are struggling with overdose of addictions is being properly funded and managed, and because individuals certainly will gain access to supports and health treatments at various facilities across the province.

So we do work very closely together. Our government continues to monitor the rates of overdoses and deaths from—those deaths from overdoses.

And that is why we've established a five-year road map and we're funding that road map so that we can add supports to core services, supports that were often, under the previous administration, overlooked. That is why our government has added Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinics. That's why we have—are making naloxone available to over 120 different locations, Mr. Chairperson. And that's why we're even going further in terms of helping our youth through our new Huddle youth hubs, where they can gain access to primary care, to referrals for addictions, mental health support.

So we are focused quite broadly on ensuring all Manitobans, regardless of age, have access to the supports that they need, and we will continue to do so as we move forward as a government.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: I'd like to remind the honourable minister that when referring to a member, they should be referred to by their title or ministry or constituency, but not by their name. So, I'd just like to remind the member. She had mentioned Sarah Guillemard. So if the member—if the minister could just keep that in mind.

The—or, the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara).

MLA Asagwara: Thank the minister for that response.

Interestingly enough, the minister talked about steps that may be taken that folks can access after they've been infected with a disease. And so, I mean, it's pretty important that there be a plan in place to address the rising rates of congenital syphilis, as one example. This is something that is devastating families, and it is inexcusable that, under this government, the rates of congenital syphilis have—not only exist, but they are incredibly high, they're markedly high, highest in the country right here in Manitoba.

And so my question is, what is the minister doing to bring down those rates of congenital syphilis? What is the minister doing by way of action to prevent babies from contracting congenital syphilis? What steps is this minister taking? What investments are being made? What strategy is in place to bring down the rates of congenital syphilis in Manitoba?

Ms. Gordon: I want to note, for the record, that this is an area that is very, very important to our government as well as our public health officials. Our chief and our deputy chief have stated numerous times their commitment to ensuring that supports are in place, and they continue to monitor the numbers and to have conversations with my department regarding the need to scale up supports in areas that may be identified.

I do want to go back and answer the member's question about the budget in 2021 for community health. The member had asked if I was aware—if I could provide the number for what the budget would have been if—before the departments were divided and the new ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery was created.

That budget for 2021 is \$367,697,000 in Health. Again, the amount that remained in the Ministry of Health or Department of Health—\$180,611,000. The amount that went to mental health was \$187,086,000.

* (15:40)

So I will pivot back to the question posed by the honourable member regarding syphilis and just share that we are, as a government, and Public Health, aware of an increase in STBBI cases across Canada, and the government is working with Dr. Roussin, as I mentioned before in Public Health, to address the issue.

One of the things that we have done is we've increased syphilis testing in pregnant women in the province, and pregnant women are now screened multiple times during their pregnancy. We've expanded harm reduction networks and peer advisory councils across Manitoba. Specifically, since 2019, we've provided over \$850,000 in increased annual funding to the Manitoba Harm Reduction Network. We've increased the distribution of harm reduction supplies in every health region for things like sterile equipment, including \$650,000 in the WRHA—Winnipeg Regional Health Authority—alone. We added new Public Health nurse positions to support STBBI case and contact management and STBBI testing and treatment among priority populations and outreach locations.

We have funded new social workers and reproductive nurses at Mount Carmel Clinic to provide on-site and outreach services, and I want to talk a little bit about Mount Carmel Clinic, that we did this in partnership with WRHA and Street Connections. In 2019, we launched the Star Lodge Keewatinook Ashak Mino Awaganak [*phonetic*] to enhance overall community health related to sexually transmitted blood-borne infections, specifically syphilis and congenital syphilis. And we—they are focusing on those who are pregnant or in child-bearing years, including their parents and individuals who use substances, and it's grounded in culturally relevant teachings and culturally safe approaches.

Star Lodge supports low-barrier access to STBBI reproductive health care. And so Mount Carmel Clinic was provided with funding to hire 1.0 FTE social worker, outreach worker, and 1.0 EFT reproductive health nurse for the project, and the WRHA was provided with funding to hire a 1.0 EFT public health nurse to work in collaboration with Mount Carmel Clinic.

Services are delivered on-site at Mount Carmel Clinic and by outreach twice a week in the afternoon—approximate. Several clients have been engaged in testing and several prenatal clients as well.

And, as I mentioned before, we scaled up our harm reduction networks and peer advisory councils and, in addition to the \$850,000, WRHA also received \$100,000 to implement a Harm Reduction Network full-time co-ordinator in the WRHA.

Other supports in Southern Health-Santé Sud, Prairie Mountain Health, northern regional health authority, and Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority as well.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response and providing those details.

I'm wondering if the minister can clarify the dollars that she's outlined for 2018-2019; 2019-2020; and 2020 and 2021. Can the minister clarify if any of those dollars, any of that funding—I guess, more specifically, for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, were specifically to address COVID-related expenditures? And, if so, how much of—what's the amount, rather, that was specifically allocated to address COVID-related expenses?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question.

In our annual report, the—we are being transparent in terms of showing that the 2020-2021 authority included supplementary authority of \$600 million from internal service adjustments to support COVID-19 support programs in the department and that those funds went to acute-care services. That is shown in our annual report quite clearly.

The member is asking whether the community health dollars that was shared for 2020-2021, if any of those dollars went to COVID, and my answer is that there was separate funding allocated for COVID spending, and that is under the acute-care services line: \$600 million.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: Thank the minister for that response.

A couple of weeks ago, now, at this point, I raised concerns that we have about long waits for cardiac surgery. I'm sure the minister, like many of us, has received correspondence from Manitobans who are still waiting, who've been waiting years for cardiac surgery or who—more recently, we shared the story of

a gentleman who was just a couple of hours away from receiving surgery and was told, you know, moments before he was meant to go in that it was cancelled.

* (15:50)

So I'm wondering, given the importance of addressing this backlog that we know is affecting so many Manitobans, and also given that we know, specifically in regards to cardiac times, the wait in March was 70 days—70-days-long wait in March compared to just 12 days a month before. So that's a pretty big increase. It affects a lot of families.

What is the minister doing to address these waits?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for Union Station for the question because it gives me an opportunity, once again, to thank all our health-care professionals that have been working diligently to ensure Manitobans receive the surgeries and diagnostic tests that they have been waiting for. And I'm pleased to state that all the health-care workers that were redeployed to assist in critical care and ICU during our fourth wave and our Omicron variant wave has now returned to their program and clinic areas.

And so, as of May 24th, there were 1,188 non-emergent surgeries completed the week of May 16th to 22nd at Winnipeg sites. This is a—150 more surgeries than the number completed during a similar week in 2019. So that would be May 13 to 19th, 2019, when 993 surgeries were completed.

That means Winnipeg's surgery program operated at 119.6 per cent of pre-pandemic levels last week, Mr. Chairperson, and the number of surgeries completed last week is 45 more than the week before it. This marks a 3.9 per cent increase week over week.

Also, all emergent and urgent surgeries, including cardiac and cancer procedures, continued to be prioritized. Non-urgent surgeries are reviewed by physicians to prioritize patients who medically should not wait any longer for procedures to be performed.

The number of emergent surgeries performed last week also remained steady, as it has throughout the pandemic. There were 185 emergent or life-saving surgeries performed last week in Winnipeg, up one from the previous week.

There were 262 surgical slates in Winnipeg last week. This is up one from the previous week. So they're at 95.3 per cent of pre-pandemic baselines.

And I just want to remind the honourable member that the number of surgeries performed during a slate

will vary widely depending on the acuity of the patient and the complexity of the procedure. So, for example, an endoscopy will not take as long to perform as neurosurgery. And the time allotted for surgical slates in 2022 may vary from those performed pre-pandemic due to demand resulting in fewer surgeries being performed.

And, of course, COVID has also resulted in some slowdowns in terms of infection and prevention control and what needs to be done to ensure a room is prepped and ready for the next patient.

But with respect to the member's question about cardiac surgeries, 21 cardiac surgeries were performed May 16 to 22nd, which is unchanged from the previous week, but all 21 surgeries were non-urgent, elective in nature. And there were 17 cardiac surgeries performed during a similar period in 2019: 13 non-urgent, elective, and four emergent.

And in terms of rural surgeries—because we don't just want to focus on what is happening in the city of Winnipeg—the surgical slates are at or near baseline funded capacity at most of our sites outside of Winnipeg, and surgical slates were restarted in Ste. Anne on May 10th. And we continue to support other sites such as Bethesda Regional Health Centre in Steinbach. Effective May 30th, they are also supporting Ste. Anne in terms of ensuring that any overflows or any needs from the Ste. Anne Hospital are being transferred to Bethesda Regional Health Centre in Steinbach. And so they are continuing to ensure equity in health-care services.

So we continue to work with our cardiologists and the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force to ensure Manitobans receive those cardiac surgeries and are not having to wait for long—

Mr. Chairperson: The minister's time has expired.

MLA Asagwara: I'm sure the minister is aware and understands that referencing surgical numbers—number of surgeries that have been performed and identifying that they—the numbers—most recent numbers she provided that she has available are the same as they were during that time period in 2019—I'm sure the minister understands that that is actually reflecting an inadequacy in terms of the amount of surgeries that are being performed right now, given the fact that we have an unprecedented surgical and diagnostic backlog.

And so, you know, I would hope that the minister would recognize that and appreciate that, certainly, we have to be performing above and beyond what we

have historically in order to address this backlog in a way that doesn't continue to see thousands upon thousands of Manitobans have poor health outcomes because they've gotten so sick and gone without the care they need that their diagnoses become that much more complex.

I had an interesting conversation with a few surgeons last week who made it abundantly clear that the surgeries they were performing are increasingly more complex and taking longer and, quite frankly, taking a lot more out of them as doctors, as surgeons, because the cases are increasingly complicated because folks are presenting much more sick than they would have had they gotten their procedures and their surgeries much earlier on and not been delayed by this backlog that is astronomically high right now in Manitoba and has unfortunately not been addressed in a meaningful, adequate way by this government.

And so that's just a flag for this minister that, you know, comparing those numbers really doesn't do a service to Manitobans who are still waiting for their surgeries and it doesn't reflect the ways in which we really need to be addressing this backlog for folks to not continue to wait in pain.

What I'd like to clarify here is whether or not the minister has taken steps to address the wait for cardiac surgery. She failed to answer that in her question. It was 70 days in March. What steps has she taken to bring that wait time down?

And, following that, I'd like to ask the minister some questions about Grace Hospital, but if she could provide clarity on that point, I would appreciate it.

* (16:00)

Ms. Gordon: I want to be sure I have time to clarify and put accurate information on the record with regard to the member's statement that individuals are having to wait 70 days.

But before I do that, I do want to state that, since January, we've had one—13,323 non-emergent surgeries completed, 3,604 emergent surgeries completed, for a total of 16,927 surgeries that—this is in addition to the 11,000 surgeries procured by the task force through request for supply arrangements. So this is in addition to returning, as I mentioned before, to pre-pandemic levels, and we do—we have sent out the RFP for our sixth request for supply arrangements so that we can increase those volumes.

And so with regard to cardiac surgery, so the—we need to clarify that wait times are reported for all

cardiac surgeries combined, and for coronary arterial bypass grafts, commonly referred to as bypass surgery. So it's broken down by level of urgency: emergent and urgent, semi-urgent and elective. So the information provided that the member's referring to is, for all cardiacs combined, the median wait time was 70 days.

But if we break it down by the various levels of surgeries—so, for example, emergent and urgent, the average is four days and, in terms of priority level 1, it's required to be done within 14 days. So these are critically ill, medically unstable patients who cannot be discharged from hospital prior to receiving care.

And level 2 is semi-urgent; the average time is 20 days, and for semi-urgent, priority level 2, the wait time should be within 15 to 42 days. And these are patients with significant heart health problems. They may be doing poorly with medication and/or may have pain with minor exercise. These patients are not critically ill but waiting too long could result in a deterioration of their health status.

And then there's level 3, which is elective. The average time is 63 days, but elective priority 3 is required to be done within 43 to 180 days. And these are patients who are stable but have some form of heart health problem. Their procedure may be scheduled after a wait time without undue deterioration in their health status.

So the 70 days the member is referring to is the average for all cardiac surgeries combined: again, level 1 average is four days, level 2—level 1 is emergent and urgent, the wait is four days; level 2, semi-urgent, is 20 days; level 3, elective, is 63; and for all coronary arterial bypass grafts, the number of days—levels is 45 days.

So I just wanted to clarify that, because we certainly don't want to frighten Manitobans into believing that if they are emergent and urgent, they will be waiting 70 days. So these are critically ill, medically unstable patients who cannot be discharged from hospital prior to receiving care.

And everyone that requires a surgery is important. I certainly don't want to give the impression that if you're an elective cardiac patient, that you're not important. Our emergent and urgent priority level 1 is important, our semi-urgent priority level 2 is important and our elective priority 3 patients are also important, Mr. Chairperson. But I think it was factually incorrect for the member to just state the number, 70, and to leave that number in the minds of Manitobans

who may be waiting for surgery and feeling that, again, if they're emergent or urgent they would be waiting 70 days. That is factually not correct.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response. Our respect for the many Manitobans who are currently waiting for cardiac surgery, I'm not going to get into the weeds of what the minister just put on the record. I think it does a disservice to those folks.

We shared the story of Mr. Moyses who is waiting—has been waiting years for his surgery. He has a heart functioning capacity of 30 per cent, was mere hours away from getting his surgery and he was told it was cancelled. I—the wait times being, on average in March, 70 days; hearing stories like that of Mr. Moyses certainly should be a catalyst for this government, treating this as a crisis in our health-care system, to see this as urgent.

And so the facts that we have put on the record in regards to cardiac surgery waits are important facts that reflect the realities of Manitobans, and I won't contribute to this narrative from the minister of trying to diminish the realities that Manitobans are facing. It does them a disservice.

I'd like to ask the question—ask a question around the Grace Hospital. I just indicated previously to the minister I would be doing so.

What we're hearing in terms of what's going on at Grace Hospital is quite scary. We've been hearing for well over a year now—myself; my colleague, the MLA for St. James; our leader, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew)—we've all heard from many, many staff at the Grace Hospital, from constituents who have accessed care at Grace Hospital, that things there are in utter chaos; that nurses, health-care aides, doctors are working in conditions that are, for them, horrific and that Manitobans are experiencing what Manitobans should not expect in their emergency rooms and in their hospitals—which is disarray, folks reporting languishing in hallways, going without water, without anyone checking up on them for hours, sitting there for days on end.

This has been a crisis for far too long. The minister and her government refuse to call it a crisis, refuse to take meaningful steps to address the crisis, and now we're beyond that point at Grace. We know that at Grace Hospital—and we know this because we obtained staff schedules, that there were times when only two or four nurses are staffing the emergency room at night. We've highlighted the staffing crisis in the

emergency rooms for years. We've highlighted that there are 2,400 vacant nursing positions in the province right now: 33 per cent of positions are vacant in emergency rooms; 32 vacancy—32 per cent vacancy rate in the medicine unit.

Manitobans should be able to go to an emergency room and get the care they need when they need it. They should be able to expect that and they can't, and, quite frankly, they don't.

What is the minister doing to ensure that staff resources at Grace Hospital for nurses, not just—not this plea for anybody, you know, to show up and put in some hours there, but what is this minister doing to ensure to shore up nursing capacity at the Grace Hospital to address this horrific crisis that they're facing right now?

* (16:10)

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question. It gives me an opportunity to just place on the record some information about how we got to where we are today.

And, Mr. Chairperson, I remember back in 2013 when then-Selinger government campaigned on the highest number of active nurses. And what they didn't tell Manitobans was that at that time—2013—there were 1,777 nurse vacancies, and so they were warned that there was a crisis.

And so 13 years ago, again, a warning: the alarm bell was rung with regard to the deficit of registered nurses, and that was in a report authored by the Canadian Nurses Association of a projected deficit of 60,000 registered nurses nationwide by 2022. So the NDP were told of this and Manitoba's share of the deficit was estimated at 2,160 nurses, and that was before the pandemic, Mr. Chairperson.

And what did the former NDP government do when they were told it was time to begin to steer the ship away from the staffing crisis in the early 2000s? Nothing, Mr. Chairperson. Under the NDP's tenure, there was a clear lack of expanding the nursing RN and LPN program capacity.

What our government has done is we've acted. We've added 400 new nursing education seats to five post-secondary institutions, and this change doubles what they—the NDP—had in 2000. And we're also graduating 15 per cent more nurses on average than the NDP ever did and, again, the \$7.2 billion, the

largest health-care investment in our province's history, as well, Mr. Chairperson.

With regard to Grace Hospital, the wait times that—are concerning and, again, I want to state that the health system leadership has acknowledged the challenges they've experienced not just at this health facility but at others. And the solutions are coming forward from the hospital floor, which includes a \$1.2-million expansion supported by our government of the physician and triage model of care. This pilot program places a physician in the triage area to manage and provide care for those waiting to be seen, with a particular focus on higher acuity patients, Mr. Chairperson.

And we're also improving lab turnaround time for patients requiring admission, which will significantly help with COVID testing and, as well, the level loading of transport arrivals across all sites to try to alleviate some of the pressures on Grace and our other acute-care facilities. And we expect that these initiatives will have success in reducing the wait times in the weeks ahead which have—are some of the pressures that Grace Hospital is experiencing.

And then our government's overall commitment of—to our nurses: 93 nurses in the last year completed the 12-week critical-care orientation program, 23 of which graduated in January; 29 more nurses will graduate from this program this month; 19 have enrolled for the next program class that started yesterday; and we are going to be graduating more nurses from our faculty of nursing later next month. We continue to—our commitment of the \$19.5 million, again, to add 259 nurse training seats this year.

And those nurses don't just go to work in one facility. We encourage them to apply to work across many facilities. We hope to see many of those nurses at the Grace, as well, and we'll continue to support the work of the health system leaders—

Mr. Chairperson: The minister's time has expired.

MLA Asagwara: So, because this is such an incredibly urgent issue, what is happening at Grace Hospital has gone beyond a crisis, and those nurses and health-care aides and support staff and physicians desperately need to know that their Minister of Health and their government is listening to them. They need to believe and they need to know that they haven't been abandoned by this government and by this minister.

And so I'm going to ask the minister, again, knowing that nurses are actively leaving their careers in Manitoba because they have PTSD; knowing that

nurses are actively leaving their jobs which they love, which they have poured time, energy, money and love into working because they fear losing their licences; knowing that nurses are leaving because other jurisdictions, other provinces are offering them what this government has refused to—to recognize their skill set and their service; knowing that nurses have made very clear that their concerns and their challenges predate the pandemic, that nurses at the Grace were sounding their alarms and raising concerns back in 2019—that goes for nurses at HSC and as well nurses at St. Boniface—but specifically at the Grace; I would ask the minister to, in her response to my question, think about those nurses and those health-care professionals and what they need to hear from this minister.

What steps is the minister taking right now so that the staff working at the Grace Hospital emergency room do not go into work every day feeling like their drowning? What is this minister doing right now to ensure that they have the capacity there to provide the care that Manitobans deserve and should come to expect when they're accessing that emergency room? What steps has this minister taken or is taking immediately?

* (16:20)

Ms. Gordon: You know, I want to begin my response by saying this is in no way a reflection on the committed and dedicated health-care professionals at Grace Hospital. They have—are doing incredibly great work, and our government is committed to supporting them and hearing from them through our health system leaders. And, as I mentioned before, some of the suggestions that have come forward have been implemented.

But, you know, I noted in today's Winnipeg Free Press that the author of an article stated that hospital overcrowding is not a new phenomenon. It predates the COVID-19 pandemic and Manitoba's healing our health system consolidation plan, the first phase of which was implemented in October of 2017. And it even predates that time period. I have articles dating back to June–September 19th, 2014. The CBC article headline was, Winnipeg's Grace Hospital has worst ER wait times in Canada: study, and that was under the previous administration. And then, June 11th, 2015, another article: Winnipeg hospital wait time the worst in Canada.

So this has been a struggle, is not based on a government; it is challenges that they faced and we face as a government. And we're certainly committed—far

more committed—to finding solutions, I believe, than the previous government.

And if I can read into the record an exchange that occurred on June 9th, 2015, between the Health critic and the then-minister of Health, Sharon Blady—and I quote, Mr. Chairperson—and the question's being posed by the critic: "Mr. Speaker, there is an ER crisis and there are also regions in Manitoba—there are regions in Manitoba that are experiencing a critical doctor shortage. Because of that, two dozen rural ERs are closed. When asked in Estimates yesterday how she was going to address this issue, this Minister of Health said that she's still waiting for a, and I quote, 'magic health-care wand.' I would like to ask her: Since last evening, did she find that wand?" End quote.

And that is how the NDP addressed the concerns and the issues of emergency room crisis, was for a Health minister to state that they were waiting for a magic health-care wand.

But, Mr. Chairperson, our government is certainly not as dismissive of what was—is happening in our hospitals, in our emergency departments, as the previous NDP government, and that's why we've made the commitments that we have: the \$19.5 million for 259 nurse training seats expanding to 400.

You know, I was up in the North last week talking to health leaders, service delivery organizations, stakeholders, touring the nursing simulation lab, hearing that the number of nurses that will be graduating this spring from the University of Manitoba faculty of nursing, very heartened to hear that there are nurses across our province that will be moving into the system, and hearing, as well, from the regulators that the number of nurses that are registering in our province has not decreased. And so nursing continues to be a rewarding and fulfilling profession.

We continue to support our nurses, regardless of the facility that they work at. We will support our nurses at the Grace Hospital. We will ask our system leaders to be on the front lines talking with staff about: what are the needs, how can we work together to find long-term solutions? That is being done. I've been assured by Shared Health leadership that those meetings are taking place. When suggestions come back to our government, we are funding those solutions, and we will continue to support Grace—

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

MLA Asagwara: Well, I think it's fair to say that the staff, the health-care support staff, the allied health-care professionals, nurses, health-care aides, physicians at Grace Hospital would not be inspired by that response from the minister. It certainly doesn't instill confidence that she's taking this crisis—what it is, beyond a crisis at this point—as seriously as needed in order to make sure that those folks have increased capacity to provide the care to Manitobans that they know Manitobans deserve, which is disappointing, quite frankly.

Like the concerns of those health-care workers at Grace Hospital, those concerns we previously raised, we've also raised our concerns with the minister about the neurology program. I know this is something the minister is well aware of. I've had several colleagues in our caucus raise concerns that have been brought to them by their constituents. Folks, neurologists themselves have spoken publicly about this issue.

Can the minister tell us what the number of vacancies and the vacancy rate currently is in the neurology program?

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

* (16:30)

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for the question about neurology. I do want to state for the record that our government remains committed to improving health care for all Manitobans, and that includes strengthening neurology services and care for patients with multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, as well as improving our stroke services.

Recruitment and retention of neurology physicians and staff remain a priority. Six new neurologists have been recruited to the neurology department over the past year. This includes one MS neurologist, two epilepsy neurologists, two stroke neurologists and one cognitive neurologist. Support staff has also been recruited. Hospitalists have also been recruited to support in-patient work in neurology and stroke care, providing important patient care while freeing up some specialist care for more specialized services.

I want to also just share about epilepsy. Our government announced \$4 million in support for a four-adult-bed epilepsy monitoring unit, which underscores our commitment to improving neurology services in our province. This investment allows the adult epilepsy monitoring unit to expand to four beds from two and the purchase of new state-of-the-art monitoring equipment as well as provide technology related upgrades.

We are also committed to a long-term plan to develop an adult surgical program. The expanded adult unit follows the creation of a pediatric epilepsy surgery program in 2018 by our government.

And with regard to stroke, looking forward to announcing very soon the construction of Manitoba's first dedicated acute stroke unit. And funding to appropriately support this new unit will also be in place when I announce the opening, and I look forward to sharing more about this investment with all members of the Legislature very soon.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Asagwara: Can the—oh, I think I should provide some context, here. It's context the minister's already aware of, but Dr. Dan Roberts, who I know the minister knows—is well aware of who Dr. Dan Roberts is—has called the situation regarding neurology here in Manitoba—and it's a direct quote: desperate and a slow-moving train wreck and that we face the closure of the MS clinic within as little as 90 days.

That is—those are very serious statements from a leading voice in this area, somebody who's highly regarded and respected.

And so, with that in mind, with just how serious this is in mind and the reality that, according to Dr. Dan Roberts and others, that we're facing the closure of an incredibly important clinic here in Manitoba in as little as 90 days, can the minister tell us what she's doing to address this incredibly urgent situation?

Ms. Gordon: I do want to assure the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) that the comments that I read into the record are aligned with Shared Health's comments in regard to the request to provide a response to Dr. Dan Roberts's media availability last week.

And to just reiterate or just share, for the record, what that response was is our government remains, again, committed to improving health care for all Manitobans and that includes strengthening neurology services and care for patients with epilepsy, as well as improving our stroke services.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Again, our government is supporting Shared Health in their efforts to strengthen neurology services and enhance local access to care for patients, including those living with epilepsy and MS. Our government implemented new initiatives to enhance neurology services in our province, including the

adult epilepsy monitoring unit announced last year and the new dedicated acute stroke unit being constructed at HSC Winnipeg, and again, for which funding will be in place to appropriately support when it comes online.

Shared Health has recruited an MS neurologist, two 'epiltologists,' two stroke neurologists and a cognitive neurologist, including support staff, over the past 18 months. Additionally, physicians have been recruited to support in-patient work in neurology and stroke care, providing important patient care while freeing up some specialist care for more services. An interprovincial agreement has been signed with the BC Institute of Technology that provides two EEG seats for Manitoba students and an increase in the clinical stipend for MS positions has been approved.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Okay, yes. My question to the minister is this: What is the situation with regard to electronic medical records across the province? I know there was a wide variety of systems that, when Southern Health was formed, there were two different systems being used.

What is the situation and what is the minister's plan?

* (16:40)

Ms. Gordon: I thank the honourable member for River Heights for the question with regard to electronic medical records across the province with the change in the movement of Digital Health from eHealth under the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority to Shared Health. We—this has allowed us to plan provincially. So we use the term, planning provincially, delivering locally.

Of course, individual physicians will—may decide to use other records. One of the examples I use quite often is that, right now, the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, in terms of gathering information on various surgeries, is having to go individually to surgeons' offices because some are using different systems. And so they do have ability to make choices about which systems they want to use.

But, certainly, as a government, as a Province, we're using the expertise of Shared Health now that we've transferred Digital Health to Shared Health to try to encourage those physicians to work with us in terms of planning provincially.

So some examples of how that has been done is with the Emergency Department Information System,

and as well the surgical information system that is being worked on or developed under the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, is being done on a provincial scale. So, as well, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were opportunities to allow for access to emergency medical records provincially so that we could plan, we could roll out our vaccine campaign not just regionally but across the province and really monitor the number of vaccines that were going into arms during that time.

So the plan is—to address, specifically, the member's question—is to continue to support the work of Shared Health and Digital Health, that now comes under Shared Health, to plan provincially, ensure that we have consistent medical records that can be accessed at various levels of the health system.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I notice in the Shared Health strategic plan, there is a plan for a home-care hub. Is that up and running, operational? How many people are staffed there and what is the plan for what the home-care hub will do?

Ms. Gordon: Can I ask for clarification or for the member to repeat the question, please? I didn't hear—his voice kind of trailed off at the end, so I didn't hear all of that.

Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: On page 15 of the Shared Health plan—or strategic plan, there's a reference there to a home-care hub. And I'm asking, what is the—is the hub up and running or not? How many staff are in it or will be in it? And what is the plan for what the home-care hub for the province will do?

* (16:50)

Ms. Gordon: I do want to go back to a previous question that the honourable member for River Heights had asked, and we had run out of time during Committee of Supply, and I do want to respond to it. It was a question about who provides primary prevention for diabetes and who provides secondary care for diabetes.

And I want the member to know that primary prevention is done under the Ministry of Mental Health and Community Wellness. Secondary prevention in diabetes care involves reducing further complications related to diabetes, which means that once someone is diagnosed with diabetes they are at a higher risk of developing renal, ophthalmological, neurological and cardiovascular complications.

So secondary prevention in diabetes care may include, and which might fall under the Ministry of Health: early diagnosis; education on diabetes management and care, including monitoring glucose levels and ongoing support for lifestyle modifications including diet, exercise and weight loss; smoking cessation therapy and medications; managing cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugars; using lifestyle modifications and medications; use of preventive medications to assist in preventing vascular complications; as well as vaccination, including COVID-19, influenza and pneumococcal vaccine; as well as regular eye exams; regular foot care; including assessment for neuropathy.

With regard to home care, we were pleased to include in Budget 2022's budget speech that \$7.2 million more is being provided to support two home- and community-care modernization pilot projects, the Priority Home and client-directed funding pilot and supportive housing pilot, Mr. Chairperson. This is to provide more safe spaces for seniors and to improve home- and community-based care.

So we continue to work very, very closely with our Home Care program and support the work of the program. Shared Health is launching a number of initiatives to continue to support Home Care because we know that being able to allow Manitobans to return home when they're in an acute-care setting, if they've had surgery or a stay in hospital, is very important in terms of their recovery and as well in terms of patient flow.

So, yes, Home Care is working very closely with Shared Health, and they do have in their strategic plan several initiatives that they will be undertaking with the Home Care program.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Gerrard: There are a number of important prevention initiatives, including what we talked about earlier: congenital syphilis and tuberculosis, which are infectious diseases and in-environmental issues, lead toxicity leading to behavioural and learning problems in kids and radon problems leading to lung cancer.

Can the minister tell us, what is the respective role of the Department of Health in these—because, to some extent, it's shared between the Department of Health and the department of mental health and wellness—and what her department is doing?

Ms. Gordon: So, Public Health is the subject matter expert, and we seek advice from Public Health. We certainly don't duplicate, we collaborate. And so, with

regard to the member's question, the two departments work very, very closely together, but then we work, as well, with Public Health and many other departments on this very, very important work.

So again, agriculture—

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

ROOM 255

EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): 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 Education and Early Childhood Learning. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I'd like to welcome the minister back to Estimates, this very important process that we use to get to know a little bit more about what's going on in the department.

I just want to begin today by saying that as educators and human beings, yesterday was a very difficult day. I know that the minister also has experience working in schools, also has experience working with kids that endure trauma, families that endure trauma. Yesterday was very difficult.

I found myself taken back 11 years before, when I was working in a school, having to do—and having to process very much this—a repeat event that leaves us bereft and also speechless, knowing that schools are safe places. They're supposed to be harbours of safety, harbours of support, places where parents hand over the care of their child to very caring, dedicated individuals. And to see a school again targeted in that way is difficult.

I know we have the former minister of Education across from us here today, too. I know he knows that those events are—leave a mark. And Mr. Chair, at this point, I'll end that comment and offer the minister a chance to respond. Thank you.

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Mr. Chair, can you hear me okay?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, we can.

Mr. Ewasko: I'd like to—yes, I'd like to thank my friend, the MLA for Transcona, for bringing this topic up. And it's—it is—it's a tough situation. Definitely something that—it doesn't matter if it happens, you know, next door or in the neighbouring school division or in the neighbouring province or in the neighbouring country, or anywhere throughout the world; this senseless act of violence is absolutely horrendous.

I know the member, much like myself, worked in the school system for quite some time, and we've dealt with different situations, whether it's with student services or just—it could be as simple as some threats, I guess. It definitely gives a perspective for us to, No. 1, be thankful to a certain degree that when you do get home, you, you know, put that extra few seconds, minutes into the loved ones that you have at home. And, you know, in my case, thank God that they're okay and they're safe and all of that, for sure.

And each and every day, I think—I don't think it matters how old they are, either. I think, as a parent or as a family member, as a community member, I think you wish that everybody can leave their home in the morning and return home in—safe in the evening.

And I know that, working with many administrators and school officials throughout the province and throughout my time when I was still in school, I mean, this definitely shakes a community up, shakes a household up for sure. And I know that many educators and administrators take various forms of training to deal with these types of situations and I know that they spring into action when things like this do happen.

But, at the same time, I do know that there's time for some reflection and decompression after events like this as well, so I appreciate the member for bringing it up, and definitely, you know, as we, as all sides of the House today in the Chamber stood for a moment of silence in just thinking about the situation.

And, thankfully, something like that hasn't or doesn't occur here. We know that, on a yearly basis, there are various threats at the school level or within communities, municipalities and, you know, I have to maintain vigilant, as I know that the member opposite would agree with me, I'm sure. We have to maintain vigilant that those training—all that training that we do take as educators and those that are in a supervisory or administration-type role—you know, you hope that you never ever have to use it, but you hope, and I

know that all that good training does come to the forefront in individual's minds when it is needed.

* (15:10)

And so, whether that's law enforcement or school administration, I know that the safety of students and staff are absolute paramount and when events like this happen—again, doesn't matter where—I think it all gives us an opportunity to think about the various policies and processes that we have in place, basically, throughout all sectors, not only within the province but everywhere else.

So I, again, look forward to further questions coming from the member opposite and carrying on the discussion.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Altomare: I want thank the minister for his comments.

It does cause pause and it does force us to reflect on ensuring that we put the safety of students first and ensuring that families, communities know that schools remain that beacon of safety for their kids. And I want to thank his—the minister for his comments there.

I will get into some of the organizational structures of the department. In reviewing them, from previous year to this year, it—there are some changes to the structure, as was reported in April of 2021. There was a planning and transformation ADM within the department, and I notice that that's been removed this year. And that's an interesting development. Of note, too, is that there is now a Corporate Services ADM that's been added to the leadership team and the Corporate Services ADM remains vacant.

My question to the minister, Mr. Chair, is: can he provide what that job description would be for a Corporate Services ADM within the Education Department, and when does he see this position being filled?

Mr. Ewasko: So, basically, the—and you know what? This is a good question coming from the member opposite.

Basically, the title in the department that was in 2021, it's been renamed Corporate Services. So it's the same group, just renamed to Corporate Services.

Mr. Altomare: The second part of my question was: does he know when that position will be filled?

Mr. Ewasko: So, you know, much like, you know, the member from Transcona knows some of this.

I mean, when there is a vacancy and, you know, you basically put forward, you know, a plan. And you put the plan forward and ask for—you know, there's a recruitment strategy and a process that is under way. And that is under way.

And so, when that—when an individual gets hired for that position, we'll make sure that the member is alerted shortly thereafter.

Mr. Altomare: Also of note, Mr. Chair, was the change of the leadership at the ADM level. One person remains from the previous year's organizational structure.

This is quite a shift in the leadership team, and especially within a department of Education. My question to the minister, Mr. Chair, is: what brought about this change at the ADM level, and what does he look forward to as far as leadership from this group?

Mr. Ewasko: So, as the member may know as well, as—in certain circumstances, definitely since the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson)—and I know I've shared this with the member before—I am more than—I was more than honoured and continue to be honoured to hold this position as Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

And so, in January, when the department basically grew because we brought the wonderful team of Early Childhood Learning over into the department, of course, that brings in an additional position, and so that's why you see an added ADM in there.

There is a few new faces within the team and that basically—what I can tell—what I can share to the member without divulging a whole lot of personal information is that an—one individual is on temporary leave and two have actually taken opportunities elsewhere in governments.

And so, I know that he's looking at the same chart because he mentioned the vacancy of the assistant deputy minister for Corporate Services, which we have the recruitment process well under way and are encouraged that we will be filling that position. But Financial and Administrative Services, we have our executive financial officer, Claire Breul. We have Mona Pandey, who's our assistant deputy minister for System Performance & Accountability. We have Helen Robinson-Settee, who's the director of Indigenous Inclusion Directorate. We have Janet Tomy, who is assistant deputy minister for Student Achievement & Inclusion, and we have Jerin Vilow [*phonetic*], who is our acting deputy minister for Early Learning and Child Care.

* (15:20)

So with that, Mr. Chair, I look forward to the member for Transcona's next question.

Mr. Altomare: The second—oh, thank you, Mr. Chair—the second part to my question kind of touched upon the kind of a thematic approach as to what the department will be known for.

Prior to 2016, Mr. Chair, the department really had a focus on education for sustainable development and provided substantial resources to schools, to educators, to everyone that worked in the system regarding ESD—education for sustainable development.

I guess what I'm driving at with my question to the minister regarding, at the ADM level, is: What does he see as the theme emerging from this group that he's going to bring to educators or that this group is going to bring to educators in the province?

Thinking back to what used—what the department was really focused on with education for sustainable development, what's the next focus going to be? What are the next major resources going to be targeted towards?

Mr. Ewasko: It's—it was a good question from the member from Transcona, especially, of course, being an educator himself and an administrator for quite a few years before he got into this wonderful, wonderful occupation and honourable occupation as an MLA.

And I think, you know, in some cases, when he talks about sustainable development within education, I think we also have to make sure that some of the information that the member's putting out there is accurate. And I just want to assure the member that sustainability of our education and early childhood learning department is actually part of that fabric that the teachers on a day-to-day basis deliver to their students within, you know, with consultations with their administration, with the department, with our education partners all across this great province of ours.

You know, we—I know the member, you know, likes to share the odd thing that happened before 2016, and I'm not sure if his leader really wants him to be bringing up anything along those lines. But I digress, Mr. Chair.

I think, you know, part of our focus, of course, you know, we know that the last royal commission on education was not done since 1959. You know, we decided to say, hey, you know, it's time for the education—the K to 12 system to have a look at and a bit of

a commission and hear from Manitobans on what they want to see, you know, moving forward. You know, well over 25,000 individuals have shared their opinions on anything in regards to education moving forward; 75 recommendations came out of that K-to-12 commission.

And a couple of the main focuses that we heard from Manitobans was to strengthen literacy, numeracy and, of course, Indigenous education and—which then, you know, sort of takes me to the couple comments about our great initiatives that we've brought forward in response to the K to 12 seventy-five—or, K-to-12 commission's 75 recommendations, Mr. Chair.

You know, so April 20th we launched the action plan, which I'm assuming by now the member opposite has had a chance to take a good look at it and basically talk about the four main pillars in our action plan. You know, making sure that within those pillars—you know, and I'll just take a few seconds, Mr. Chair, to mention them.

I mean—so, high-quality learning is one of the pillars within the action plan. Of course, we need that, we need student engagement and well-being, I mean, we speak about that quite often, you know. And then, of course, when it comes to teaching, we want to see excellence in teaching and leadership, so opportunities—you know, making sure that for the teachers we've got those opportunities for—to continue on building on those successes for excellence and leadership. And then, of course, responsive systems.

Mr. Chair, this is such a great question that I might have to ask for leave to keep going, but in addition to the action plan, I mean, the very next day, on April 21st, we had a discussion. We launched our framework for learning, which, again, came—we had received great accolades about the action plan and the framework for learning. And then a week later, Mr. Chair, we launched Mamāhtawisiwin, which is actually the thread that gets woven in to all of those four pillars that I mentioned from the action plan.

So when we talk about listening to Manitobans, partnering with Manitobans, collaborating, making sure that our focus is on literacy, numeracy and Indigenous inclusion and education, Mr. Chair.

So I look forward to the member's next question and opportunity to share more with everyone.

Mr. Altomare: There is an action plan there, and that part has been noted.

What teachers are waiting for, respectfully, minister, is: how is this going to translate down to their everyday work in their classroom; and specifically, what opportunities will there be for teachers to enhance their professional development?

And can he describe the resources that the department will allocate to ensure that this action plan really does impact that child in the classroom?

* (15:30)

Mr. Ewasko: So—wow.

So, in regards to professional development, supporting teachers, making sure that we're moving forward and the biggest thing, Mr. Chair, is exactly what is the centre focus of absolutely everything: student success.

Student success is the centre of our action plan, everything that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning is focused on, Mr. Chair. It's making sure that those students are ready, so that when they graduate grade 12, they are ready to go on to some form of post-secondary, whether that's a private vocational institution, a college, a university, apprenticeship or—do you know what, I know this is going to sound crazy—or maybe just go and get a job.

We want to make sure that those students are supported. And how do we make sure those students are supported? We have to make sure that, as I mentioned earlier in the action plan, basically, the excellence in teaching and leadership is very paramount because we have to make sure that the teachers that are teaching our students are trained, and they've got those professional development opportunities.

Some of the core global competencies—I know that the member from Transcona has probably heard of this because he was probably tied in a little bit with some of his leadership professional development as well—but of course, you know, a pan-Canadian global competencies was adopted by CMEC, the council—Canadian Council for Ministers of Education. So, the six critical global competencies is citizenship, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, connection to self and creativity, Mr. Chair.

Within this, I know that, you know, we've got multiple, different avenues to access different funds, whether that's through school divisions or, you know, we've got the transformation fund. You know, the member mentioned earlier, you know, about the sustainable development division of the department from before that is now renamed, but we still have the

Education for Sustainable Development grant, which definitely can go on to help with that teacher professional developments. We've got, you know, for curriculum redevelopment, I mean, we're making sure that curriculum's up to date.

I know under the previous government, you know, back when I was still teaching and then when I came into politics in 2011, I know that the previous government never ever really took a good look at keeping curriculum up to date, and they really didn't have a schedule. So what we're doing is we're making sure that curriculum is reviewed on a timely basis and making sure that we're, you know, again, building on those successes. You know, but at the same time, what is maybe changed in the world that needs to be tweaked within the curriculum?

I think teacher—what teachers are looking for, what I've heard from my teacher friends from across this great province of ours is they're also looking so that curriculum is a little more—not necessarily flexible—but more along the lines of consistency. Making sure that whether they're teaching grade 1, let's just say math, and they're—and then all of a sudden, in a year or two, they go on and they want to teach grade 6 math, that the curriculum is consistent. It looks the same; it feels the same; it's comfortable, so that it's—they're not necessarily going in totally unprepared.

I have a few more examples which I'll share in my next answer, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

Mr. Altomare: I knew about the ESD grant still being available, and that's a good thing because I do know that schools really rely on that sustainable development grant because it maintains—it keeps the theme rolling, right? Because I know the department still has their website up on Education for Sustainable Development, and many teachers see that as a resource that helps them, you know, to teach and to learn about how to alleviate poverty, talks about human rights, health and environmental protection, all important themes.

Especially coming out of the pandemic, we certainly noticed a lot of cracks that appeared in our system that needed to be—that need to be addressed. And one of the things that is interesting is that I know the minister talked about an up-to-date curriculum and the need for a schedule.

Is the department providing a—or, can the department provide a sort of road map for what pieces of the curriculum they're going to update and—so that

teachers can know what's coming down the pipe and Manitobans can know what's coming down? I was kind of curious that he brought up that, Mr. Chair, and like to explore that a little further.

* (15:40)

Mr. Ewasko: So, I will get to a portion of the member's question in a few seconds.

But I just also wanted to mention about some of the other great things that the department and we are doing as a government to further strengthen teachers' professional development and making sure that teachers are supported, working with their curriculums, making sure that they're resourced up, and then, if there's also professional development opportunities, you know, again, working with school divisions, working with our, you know, our Manitoba Teachers' Society, definitely asking them, you know, what are certain things that they're looking for, for professional development.

And I mentioned the launch of Mamàhtawisiwin, which is Indigenous education policy framework—I think that was around April 26th or 27th, in there—matter of fact, I think it was April 27th. So, I wanted to touch on a little bit more that we're doing in that stream, because, as I said before, Mamàhtawisiwin is the thread that winds in and throughout those four pillars. It's basically the foundation that we're going to be working towards those pillars. And, you know, the—I appreciate the member saying, you know, the great resources that are available for teachers that are online, because that's sustainable development, too. I mean, that's woven within the curriculum, and we need to make sure that we're teaching those global competencies as well.

So we just hired an Indigenous inclusion consultant who is going to be providing support to school divisions on the implementation of Mamàhtawisiwin.

Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium will be providing training for teachers beginning in rural school divisions and will expand to urban and northern school divisions, as well, Mr. Chair.

I know also that, when we start talking about that professional development, taking a look at the recommendations from the K-to-12 commission, I mean, there were 75 recommendations, and I know, as I mentioned earlier, that the member, no doubt, has had an opportunity to go over the action plan with a fine-tooth comb and making sure that he's brought up to speed on anything that's in that action plan and,

of course, the framework for learning and then Mamàhtawisiwin as well.

But, you know, to go to some additional answers to his later question and his question in regards to curriculum, I mean—this actually gives me an opportunity to say something else, but I'm going to reserve my comments on a couple things.

But I'll just say that some of the recommendations that came out from the commission, and we know that, again, listening to thousands and thousands and thousands of Manitobans, you know, we take a look at—the recommendations is that curriculum gets reviewed. And one of the recommendations from the commission is definitely for the phys. ed. and the health curriculum to be reviewed, as well as the science curriculum.

We know that teachers don't like to be surprised. And I think that, you know, myself teaching prior to 2011, I think there were too many surprises coming out of the NDP Department of Education, and it left many of us scratching our heads on a day-to-day basis. But, you know what, it's a calling, Mr. Chair, and we continued moving on and teaching students to the best of our abilities.

So, absolutely, when we—when the department starts to pull together the curriculum development process and the cyclical refinement, we're going to make sure that teachers and all education partners across this great province of ours are aware of what the cycle is going to be, so that there is no surprises, so that they know what's coming, because that's what we're about; we're about collaboration and having those good conversations, and seeing, you know, what's going to be working with those front-line workers, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Altomare: So then I take it from the minister that there will be some sort of schedule coming forward so that teachers can see what's coming down the pipe. I think that's what I got out of that response; I'm not quite sure. So I look forward to seeing that. I'm sure many educators in the province would look forward to seeing that, as well.

I know the minister talks about Mamàhtawisimin [*phonetic*] and how that is going to impact teaching in the province and a child's experience at school.

So, what I'd like to ask the minister at this point regarding Mamàhtawisimin [*phonetic*] is: what are we going to see different? If we take a snapshot of a classroom now, how is the classroom going to look—say, we'll take a middle-years classroom—look a year

from now, after Mamàhtawisimin [*phonetic*] has been rolling for about a year and resources have been allocated.

What would the minister see as being different in those classrooms?

* (15:50)

Mr. Ewasko: It's interesting that the member from Transcona would ask me a question like this.

Now, part of it—oh, wait. Before I get to his answer of this question, I know that the—his—in his preamble, he was asking me in regards to the curriculum development process. And I'm not quite sure what he was listening to, but I absolutely did say, yes, there is going to be a cyclical refinement of curriculum, and, yes, there is going to be a, sort of a timeline so that teachers and staff and administration will know when those timelines are and when that is all happening, Mr. Chair.

So, absolutely, unlike the previous government that kept surprising teachers every six months, it seemed, with different little tweaks and whatever that really didn't make sense, we're going to make sure that the curriculum is consistent; it looks and feels the same throughout the K-to-12 system.

We're going to make sure that, again, going to and building upon and listening to the thousands and thousands and thousands of Manitobans that chimed in for the K-to-12 commission, and one of the recommendations is to do, you know, to take a look at the various curriculums and to start with phys. ed. and health and, of course, science to make sure that that schedule is out to our—to the people that need to know what the schedule is—and those are our teachers and administrators—and making sure that, you know, they're following the various framework in the curriculum documents that they have to be teaching to their students and making sure that, you know—and this is where I'll get into the minister—the member's question, making sure that Mamàhtawisiwin is embedded within that learning as well.

We know that there's, you know, the member asks, you know, well, what is a middle-years classroom going to look like?

Well, you know, I can tell you that I taught middle years for a few years, and my classroom looked a little different than the—than my colleague across the hall. It looked a little different from my colleague in a different school within the school division. I have no doubt that my classroom looked a little different from

a colleague who's teaching, say, in Thompson in northern Manitoba.

This is what's the great thing with us listening and collaborating with Manitobans, Mr. Chair. The fact is that we've developed the action plan, which is a living, breathing document—which, again, there's always going to be that reassessment going on and making sure that, you know, various partners are having the opportunity to chime in and to take a look at. Then, of course, Mamàhtawisiwin is a framework as well that is built upon the fact of the—you know, the Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing and is basically the action towards truth and reconciliation. Because we've said this—I've said this multiple times, and, you know, this isn't a Wayne Ewasko quotable; this is, you know, something that—*[interjection]*—many people have said: you can't have reconciliation without truth.

And so with that, Mr. Chair, and I know that I'm probably going to get called on the fact that I've said my own name, and I apologize for that if that's not allowed in committee, Mr. Chair. But some of the policies that we are going to be looking at—and I know that school divisions have already embraced, and it's not even a have to yet, because we're working on making sure that we've got those tools in place, we've got the supports in place from the department working with teachers.

Some of the policies that—the four policy topics that we're talking about from Mamàhtawisiwin is authentic involvement, putting students at the centre, understanding of world views, values, identities, traditions and contemporary lifestyles and inclusive and culturally safe learning environments. Important stuff, Mr. Chair.

Now, for me as the Minister of Education to go to any—and I'm going to use his example as a middle school classroom—to go across the province and tell them thou shalt—it look—shall look like blah, blah, blah, that's not on. That's not cool. That's not what he would want me to do. And he'd be in the Free Press tomorrow, or the local media, telling that I should keep my nose out of school divisions' plans.

But, Mr. Chair, I'm just making sure that the autonomy is there for school divisions, for teachers and for administration to strengthen—

Mr. Chairperson: The minister's time is up.

And I would remind the minister that—and I know you did recognize and explain and apologize, but I would remind him—or remind the minister that even if

you're referring to yourself, you must refer to yourself as the minister or the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko).

Mr. Altomare: It's interesting that the minister would describe it like that as far as thou shalt, what every classroom should look like.

The intent of my earlier question, Mr. Chair, was just to get an indication of, you know, what are some of the things that you would notice in a classroom as you're going through? Of course, there are going to be differences, right? But after putting a—you know, I would probably imagine as a significant amount of resources into this initiative, that you would notice some of that in a classroom.

And that is what I was driving at. I'm never talking about being very prescriptive as far as it comes to classrooms. No. But there are going to be certain signposts that you're going to notice as far as differences because we do know that classrooms evolve, absolutely.

So that's—I want to put that on the record, too, Mr. Chair, because I think these are important initiatives, absolutely. And there needs to be, you know, some—you have to notice what the investments have resulted in, and that was my—the root of my question.

I'd like to move on to the Auditor General's report and what he was talking about as far as the department being ready for the COVID-19 pandemic. The Auditor General, Mr. Chair, did note a lack of preparation due to not having an emergency management program or proactive co-ordination with K-to-12 leaders in the province. There are a list of eight recommendations, including regular assessments of risks, hazards, vulnerabilities of the school system and the creation of plans to improve Internet connectivity so online learning is accessible everywhere in the province and to avoid a repeat situation of what occurred during the pandemic.

* (16:00)

The Auditor General, Mr. Chair, also indicated there was neither an emergency management program nor a co-ordinated emergency plan for schools, said that the documents that were there were outdated and did not consider the consequences of remote learning—which, you know, it's a good thing to have some of these pieces put forward by the Auditor General so that we know that we can move forward and make the necessary adjustments.

The Auditor General also found that there was no province-wide data collection happening to identify long-term risks and impacts of the pandemic, and little work had been done when it came to recovery planning throughout the review period, which occurred between January of 2020 and February of 2021.

So, Mr. Chair, my question to the minister is: Since the report has been released, what plans has the department undertaken to ensure preparedness for the next public health event that may occur in the not-too-distant future?

Mr. Ewasko: I'm going to need a GPS system to figure out which way the member keeps going with his questions because he sort of goes a little bit on one set of questions and then wants some more information but then 'droms'—jumps another topic.

So, I'm going to go back a little bit with the Mamàhtawisiwin, and I'm not sure what he meant about the thou shalt. I'm not me—I'm not sure if he's saying that I should be telling them thou shalt do certain things or not. I don't—I'm hoping not, but nonetheless, I know that the member, my friend from Transcona, has no doubt done his homework and looked at the various different documents that our department has put out in collaboration, again, with Manitobans and in, you know, taking into account the recommendations put forward by the K-to-12 commission, which, I must say, has not happened since 1959, so I'm glad to be part of a government that actually did something like that and, again, is building on the successes that are within our education system.

And, again, the member knows that there's various things within the education system, even in his own career as an educator and administrator at the early-years level, that there were things that were great, and there were things that were pretty good but needed some tweaking, and there are things not so good.

So, you know, on the Mamàhtawisiwin, you know, so when he talks about, you know, what types of things are people going to be able to see within the classrooms. Well, I'll encourage the member, and I'm going to give him a little bit of a hint here to pick up the document and take a quick look because it specifically, Mr. Chair, outlines various things that, with the framework, and, again, weaving in Mamàhtawisiwin into those four pillars that I spoke about earlier in regards to the action plan, there is pretty much a great road map here in regards to the various roles and responsibilities of everybody involved.

There's a role for students in regards to the policies: authentic involvement; putting students at the centre; understanding of world views, values, identities, traditions, et cetera; and inclusive and culturally safe learning environment. So there's a role for students, and what is that going to look like under all those policies? It's laid out quite nicely. Teachers, of course, teachers are paramount in the delivery of not only the action plan but the framework and Mamàhtawisiwin, so there's a role for teachers, and it tells—again, going under those four policies.

School-based support teams, school leaders, school division, district leaders, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood—there's a role for us in the department too, Mr. Chair. And it's all going to be happening and continuing to happen as it already has, it's just that it is going to be a little more focused, and there's a bit of a road map and making sure that those resources are there.

Also, I would be remiss to mention, of course, our—another great support that we're doing for schools is in regards to our elders and knowledge keepers announcement that we made for schools initiative. And, again, much like what I said earlier in regards to not every school is going to be using these tools, these resources the same, but just knowing that they're there is very important.

And it's—hey, it's unfortunate, Mr. Chair, that the previous government never really thought of doing some of this stuff, but we're doing it and that's okay, because it's more about from today moving forward and, again, we launched these messages.

So, the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiatives are going to support students, educators and families to learn First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, languages, cultures, tradition, values, et cetera, and, of course, the traditional knowledge systems all across our K-to-12 learning environments.

And, again, I encourage the member to pick up the document, Mamàhtawisiwin, and take a read. You know, it's not a difficult read; it's very nicely laid out; there's multiple colours to keep attentive.

And with that, Mr. Chair, I'll answer his question on the OAG in my next answer.

Mr. Chairperson: I would like to remind the minister and also members of this committee, just regarding the appropriateness of addressing members.

Should not refer to people as my friend only, but rather refer to members by the ministry or the constituency or, if you're going to use my friend, then it should be my friend, the member from a particular constituency.

So, just for clarification.

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that guidance, and my apologies for—you know, I don't think that was an offensive comment, but it's a—you know, again, it's a—more of a rookie mistake.

So, moving forward, if I do mention my friend, I will definitely mention my friend's constituency as well, from Transcona, so just so that—I've got many friends, I know, that's in the committee room and that's probably listening to this riveting, riveting debate this afternoon. And so, if I'm talking about any specific friend, I'll make sure that I mention where they're from.

Thanks, Mr. Chair, for your guidance.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for that explanation, and I would call on the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare).

Mr. Altomare: I do look forward to the minister's response regarding the AG report and as far as plans.

These are important issues that were brought up, and I'm anticipating the minister's response to that portion of my questioning earlier.

* (16:10)

Mr. Ewasko: Thank you, Mr. Chair, my friend from Dauphin, for allowing me to put a few words on the record in regards to the member for Transcona, and just so that, you know, he doesn't feel left out, my friend, the member from Transcona, on the OAG's report.

So, unfortunately, the member from Transcona felt that it wasn't important to give the whole story, but this is nothing new. And, again, I'm strongly encouraged by the relationship that I have with the member from Transcona that it's not necessarily intentional, but I do know that in the past, some of the members from the NDP, the opposition, sometimes tends to not put the whole story on the record and then, you know, leaves some room for interpretation.

So, I am going to put a few—the whole story, sort of, on the record. So, the OAG report, which was released in April—early April, I mean—we take a look at the time period, first of all. First of all, the time period of the OAG's report. First of all, you know

what, before the member from Transcona takes something that I'm saying out of context, I do want to thank the office of the Auditor General for their work and their acknowledgment of the efforts made by the department and the broader education system, keeping in mind that this was a worldwide pandemic.

And the time frame, when the Auditor General did their investigation—really, the audit—was done from January 1st, 2020, to February 28th, 2021, and many of the things that were pointed out in that audit, many things already had improved. And keep in mind that roles and responsibilities, decisions and actions, you know, of other departments, of course, including the Office of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, individual schools or school divisions—I mean, everybody played a role, Mr. Chair.

And, again, there was no playbook, necessarily. You know, I know that the Office of the Auditor General, you know, basically made a comment, you know, finding that the department said, was not prepared for the pandemic. But—and this is what the member for Transcona fails to put on the record—but, and I quote, led an effective system response and did not initiate recovery efforts during the first year of the pandemic—led an effective system response.

So, after things actually got rolling and listening to advice of the chief public health officer, the Department of Education—and back—you know, back at the time, I'll just sort of give a bit of a shout-out, also, to my new department family members from early childhood learning—you know, again, we're adapting and changing and 'hadding'—had to be flexible and nimble in regards to how we were reacting to the pandemic.

And I applaud—because, of course, at that time when the audit was done, I was not, you know, the Education Minister—but I applaud the hard work of the Education minister at the time, as well as the department staff and officials and all our education partners all across the province.

So, to the member through you, Mr. Chair, to the member from Transcona, you know, we—again, I thank the work of the—our—Office of the Auditor General. We have three working tables to address all eight of the recommendations. You know, if he wants, I could go through a bit of a list as far as who's on those working tables.

But basically, Mr. Chair, I believe that the department worked very, very well in regards to the pandemic. Is there things that we would do differently if

we could back up to the start of January 1st when the audit began? Absolutely. But we've made very huge efforts moving forward.

Mr. Altomare: What I was looking for, Mr. Chair, is the guidance that the department has taken from the AG report.

I did hear the minister say that there are three working tables to address the recommendations that have been established. I'm hoping that, as these tables are established, that, you know, some guidance is taken from the AG report. There's a lot of good things in there that, certainly, the department can take some guidance from. And I see it as an important step, because preparation is important when it comes to critical departments like the Department of Ed and ensuring that they're ready to go when these events do befall the system.

I do know, too, that what came out of that, Mr. Chair, was a real focus on how important air quality is in schools, and air ventilation systems are in schools. It's become known, and there's a significant body of research now that 'sairs' air ventilation and air quality is something that can be not only improved but also focused on, because it keeps buildings and the people within the buildings safe; prevents the spread of airborne viruses like COVID, or like the common cold or like the flu. And these are important pieces that need to be addressed.

My question to the minister at this point is: Does the department meet with directors of maintenance or secretary treasurers to get an idea of an audit of the quality of air system and air ventilation in our public schools?

* (16:20)

Mr. Ewasko: Again, I'd like to thank the member for the question.

And it gives me an opportunity to talk again about, you know, the various different things that, you know, the audit had shown. And again, I wanted to stress that, you know, we appreciate the work of the office of the Auditor General. And, you know, taking a look at the response, and also for their office acknowledging the fact that it was an effective response overall and that once, like we said, during that year of being—of the first year of the pandemic and being audited, also acknowledging and knowing that we had already put many things in place since that audit had been completed. And then again, of the recommendations put forward by the Auditor General, making sure that we're working.

You know, all of the recommendations are in progress, and over the past year, we, the Manitoba government, has made appreciable—appreciable investments into the education system to ensure that school divisions can provide in-person learning and this includes investments that we've made; personal protective equipment. The member mentions ventilation projects, which is great; I'm sort of glad that somehow, telepathically, I messaged him and asked him to bring up ventilation because I think—I mean, we still have a lot of work to do, Mr. Chair, but I think the mess that we inherited in 2016 and I think the collaborative approach that our team within the PC government took to highlight some of the weaknesses within the infrastructure, I guess, within our school divisions and our schools had absolutely been lacking.

Because we know that the former government never met a ribbon that they didn't like to cut, Mr. Chair. And some of the deferred maintenance and various things along those lines. I mean, we know that we've got 20-plus years of catch-up to do on deferred maintenance, and this doesn't only go in the education system, but absolutely all across this great province of ours.

But, you know, in regards to, you know, capital, and I know that the member's asked the question about whether the department speaks to secretary-treasurers or maintenance supervisors or whatever, I think is a great question because it gives me that opportunity to say, yes, absolutely, there is multiple conversations happening between the department and those officials within school divisions, Mr. Chair. I mean, we talk about, you know, the safe school funding alone that we provided to school divisions throughout the pandemic. I mean, for the '21-22 school year, you know, we had \$63 million—were allocated through the Safe Schools Fund. That basically breaks down to, you know, \$45 million, you know, helping with mental health and well-being, safety, addressing learning impacts and vaccine promotion.

You know, we had \$6.8 million in ventilation improvements. You know, divisions were asked to, you know, take an assessment of, you know, what is your ventilation system? How are they working? What's going on? Because we know that the previous government—the previous NDP government really didn't feel that deferred maintenance was important, and so we felt it was important, and, of course, you know, coming into COVID, air quality, hey, pretty important, Mr. Chair.

So, we made sure that we're asking school divisions to go and take a bit of an inventory on their ventilation needs, and we provided—we made sure that there was a couple avenues for them to—school divisions to approach the department—and also department under the MLA for Brandon West—to make sure that their capital improvements are met. I know that the member from Transcona fails to commend our government for increased funding to education, but it's a fact.

Mr. Altomare: It's interesting that the minister, Mr. Chair, brings up the maintenance dollars that are needed to ensure schools are safe learning environments. Those are important—that's important information to know and certainly something that school divisions are—have had to deal with for a number of years, especially since 2016.

The maintenance deficits in many school divisions throughout this province are noted. It's something that they regularly bring up with the department and are looking forward to a plan to address many of those maintenance deficits that do exist. It's important. I'm glad that the minister brought that up because it's going to take significant planning and investment to ensure that right now, what's noted by the experts is the need for improved ventilation in schools.

I will also say, Mr. Chair, that \$16 million to improve ventilation is a start, one would suppose, and I would like to see more dedicated to this because this is an important piece because it's not just about COVID or any pandemic. This is just about creating great learning and working environments for kids, and I would anticipate that the minister and his department allocate the necessary resources to tackle this deficit because it's an important one that needs to be looked at and one that does require a lot of attention.

What also requires a lot of attention, Mr. Chair, is the state of equity in education in this province. Many in Manitoba have called the introduction of education equity offices in Winnipeg and in other cities and parts of our province as absolutely essential in order to address systemic racism and improve representation and outcomes for all kids and be accountable to the public.

It's important that kids see role models that they can look up to, especially in their classrooms; seeing themselves reflected in their teachers and other adults that work in the building is important. It produces hope in kids. It produces something that is really important, and I do know that Equity Matters—there's the group that exists that has spent a lot of time and resources in meeting with politicians in Manitoba.

And so, Mr. Chair, my question to the minister is: Has he been in contact with Equity Matters in Manitoba, and what plans have come out of those meetings, and if he can describe those plans?

* (16:30)

Mr. Ewasko: Again, good thing that I am able to take a look in the crystal ball and see where the member from Transcona—my friend, the member from Transcona—is going with his questions because we went from OAG report to ventilation and then to Equity Matters. And it's just—it's a fun afternoon, Mr. Chair. And—but, that being said, I would like to go back for a couple seconds before I answer his question on Equity Matters.

So just to be clear, I just want to make sure that the member knows, and I appreciate the member saying and applauding us for the great work that we have been doing on ventilation. I know that we had a, you know, a huge mess to clean up, but we're doing it and I appreciate the member for acknowledging that we are moving forward. We have a lot of work to—yet to do, Mr. Chair, and I know that if the member has specific questions in regards to, you know, the percentages of schools that have air conditioning or don't have air conditioning or improved ventilation systems, I know that the member would probably be interested in joining the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services (Mr. Helwer) on that question.

But I would like to share with the member, because I've said it multiple times in question period, but I'm not sure if the member's really taking it to heart, that, you know, our \$327-million investments in education over the last two years—which is an over-17.2 per cent increase—that doesn't include, Mr. Chair, the capital funding that we've dedicated to schools.

And—but the member doesn't want to talk about that because it's a good news story. It's a great news story. It's—you know—all, you know, for the last few years, we were dedicating \$160 million to capital improvements and renovations and all that. We've actually upped that by \$100 million, so we've actually—we've dedicated \$260 million over the last few years to capital improvements and, basically, to address some of the deferred maintenance that the previous NDP government just didn't really pay attention to, Mr. Chair.

And within that, Mr. Chair, good news story, we've got, you know—we've made a commitment of building 20 new schools by 2026-27. And you know

what, we needed to up that as well, so we're actually going to be building 22 new schools, which is great for, again, planning ahead for the future.

Which—I know that the previous government, all they wanted to do was build some portables, and they kept building portables. Don't get me wrong, we still need some portables, which is great, but at the same time, it's building these new schools, Mr. Chair, and having that foresight to making sure that we're getting ready for the future. Because we're going to have so many new Manitobans come into Manitoba, and they're going to be bringing their kids, and we're just going to have to teach them and have room for them, and it's just fantastic information.

To Equity Matters: absolutely, equity matters, Mr. Chair. And I think that, when students are sitting in the classrooms and they're taking a look at their teachers who are instructing them in front of the classroom or within the classroom, within the building, they want to see themselves there as well. So that's why we're working hard with our various partners all across this great province of ours—our education partners.

But again, you know—I know I'm going to say something here that I know that the member knows, but for those listening at home and, you know, tuned into this conversation about Estimates of Education and Early Childhood Learning, the member knows that school divisions and school boards actually hire the teachers. And I know they're working hard to make sure that they're hiring equitable and many, you know, different people with different cultural backgrounds to educate our students all across this great province of ours, Mr. Chair.

We've had meetings with Equity Matters. I'm not going to go into specific dates—Tom Simms, Crystal Labera [*phonetic*], Suni Matthews, to name a few—and we are working on various different things moving forward. They're absolutely thrilled with the recommendations from the K-to-12 commission, and they're thrilled with the action plan, Mr. Chair.

So I look forward to the member's next question.

Mr. Altomare: I did hear the minister say something about an action plan regarding equity? Can he expand on what he was referring to?

It was just in the last few seconds there.

Mr. Ewasko: So, I'm not quite sure why my friend, the member from Transcona, has that scowly look on his face, but I was absolutely—I thought—pretty clear

that within the action plan—you know, it's definitely within the action plan to make sure that equity is brought forward within our school system.

Again, it's a living, breathing document. I strongly encourage the member to take a read. If he doesn't have a copy, if he wants—you know, and this is not one of those things where we need, you know, the Clerk's office to write down and get him a copy. If he really needs a copy, I can get him a copy. I can give him a copy tomorrow or later today. I can highlight some of the pages as far as where some his questions—you know, really, the answers are there.

But I mean, Equity Matters is a key stakeholder of ours, partner on having conversations about making sure that, you know, as we move forward, educating our students, that it—I mean, they're thrilled.

And maybe the member himself has met with equity members—Equity Matters, sorry, Mr. Chair. And I'm sure that they would say that they're happy with the action plan. It's one of our guiding principles within the action plan. I'm not going to do a Where's Waldo? thing—this with him, but I strongly encourage him to read the action plan.

It's in there, so he didn't need to have that look on his face in regards to what I meant by equity and the fact that it's in the action plan, because I think even if we look back in Hansard, I was pretty clear.

* (16:40)

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to continue the conversation that we were able to have last week in regards to child care. I want to thank my colleague for giving an opportunity to ask some questions, and I'd like to thank the minister for being here today to answer some of them.

I'd like to just go back to the question of subsidy, which is what we ended on last week. Today, of course, we did raise that in question period, and I just—I'm not sure that we received much clarity from the minister last week when we discussed this government's approach to the subsidy. So I'm just hoping he can provide some clarity over the rollout and what's been happening with that.

One specific question I'd like to ask and I'm seeking clarity on is: We're hearing from child-care centres that anyone who applies for the subsidy, regardless of whether or not they fall outside of the—above the \$83,000 income threshold, everybody's getting it. So I'm hearing stories of families that are, you know, \$250,000-a-year income families that are applying

and have been getting months of free child care, which raises serious questions about equity and how these dollars are being distributed.

Again, this is what we're hearing from centres. Can the minister provide clarity as to why that's happening and a little bit more clarity about what his government is doing to respond to the confusion out there about the subsidy rollout?

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate my friend from St. James asking me a few questions.

He started the questioning about—he thanked me for being here for these questions and answers on Estimates. And I'm not quite sure where else I would be. But that being said, I thank him for being here as well to be able to ask some questions, and it's going to give me an opportunity to be able to put some information on the record that hopefully will bring clarity.

So, I'm not going to—you know, I'm not going to go down the vein of pointing out to the member from St. James, you know, whether he's putting false narratives on the record or whatever else. I'm not going to go there right now. I'm just going to basically—he's looking for some clarity. Some people that he's talking to are asking for some clarity. He's saying specific centres are asking for some clarity around the subsidy rollout.

As I've answered him in question period, you know, I mean, one of the key points to this rollout—and, again, trying to make sure that, No. 1, that we're increasing seats, but we're also making sure that the child-care seats are affordable. And so by—rolling out the \$75 million to improve the affordability of child care through the advanced subsidy payments to facilities was very important.

I'm not sure, you know, as far as clarity to the sector—I mean, so we had two great announcements in February. I know the member no doubt read the news releases and was there for listening to what I had to say, but also the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and Minister Gould and even the Prime Minister was one of the—was on one of them, as I said today in question period as well.

I mean, we're talking about a major, major, major subsidy indexing increase here, and the goal of the subsidy rollout is to make sure that as quickly as we possibly could, make sure that those dollars are rolled out to those families that need ahead of time, during the application process.

* (16:50)

As far as confusion goes, I mean, I'm not quite sure what the member's a hundred per cent speaking about, and I'm hoping, then, that the member from St. James can then pass along to me any child-care centres, or directors or board members that he's aware of, so that we can help with some clarity.

Because the announcements happened in February. Since February, we've put out communications, we've put out circulars. Matter of fact, the member from St. James mentioned the last time that we got together for Estimates, he mentioned about the circulars, which—he knows that there's information flowing. We had a couple virtual workshops, town-houses, workshops where people could ask questions. One was on March 30th. We just had another one on May 20th—over 400 participants, Mr. Chair.

I mean, so I think as far as clarity and any type of that—I mean, and don't get me wrong, there's always going to be times when individuals have further questions. And so, again, we wanted to make sure that the \$75 million, you know, in the time period of being able to—to be able to do the application process, Mr. Chair. I mean, some of the eligibility, that's taken into account into the process. And this is from the department.

So, the child-care centres, what they need to do is they need to continue to do what they've always been doing, and that's providing the department with their enrolment and who's sitting in the chairs. But the department—I mean, some of the things that are for eligibility is: household income, the family makeup, number of children and ages of the children. And then that's where the subsidies sort of come into play, Mr. Chair.

So, as far as—I know that we'll probably have another couple questions coming from the member on this topic, so I look forward to those and providing more clarity as time goes on here, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sala: In relation to confusion about the subsidy, I'm going to read the minister an email that was sent from a local child-care director to ELCC, and the response that they received.

This is to ELCC: Hello, I'm looking for more information on the whole subsidy advance situation. I did not encourage our families enrolled as of February 6th, 2022 to apply. It seemed unlikely that they would receive a quote, unquote free child care, and I did not want to infer they would.

Very few of our families took this up and applied, so now it seems our other families were at a disadvantage since they did not apply. It now appears to me that the program is extended to July 23rd, 2022, so can I now encourage all those older families and any new ones to apply and receive the three months credit?

This has been a very unclear process, and certainly not the way I would expect our government to do business. Clarity is much appreciated.

Here's the response from ELCC, from your government: Hello. Thank you for your email. I understand the frustration. Yes, ELCC is advising all licensed child-care facilities to strongly encourage all families—not those that should qualify; all families—to apply for subsidy.

Facilities should use the subsidy advancement to credit all families enrolled in the child-care facility—subsidized families and non-subsidized families—starting February 6th, 2022. If facilities have not done so and still have a surplus of the subsidy advancement allocations, the facility may credit all families three months free child care using a subsidy advancement to cover child-care costs starting immediately. If the facility does not have a surplus, then only credit those families who have approved subsidy.

I wanted to read that for the minister, just so that he could hear it right from what was shared by government to a child-care director in our community, to give him a sense of what's driving confusion, frustration and, frankly, what's driving a huge missed opportunity for a lot of low-income families who are not learning about the subsidy, who are being left behind. Meanwhile, as this states, we have other families that are far beyond the income limits that are applying and are getting free childcare.

This isn't partisan politics, Minister, this is just information I'm sharing. And it's genuinely concerning, because there's families that are missing out on potentially thousands of dollars of income support at a time when they're really struggling.

And I am happy to share this email with you. I've mentioned this to you and I will send this to you so you can see it.

I do want to insert one last question, because I think we're going to run out of time here. Very quickly, around supply: we need more child-care spaces for Manitoban families in this province. We're in desperate need of that. The minister knows there's a huge line—a huge number of families that are in the queue for spaces. The Manitoba child-care agreement

that was recently signed states that this province will seek to add 23,000 child-care spaces by '25-26. That will ultimately create coverage for a total of only 41—or, 40.1 per cent of preschool children in Manitoba, assuming that we have 121,000 children zero to six that would qualify. And that's—those are numbers that are all from the agreement.

Every other province, or almost every other province has committed to meeting 59 per cent or covering 59 per cent of children in those age categories. Why is Manitoba getting these same federal supports getting 20 per cent less spaces than other provinces?

Mr. Chairperson: I would ask the member for St. James, is that letter that you read, is it private correspondence?

Mr. Sala: It is private correspondence, but I was given permission to share this.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, if you could—we would need four copies tabled, and if you only have one, we can take it and photocopy it for the members of this committee.

The honourable minister. Are you ready to answer yet? No?

Mr. Ewasko: I think, you know, definitely, I look forward to taking a look at the email, taking a look at the response and, of course, see the timing of that and whatever.

I mean, definitely, you know, we're trying to make sure that those who absolutely need are getting and that they're applying and they're going to be getting their money. This is the most generous subsidy program ever in the history of the province, Mr. Chair, in regards to child-care spaces.

I'm assuming we're going to be going back into Estimates shortly as well, so I can continue on some of the member's additional questions the next time. But, definitely, I want to point out that the subsidy indexing increase—Mr. Chair, basically, if we take a look at various amounts, the 45 per cent that we have done here in Manitoba is the largest. The last indexing fee increase by the previous NDP government, in July of 2012, was five—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

**CHAMBER
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

* (15:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order?

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for, or of Executive Council.

At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and we ask the members to please introduce their staff in attendance.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I just wanted to introduce the staff that I have with me today Mr. Michael Richards, the deputy Cabinet secretary as well as the deputy minister for intergovernmental relations, and I have Jordan Sisson, my chief of staff.

Mr. Chairperson: As previously stated, in accordance with subrule 77(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I wanted to begin with somewhat of an opening comment for this afternoon before I pose the first question.

You know, I would like to begin committee this afternoon by asking about the tragic fire that happened in Pimicikamak Cree Nation earlier this year. Everyone across the province was very moved and very upset at the tragic loss of the young people and members of a family.

And I know the Premier travelled up to the community at the time, and as a result, I think there's that shared interest in making sure that we do what we can, that we take the steps to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring again.

I have invited the—some of the members of the family to join us today. We have Orton and Jen Muskego who are the, you know, grandparents on the mom's side of that family. And I should say for the benefit of the committee, quite often when we have guests, it's like, you know, an adversarial situation sometimes. But I just want to assure the committee that this is not being done in a partisan way. I took the opportunity to speak with the Premier beforehand and just to give her the heads-up as to the sort of the questions that I want to explore here, and we just took a

moment to speak with the family as well, just for a few minutes before getting started.

And I think all of us across the province, we want to see steps taken to ensure that there's safe housing on reserves across the province, including in Cross Lake, which is the community that we're speaking about here. This is an issue that moved many people, and so we just want to make sure that there continues to be that focus on what we can do to address it.

So I did want to begin by talking about the Northern Flood Agreement which, you know, Cross Lake and Pimicikamak is still a party to, and ask about what the Province is doing to implement that. But I'm sure the Premier probably would have some comments as well, so maybe I'll just leave it at that for the time being.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just want to thank the Leader of the Opposition and welcome our guests in the gallery today. Orton and Jen, it was, you know, pleased to meet you today and, obviously, our thoughts and prayers go to you and your family for the horrific tragedy that took place in Pimicikamak Cree Nation.

And I just wanted to say I did—I was able to, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned—I was able to get to the community to visit with members of the family at the time and just the horrific tragedy that has taken place and really visit it, you know, myself. It affected not just family members, but, indeed, an entire community. Certainly, what I saw and the outpouring of love and support for the family members was amazing to see, and just, again, just so honoured to be there and to offer our condolences in person to the family.

And so I'll leave it at that in terms of the comments today, and these are important discussions. And I, again, appreciate the Leader of the Opposition, you know, that this is not a partisan issue. This is one of wanting to ensure that we get services into those communities that are needed and that we work in all levels of government to ensure that we work towards ensuring those services are there for members of the community when they need them.

And so I will leave it at that for now, and I'm happy to take any questions from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: I want to—on behalf of our team and, you know, so many people across the province—extend our condolences to the family and let them know that we are not going to forget your loved ones.

* (15:20)

I wanted to ask about the Northern Flood Agreement in relation to this because the NFA is an agreement that the Province is a party to, directly, and also Manitoba Hydro is a party to that agreement, as well, along with the Government of Canada. And as a result, even though quite often there's a conversation about on-reserve issues being federal jurisdiction, here with the NFA, we have an agreement that brings the Province into the fold.

So I wanted to ask just a very general question at the outset, which is, when it comes to Cross Lake, what is the Province doing to implement and to honour the Northern Flood Agreement?

Mrs. Stefanson: I just want to start by saying that we take our obligations under the Northern Flood Agreement very seriously. I know that this issue came up when I visited the community and I spoke to several individuals there, including the chief, about Manitoba Hydro, as well. I think there was some challenges of maybe meeting with Manitoba Hydro, and so from that meeting, I know, you know, we did ensure that, you know, I did pass that along that we obviously need to sit down at the table to have these discussions further. I think that was the most—that was the issue sort of at the time.

And I'm certainly—I'm happy to go back and follow up with Manitoba Hydro to find out where the status is of those discussions with those communities under the Northern Flood Agreement.

I do know that after—there were other issues that were brought up there, as well, including issues of overcrowding and housing and so, subsequent to my visit to the community, I did speak to our Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations (Mr. Lagimodiere) and asked him to send a letter to the—his federal counterparts, Minister Hajdu and Mr. Hussen, I believe, and call on them to take immediate action on—in some of these areas as well.

And so that letter did go out, I believe, in February 22nd, so it was somewhat after that—it was just shortly thereafter—shortly after my visit to the community. So those are some of the actions that we have taken, but of course, we take the situation very seriously. We want to work very closely with the communities affected, and we want to work very closely with other levels of government to ensure that we get the services that are needed in these communities.

Mr. Kinew: And—[interjection]—oh, yes. I can introduce staff.

Mr. Chairperson: You can introduce your staff, perhaps.

Mr. Kinew: Yes. So, I introduce my chief of staff here, Mark Rosner, who's joining us again today.

Thank the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) for the answer to the previous question. We had sent a similar letter to the federal government as well. I'm wondering if the Premier would be able to share the letter with the committee either by tabling it or as a matter under advisement later on.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. I don't have any problem with sharing that with the committee. I believe we'll get some copies. This one has some markings on it; we'll get a clean copy of it and make sure that it's—and three copies of it as well, and make sure that it's available here.

It was also cc'd to Dan Vandal, Grand Chief Arlen Dumas, Grand Chief Garrison Settee, Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, as well as Chief David Monias as well.

Mr. Kinew: Yes. Thanks for that commitment, and I don't believe that we've received a response to our letter, but I would ask whether the Premier or the minister ever received a response to the letter that their government sent yet.

Mrs. Stefanson: I don't believe that my office has received a response to the letter but, again, I will double-check to see if there was a response in the department of northern recon—oh, sorry—Indigenous reconciliation and northern relations.

Mr. Kinew: All right. I thank the Premier for that.

I was speaking with, you know, Chief Monias about the issue of the Northern Flood Agreement and, you know, I think I'm sharing his words fairly accurately when he says the Northern Flood Agreement is about the eradication of mass poverty in Cross Lake and in other communities.

And speaking with the family and also subsequently to Chief Monias, in that conversation they talk about implementing the Northern Flood Agreement to eradicate mass poverty, specifically around housing and access to water and sewage for the community.

So I'm wondering if the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) will implement the Northern Flood Agreement in a way that addresses those issues of housing and water and sewer services in Cross Lake.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, again, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question, and I know we're endeavouring to get a copy of the letter to—that we've sent off to the federal minister.

But in the letter, we did highlight the importance of these very issues that the Leader of the Opposition just mentioned, and I'll just read from the letter as we're going to table this anyway: The time has come for meaningful action and funding for basic necessities like safe housing, safe potable water and to support and mobilize Indigenous housing and rapid housing initiatives through home building, adequate water and wastewater infrastructure, fire suppression services and other health and safety measures.

* (15:30)

So this is certainly something that we have brought up with the federal government. It's very important that we work collaboratively on those initiatives. And, again, I'll endeavour to find out if we received a response, and if not, you know, certainly, we'll send a follow-up letter to them as well to follow up on these issues.

Mr. Kinew: I appreciate the response there and the willingness to collaborate with the feds. So just to put a bit of a finer point on it: is the Premier willing to collaborate in the form of addressing housing issues and water issues and sewage issues with the community as part of their obligations under the Northern Flood Agreement?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. I mean, I think it's important to recognize the need for a partnership and taking that kind of approach when it comes to these very important issues to address overcrowding and other issues related to this area. And under—you know, we're definitely committed to reaching out to the federal government, to working with the federal government in a partnership to address these important issues.

Mr. Kinew: I would like to ask about the same issues on the town side, if you will. And I'm sort of doing air quotes for the town side of Cross Lake, there, because you have a—I believe a Northern Affairs community there as well, as they're kind of known. So that would be an area of provincial responsibility. What steps is the Province going to take with respect to housing and water and sewer infrastructure when it comes to the quote, unquote, town side of Cross Lake?

Mrs. Stefanson: I just wanted to say I've got a copy—three copies of that letter, which I'm happy to table now.

And just in response to the Leader of the Opposition's question, I think it's very important that we work very closely with the federal government. We certainly recognize our responsibility when it comes to Northern Affairs communities, and—but we also—I think we need to work very closely with—both on, you know, on reserves as well as on the town side as well and take sort of a whole approach to all of this to ensure—not—it's not sort of one as opposed to the other; it's really looking at both and really developing a strategy that is complimentary, I think, to addressing many of the issues of concern: things like basic necessities like safe housing, safe potable water, and to support and mobilize, you know, Indigenous housing and rapid housing initiatives.

So I think these are very important issues that we can't look in isolation. I think we need to take, you know, a whole-of-government approach, which we are working between our different government departments, including, you know, housing; so it would be the Department of Families, including Infrastructure and, you know—so we'll continue to work on our side in a whole-of-government approach when it comes to offering these services to those communities.

But I think we can't look at it in isolation. We've got to look at it together and ensure that we're also bringing in the federal government as they are, you know, a significant partner in all of this.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I thank the Premier for the answer to the question there.

I just wanted to share some words just for the Premier and her team about the importance of housing on this issue.

The, you know, family who joins us today have spelled out very clearly, the home that we're talking about with respect to this fire was 16 feet by 16 feet. It was a house that built for—to be an isolation unit for COVID-19. So when we're talking about 16 feet, we're talking about the distance between the Premier and I—even less than that right now. And so you imagine a space of that distance, squared, and then you put a fridge, you put a stove, you put a mattress in there—seven people were living in that space at the time of this tragedy.

So I share that because, when I heard that from the grandfather, it was very striking. Like, it just made the issue of overcrowding and the necessity to have more access to housing, made it very clear, very visible—you can visualize it—and it made it very plain.

So I just wanted to share that comment as an illustration for the need—the urgent need—for action when it comes to these issues.

And the issue of Northern Affairs—and, again, I know the naming has changed with the change in the department, of course, so I guess they're probably Northern Relations communities now. But, you know, whether you're in Cross Lake or you're in Norway House, Nelson House, Berens River, many other communities, there is many communities where you have a large First Nation with a—either a quote unquote, you know, town side or Métis community side not too far away. So I would also just share those comments on the record, that we do have these similar dynamics across the province, particularly across northern Manitoba.

One of the issues that I think we have—or, one of the responses to this issue that we've seen in other jurisdictions has just been the provision of fire detectors or smoke detectors on reserve; I know some provinces have moved in that direction. I'm wondering if that's something the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) can commit to, a program to provide smoke detectors on reserve across Manitoba.

Mrs. Stefanson: I appreciate the question from the Leader of the Opposition.

And, certainly, that was an issue that came up, as well, when I was meeting with members of the community and Chief Monias as well. And it is one of those things, it's one of those basic necessities, and that's something that we also brought up with the federal government as well, to ensure that, you know, part of safe housing is ensuring that there's adequate, you know, smoke detectors in place to ensure that—you know, that that's all part of providing safe housing, I believe.

* (15:40)

So, this is something that we have brought up with the federal government as well, and is all a part of those discussions that—those ongoing discussions that we'll continue to have with the federal government and with the community, to ensure that we have the access to that, you know, safe housing in the community.

Mr. Kinew: I thank the Premier, also.

I wanted to ask about training, both for firefighters and on the fire prevention side because, certainly, we know—well, I just recall, like, you know, growing up, you'd hear talk of, like, fire plans; you

know, what's your fire plan, what's the safety plan? We do that at work quite a bit, you know, there's a safety plan for a building, for example; school, they often do fire drills, et cetera, et cetera.

So, I'm just wondering what sort of provincial programs—maybe we could just start on the prevention side, in terms of fire prevention. What sort of provincial programs do we currently have, or might we look at in the near future, to prevent fires, both across Manitoba but also, you know, specifically, in this instance, on reserves in Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I think this is a very important discussion to have and to look into. Obviously, what provincial programs or fire prevention programs that are being offered out there. I just don't have the detail—that kind of detail with me today, in terms of what—you know, what some of those programs are.

And I think it's an important discussion to have and would be good, I think, to ask in the Committee of Supply of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, where they would be, I think, more adequately able to provide the Leader of the Opposition with the answers to those specific programs.

But I think it is a very important question, and I think it is something that, obviously, we will—you know, I'm pretty passionate about wanting to—you know, to help in this situation, and to help on these First Nations, as well, to ensure that we have—you know, that safety initiatives are offered in those communities, when it comes to fire prevention.

And so, I think that those—that would be a good question to ask at those departmental Estimates. But a very good discussion to have kind of the overarching—you know, these are some of the things that should be considered when looking at how do we work collaboratively with the federal government, with the community, to ensure that these types of programs are there.

And I think that's an important high-level discussion for us to have.

Mr. Kinew: I thank the Premier.

I wanted to ask a similar question, just with respect to firefighters and to ask what programs there is—there are, rather, about training firefighters, including ones that would operate on-reserve.

I know there's—there are many firefighting crews across the province, many of them located on First Nations. Many of them are firefighters locally in their community; others fire—others fight forest fires. We have, I guess, 70-some-odd firefighters in Whiteshell

right now, that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and I toured overhead of. So, by way of acknowledgment of all those folks and their efforts on all of our behalves.

But I wonder whether one of the things coming out of this isn't maybe more resources and more training opportunities for firefighters to be able to game out the various situations that they may encounter, and therefore, be better positioned to respond to the various challenges that might face them.

So I wanted to ask about firefighting training that the Province might be undertaking, including that which could be offered on reserves across Manitoba.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. It's an important one and, in fact, I think he'll see the letter that we tabled. And in that letter, we did raise fire suppression services that are being offered and how can the federal government help to ensure that those services are offered on reserve, as well, to ensure that, you know, the safety of people living on the reserve.

So, it is, again, something at a high level that, you know, we are having discussions about. We would like to see what kind of training. I think these are good questions to ask, as well, and we'll continue to work with the federal government and see what kind of programming is being offered elsewhere that could be offered in these communities in Manitoba as well.

And, so, again, we'll continue to have that collaborative approach to all of this and ensure that we have, you know, the appropriate, you know, training of firefighters on reserve. And, again, those are discussions that we're having with the federal government.

Mr. Kinew: I wanted to ask specifically about a, I guess, technique of responding to a house fire called breaching a house and wonder whether the Province would commit to ensure that training for firefighters in this sort of situation would encompass, you know, whatever training is necessary for a firefighter to be able to breach a house, should that be necessary or appropriate under—in a fire.

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

And, you know, I believe very passionately in these—in ensuring that these services are offered in these communities. And I will work and do whatever I can with—in a collaborative way with the federal government to ensure that these services are offered.

When it comes to training programs with—you know, in general, training programs that are offered

with respect to firefighters, it certainly would fall under the Office of the Fire Commissioner, which falls under Municipal Relations.

And so I think, again, I would just—to have a high-level discussion, I think we're in agreement that, you know, that we need to move to ensure that there's more that is offered in terms of the basic necessities on—in those communities. When it gets into the details of the types of training programs that are being offered, I think that would more appropriately be asked under Municipal Relations, specifically under what those programs are that are being offered, and the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

* (15:50)

Mr. Obby Khan, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Kinew: I also thank the Premier.

There is a wage and salary inequity for some of these life-saving first responders on reserve. It's my understanding that, I guess, some of these firefighters, their compensation is just \$40 per call. It doesn't matter if they're there for 10 minutes or 10 hours. It's like a lump-sum payment, as opposed to how remuneration might exist in other situations.

So I was just wondering if the Premier might commit to raising that issue with the federal government and trying to ensure that, again, for these folks who are being asked to step up in times of crisis and, you know, who we're turning to to be heroes, if they can have that issue addressed.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes. No, I thank the Leader of the Opposition.

I don't know whether or not that is the case. That's the first I have heard of this and—but certainly, I have no problem bringing that up as the wide range of the issues that we have brought up with the federal government with respect to these basic necessities and the safety within the communities, and certainly, when it comes to our firefighters, the incredible work that they do day in and day out to save lives in our communities. And so I just want to thank them—just take this opportunity to thank them for the incredible work that they do.

But obviously, I have no problem bringing something like this up with the federal government to see, you know, whether or not this is the case, and if it is, what the plan is moving forward.

Mr. Kinew: I thank the Premier.

One of the ideas that came up in conversation with some folks is perhaps a fire hall in the community, named in remembrance of those young people who passed away, which I think is a fitting and appropriate tribute.

And I'm sure there are many, many considerations that go into the construction of a new fire hall, chief among them being the planning of the First Nation itself and the local leadership's commitment and, you know, their priorities for planning in the local community. I'm sure the federal government also has a role.

But assuming that there's perhaps an ability to collaborate there, I just wonder whether the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) would also commit to raising that idea of a new fire hall in response to this tragedy, as one of the possible follow-ups here.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the Leader of the Opposition.

I think—you know, for his question. And I think it's a good idea, frankly, to look at a fire hall for the community. And I'd be honoured to, you know, to pass that along to the federal government and have those discussions with them and call on them for something of that nature, a fire hall in the community itself.

And I—I mean, I like the idea of naming it after the individuals who tragically perished as a result of this horrific situation that transpired in that community. And so, certainly we'll endeavour to add this to the list of things that we discuss on a regular basis with respect to this. And with our follow-up to the letter, as well, we'll add that to the list of things to discuss with them.

Mr. Kinew: And I thank the Premier, as well. So, I appreciate the Premier's interaction here with myself. I'm just trying to bring forward issues on behalf of folks in the community and, by extension, on behalf of people across Manitoba.

With that in mind, and we've certainly touched on a few issues here, smoke detectors, fire prevention programs, firefighter training, some specific techniques within training, remuneration for those firefighters, the prospect of a new fire hall for the community. I'm wondering if I might ask the Premier whether she'd be willing to put some of these issues in writing to the federal government.

The reason why I say that—and I do acknowledge the letter that was tabled, and I do appreciate that—is I think it helps to put a finer point on the issue. Where

the letter does say fire suppression, if we do have, perhaps, some of these specific points just laid out in a more comprehensive and detailed way, I think that that might help ensure that there is the appropriate follow-up, not only from the provincial level but specifically from the federal government here. And then, if nothing else, the family and community, at a later date, can say, well, you know, these issues were raised to you in black and white in such-and-such date of 2022.

So I just wondered whether the Premier might be willing to entertain putting these issues and questions into writing to the federal government.

Mrs. Stefanson: Certainly follow up with the minister responsible for these areas and action these items. I—and perhaps he—you know, in his follow-up to this letter, we'll see where it's at and add those items to another list of things to be actioned, as well, by the federal government.

Mr. Kinew: I wonder if I might ask the Premier to take it as, like, a matter under advisement to undertake to come back to the committee at a later date, once that follow-up has happened.

So let's say, for instance, just pulling the dates out of the air, let's say that follow-up conversation with the minister happens a week from now and the minister's able to send that piece of writing to the federal government a week thereafter.

Would the Premier then commit to coming back as a matter under advisement just to provide an update whether, you know, it's an email or a document or something else, just to provide that update later on once there is something to report?

Mrs. Stefanson: I don't really believe that that's required under these circumstances. I believe I've already agreed to follow up, and I'm committed to doing that with our minister and to following up on the issues that are—that have been discussed today.

Mr. Kinew: Will the Premier commit to following up with the community on these points?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes.

Mr. Kinew: And can we be assured that that communication would be in writing?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I think any follow-up letter, obviously, that will go out by the minister in response to, you know, the issues that have been brought up by the Leader of the Opposition, I mean, that will obviously be cc'd to the individuals who were cc'd

before, so the three grand chiefs as well as Chief Monias, as well.

Mr. Kinew: I wondered if we could just ask to recess for five minutes. I just wanted to go talk to the guests and, you know, they have other, you know, commitments today. So, just wonder if we could take that recess for five so—five or so minutes.

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): Is it the will of the committee to take a recess, five minutes?
[Agreed]

Committee is then in recess.

The committee recessed at 3:59 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:09 p.m.

The Acting Chairperson (Obby Khan): The committee will now resume consideration.

Mr. Kinew: Mr. Chair, thanks to you and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and to everyone else for indulging the recess there. I just wanted to be a decent host and talk to our guests who are going to hit the road soon. So I appreciate the back and forth there on that and, certainly will be, I guess, more to come and more to follow up there.

I wanted to turn now to some discussion of Manitoba Hydro, and just talk about some of the issues with Hydro when it comes to, I guess, some of the projects that Hydro's been working on and some of the status of, I guess, the overall picture of the organization.

* (16:10)

I wanted to begin just by—ask what the status is of the Keeyask Generating Station Project. Specifically, is it complete and is it all online now?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mrs. Stefanson: I've been advised that all turbines are installed and operating, but that there is still some construction under way.

Mr. Kinew: Thanks for that.

I understand that the turbines all went online on March 7th of this year. Why was there no public press release or announcement around that?

Mrs. Stefanson: You know, I think we're getting into a—maybe a line of questioning here that's either better asked of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen), but I certainly, as a premier, don't get involved in communications strategies at Manitoba Hydro. I think

that's a bit of an overstep—that would be an overstep on my part, getting involved in that area.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable official leader—the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew)—it's a mouthful, I'm sorry, I mess it up sometimes. Anyway.

Mr. Kinew: Nailed it—you nailed it.

Have any new firm export contracts for Manitoba Hydro been signed in 2021 or 2022? Firm contracts to export power, just to—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable official Leader of the Opposition—the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: Just to get the phraseology right, as we all endeavour to get our own phraseologies right, new firm contracts to export power by Manitoba Hydro; either—were there any new deals in 2021 or new deals in 2022?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think when it comes to issues of this nature and detailed nature when it comes to Manitoba Hydro, I think those questions are best asked of the Minister of Finance who is also responsible—the minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Kinew: I guess I just consider Manitoba Hydro to be so important to our province and to the overall not only finances of the provincial government, but also to the economy of Manitoba, that, you know, the Premier ought to engage with the issue in a substantive fashion.

So just returning to the question around the, you know, lack of a press release, you know, the Keeyask generating station might have been the biggest construction project in Manitoba's history, if not absolutely the biggest, and certainly one of the largest construction projects in Manitoba's history, so wouldn't it have made sense to put out a press release, even so that the construction partners and others could hear about this milestone, with the turbines coming online?

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

Of course, Manitoba Hydro is incredibly important to our province and to the finances as well as our province—of our province, but I think the Leader of the Opposition is asking very detailed operational-type questions that would be more appropriately asked of the minister responsible, and he can endeavour to get the answers to those questions.

I don't think it's appropriate for the premier to have to get into the detailed operations of Manitoba Hydro. We leave that up to those at Manitoba Hydro to carry those out, so when it comes to press releases or things of that nature that—for Manitoba Hydro, we leave that up to them to do that.

But again, I think if we have overarching and high-level discussions on Manitoba Hydro, I'm happy to have those discussions. But when it gets into the detailed operational-type issues of Manitoba Hydro, I think those are more appropriately asked in the Minister of Finance's (Mr. Friesen) Estimates, which, I believe, will be coming up soon.

Mr. Kinew: What's the current aggregate value of Manitoba Hydro's firm export contract sales?

Mrs. Stefanson: I don't have the numbers at my fingertips right now. Again, I would say that those are questions that are more appropriately asked in the Estimates of the Minister of Finance.

* (16:20)

Mr. Kinew: Would the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) like to sell more hydroelectricity to Saskatchewan?

Mrs. Stefanson: You know, the Leader of the Opposition, we are always looking for new customers for Manitoba Hydro, and if he has a line on an interested party that we could bring forward to Manitoba Hydro, we'd be happy to pass that along to Manitoba Hydro. So I certainly appreciate the enthusiasm of the Leader of the Opposition in wanting to find more customers for Manitoba hydro.

Mr. Kinew: All right, we're back in engaging substantively on the issues that would say, yes, look west. Look south, look north. You know, there's many opportunities. We've got, certainly, Saskatchewan and Alberta who need to decarbonize their electricity supply, and, certainly, there's a ton of opportunity there. We have the Kivalliq Region in the North; certainly, not only a hydro but also a broadband connection to that region, I think is very promising.

We know that we already export power to our American neighbours but, certainly, we can always endeavour to explore that and, you know, even converse with other jurisdictions, as well. So I think there's a ton of good opportunities.

When we get into the conversation around export sales, quite often, in addition to having, you know, hydroelectricity, which is clean in terms of the

generation, there's also a question about the partnerships with Indigenous communities that lead to the generating of that power.

So I just wanted to ask about the partnerships around Keeyask, with the First Nations there—you got the four Keeyask nations as their known—maybe just at a high level, does the Premier believe that the agreement with those First Nations and Manitoba Hydro to get Keeyask done, does she believe that that's fair? Is the agreement fair, or does the agreement need to be revisited in any way?

Mrs. Stefanson: Just—I want to start off sort of a higher level here and looking at—we're obviously looking at decarbonization as part of our economic development strategy moving forward. Manitoba Hydro is a significant part of that and an important part of our clean, green, renewable energy here in Manitoba where there's great opportunities to work in partnership towards that decarbonization for economic development opportunities in Manitoba, and we look at Manitoba Hydro as an important partner in all of that.

What I would say is with the Keeyask Cree Nations, with the—there's ongoing—I'm sensitive, obviously, to ongoing negotiations that are continuing to take place. And I think it would be inappropriate at this point in time, Mr. Chair, to intervene in those. Those are ongoing discussions, and so those are important discussions that will continue to take place, and I think it would be inappropriate to intervene in those discussions while they're—as they're ongoing.

Mr. Kinew: Thank the Premier again.

Does the Premier intend to direct Manitoba Hydro to file a general rate application this November? And I ask the question given the fact that her predecessor, the member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), directed Hydro, by order-in-council, to file an application last year.

Mrs. Stefanson: No, it's not our intention to direct them in filing a rate application.

Mr. Kinew: Can the Premier just explain the rationale for the difference in approach there?

* (16:30)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think it's important to put this into context, and certainly, the—and I'm not going to comment on what the previous premier and his decision that would've made when I wasn't around a Cabinet table when those decisions were being made.

But what I will say, that at that—at those—at that time, very different set of circumstances at that time. We now have legislation that provides clarity now on the Public Utilities Board's role in approving hydro-electricity rates. We have a bill before the Manitoba Legislature now, Bill 36, that protects ratepayers, and so—and provides clarity around the PUB role.

Mr. Kinew: So, will Hydro file a general rate application this November?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think that question is better asked of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) in his role and responsibility for Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Kinew: The finances of Manitoba Hydro have a huge impact on the budget of the provincial government, you know, general rate application. You know, if a rate moves 1 per cent in a certain direction, that can have impacts—tens of millions of dollars. Rate application and rate-setting processes could move the financial picture potentially by hundreds of millions of dollars, and again, that would materially impact the province's budget, both in terms of—on the revenue side, but also, you know, in other important aspects, as well.

So does that mean that the province prepared this budget this year without knowing whether or not there would be a general rate application done by Manitoba Hydro?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, well, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question because it brings about a very important issue, which is the exact reason why we brought forward Bill 36, was to protect ratepayers.

So, it's 5 per cent or the rate of inflation, whichever is the lesser. So that protects Manitoba Hydro from—if inflation rises beyond those amounts. And so it's the lesser, and if it's lesser than 5 per cent, that will be the rate, so it protects ratepayers.

And so that's exactly why we brought forward Bill 36, and I think the Leader of the Opposition is making the case for the importance of Bill 36, and so I'm hoping that he and his colleagues will support that, because it's in the best interest for ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Kinew: No—Bill 36 is a bad bill. We will not support it. That's why we delayed it.

What the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) effectively said, though, given the fact that inflation is running north of 5 per cent right now, on an annualized basis, is that there will be a 5 per cent rate increase at Manitoba Hydro this year. That is far in excess of

what the long-term-rate picture approved by the Public Utilities Board set out and, you know, I think that's why we need a PUB and that's why we can't have a Bill 36.

A Bill 36 will take away the teeth from the Public Utilities Board, will take away the independence from the Public Utilities Board and take away their ability to protect Manitobans from another set of PC rate hikes. We know that it was only the Public Utilities Board that prevented Brian Pallister from raising rates by 8 per cent. I think we all remember that. I know Mr. Pallister was talking about 8 per cent; we need 8 per cent, 8 per cent. And the PUB said, no; that's absolutely not acceptable; it won't be permitted and it doesn't match up with the financial picture.

Then again, you know, even as Mr. Pallister moved on, we heard the—all the same Cabinet members who are still around the table today make the case about how we need all these other big PC rate hikes; that came in here and brought legislation to circumvent the PUB and increase rates directly through legislation. An unprecedented move—only political operation in Manitoba history to ever increase rates through that measure.

That was a big mistake. It was unnecessary and it speaks to why Bill 36 is not a good bill because again, it will undermine the PUB's independence. You would think that for a Conservative political organization, they would welcome the PUB because all the Campus Conservatives are taught growing up that, you know, if you have a monopoly situation in a given market, that you need an independent regulator or some independent body to protect the consumer from the monopoly power of that organization, right?

And so, you would think that a right-leaning political operation would embrace the PUB. However, there must be ulterior motives at play as to why the PCs are so intent on taking away the PUB's ability to protect Manitobans and seem set on increasing rates on the people of Manitoba, even as cost of living continues to go up and up and up.

So, that's a cogent analysis, both of, I guess, some of the hypocrisy of modern conservatism and also the failings of Bill 36. Happy to put that on the record.

Will Cabinet or Treasury Board approve any general rate application from Hydro prior to it being submitted to the Public Utilities Board? So, just curious as we're talking about the PUB here. Will a GRA be approved by the Cabinet or the Treasury Board before it gets submitted to the PUB by Hydro?

Mrs. Stefanson: You know, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. And, of course, distorting the history, you know, doesn't change the fact that the PUB will—has played a significant role in setting the hydro rates, and they will continue to play a significant role to that end.

And so, obviously, Bill 36 is before the Manitoba Legislature right now. It continues to bring clarity to the role of the Public Utilities Board. It also protects ratepayers. And so, you know, I will continue to look and call upon the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues in the—his NDP caucus to support that bill, because it will protect Manitoba ratepayers.

Mr. Kinew: So, will Cabinet or the Treasury Board approve a general rate application from Hydro before it's submitted to the Public Utilities Board?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, I mean, this—you know, this brings clarity to the Public Utilities Board and the role—and Cabinet has no role—including Treasury Board, has no role in setting rates for Manitoba Hydro.

Those are decisions that are made at the Public Utilities Board.

* (16:40)

Mr. Kinew: This was in the BITSA bill last year. TRA, because of the PC's legislative changes in the Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act last year, you know, the PCs wanted to get that, you know, process to go through the Cabinet and the Treasury Board there, so, just wanted to see if that's actually what's going to happen, if there's a general rate application this year. Do they intend to follow through on what they legislated in BITSA last year, effectively, is the question.

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, to the Leader of the Opposition, you know, the Public Utilities Board is responsible for setting the rates for Manitoba Hydro, not the Cabinet table, and this process is outlined in Bill 36. It's a bill that protects ratepayers of Manitoba Hydro, and so—and provides clarity to this very line of questioning where those decisions reside at the Public Utilities Board, not at the Cabinet table.

Mr. Kinew: Yes. And thank goodness we have the Public Utilities Board to prevent, you know, an 8 per cent rate increase like the one Mr. Pallister tried to bring about.

But this is just—this is a question, just to acknowledge, I guess, like, the legislative framework that the PCs set out in their BITSA bill last year, which is that according to the legislation that they passed last year,

that they took it upon themselves at the Cabinet level or the Treasury Board level to approve a general rate application before it gets submitted to the Public Utilities Board.

Yes, the Public Utilities Board will be the arbiter of adjudicating the contents of that rate application, but I just wanted to ask the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) to confirm that it is, in fact, going to go through Cabinet for Treasury Board approval prior to arriving at the PUB.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I'm not sure how much more clear I can be on this issue that the Leader of the Opposition is questioning. I've been very clear that there is a process in place right now where the Public Utilities Board sets the rates for Manitoba Hydro. That's not the Cabinet table. Also, it provides more clarity in Bill 36 and protects ratepayers in Bill 36, so I'm not sure why the Leader of the Opposition and his members of the NDP don't want to support that, Mr. Chair.

You know, we, on this side of the House, want to protect ratepayers in Manitoba. We believe in the Public Utilities Board process that exists now and will continue to exist in providing even more clarity around that role with respect to Bill 36. I don't know how much more clear I can be than that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kinew: The—you know, Public Utilities Board, as an independent body, protects Manitoba ratepayers by virtue of independent interveners and a public hearing process, both of which will be undermined by this government's Bill 36. You know, they're removing the ability of interveners to participate in reality. They're also removing independence from the Public Utilities Board and trying to bring that closer to central government. All of these threaten the PUB's ability to stand up and protect Manitoba ratepayers as they have done these past number of years. You don't have to take our word for it; that's from the Consumers' Association—serious concerns about Bill 36 and what it means for the PUB.

But, again, you know, the Premier speaking about, I guess, potential laws, which are on the table. We know that they capitulated and abandoned their legislative agenda last year; I'd hope that they do the same thing again this year. But they do seem intent on trying to change the PUB and Manitoba Hydro process.

So that's why I'm asking about the current process. Right now, were there to be a general rate application, according to the changes that they put under

BITSA, you know, they would have to approve that with their Cabinet ministers or the Treasury Board process. So I just wanted to ask the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) to confirm that; that that's the case right now.

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, we believe in the Public Utilities Board's process in setting the rates for Manitoba Hydro, and I think that, you know, that process continues right now and is even enhanced and clarified in Bill 36, which is before the Manitoba Legislature. And, again, you know, the Manitoba Hydro rates will continue to be set through the Public Utilities Board's public hearing process; that's all part of this.

So, I'm not sure—I mean, unless the Leader of the Opposition is just trying to fear monger with Manitobans. But what I will say is that Bill 36 protects the ratepayers from rising inflation costs, Mr. Chair, and it provides clarity around that role of the Public Utilities Board that will continue to have public hearings as part of that process in deciding the rates for Manitoba Hydro. So, again, that's where those decisions are appropriately made.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, so I'll just state for the record, the BITSA bill last year amended The Financial Administration Act. It made—oh, you can't hear me?

Mr. Chairperson: Is the mic on? Okay. We are good. Apologies for the interruption.

The Leader of the Official Opposition, please go ahead, and I'll reset the clock.

Mr. Kinew: Okay, thank you very much for your indulgence there, Mr. Chair, and I also thank the Premier.

So, again, the BITSA legislation last year modified the financial—or amended, I should say, to be more technically accurate—amended The Financial Administration Act such that, you know, Manitoba Hydro has to take not only general rate applications, but also capital budgets and other high-level decisions to the Cabinet and to the Treasury Board Secretariat. That's the bill that all the PC members voted in favour of, you know, so I'd hope that they know the contents of what they were voting in favour of.

So, given that that's the situation, you know, I would like to know what the rate increase is going to be this year that Manitoba Hydro is going to be requesting and that the Cabinet via TB would be asked to approve? What's the rate increase going to be this year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, the Leader of the Opposition, I guess, is engaging in fear-mongering tactics, and that's fine, he's—you know, that's in his prerogative to go down that line of questioning, but I—you know, I've said it before and I'll say it again, that the Public Utilities Board is an—is a process that we respect, it's in place now. And, in fact, Bill 36 provides further enhancements within that bill for that process. It's—these are positive and provides improvements to the Public Utilities Board process, Mr. Chair.

* (16:50)

And so, I think it's important that—you know, to reiterate for Manitobans, to reiterate for the House, that we respect that process, and that process is that the Public Utilities Board decides the rates for Manitoba Hydro, not Cabinet.

Mr. Kinew: Just to put a finer point on it: so, I outlined the changes to The Financial Administration Act that the PC government, including the Premier, ushered in by virtue of the previous budget implementation and tax statutes amendment act. And just to put a finer point on the fact that, you know, they legislated for themselves to be the arbiter at Cabinet and Treasury Board for Manitoba Hydro to have to go through them before filing a general rate application with the Public Utilities Board.

Not only is that reflected in the statutes of Manitoba, were anyone to go read the laws governing this and the bills passed in the House, they would find that this is accurate information. Just to put a finer point on it, I'm looking at a flow chart, if you will, listing the steps that Manitoba Hydro has to go through, and the first step is to get Cabinet sign-off. The second step is to get Treasury Board sign-off.

And when you look at this, what's interesting is it's not only about rate applications; it actually goes further to capital projects, capital budgets. It even talks about approving public communications, at Cabinet and at Treasury Board.

You may recall that this discussion on Manitoba Hydro began with a simple question about why was there no press release on Keeyask coming online. Manitoba Hydro's internal documents say that they would have had to seek Cabinet and Treasury Board approval for any comms decision, especially one involving Keeyask, potentially the greatest—or one of the biggest, I should say—construction projects in the history of Manitoba.

Similarly, Manitoba Hydro is going to seek to make a general rate application. They will have to—

according to their own internal process, their own internal document, they will first have to seek Cabinet approval. And then they'll have to seek sign-off from the Treasury Board.

Given the magnitude of the financial picture that we're talking about here, given the impact on the provincial budget, not to mention the impact it'll have on the average Manitoban who has to pay a hydro bill, I would assume that these conversations are already well under way.

So I would ask again: What is the rate increase going to be this year that Manitoba Hydro asks for?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, I'm just curious as to, you know, what the Leader of the Opposition is—you know, he's—continues to go down this line of questioning. I've continued to be quite clear, and I'll continue to be clear that the rates for Manitoba Hydro are set at the Public Utilities Board. They are not set at Cabinet. So, I've said that several times now. There is a process that's in place now with the Public Utilities Board, and we respect that process.

And again, the—Bill 36 actually enhances and clarifies, further clarifies, the role of the Public Utilities Board. And so, again, that's where those decisions are made.

And, again, you know, Bill 36 actually protects ratepayers, Mr. Chair. And I think it's important that Manitobans know that and the Leader of the Opposition and the rest of his NDP party are holding up that bill, which protects Manitoba Hydro ratepayers.

So I'm not sure where—why he's going down this line of questioning. I'm not sure what he's trying to fabricate as a result of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker and Mr. Chair. But what I will say is that, you know, I have said it before, and I'll say it again: those decisions on the rates for—setting the rates for Manitoba Hydro are made at the Public Utilities Board.

Mr. Kinew: I think we all recognize that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is deliberately trying to misconstrue the question to evade what is pretty straightforward, right? I've posed the question a few times: What is the rate increase going to be that Manitoba Hydro is going to ask for?

And instead, the Premier seeks to answer a question in a different way. But, obviously, she could choose to answer the question by telling us what, in fact, Manitoba Hydro's going to bring forward in terms of the rate-increase request.

I did want to pause for a second just to point out why we are going to delay Bill 36, why we have done so, why we will continue to do so: because it might actually save Manitobans a few hundred dollars this year. If we were to allow Bill 36 to pass on June 1st, we would be locked into a situation where the rate increase is either going to be 5 per cent or it's going to be above 7 per cent, which is the annualized rate of inflation in Manitoba right now.

So, again, the PCs are in a rush to pass Bill 36. They think it's a great idea.

Passing Bill 36 in June would guarantee a rate increase this year of between 5 and 7 per cent in Manitoba. That's way too much money. People are struggling right now. People are getting hit every time they go to the gas station with a higher gas bill. Every time they go to the grocery store, they're getting hit with a higher grocery bill. Our team delaying Bill 36 past June 1st means we hold open the possibility that we could have perhaps a more affordable result from the Public Utilities Board.

Again, we know the long-term approvals that the Public Utilities Board laid out for the decade that we're currently in was talking about, you know, 3 per cent, 3 and a half per cent. Why would we abandon something that's been done all above board and it's been done in the public eye? Why would we abandon that—you know, the numbers that we're talking about in that neighbourhood, and instead guarantee that we increase hydro bills on the people of Manitoba by 5 per cent to 7 per cent? As a political proposition, why would you want to go to the doorstep and say, we guarantee that we're going to increase your hydro bill by 5 per cent to 7 per cent this year? I like our message: We don't want your hydro bill to go up. I think that's a good message. We don't want your hydro bill to go up.

PCs, I'm sure, have invested a lot of time in doing focus groups and testing the message. But at the end of the day, you're going to try and sell Manitobans on 5 to 7 per cent increases on hydro bills? Okay. Our message is more simple. It's simpler: We don't want your hydro bill to go up, and we're fighting for that.

I'm looking at a document here that says that not only does Manitoba Hydro present their budget to the Treasury Board, that they then adjust their budget based on the feedback from the Treasury Board Secretariat. So it's pretty well understood, on the Manitoba Hydro side of the equation, that it is the Cabinet and the Treasury Board who are going to be the ones who decide how much to raise rates on

Manitobans by. It is pretty clear understanding on the Manitoba Hydro side that it is going to be the Cabinet ministers who are saying, raise the bills on Manitobans by 5 per cent or perhaps, no; raise it by 7 per cent.

You know, that's going to be the direction coming from the Cabinet. Manitoba Hydro, they've got no issue with it. You know, they're not the ones who have to come into the committee, I guess, and say this directly to the people of Manitoba. So—and in their own internal documents, they've got no hesitation putting it in black and white: we're going to bring our

Manitoba Hydro budget to the provincial Treasury Board Secretariat and then we are going to adjust our budget at Manitoba Hydro based on feedback—

Mr. Chairperson: The time being 5 p.m., 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 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

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Chamber

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