

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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
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, Hon.	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
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>	Kirkfield Park	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 5, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom 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 gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and 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 the 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.

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 241—The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act

(Licence Plates for MMIWG2S Awareness)

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I move, seconded by the member from Thompson, that Bill 241, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Licence Plates for MMIWG2S Awareness), now be read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Smith: It's clear that more needs to be done to protect Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people in Manitoba. This bill would allow for a speciality licence plate to be purchased that has a graphic of a red hand or a red dress and the abbreviation MMIWG2S, meaning missing and murdered Indigenous girls—women, girls and two-spirit.

This licence plate would help to raise awareness and inspire action to be taken. As well, the money

collected will benefit the children left behind of these women and girls and two-spirited people who have been murdered or have gone missing in Manitoba.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, just tabling the revised sequence of consideration for departmental Estimates.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade): Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Manitoba Development Corporation Annual Report for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

Madam Speaker: And pursuant to rule 83(3), I'm pleased to table a letter from the House leaders documenting the standing committee membership composition for this Legislature.

And also, in accordance with section 19 of The Legislative Building Centennial Restoration and Preservation Act, I am pleased to table the long-term restoration and preservation plan, which includes the current annual implementation plans for the fiscal years 2022-2023 to 2029-2030.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

World Teachers' Day

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): As the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning, I rise today to observe and celebrate World Teachers' Day.

World Teachers' Day is celebrated internationally on October 5th to commemorate and acknowledge the important contribution of the teaching profession to all societies.

Our government and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) supports this worldwide acknowledgement of teachers and has proclaimed its thoughtful observance to all citizens by a proclamation.

October 5th is a day devoted to appreciating teachers and is an opportunity to recognize the enduring contributions they make every day to education

and development in Manitoba classrooms. Promoting teachers helps ensure that this profession, so vital to the healthy function of society, receives its due respect.

Beyond thanking teachers, our government has increased funding to the K-to-12 education system by \$460 million this school year, 2022-2023. This includes a \$51-million increase in annual operating funding and \$77 million in additional funding to assist with financial pressures; \$22 million to strengthen students' learning and supports and \$2 million to expand the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative.

Our government has also dedicated \$308 million in capital funding to build new schools and renovate existing ones. In addition, we as Manitobans are Canadian leaders in teacher remuneration.

I encourage all Manitobans to celebrate and respect the work teachers undertake in classrooms every day and to recognize their efforts in delivering quality education to the youth of our great province, Madam Speaker.

Today, we are joined in the gallery by Manitoba Teachers' Society's president, Mr. James Bedford, and Vice-President Nathan Martindale and members of the board: Sonja Blank, Carla Bouchard, Lindsay Brown, Chris Darazsi, Jay Ewert, Kristen Fallis, Kent McPherson, Cathy Pellizzaro, Cathy Pleskach, Joel Swaan and Cynthia Taylor.

Please join me in thanking Manitoba teachers for their service to Manitoba students.

Madam Speaker: And I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings had been provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): October 5 is World Teachers' Day, a day when we celebrate educators and the incredible work they do to help educate the next generation of Manitobans. Teachers are an invaluable part of our society. They work every day to ensure that our children are receiving the support they need to be their very best.

We all know that the last few years have not been easy for schools, but whether they were on Zoom, hybrid, socially distanced, teachers have persevered and found creative ways to continue connecting, educating, and inspiring our Manitoba kids.

* (13:40)

In addition to celebrating the incredible people who become teachers, today is also a day to reflect on how we can best support them by ensuring they have the resources needed to provide the education every child deserves.

Nurturing the next generation of Manitobans is no easy task and the government needs to rise to the occasion, ensure proper funding and support for students, teachers and families. Teachers deserve, Madam Speaker, a real partner in the provincial government, one that provides access to the professional services and resources they need to help their students thrive.

Manitoba teachers give their best every day to support their students, yet they don't receive the same level of support and commitment from this government. Since taking office, this PC government has continually cut and underfunded education and failed to adequately support public schools.

In 2016, it's well noted that the provincial portion of funding was at 62.4 per cent. It's now down to 56.4 per cent, Madam Speaker. This World Teachers' Day, this government needs to commit to putting the needs of students and teachers at the top of their education agenda and stop the cuts now.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of our NDP caucus, I would like to recognize all the teachers in Manitoba for their dedication and perseverance, and thank them for everything that they do.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to respond to the minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Does the member have leave to respond to the ministerial statement? [*Agreed*]

Ms. Lamoureux: I am glad to have the opportunity to rise today in recognition of World Teachers' Day.

Let me begin by first sharing how grateful we are for everyone who is working in our education system, and I specifically want to thank MTS, Manitoba Teachers' Society, for their efforts in helping all of us MLAs better understand the current concerns in schools across Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, it is evident how those in our school systems continue to go above and beyond. We have heard examples of how teachers having to purchase own—their own school supplies for their classrooms out of their own pockets. And in terms of teacher capacity and retention, we have heard about

how the number of teachers exiting and retiring are exceeding those actually entering our school systems.

Madam Speaker, it is clear how funding has fallen behind in our schools despite cost of living and student growth. Funding is desperately needed for: mental health, for both students and teachers; transportation, especially with the price of gas being as high as it is; and EAL studies; new student fees; and just basic human resources.

Madam Speaker, I am grateful that the government gave some funding to the Child Nutrition Council, but a one-time lump sum of money is just a band-aid solution.

Everyone here knows the president of MTS, James Bedford—and I am paraphrasing something he said lot more elegantly than I am—but public education is a 13-year commitment—that's a length of a student's education. So, a one-year solution—in this case, a one-year nutrition grant program—it just doesn't make sense.

There are a lot of other needs, including long-term grant programs, higher achiever opportunities, French studies; these also need to be addressed. However, I am glad to have the opportunity to express these needs today on World Teachers' Day.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, I am looking forward to committee tonight, to hearing from the public presenters about Bill 208, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act that would allow for representation for over the 10,000 RTAM members here in Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Manitoba Ag Ex

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): While I stand here today and welcome everybody back into the House, I would also like to invite everyone to visit Brandon for the upcoming Manitoba Ag Ex.

From October 26 to 29th, the largest all-breeds cattle show in Manitoba, attracting exhibitors and visitors from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, will be under way. Ag Ex has a tremendous experience in hosting major shows such as the National Trust Simmental Sale and the national Charolais sale, both of which are major draws for cattle producers right 'acrost' our country.

Along with breed-specific shows, Ag Ex hosts a Jackpot Heifer Show, a Bull Show and a Junior Show,

culminating in the Supreme Breed Extravaganza, the champions of which go on to the Canadian Western Agribition held in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba Ag Ex includes programs such as Moo Mania. This event offers an educational, on-hands opportunity for grades 4 and 5 students to experience livestock, and learn about good husbandry practices. Manitoba Ag Ex is focused on the cattle industry, displaying the best of the breeds as well as an opportunity for youth to both show and to attend educational events.

New this year are exhibitors from the Manitoba Sheep Association. You will witness demonstrations by the world record holder for lamb shearing. Pauline Bolay of Fairford, Manitoba, sheared 510 lambs in eight hours, beating out the previous record of 507, smashing her own personal best of 412. You will also be entertained with demonstrations from the stock dog show, plus see the top breeds from the Manitoba sheep and lamb producers.

Madam Speaker, I welcome you, all my colleagues and all Manitobans to join myself at the Manitoba Ag Ex to learn about the life of a cow, learn the benefits of beef and the business of beef. Come take a tour of the cattle barns and have a great opportunity to participate in a mock cattle show and auction.

I look forward to seeing you all there.

Thank you.

Some Honourable Members: Moo.

Madam Speaker: Order. I hate to say, but I don't think mooing is allowed in here.

UCN Trades Program for Indigenous Women

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): I'm pleased to be able to stand here today to celebrate one of the programs offered by University College of the North. I was once the representative workforce co-ordinator at this institution. I was directly involved in planning some of the educational and career opportunities that would be offered to help families thrive in northern Manitoba.

The University College of the North previously offered a home builder certificate program. However, they have recently begun separately offering this program with a dedicated Indigenous women focus. Thanks to collaboration with the Opaskwayak Cree Nation office of employment and training, the program is offered at no cost to the students. This

program provides residential construction industry-ready skills to those admitted as well as the opportunity not only to build a home but ultimately gain exposure to the many trades and career paths associated with the residential construction industry in the home building process.

The effort to bring Indigenous women into construction trades is essential for the future of construction trades and is also essential for Indigenous women to have an equal opportunity to work in our communities. Offering a dedicated program such as this offers an opportunity for applicants to avoid barriers of gender discrimination, remote training, lack of 'esposure' and lack of experience.

UCN has been a driving force in bringing access to technical training to the North and an immense benefit for our communities in the North and as it has provided access to essential training for workers looking to start or empower their career. This step of including programs for Indigenous woman seeks to provide employment equity in this field that has long been difficult for them to break into or get ahead in.

Please join me in celebrating this program's efforts in advancing Indigenous women in constructive trades as well as the currently enrolled students on their new journey.

Ekosi.

Powerline Initiative in Notre Dame

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, I am very humbled to represent the constituents of Notre Dame. My community has raised a number of concerns, including rising crime, violence and addiction. Our community has multiple abandoned properties and a growing problem with vacant properties and garbage.

Of course, our families want safe and clean communities. That's why I have organized and participated in three community consultations regarding safety so far for the Daniel McIntyre and Sargent Park communities. More consultations are coming up for small-business owners for West Alexander and Weston-Brooklands neighbourhoods.

As a community we have decided that we would like to address these problems. To do so, in September we started the Notre Dame Powerline initiative, modelling it after the North Point Douglas Powerline begun 14 years ago by community organizers like Sel Burrows.

Our goal is to empower residents and help keep our neighbourhoods safe and clean. Notre Dame Powerline is volunteer-run and works in partnership with city bylaw enforcement and the police community support unit and fire prevention services.

In North Point Douglas's Powerline's first three years of existence, this community group helped to address 32 properties that were causing a great deal of problems.

Community members are encouraged to please phone Notre Dame Powerline at 204-588-7111 and text or leave a message for their community concerns.

* (13:50)

We will do our part to make our communities safe and clean. The City departments that we are dealing with are doing their part, as well. But at this time, we are not asking. We are demanding that this Province does their part as well.

The PC government has had two terms. They still are not doing their part with resources to take action on a comprehensive housing strategy, a comprehensive mental health and addiction strategy or enough prevention resources to keep families together.

Our community is demanding co-operation from this government—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Is there leave to allow the member to complete her statement?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

Marian Jaworski and Irek Lemans

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): It gives me great pleasure to recognize regional director for the Canadian Polish Congress in central Canada, Irek Lemans, editor of Radio Polonia Winnipeg, for their strong vision and efforts in promoting and strengthening the Polish culture and media in Manitoba.

Marian Jaworski serving the Polish community in Manitoba for over 40 years, and 22 of those years he has held a president's position at the Polish Gymnastic Association Sokół Winnipeg. As this current time, he is a regional director for the Canadian Polish Congress for central Canada.

Irek Lemans has also served not only as a volunteer and member of the Polish gymnastic—Sokół Winnipeg but also a manager of the Sokół community

soccer club and as the radio editor for Radio Polonia, CKJS 810 AM or FM 92.7, the Polish voice in Manitoba for the last 26 years.

This May, I travelled to Poland to witness and support Marian Jaworski and Irek Lemans being honoured with the Pro Patria Medal by the Government of Poland and the highest order of honour presented by the Polish Gymnastic Association Sokół at the Museum of Independence in Warsaw, Poland, for their continuing service to the Polish community abroad.

We also had an opportunity to meet and greet newly arrived-by-train Ukrainian refugees to Poland, as well as meeting refugees and the many non-government agencies on both sides of the Ukrainian-Polish border.

Marian and Irek have not forgotten their Polish roots and its wonderful culture. Poland has not forgotten Marian and Irek.

Congratulations to Marian Jaworski and Irek Lemans. You make both Poland and Canada very proud to call you their own.

Please join me in thanking Marian Jaworski and Irek Lemans for their continued vision and hard work on behalf of the Polish community in Manitoba. As well, a special thank you to the citizens and people of Poland for their unwavering support of Ukraine.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Marny Campbell

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration): Madam Speaker, there are many untold stories of great community members in our province, why we are truly called friendly Manitoba. Well, I am about to share one of them.

Today I have the great pleasure of honouring Waverley constituent, Ms. Marny Campbell. Marny truly has a heart of gold. I know we know many who have these attributes. She has volunteered non-stop in helping newcomers settle into Manitoba since the start of the Ukrainian war.

Her family's immigration is a story of bravery, sacrifice and belief in bettering the lives of future generations. In 1911, Fred, a prisoner of war, escaped from occupied Ukraine with his wife, Anastasia. They fled with only their clothes on their backs to a country called Canada.

There they built a life based on hard work, unwavering faith, love of their culture and much respect

for their new homeland. Three generations later, their great-granddaughter, Marny, was born. While they would never have the opportunity to meet, she carried within her gratitude for their sacrifices and vowed to honour their legacy of loving kindness. Fast-forward to February 24th, 2022; Russia invaded Ukraine, displacing millions of Ukrainians.

Many of the displaced now call Manitoba and Canada home. Marny has volunteered every day since the invasion, offering information on immigration, health care and finding the newcomers employment while co-ordinating donations of furniture, food, clothing and lending a helping hand wherever it was needed. She has assisted several families settle in Manitoba, setting up apartments from scratch right down to the final details such as a bassinet and baby items for a Ukrainian mom that is due to deliver any day.

Her goal is to make everyone she encounters feel loved and welcomed, recognizing that each immigration story is a part of a legacy that can inspire generations.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honouring Ms. Marny Campbell for her dedication to service in developing the lives of newcomers and new immigrants through her hard work and community service.

Thank you, Marny.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I have some guests that I would like to introduce to you.

I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Bob and Ruth Norton, who are the guests of the honourable member of The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin).

On behalf of all honourable members here, we welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Education System Funding Levels

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, I'd be remiss if I did not recognize the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler), who announced yesterday he is not going to run in the next provincial election.

I know the member has been an MLA for many years, and in addition to representing Lakeside and bringing forward those issues here, he also brought his own unique sartorial sense to the Chamber. So, I want to take this opportunity to recognize the member. You know—[*interjection*]

We know it's World Teachers' Day, Madam Speaker, and yet each and every year that the PCs have been in power, they've cut the provincial share of education funding.

Will the Premier finally stop the cuts to education?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, I, too, want to thank the member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) for his incredible contribution to the people of Manitoba, and we wish him well after the next election. We wish him well. And he and his family—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker, I, too, want to say happy World Teachers' Day. I want to thank those members from MTS who are here with us in the gallery. I want to thank all of our teachers here in the province of Manitoba.

I think, Madam Speaker, they have what is one of the most important jobs in the world, if not the most important job in the world, and that is educating our kids. So, I want to thank all of the teachers in Manitoba for the incredible contribution they make for our kids.

And I'll address the litany of false accusations in the next—after the next preamble, Madam Speaker.

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

Education Property Tax Corporate Rebate

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, we know this Premier's stance when it comes to public education. She seconded bill 64, and she supported Brian Pallister's cuts to education year after year after year. And she continues them to this day. She's continuing Mr. Pallister's agenda of cuts to our schools.

Not only that, though. She's taking revenue meant to fund education and she's using those dollars to send cheques to billionaires, Madam Speaker. Millions of dollars worth of cheques being sent to billionaires. That's what they stand for. On this side, we're against it.

Will the Premier stop sending cheques to billionaires and instead use those dollars to invest in our schools?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, I will never apologize, and members on this side of the House will never apologize, for listening to Manitobans and taking action on their behalf.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is just wrong. Historic additional \$460 million in education funding overall this year alone. That's more money into the education system, not less.

* (14:00)

I know members opposite have difficulty with math, Madam Speaker, but I'll tell you, \$460 million is a significant investment in our education system.

We will continue to invest in the education of our children.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Opposition, on a final supplementary.

School Nutrition Program

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the Premier seconded bill 64, and she's made class sizes bigger.

She also has a backbencher that she stands with who said that feeding hungry kids with nutritional programs in schools was a, quote, bad idea. That's what they stand for on that side. Feeding hungry kids is a bad idea. They'd prefer to send cheques to billionaires.

On this side of the House, we think helping kids who need a little bit of food during the school day is a good idea, so that they can learn along with all the other children in their classrooms. A universally accessible meal program is a good idea.

When is the Premier going to stop cutting cheques for billionaires and instead use those resources to help feed hungry kids in our schools?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition seems to be fixated on old bills that used to be before the Manitoba Legislature. The fact of the matter is that bill was taken off the table, and we will continue to do—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —what's in the best interest of the education of our children, Madam Speaker.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition mentioned something very important: the nutrition of our kids.

And that's why our Minister of Education (Mr. Ewasko) was out very recently and announcing a \$2.5-million increase to the nutrition program in schools, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, when it comes to the education and nutrition of our kids, we will take no lessons from the members opposite.

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a new question.

Prairie Mountain Health Region Nurse Vacancy Rates

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, the value of just one of the cheques they will mail to a billionaire this year is worth more than the entirety of that announcement.

We know that health care is also in a shameful crisis right now caused by the cuts of this PC government.

In Westman, we see just how bad the situation is. Dauphin has a 39 per cent nurse vacancy rate. Grandview has a 57 per cent nurse vacancy rate. I'll table the documents for the Premier, generated by her government, that prove the case.

People in the Parkland need better access to health care closer to home, not more cuts from the Premier.

Why has the Premier failed the people of the Parkland, including those who live in Dauphin and Grandview?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, because it gives me an opportunity to put some facts on the record.

The fact of the matter is that our Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force has made significant progress over the last little while. Thirty-five initiatives that are operational that have yielded good, positive results for all Manitobans, all across this great province of ours, Madam Speaker, no matter where they live.

We've reduced the endoscopy wait-list by 877. That's a 50 per cent increase in the number of procedures completed, Madam Speaker.

The Maples master services agreement is completed and operational, and it adds 300 gynecological

procedures per year. The first five women were seen just last week, Madam Speaker.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition has said that he won't contract out for those services. That's 300 women who need those surgeries that would be denied by the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, on this World Teachers' Day, Manitobans are concerned that this government is going to do with the education system what the PCs have already done to the health-care system.

And when we look at the proof—the documents that I just tabled—in the health-care system, what's going on in Westman right now, what's going on in the Parkland, well, Roblin has a 40 per cent nurse vacancy rate. Reston, it's also at 40 per cent. Killarney, it's more than 52 per cent. More than half of the nursing jobs are sitting empty in the constituency represented by the MLA for Turtle Mountain.

There's a crisis in health care, in the Westman across the Parkland. And this Premier and their government refuses to recognize it. We know that it was caused by PC cuts.

When will they finally stop the cuts to health care and start investing in nurses?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, I again thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question because it gives me the opportunity to talk about health care in Westman, in Eastman, in southman, in northern Manitoba and in the City of Winnipeg.

In all of these areas, we have increased the number of surgical procedures to help reduce the backlogs in the province of Manitoba. That is helping everybody in all areas of Manitoba.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, nobody believes the PCs when it comes to health care because Manitobans have never been waiting longer to get the surgeries that they need. When we look at Western Manitoba, when we look at—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —health-care hub for the Westman in Brandon, which is also part of our province-wide ICU system, there are a ton of nurse vacancies there as well—18 per cent of nursing positions at Brandon's

hospital are sitting empty right now, as we speak, Madam Speaker.

We know we need more nurses in the Westman. We need more nurses in Reston—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —and Dauphin and Grandview and, yes, in Brandon as well.

Will the Premier stop the cuts and start to invest in nurses in the Prairie Mountain Health Region and across Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, we are investing in nurses in the province of Manitoba.

And we also—I want to take this opportunity to thank those nurses for the work that they do to help patients in our hospital system and right across this province, Madam Speaker, for the incredible work that they do for their patients.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition knows that we have announced and we are moving on 400 new seats, nursing seats, in the province of Manitoba. That's 400 more that—the NDP, by the way, voted against that in this Chamber. They voted against it, shame on them.

The fact of the matter is that the members opposite have no plan, no vision for the future of the province when it comes to health care, Madam Speaker. We will take—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —no lessons from the members opposite.

Prairie Mountain Health Region Cost for Private Agency Nurses

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, the use of private agencies is accelerating under the PCs. Earlier this week, I shared new figures from Southern Region, which spent \$3.4 million in just half a year. Now, today, I'd like to table five months of data for Prairie Region.

Between February and June, Prairie Region spent \$10 million. At that rate, they are on pace to spend \$24 million this year. That also means that one out of every four nurses is going—one out of every four dollars for nurses is going to private agencies. That's not the right approach, Madam Speaker.

What is the minister doing to address the growing overreliance on for-profit, private agencies?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Nursing staff challenges are an issue that are not unique to Manitoba. It's been seen across the country and, sadly, globally, Madam Speaker.

But our government is addressing this issue, something the members opposite never did—\$19.5 million to add 259 nurse-training seats, 'additional' 30 training seats at Red River College to bring that number to 289.

* (14:10)

We are on track to meet our target as a government of 400 new nursing education seats. We continue to add dollars to the University College of the North. And I was so pleased last October to join the college of nursing for their pinning session, where we welcomed 150 new nurses.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, \$10 million in the Prairie Mountain region on private agencies in just five months. One out of every four dollars for nurses is going to private agencies. The use of private agencies is accelerating in Prairie Mountain and across the province. Meanwhile, there's a 24 per cent vacancy in Brandon for nurses in the public system. Hospitals cannot keep up, and the waits are higher than they have ever been.

I know they don't like to hear facts, Madam Speaker, but the minister has to explain this to Manitobans. Will she explain her government's approach and why it means more and more for-profit, private agencies in Manitoba health care?

Ms. Gordon: My mandate as the Minister of Health is to ensure all Manitobans receive health-care services that they need in this province, Madam Speaker. That is why during the height of the pandemic when the Red Cross nurses offered—kindly offered—to come and help us here in Manitoba, we said yes, and they said, send them home.

We are going to continue to support the college of nursing, Red River College, University College of the North, all the advanced education facilities and institutions across our province that are working with us on solutions to add nurses to the health-care system.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, the minister explains her mandate, but she won't explain to Manitobans why they're not fulfilling that mandate.

The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has said that she's actively contracting out health care. And that's precisely what they've done with private agency nurses. Their approach is undermining public health care in Manitoba. Nurses in the public system—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —are being mandated like never before. Meanwhile, private agencies are providing more money and more flexibility. This is eroding the public health-care system in Manitoba, Madam Speaker. Prairie Mountain is on track—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —to spend \$24 million on private agencies this year.

Why is the minister increasingly overrelying on for-profit, private agencies?

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Order.

Ms. Gordon: The president of the Manitoba Nurses Union recently stated publicly that members opposite were told of the nursing shortage that we would be experiencing now. They sat on their hands, Madam Speaker.

When the member opposite talks about—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —the individuals who are—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms. Gordon: They don't want Manitobans to know about their record; that is what they will run on, and we will run on our record of making achievements in the health-care system, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, our record: 50 per cent reduction in the number of endoscopy wait-list individuals; 300 gynecological procedures for women in this province—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Member's time has expired.

I think I'm going to have to remind members that banging on the desk has been requested that we not do it. I sent a memo to all members, and it comes from our translation people, because it is quite traumatic on their eardrums when we are banging on a desk that is highly sensitive to sound.

So, I'm going to ask all members—that is a practice that I've asked everybody to support not doing it, in order to support our interpreters, our translators.

Public Education Funding Levels Programming and Staffing Concerns

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): It is World Teachers' Day, and what better way to thank a teacher than to promise them there'll be no more cuts to public education. Unfortunately, that's not a promise that this government can keep.

Brandon was forced to cut 10 positions—as well, Madam Speaker, cut speech language pathology, psychology and reading recovery: necessary services for our kids. Seven Oaks had to cut educators as well. It's time for a new approach.

When will the minister stop the cuts to our public schools?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I'd like to thank my friend, the member from Transcona, for this opportunity to stand today on World Teachers' Day and absolutely show the evidence to the gallery—and thanks to the Manitoba Teachers' Society—that the member just can't help being partisan, Madam Speaker.

The fact is that today, on World Teachers' Day, we take the time to recognize not only here in Manitoba, not only here in Canada, but across the world, on how much we as citizens value the day-in, the day—each and every day the hard work that our educators put to support the Manitoba students not only here in Manitoba but across the world, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Transcona, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: Over the last three years, the Province's core operating funding for public education has gone down by \$36 million. The Province's share of education expenditure has also fallen. It's well documented in the FRAMES. The result, Madam Speaker: Winnipeg School Division was forced to cut

full-day kindergarten. Seven Oaks was also forced to cut important programs for their kids.

The minister wants to celebrate World Teachers' Day, but all his government has done is cut and undermine public schools.

When will they stop the cuts, Madam Speaker, and adequately support our public schools?

Mr. Ewasko: As I stand and want to thank and congratulate the teachers for all their hard work, this member continues to get up and put false information on the record, Madam Speaker.

Just this year alone, in '22-23, we're talking about a historical funding increase to education of \$460 million. The information that this member's putting on the record, it—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —couldn't be more than false, Madam Speaker. Seven Oaks School Division, 9.7 per cent increase over the last two years; River East Transcona—the place that he used to teach—12.2 per cent increase over the last two years.

Madam Speaker, I can go on and on and on, and I will talk, in my next answer, about some additional things of the misinformation that this—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Transcona, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Altomare: Madam Speaker, teachers need more supports in the classroom, but that's not what they're getting from this government. It has not been delivered at all.

School leadership overwhelmingly told the Auditor General that they don't have faith that this government will take appropriate action to address the long-term impacts of the pandemic, and we're feeling it right now: turnover rates that are unprecedented, people leaving the system, and now we're having difficulties filling our positions. That's because this government cut \$36 million from core operating funding. This minister knows that. We have to do something about that.

Will they change course, Madam Speaker, and reverse their cuts to our public schools?

Mr. Ewasko: Oh, Madam Speaker, I think the NDP are going to have rebrand to M-squared party: misleading Manitobans party. They're—so much

misinformation coming out of that member's mouth, it's unbelievable.

* (14:20)

Again, literacy and numeracy skills in Manitoba—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —that's what parents want. They want to increase those skills for our Manitoba students.

So, on page 4, which the member fails to reference—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —page 4 on the FRAME report says, a 65 point—a 67.5 per cent increase in funding—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —this year alone, that doesn't include the education property tax coming off, which is also being put into the education world.

Madam Speaker, the member from Transcona doesn't know that more is more—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired. *[interjection]* Order.

I'm not sure teachers would be impressed with the kind of heckling and yelling that goes on here. I'm afraid I can't even hear some of the questions and answers that are being put forward, so I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation, please. I need to be able to hear and I think a respectful debate is probably something that is taught in schools, and I would like to see something like that happen here, that we can respectfully listen to a question, respectfully listen to an answer. People might not like all of it, but that's how democracy works and that's how debate works.

People have their own opinions, but that does not give you the authority to try to shout somebody down like we're hearing, and making fun and laughing of people. I think that's really showing a high disregard for democracy.

So, I'm going to ask everybody's co-operation, please.

Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Request for Safe Consumption Site

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Yesterday, we received notice that five years after the VIRGO

report, this government has still not gotten off the runway.

Later this—earlier this year, they provided a company \$450,000 in the minister's own words, to identify the priority areas needed to address the mental health and addictions.

Madam Speaker, why isn't the minister prioritizing action on the things that the community have called for for such a long time, like consumption sites? Why won't she do that today and help save Manitobans' lives?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Acting Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Our government recognizes that there is a growing concern for people that are experiencing addictions and mental health issues in the community. That is why we created a dedicated department. A dedicated department that has come forward with 47 initiatives since 2019 at the price of \$62 million to help with mental health and addictions initiatives.

That is why we have also invested nearly \$50 million in combined addictions treatment and housing for people who are experiencing homelessness or are precariously housed or unsheltered, so that they can get the services and the supports that they need when they need it.

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

Mrs. Smith: The supplementary Estimates for the department of mental health and addiction shows that spending has gone down over the last year by \$6 million. Meanwhile, the minister is spending \$450,000 to identify the priority areas needed to address mental health and addictions.

This top-heavy department has to spend nearly half a million dollars to set priorities five years after the VIRGO report was released?

Why won't the minister get on it and address the needs of the community today?

Lives are being lost and this government is sitting on their hands. We need a consumption site today.

Ms. Squires: This year alone, our government invested \$17 million in a road map to help provide the supports to people, meet them where they're at and help them—ensure that they've got the supports that they need—supports including \$500,000 to address six crisis stabilization beds at the Crisis Response Centre. That was last year's investment.

One point nine million dollars in capital funding to Home First Winnipeg, \$35,000 to the Tamarack Recovery Centre, \$185,000 to the NorWest Youth Hub, money for crisis counselling. We've also established crisis hotlines and are helping to ensure that not only do people get the services that they need, but they can actually get access to information about services that will be available for them when they need them.

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

Mrs. Smith: Five years have passed since the VIRGO report was delivered. The problems identified in that report have only gotten worse under this government.

We need real action, action that turns back the tide. The minister is spending nearly half a million dollars on a private company, in the minister's own words, to identify the priority areas. Action on mental health and addictions was needed five years ago.

Why won't this minister deliver for Manitobans dealing with the challenges of mental health and addictions? Open a safe consumption site today. Families are losing loved ones while this government does nothing.

Ms. Squires: Well, Madam Speaker, the member references that help was needed five years ago. I would argue with her that help was needed 15 years ago, 20 years ago, when they were in office, and they did absolutely nothing.

They didn't set up a department responsible for helping—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —people with mental health issues and addictions and wellness. They did not set up a road map towards recovery. They did not have a comprehensive solution for people experiencing addictions. They did not have RAAM clinics in the community.

They turned a blind eye towards the growing crisis, and our government is committed to meeting people where they're at and getting them the services that the NDP never offered.

Economic Review of Bipole III and Keeyask Implementation of Recommendations

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Madam Speaker, this government wasted nearly \$2.5 million on the Brad Wall report.

Just like this government, Brad Wall covered up key evidence to come to a conclusion he wanted. Key evidence such as a \$5 billion in revenue, which he and this government tried to keep secret.

Despite the obvious flaws with this report, this government ordered Manitoba Hydro to implement every single one of its 51 recommendations. I'll table the directive now.

Can the minister confirm whether his government is still committed to implementing all of the 51 recommendations?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): The member is just wrong, actually. The government's commitment is to respond to the 51 recommendations.

It's no wonder that the member and his party don't like the expert report on Keeyask and bipole—*[interjection]* You can hear it now because they try to shout down the responses. You know that they don't like this expert report on bipole and Keeyask because it's a damning report of NDP's failures again and again to disclose, to be honest, to be accountable to Manitobans.

Projects that went \$4 billion over budget; they knew. They did not disclose. They went around the channels that were there for the safety and the protection of the ratepayers, and we'll make sure that we respond to the report.

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

Mr. Sala: The minister calls the author of the report an expert. We know him as a highly partisan ex-Conservative-premier of Saskatchewan.

This government directed Manitoba Hydro to implement all—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —51 recommendations laid out in the Wall report, yet Brad Wall's recommendations were based off a \$5-billion cover-up. These recommendations included selling off non-core assets, contracting out and P3s.

This government obviously supports these recommendations as they directed Hydro to implement all 51 of them.

So, I ask the minister, which non-core asset do they plan on selling off first?

Mr. Friesen: Well, we know that the opposition doesn't like this expert report on bipole and Keeyask because, of course, it says extremely critical things.

It concludes extremely critical things of the NDP's failure to lead, failure to disclose cost overruns that they said wouldn't occur and obligations now on ratepayers that they said would not happen.

We know that it was a litany of failures, but more than that, now the the member is failing because he doesn't understand history, and that member should understand it was actually a PC government in the late '90s that repatriated Centra Gas into the hydro utility, brought it inside, strengthened it and provided those services to Manitoba. It was a PC government that brought Centra Gas in. *[interjection]*

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: Order.

The honourable member for St. James, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Sala: Brad Wall was paid nearly \$2.5 million to tell this government exactly what they wanted to hear. He ignored \$5 billion in revenue to arrive at 51 deeply flawed recommendations with this government has publicly committed to implementing, recommendations that included selling off non-core assets such as Centra Gas.

Manitobans want all aspects of Manitoba Hydro to remain public and they deserve to know what this government's intentions are.

Will the minister share with this House which non-core assets they plan on selling off first?

Mr. Friesen: Well, it's the NDP way: if you can't go to facts, they go to fear. And that's what they always do.

But, of course, what they truly do is fear this report because this report, after thousands of interviews, after the collection of thousands of pertinent documents—I'm quite sure the member's never read the expert report on bipole and Keeyask because if he had read it, he would understand that this collated and carefully detailed report concludes that there have to be protections in place for ratepayers.

The PUB needs a better mandate, going forward. Hydro needs to complete an integrated resource plan. The government is working on its energy policy. All of these things are strengthening in order to provide the conditions in which Manitobans won't get fooled again by an NDP party.

Refugee Settlement Services Education Supports Needed

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We had the pleasure today of meeting with advocates for the Manitoba Teachers' Society today to hear their concerns. It needs to be recognized that of all the public systems that showed the most resilience, K-to-12 public education was outstanding in providing and advocating for care and support of our children in the middle of a very tough pandemic.

We are all delighted to see refugees arriving and settling in our schools; my son has six new Ukrainian classmates. But we're concerned about the lack of funding to help them settle in, especially with language.

Some school divisions have hundreds of new students, which is like adding an entirely new school with no new funding.

We knew this was coming, and I was wondering if the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) can assure us that funding will be in place to make sure that refugee kids get the extra support they and teachers need in Manitoba schools, because it is not there now.

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I'd like to thank the Leader of the Liberal Party for the question.

In regards to supporting Ukrainian children and students right here in Manitoba, we're working quite closely with our education partners all across this great province of ours, Madam Speaker. We're making sure that those schools and school divisions and those local communities are keeping track of how many students are coming in.

As the member knows, September 30th is usually that date when schools start to share their enrolment, and so we're looking at those numbers. We're taking a look at how we can continue to support our Ukrainian students right here in Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

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

French Immersion Teacher Shortage Opportunities for Immigrants

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): Tout comme dans les soins de santé et d'autre professions, il y a de nombreuses pénuries d'enseignants en immersion française, même si la demande est énorme. Et tout comme pour les pénuries dans d'autre professions, on nous dit qu'il y beaucoup de gens au Manitoba qui sont

formés et qualifiés pour enseigner le français dans les écoles en ce moment, mais leurs titres de compétence ne sont pas reconnus.

Je peux certainement garantir que la qualité du français chez les nouveaux arrivants à Saint-Boniface est au-delà de l'excellence. Nous gaspillons les talents et les possibilités de gens alors que les enfants n'ont pas d'enseignants.

Le gouvernement verra-t-il à ce que les enseignants francophones puissent travailler au Manitoba?

Translation

Just as in health care and for other professions, there are significant shortages of French immersion teachers, in spite of an enormous demand. And just as is the case for shortages in other professions, we are told that there are, right now in Manitoba, many people who are trained and qualified to teach French in schools. However, these people's professional qualifications are not recognized.

I can guarantee that the quality of French spoken by newcomers in St. Boniface is beyond excellent. We are wasting these people's talents and opportunities when there are children who do not have teachers.

Will the government ensure that French-speaking teachers can work in Manitoba?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I thank the member again, the Leader of the Liberal Party for this question in regards to French language teachers here in Manitoba.

We know that for years and years and years, going back to before I got into this wonderful profession as a legislator, Madam Speaker, we were short on French language teachers, whether that's français or franco-phone communities. We—that's why our government are not waiting for some kind of magical anything. We actually increased the education seats at Université de Saint-Boniface for French language teachers.

We're also looking at when new teachers are coming into the province, on how we can take a look at their credentials to make sure that our schools and our francophone communities are being taught by French-speaking teachers, Madam Speaker.

Teaching Profession-Shortage Concerns Post-Secondary Education Enrolment

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): There are a shortage of teachers in our school systems. There

aren't enough substitutes to cover classes. Teachers are being forced to postpone their own professional development. And currently, here in Manitoba, teachers are exiting and retiring faster than teachers are entering the school system.

Madam Speaker, all of this is affecting the attention and the opportunities that students should be receiving. What is this government doing to encourage post-secondary education enrolment and to review accreditation for those who could be teaching?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I appreciate the question coming from my friend and colleague from the Liberal Party on workforce for education.

Again, Madam Speaker, this is not something that is germane just to Manitoba; this is happening all across this great country of ours. And we know that we're working with our education partners not only to look at credentials, but also some recruitment. And retention, as she mentions that the retention piece, we need to retain our great teachers here.

As I was saying earlier, that prior to getting into this role, we were having substitute teachers come from the general public. And so we've streamlined the temporary teaching permit as well to help with the situation, but that's why we're working with our post-secondary—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired. The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Hearing Aids

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

A hearing aid is a battery-powered electronic device designed to improve an individual's ability to perceive sound. Worn in or behind a person's ear, they make some sounds louder, helping people hear better when it's quiet and when it's noisy.

People who suffer hearing loss, whether due to aging, illness, employment or accident, not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, family or colleagues, they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

Hearing loss can also impact the safety of an individual with hearing loss, as it affects the ability to hear cars coming, safety alarms, call 911, et cetera.

A global commission on the state of the research for dementia care and prevention released an update consensus report in July 2020, identifying 12 key risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline. The strongest risk factor that was indicated was hearing loss. It was calculated that up to 8 per cent of the total number of dementia cases could potentially be avoided with management of hearing loss.

Hearing aids are therefore essential to the mental health and wellbeing of Manitobans, especially to those at significant risk of dementia, Alzheimer's, a disorder of the brain affecting cognition in the ever-growing senior population.

Audiologists are health-care professionals who help patients decide which kind of hearing aid will work best for them, based on the type of hearing loss, patient's age and ability to manage small devices, lifestyle and ability to afford.

The cost of hearing aids can be prohibitive to many Manitobans, depending on their income and circumstances. Hearing aids cost on average \$995 to \$4,000 per ear, and many professionals say the hearing aids only work at their best for five years.

Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, are prescribed by an 'otologist', or, audiologist, will receive either an 80 per cent reimbursement from Manitoba Health of a fixed amount for an analog device, up to a maximum of \$500 per ear, or 80 per cent of a fixed amount for a digital or analog programmable device, up to a maximum of \$1,800.

However, this reimbursement is not available to Manitobans who need the device who are over the age of 18, which will result in financial hardships for many young people entering the workforce, students and families. In addition, seniors representing 14.3 per cent of Manitoba's population are not eligible for reimbursement, despite being the group most likely in need of a hearing aid.

Most insurance companies only provide a minimal partial cost of a hearing aid, and many Manitobans, especially retired persons, old-age pensioners and other low-income earners, do not have access to health insurance plans.

The Province of Quebec's hearing devices program covers all costs—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Lamoureux: —related to hearing aids and assistant listening devices, including the purchase, repair and replacement.

Alberta offers subsidies to all seniors 65 and over and lower income adults 18 to 64 once every five years.

New Brunswick provides coverage for the purchase and maintenance not covered by other agencies or private health insurance plans, as well as assistance for those whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.

Manitobans over age 18 are only eligible for support for hearing aids if they are receiving Employment and Income Assistance, and the reimbursement only provides a maximum of \$500 an ear.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider hearing loss as a medical treatment under Manitoba Health; and

To urge the provincial government to provide income-based coverage for hearing aids to all who need them, as hearing has been proven to be essential to Manitobans' cognitive, mental and social health and wellbeing.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Louise Bridge

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

The background of this petition as is follows:

(1) Over 25,000 vehicles per day cross the Louise Bridge, which has served as a vital link for vehicular traffic between northeast Winnipeg and the downtown for the last 111 years.

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years as it has deteriorated extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

(3) As far back as 2008, the City of Winnipeg has studied where the new replacement bridge should be situated.

(4) After including the bridge replacement in the City's five-year capital budget forecast in 2009, the new bridge became a short-term construction priority for the City—in the City's transportation master plan of 2011.

(5) City capital and budget plans identified replacement of the Louise Bridge on a site just east of the bridge and expropriated homes there on the south side of Nairn Avenue in anticipation of a 2015 start.

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds.

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began its campaign to demand a new bridge and its surveys confirmed residents wanted a new bridge beside the current bridge, with the old bridge kept open for local traffic.

(8) The NDP provincial government signalled in—its firm commitment to partner with the City on replacing the Louise Bridge in its 2015 Throne Speech. Unfortunately, provincial infrastructure initiatives, such as the new Louise bridge, came to a halt with the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 2016.

(9) More recently, the City tethered the Louise Bridge replacement issue to its new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. Its recommendations have now identified the location of the new Louise bridge to be placed just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed. The City expropriation process has begun.

(10) The Premier has a duty to direct the provincial government to provide financial assistance to the City so it can complete this long-overdue, vital link to northeast Winnipeg and Transcona.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier to financially assist the City of Winnipeg on building this three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this vital link between northeast Winnipeg, Transcona and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction.

(3) To urge the provincial government to consider the feasibility of keeping it open for active transportation in the future.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library, JRL, has been served notice by the Red River Valley School Division, RRVSD, to vacate the premises during—currently situated in the auditorium of École Héritage school, ÉHS, by March 31st, 2023.

(2) The auditorium was originally built in the 1960s by renowned Manitoba architect Étienne Gaboury, and it has been home to JRL for 48 years.

(3) A photo of the auditorium captioned the regional library is published in a 2008 documentary titled heritage buildings in RM De Salaberry and St. Pierre Jolys. It is marked as an important modern building that could attain the status of a heritage site.

(4) JRL and RRVSD have flourished from a naturally—a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

(5) Their shared collection boasts over 50,000 books and has the fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

(6) Students that are bused in from the neighbouring municipalities that do not have public libraries, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, are provided with free access to public library in its fourth largest collection of French books in rural Manitoba during the school year.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To request the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider granting the auditorium to the JRL by March 1st, 2023.

(2) To request the Minister of Education to recognize the value that JRL provides to the student population of ÉHS, as well as the communities of the Village of St. Pierre Jolys and the RM of De Salaberry.

(3) The—to request the Minister of Education and the Minister of Francophone Affairs to recognize that an MOU between the RRVSD and JRL is mutually, financially and culturally beneficial.

(4) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community.

(5) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy and devalue the architectural integrity of the building.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Provincial Road 224

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Provincial Road 224 serves Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation and surrounding communities. The road is in need of substantial repairs.

(2) The road is in—has been in poor condition for years and has numerous potholes, uneven driving surfaces and extremely narrow shoulders.

(3) Due to recent population growth in the area, there has been increased vehicle and pedestrian use of Provincial Road 224.

(4) Without repair, Provincial Road 224 will continue to pose a hazard to the many Manitobans who use it regularly.

(5) Concerned Manitobans are requesting that Provincial Road 224 be assessed and repaired urgently to improve safety for its users.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to complete an assessment of Provincial Road 224 and implement the appropriate repairs using public funds as quickly as possible.

This petition has been signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Ekosi.

* (14:50)

Home-Care Services

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Home-care workers in Manitoba provide skilled and compassionate care that helps better the quality of life for thousands of Manitobans.

(2) Robust home-care services are proven to reduce the strain on health services and demand for hospital beds.

(3) Home care reduces the demand for long-term-care beds as it allows people to continue living in their own space.

(4) Studies show that a third of the 200,000 Canadians living in long-term-care homes could stay home with proper home-care support.

(5) Investing in home care saves money, as daily services cost half the price of a long-term-care bed and one-seventh the daily cost of a hospital bed.

(6) The provincial government's cuts to home care in Manitoba has resulted in chronic staffing issues that caused the WRHA to cancel 27,000 home-care appointments in the month of April 2022 alone.

(7) Many clients in Manitoba only receive home-care service once a day, whereas countries such as Denmark offer up to six visits a day.

(8) Home-care workers in Manitoba are paid poor wages, are offered little benefits, lack sick time and are overworked, resulting in difficulty retaining and attracting workers.

(9) Home-care workers have been without a contract since 2017, due to this provincial government's interference in labour negotiations.

(10) Investing in home care is a proactive approach that would save the Province millions of dollars as well as allow more Manitobans to age in place.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care to immediately increase investment on the home-care services so that home-care workers can be paid a fair wage and clients can receive the level of service they require.

This has been signed by Rosalinda Ganaree [*phonetic*], Jean Biden [*phonetic*], Eden Abagra [*phonetic*] and many other Manitobans.

Hearing Aids

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

A hearing aid is a battery-powered electronic device designed to improve an individual's ability to perceive sound. Worn in or behind a person's ear, they make some sounds louder, helping people hear better when it's quiet and when it's noisy.

People who suffer hearing loss, whether due to aging, illness, employment or accident, not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, family or colleagues, they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

Hearing loss can also impact the safety of an individual with hearing loss, as it affects the ability to hear cars coming, safety alarms, call 911, et cetera.

A global commission on the state of the research for dementia care and prevention released an updated consensus report in July 2020, identifying 12 key risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline. The strongest risk factor was—that was indicated was hearing loss. It was calculated that up to 8 per cent of the total number of dementia cases could potentially be avoided with management of hearing loss.

Hearing aids are therefore essential to the mental health and well-being of Manitobans, especially to those at significant risk of dementia, Alzheimer's, a disorder of the brain affecting cognition in the ever-growing senior population.

Audiologists are health-care professionals who help patients decide which kind of hearing aid will work best for them, based on the type of hearing loss, patient's age and ability to manage small devices, lifestyle and ability to afford.

The cost of hearing aids can be prohibitive to many Manitobans, depending on their income and circumstances. Hearing aids cost on average \$995 to \$4,000 per ear, and many professionals say the hearing aids only work at their best for five years.

Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, as prescribed by an otolaryngologist or audiologist, will receive either an 80 per cent reimbursement from Manitoba Health of a fixed amount for an analog device, up to a maximum of \$500 per ear, or 80 per cent of a fixed amount for a

digital or analog programmable device, up to a maximum of \$1,800.

However, this reimbursement is not available to Manitobans who need the device who are over the age of 18, which will result in financial hardship for many young people entering the workforce, students and families. In addition, seniors representing 14.3 per cent of Manitoba's population are not eligible for reimbursement, despite being the group most likely in need of a hearing aid.

Most insurance companies only provide a minimal partial cost of a hearing aid, and many Manitobans, especially retired persons, old-age pensioners and other low-income earners do not have access to health insurance plans.

The Province of Quebec's hearing devices program covers all costs related to hearing aids and assistive listening devices, including the purchase, repair and replacement.

Alberta offers subsidies to all seniors 65 and over and low-income adults 18 to 64 once every five years.

New Brunswick provides coverage for the purchase and maintenance not covered by other agencies or private health insurance plans, as well as assistance for those for whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.

Manitobans over age 18 are only eligible for support for hearing aids if they are receiving Employment and Income Assistance, and the reimbursement only provides a maximum of \$500 an ear.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to consider hearing loss as a medical treatment under Manitoba Health. And,

(2) To urge the provincial government to provide income-based coverage for hearing aids to all who need them, as hearing has been proven to be essential to Manitoba's cognitive, mental and social health and well-being.

This is signed by Edgar Baril, Jeanette Dumaine, Simone Leclair and many, many other Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Further petitions?

If no, grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Before announcing government business, I'd like to announce that, in addition to the meetings previously announced, the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet, if necessary, on Thursday, October 13th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider—to continue consideration of Bill 36, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that, in addition to the meetings previously announced, the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet, if necessary, on Thursday, October 13th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to continue consideration of Bill 36, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider Estimates this afternoon. The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

* (15:00)

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

SENIORS AND LONG-TERM CARE

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Is the minister ready to proceed?

An Honourable Member: Yes, I am, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

Before we begin, I have a leave request for this section of the Committee of Supply. Is there leave to allow the opposition to sit on the other side of the table to allow them to see the screens that are situated in the room? *[Agreed]*

And that's what we shall do.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): Yes, I do, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister, you may proceed with your statement.

Mr. Johnston: On behalf of the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care, I am very pleased to present the financial Estimates for the 2022-23 fiscal year.

The Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care was established in January 2022 to provide stewardship over the implementation of the Stevenson review recommendations as well as the implementation of a new seniors stretch-strategy, so that aging Manitobans are—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, Minister. Would it be possible for you to get a headset because the Hansard staff is having a difficult time hearing you, and we are in the room here as well.

Mr. Johnston: I can do that, Mr. Chairman, if you just give me a moment.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

* (15:10)

The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care, are you ready to go again?

Mr. Johnston: Can you hear me, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chairperson: Much better.

Mr. Johnston: I'm not sure exactly where I left off, so please bear with me.

The Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care was established in January 2022 to provide stewardship over the implementation of the Stevenson review recommendations as well as the implementation of a new seniors strategy so that aging Manitobans are able to stay in their own homes and communities as long as it is safe to do so.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed gaps in our long-term-care system here in Manitoba and across Canada and drew our focus to seniors who were not receiving the dignified care that they deserve. These

gaps are reflected in the external government commissioned review led by Dr. Lynn Stevenson.

The review resulted in 17 recommendations at the facility level as well as the systems level, including but not limited to ensuring the staffing levels and services provided are appropriate to the complexity of current and future residents and reviewing and 'streamlining'-lining the licence standards for personal-care homes to ensure currency and applicability to the changing needs of residents.

The proposed 2022-23 core budget for Seniors and Long-Term Care reflects an expenditure of fifty-four million point—\$54.3 million and 14 staff years—FTEs. The summary budget is set at \$54.4 million.

This year's budget includes investments in the following: \$32 million for the implementation of the recommendations of the Stevenson review, such as following key areas already announced, enhanced—enhancement of infection prevention and control within long-term-care sector, additional full-time equivalent housekeeping staff, improvements in emergency, continual and situational aware with personal-care homes, through enhanced Internet connections to patient and operational information and communication technology.

Our government also is reviewing the recommendations of a work group charged with the development of staffing recommendations for increased staffing at bedside; \$20 million to support the implementation of early actions on a new seniors strategy after an extensive engagement and consultation process with Manitobans to provide advice for design and an action plan of the seniors strategy and to recommend priority investments; \$1 million for salaries and benefits for new staff and other consultations, project and other operating increases.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you very much for the opportunity to say a few words on this year's Estimates. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues in other departments, such as Health, for their partnership and support in this important work for Manitobans.

I would now be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

I would, at this time, like to introduce my staff, Mr. Chairman. I have with me Bernadette Preun, my Deputy Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care; Sandra Henault, assistant deputy minister and executive financial officer, Manitoba Health, Mental

Health and Community Wellness and Seniors and long term; and Laura Morrison, executive director, Seniors and Long-Term Care.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I'm pleased to put a few words on the record for Estimates of the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care.

As Manitobans know, we've been very concerned about this particular area of government. The pandemic exposed the gaps in the system of care for many of the most vulnerable people in our province. And while we've seen the impacts of these gaps across the country, certainly here in Manitoba, unfortunately, we saw a disproportionate number of heartbreaking outcomes for seniors in our province and their families.

I have several questions in this area, including the number of beds that are currently available, when standards for personal-care homes may change, how much of the federal funds allocated for this area in Manitoba have been spent and how much additional staff has been added to personal-care homes in Manitoba. And this is one area certainly everyone, I think, across the province is acutely aware needs to be addressed.

I'm hopeful that this will be a productive session, and it will be a session that advances the concerns of seniors, their families and communities. Thank you.

And with me today I'm joined by Hannah, our staff, one of our staff in our caucus, Hannah Drudge.

Mr. Chairperson: Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 34.1(a), contained in resolution 34.1.

According to our rule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put separately on all resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Asagwara: I'd like to start by asking if the minister can tell us the names of all of his political staff.

Mr. Johnston: Yes, my political staff is Larissa Gobert as well as Danielle Orvis.

Mr. Chairman, did you hear my answer?

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, whenever you're ready, if you could please raise your arm so I could acknowledge you so that Hansard could turn you on.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I assure you, after we work out these kinks, we'll start rolling very smoothly. My apologies. My political staff are Larissa Gobert as well as Danielle Orvis.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that information.

Can the minister advise us how many vacancies are there currently in the minister's department and what is the vacancy rate?

Mr. Johnston: At this time there are no vacancies and no vacancy rates.

* (15:20)

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response and that information, and I think that's a good thing that there's no vacancies in the department. We see the challenges that's been creating in other departments.

On page 24 of the Estimates book, it shows that there are six staff plus the minister assigned to executive and seven staff that work in the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care. That's 50 per cent of this area of government assigned to the executive—or rather, to executive staff.

Can the minister explain that for us?

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the question, there is myself as the executive. I have two political staff, two office assistants, one deputy and one deputy assistant. We did—we were resourced with policy units to support the Stevenson review as well as the ongoing seniors strategy. Otherwise, we are supported through the Department of Health resources.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

I noticed on page 25 under equity—sorry, page 25 of the supplement to Estimates of expenditure, under the Equity and Diversity Benchmarks, that there are a number of equity-seeking groups identified: women,

Indigenous peoples, visible minorities—which I don't love the language of, but that's what's being used—and persons with disabilities. But there is an absence of 2S—so, two-spirit LGBTTTQ folks and gender-diverse people.

So, I'm wondering, given, you know, that's it's here, it is being—there are benchmarks that are identified in terms of having that represented within the department, but there's a notable absence of an equity-seeking group that is significant.

I'm wondering if the minister can provide some clarity as to whether or not, in fact, that information is being requested of folks and is a part of this equity and diversity benchmark strategy. Was it an oversight or, in fact, is that information not being gathered, and are two-spirit and LGBTTTQIA folks and gender-diverse peoples not going to be reflected in the equity and diversity benchmarks?

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

I would like to thank the member for bringing to our attention the ambiguity in the documentation that she references. I have taken note of that.

In regards to her question, when we—when there is—

Mr. Chairperson: If I could interrupt the minister for a second to address the critic with the proper gender pronoun.

Mr. Johnston: I said the member.

Mr. Chairperson: They, the member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara).

Mr. Johnston: Oh. My apologies, no disrespect intended.

Thank the member from Union Station for the question and bringing forward the issue of documentation that we've made note of.

As well, in answer to the member from Union Station's question, under recruitment, we would have asked to identify if they wish.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister clarify, then, will gender diverse and two-spirited LGBTTTQIA employees be represented by way of data in the equity and diversity benchmarks?

* (15:30)

Obviously, I encourage the minister to ensure that, in terms of documentation, that this is corrected moving forward, but can he clarify whether or not his

response means that they will, in fact, be reflected in the benchmarks.

Mr. Johnston: The short answer is yes.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for his short answer. I appreciate it, and, again, I hope that, you know, these folks are represented, moving forward, in documentation.

A lot of folks who, perhaps, look at these—this data, this information that the government is purporting to be collecting, deserve to see themselves and their identities reflected in the efforts the government says it's making.

Next question is on page 31 of the Estimates book. It says that, and I quote: "No statutes have been assigned to the Minister." End quote.

So, if the minister has no legal responsibilities by way of statutes, can the minister, then, provide an overview of what his responsibilities are?

Thank you.

Mr. Johnston: I just wanted to just reiterate the mandate and responsibilities that were given to this department by the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), which were focused in really two major, major areas.

First, as I had indicated in my earlier comments, the Stevenson review, which was initiated by the Premier when she was minister of Health, and when she became Premier was quite adamant that these particular needs of seniors are to be met by establishing our department.

And so, the Stevenson review basically committed the Manitoba government to over \$31 million in funding to support the implementation of 17 recommendations. And over—of that 31, over \$15 million in initial funding will support the enhancing of infection prevention and control, including 50 infection control staff, more than 200 full-time housekeeping staff, 44 allied health staffing—and I know that certainly the member from Union Station is very supportive of allied staff. I remember her making a statement in the—

Mr. Chairperson: I must interrupt the minister again and remind him as a—when referring to the MLA for Union Station, members should use the pronouns they or them. I thank you for your respectful co-operation.

Mr. Johnston: Again, certainly no offence intended, and I hope to be able to not make those mistakes when referring—MLA Union Station.

So, again, back to what the Stevenson review really was laid out, as far as my mandate goes, certainly was to enhance infection protection and control, including 50 infection control staff, more than 200 full-time housekeeping staff and 44 allied health staffing, improvements to information, communication technology to better support operations and patient care.

Also, too, a further \$16 million in addition to funding to expand staffing and training in personal-care homes, including nurses, allied health and recruitment and training incentives.

System improvements already under way is stabilizing staffing complements in personal-care homes, increasing—increases for nurses, health-care aides, allied health, infection prevention and control staff and housing, long-term-care leadership structuring to provide consistent medical guidance and communications to address cross-system issues and advancing health resource planning to address infection control and address staffing challenges.

Now, some of those comments are redundant, but they all certainly have different components to them with different initiatives.

Also, too, certainly, a large component of our—this department's responsibility is to develop a seniors strategy. And I have indicated that on numerous occasions in the House when I had indicated how this department is progressing to try to fulfill the needs of seniors and what initiatives that we're looking to proceed with.

* (15:40)

We have initiated, certainly, public consultations through community engagement networking, and those are going on as we speak. And we are approaching, certainly, stakeholders, as well as seniors, in all parts of the province to come to terms with understanding exactly what those needs are and what those particular individuals are advocating for. And we see that as being extremely positive and certainly something that will ultimately develop what our long-term strategy is—

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

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

According to Public Accounts—this is a direct quote: "Actual expenses for Seniors and Long Term Care were less than \$500,000. For display purposes,

this is shown as zero." End quote. That's on page 48 of Public Accounts.

Can the minister explain why the actual expenses for his department were zero dollars last year?

Mr. Johnston: Thank the member from Union Station for the question.

This department came into effect January the 18th. The end of the fiscal year was March 31st, according to Public Accounts. So, the expenditure within the department at that time, as we were getting set up, was frankly very minimal. Any expenditure we did have was relating to staffing, and that staffing was really myself and my deputy.

So that, I think, addresses that question, is that our expenses were minimal because of the early development of the department during that financial time frame.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

Manitoba has a federal-provincial agreement right now with the federal government. It's called the safe long-term-care agreement. It's 100 per cent federally funded, 100 per cent federal dollars. The agreement says that Manitoba was to receive 30 million—37, rather, million dollars last year.

Can the minister tell us how much of that money was actually received in 2021-22 and how much was spent and how much will carry forward to future years?

So, I'll repeat that just to make sure that I'm perfectly clear. The \$37 million that Manitoba was to receive last year, can the minister tell us how much of that was actually received, how much was spent and how much will carry forward to future years?

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member of Union Station's question, \$37 million was received by the Manitoba government, \$37 million was spent primarily in personal-care homes. And in answer to the question of what's carried over, the answer is none.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

Can the minister provide a breakdown of how the \$37 million was spent, so where specifically, what initiatives the money funded, what positions, et cetera. So would really appreciate if the minister could be—provide clarity and articulate just how that \$37 million was spent.

* (15:50)

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, funding received from the federal government for expenses incurred in the following areas were: the operation and maintenance of internal and external visitation shelters to provide a low-risk environment for in-person visits with residents.

Secondly, strengthening infection prevention and control measures, including enhanced screening protocols for staff and significantly increased cleaning and janitorial services.

And, last, the implementation of a one-site staffing model across long-term-care homes, including incremental staffing costs incurred because of additional staff and sick time.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide me with a breakdown of how much money was spent on each of these initiatives?

Of particular interest are the visitation shelters. Those shelters were established well before the minister became the minister of this new department. Those shelters were long completed.

And so, I'm just wanting some clarity here as to why those shelters would then be part of the new dollars received from the federal government. It's not a criticism, it's—it is just a curiosity and I'm seeking clarity.

So, while I appreciate the minister providing a breakdown of the initiatives that the money was spent on, it would be great, and it's important, actually, that the minister can also provide a breakdown of the associated costs with those initiatives.

Thank you.

* (16:00)

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, safe long-term fund applied to expenditures incurred approximately 18 months prior to the end of the fiscal year '21-22. The actual values for the initiatives are still being finalized. We expect that we'll have the finalized expenditures at the end of this calendar year.

MLA Asagwara: I apologize, can the minister repeat that answer? I didn't catch all of it.

Mr. Johnston: Yes, happy to.

Safe Long-term Care Fund applied to expenditures incurred approximately 18 months prior to the end of the fiscal '21-22 year. The actual values for

initiatives are still being finalized, and we expect they will be finalized by the end of this calendar year.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for his response and for providing clarity. I do look forward to seeing the breakdown of expenditures. I think that Manitobans would be very interested in seeing that as well.

Understanding now that the funds could be applied to expenditures incurred 18 months prior to the end of the fiscal year does raise questions for me around those funds being put to good use, in terms of new initiatives to address concerns in this particular area, especially given that this is a new department and the opportunity that exists there to do so.

So, we'll await that information, I guess, by year end.

I'd like to ask a question, still on—you know, on this area of funding from the government. I'm wondering if the agreement with the federal government has been renewed. The current agreement is on the government's website, and it states that it's for one year.

So, can the minister provide clarity as to whether or not the agreement has been renewed beyond that?

Thank you.

Mr. Johnston: I would ask if the member could give us some clarification on which agreement she is referring to. We want to make sure that we give her—

Mr. Chairperson: I must remind the member again to—when referring to the MLA for Union Station, members should use the pronouns they or them.

I thank you for your co-operation.

Mr. Johnston: Sorry, Mr. Chairman and apologies to the member from Union Station.

Yes, just for clarification, if the member could give us what particular agreement she's referring to, then we want to make sure that we give the most accurate information to the question being asked.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you for asking for that clarity. I actually misspoke on my question, which is probably why the minister is having a tough time finding the answer.

I just want to remind the minister, I do use gender neutral pronouns. I've been a member of this House, of this Assembly, since 2019. My pronouns have consistently been gender neutral since before then but

certainly, to his knowledge, since then. So I would greatly appreciate that he get it right.

I don't really need any further apologies. I do need the minister to respect my pronouns and use them correctly. This is not just about me; it's also about many other people who also use neutral pronouns. They're pronouns perhaps the minister is not accustomed to, but he should be. So, get it right, please. Thank you.

So, to correct myself, because I did ask in reference to the wrong agreement—I apologize for that—the Canada-Manitoba Home and Community Care and Mental Health and Addictions Services Funding Agreement. That is a mouthful but that is the agreement that I was actually referring to—I meant to refer to.

So, I'll repeat that for the minister: Canada-Manitoba Home and Community Care and Mental Health and Addictions Services Funding Agreement.

Can the minister clarify if that agreement with the federal government has been renewed? That is the agreement that is on the government's website that stated it was for up to one year.

Thank you.

* (16:10)

Mr. James Teitsma, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Johnston: I would ask that the member would be properly suited channel—challenging—channelling that question to the minister of health and community wellness during that Estimate process. I think that's where the question would be better suited.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that direction.

Outside of executive, the minister's department is basically seven positions. We've already touched on that earlier in my questioning. Those seven positions are administering two big pots of dollars in two particular streams. One is \$32 million in grants and the second is \$21 million in other expenditures.

Can the minister take us through those blocks of funding? If possible, provide as much as a thorough breakdown as possible in terms of what those streams of dollars are allocated to specifically.

Thank you.

* (16:20)

Mr. Johnston: In answer to the member's question, \$19.9 million that was referred to was for the seniors strategy. As I'd mentioned in the Legislature a number of times, our department is bringing forward early actions that we've identified based on our consultations and look forward to sharing those with the Legislature and ultimately the Manitoba public soon.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

The \$32 million that was referred to was invested with the Stevenson report recommendations, and I did go through those earlier in our deliberations.

However, the major expenditure of that is the two announcements that we had made of \$15 million, as well as a second announcement of \$16 million as per, as I mentioned, the announcements that have been made.

If the member has further questions, I'm happy to try to give her more—try to give more detail.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response. I may go back specifically around the \$16 million, but I'll leave that for now and I'll go over that in my mind a little bit more.

I'll move on to a question around consultation—or, the consultant, rather. So I understand that there is a consultant—or maybe the government uses the language of contractor—for the seniors strategy.

Can the minister tell us who that consultant is, what their budget is and how much they have been paid?

Mr. Johnston: Sorry for the delay in getting back to you here. The consultants that we had contracted were Optimus SBR and the amount that they were contracted for was—or, budgeted for was \$475,000.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you. I thank the minister for that response.

Can the minister provide some clarity around—so, the contract was for \$475,000. Can the minister clarify if that \$475,000 has been paid in full? And if not, then how much has Optimus been paid?

And is the minister able to provide a breakdown on what that \$475,000 entails, so perhaps a percentage around if part of that \$475,000 covers consultations, perhaps another percentage out of that \$475,000 is for some other aspect of that contract? As much detail as possible would be great.

And then, again, some clarity around how much have they been paid or has it already been paid in full.

Thank you.

* (16:30)

Mr. Johnston: I would like to clarify something. I misspoke, I said \$475,000 contract; I should have said—or, for the record, it should be \$475,000 budget. So I wanted to clarify that.

In answer to the member's question, nothing has been paid to date. And the components of the agreement include research, engagement and consultations, data analysis and strategy, and action plan development. Those are the four areas that we have engaged them on.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that information and for clarifying what he meant when he provided the number.

Over the summer, the minister extended consultation for the seniors strategy. I appreciate that the minister provided the \$475,000 number. I'm wondering if the minister can clarify if the extension of the consultation impacted the budget.

He's already said that nothing has been paid as of yet, but is the \$475,000 budget—has that always been the budget or did the extension of the consultation increase the budget? If that is the case, what was the original budget attached to this contract?

Thank you.

Mr. Johnston: To address the questions that the member had asked: work has been done on the consultations; however, we have not been invoiced as of yet for that work.

Consultations were always designed to be comprehensive with the consultant supporting my department. And there was nothing changed in the budget to accommodate this arrangement agreement.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response and for providing clarity around that process. I appreciate it.

I'd like to ask a bit about the seniors advocate. The minister has heard me and members of our NDP caucus advocate for this now for quite some time, certainly since 2019.

And what I found interesting—the first time I raised this with the minister in the House, the minister essentially outright rejected it as a potential measure that this government might take. And it is something that Manitobans have been calling for for some time, seniors have been calling for for some time.

* (16:40)

So, I'm wondering if the minister can provide a bit of—help me understand, you know, why he rejected this idea, something that seniors are calling for, advocacy groups are calling for, when consultations are under way. To me, it doesn't quite line up. Like, why undergo all of these consultations if you're—if the minister's mind has already been made on these really significant areas and issues?

So, just wondering if the minister can provide some clarity around why the consultations, if his mind is already made up in areas like the idea around the establishment of a seniors advocate.

Mr. Johnston: Certainly, I know how passionate the member is on this particular issue. I want the member to know that there has been discussions in regards to this consideration. However, it was the feeling of our government that by creating this ministry, that a seniors advocate wasn't warranted when you have the authority that now exists for seniors at the Cabinet table.

There have been certainly a number of initiatives that have been taken—that have been brought forward, so far, by our department that are a direct result of having a department with a minister. I don't think a seniors advocate would have been able to initiate the Stevenson review at the—at \$32 million. I don't think that a seniors advocate would have been able to initiate the seniors strategy at \$20 million. I mean, our whole seniors department budget is over \$50 million. So, those dollars certainly are being spent by this department very aggressively to fulfill the needs of seniors and that will continue.

As I'd indicated to the member on several occasions, we have a number of initiatives that are coming forward as early initiatives based on the seniors strategy, as well as the overall seniors strategy with a number of initiatives that we will be looking to initiate longer term for the good seniors of Manitoba.

All that's happening because of the aggressiveness of a department with a minister. So I'm not fully understanding why the opposition feels that a seniors advocate would have more authority or more of a lobbying power than the minister himself or herself or themselves to be able to accomplish results.

Now, I want to ensure that—I want to indicate to the member that we have talked to an awful lot of stakeholders and I don't necessarily agree with the member that all stakeholders are advocating for a seniors advocate. I don't believe that's accurate.

I will say that there has been some stakeholders who have brought the issue to my attention, but I can assure you that's not—that hasn't been the majority. And I'm just not comfortable, at this time, creating a separate department of government to address, really, what our department is addressing right now.

And we are going to the public of Manitoba through consultations. We have invited a number of stakeholders to contribute and give us input into what the needs of seniors are. So—and I will say to the member that as the consultations continue, I am not close-minded to further development of the department to address and fulfill concerns that may exist in home care, which is certainly on our radar.

And I'm not necessarily opposed to looking to enhance the department to address personal-care-home needs. Those are things that I am open-minded to when it comes to the consultations that the member refers to.

So, I'm not at this time prepared to make a commitment, but I am open-minded to some further support mechanisms.

So, I hope that answers the members question.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for his response and for sharing some feedback in terms of what he's hearing from folks in consultations. I'm not surprised to hear that there are folks who are raising the issue of the creation of a seniors advocate, and that folks are still raising that as something they'd like to see.

To be clear, a seniors advocate would not be a department, as the minister referenced.

I think the minister—if the minister were to look at the children and youth advocate as an example of an entity that exists as an independent body to advocate on behalf of children and youth in our province and the importance of that entity functioning as an independent body that ensures and fights for the rights of children and youth.

Children and youth are a vulnerable demographic in many ways, and it is critical that this entity exists in order to advocate alongside them and their families and on their behalf.

And similarly—certainly not comparing seniors and elders to children and youth, but I am identifying that seniors and elders live sometimes with vulnerabilities within our systems that require increased supports and advocacy and investigation.

And so, I think that it is important—certainly, while I respect the minister in his role and respect his knowledge and experience in being in that role, I would certainly caution the minister as I would any minister who would purport to know what is in the best interest definitively, and not be open to an independent perspective which would support his department and support his role as the minister.

I think that is—again, I'll reference the children and youth advocate as a very good example of an entity that provides vital, critical, quite frankly life-saving information to the government in regards to measures that can be taken, strategies that can be undertaken, and data that informs the ways in which we can better support and enhance the rights of children and youth.

Certainly, I would think that the minister would recognize the importance of that entity, and when you connect that to why folks are perhaps advocating for a seniors advocate, I hope the minister can see the potential value in that.

So, I just wanted to make sure I put a few comments on the record to clarify that no one's calling for a new department, but are calling for an independent body, which would actually function to really support seniors and elders in Manitoba, and also to support the government in being able to make the best decisions for those folks.

I'd like to move on to a question and go back to the minister's actual House book.

So, 'tabe'—tab four, rather, of the minister's House book talks about the number of personal-care-home beds in Manitoba. From March 31st of 2016, there were 9,698 personal-care-home beds in Manitoba. In March 31st of 2022, we see 9,505. That's a loss of personal-care-home beds.

Can the minister tell me how many personal-care-home beds are currently available in Manitoba and/or occupied in Manitoba?

* (16:50)

Mr. Johnston: I was wanting the member to clarify which document that she is referring to—or that the member—

Mr. Chairperson: I must—

Mr. Johnston: —is referring to—sorry. I'm sorry.

The member from Union Station, please clarify which document that is being referred to.

MLA Asagwara: My apologies to the minister. I can't provide clarity on that point and I do apologize for that.

Is the minister able, in the absence of being able to provide that, the minister should be able, however, to provide the information around how many beds are currently—rather, how many personal-care-home beds are currently available and/or occupied in Manitoba. That would be a number that should be readily available.

So, while I apologize I can't provide the clarity he's seeking specifically, the information that I am in need of should be available to the minister.

Thank you.

Mr. Johnston: We would want to verify this number with Health, but it's our initial data that indicates 9,513 beds are available. But again, I want to give the member the most accurate information that I can, so I do wish to verify that with the Department of Health.

And secondly, in regards to the amount of beds in use, again, I don't want to give the member an inaccurate number, so I would get back to her with verification of that number also—get back to verification—to the member with that number.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for providing that information and I appreciate him taking the further provision of data as an undertaking.

Thank you.

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

ROOM 255

FINANCE

* (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 Finance.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I'm wondering if the minister—I want to start today with the new—and I may have got the name wrong, so obviously, please correct me—either the digital services tax, or it's been in the press called the Netflix tax; and now that we've

had it for about a year, I'm wondering if the minister can advise how much revenue has been raised from that new tax.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Thank you, I'm happy to answer the member's question.

As he says, yes, the digital services tax is a tax that came into effect on December the 1st of last year. That tax was introduced in the budget. It was activated through the passage of last year's BITSA, and the activation date—the in-effect date—was December the 1st.

So, I can't give the member that—an annual or a number that would pertain to the entire fiscal year, but what I can tell him is that it is that tax that was attached to any streaming service that a Manitoban has. So it is meant to apply to services to Manitobans.

That means if you're a Netflix subscriber, your bill now contains the PST. If you—you know, if you subscribe to Amazon Prime, then you pay the PST on that. The initial assumption on an annual year was \$25 million of revenue, but there is no place in the Public Accounts where it breaks that amount out. On page 66, of course, you see the revenue consolidated statements, and it includes that line for the retail sales of tax, and this would be—the impact of this would be in there. Next year, we will have the data from a full year of this particular tax.

By the way, I will make one other point clear, and that is, the company itself, it does not have to distinguish between its—the tax it pays, online sales, and like, in other words, non-streaming services and this tax. So there's not going to be a way to parse out that number that the member wants. The estimate, of course, \$25 million per year have been collecting since December the 1st.

Mr. Wasyliv: Thank you, Minister, for the answer.

Now, you indicated, obviously, that it applies to streaming services, which Amazon Prime is obviously one. But does it also apply to digital marketplace services like just the Amazon website or the Costco website or major retailers like Hudson's Bay and all that. Are they paying PST?

And the reason why I'm—question the minister about this; I've met with the small business community in Manitoba, and they would like to have a level playing field for commerce and they often, what they called—what's the expression—showrooming where people will go into their brick-and-mortar stores, they

look around, and then they go home and buy the exact same product on Amazon and, of course, Manitoba loses out on the PST.

So I'm wondering if you could explain the scope of the tax, whether it would cover those type of transactions, and if it doesn't, are there plans in the future to quote, unquote, level the playing field to make sure that they do?

* (15:10)

Mr. Friesen: I appreciate the member's question.

Yes, the entire rationale behind the government's moves have been to address exactly the concerns that the member is raising. And that is, we don't want a system whereby there are additional benefits accruing to companies who sell online against which people with bricks and mortar who have a footprint in Manitoba are competing, and they don't want to be at a disadvantage. And previous to the changes that our government brought, there was that unlevel playing field.

The member talks about that showrooming: I've heard this myself from my children, who are consumers and living in different provinces, and they talk about this practice of going in and trying something, even buying it, you know, and then returning it and buying it online. So, we are trying to stamp out exactly that type of behaviour. The changes he's referring to are called the online marketplaces—it's a tax on online marketplaces.

He will see, in last year's budget, a 2021-2022 fiscal impact of \$3.3 million was the budget, and essentially requiring online marketplaces to collect and remit retail sales tax on the sale of taxable goods sold by third parties on their electronic platforms. It would—may—was—came into effect December the 1st. So that is in addition to the streaming service's application of tax.

And I would also want to include that this same principle is applied to online booking services of hotels. So the same practice has been extended. All of these, as the member says, for the purpose of levelling the playing field.

Clearly, in my conversations and ongoing dialogue with the retail industry and various stakeholder groups, these are concerns they have raised in the past. They are pleased to see the work made to level the playing field. These same types of changes are going on in other jurisdictions in Canada as well.

Mr. Wasyliv: So, if I understand the minister correctly, then, you know, Amazon Marketplace would get covered by this, and if he can confirm that.

But given that we have put these measures in place, I would assume that these large multinational corporations have to open up at least a PST tax account in the province of Manitoba. So then, I guess, my next question would be is, do they also have opened up a corporate tax account, and do these companies pay corporate tax in Manitoba, or do they only pay PST as part of this tax initiative?

Mr. Friesen: I'm happy to respond to the member's question.

Of course, the government, you know, has the concern that the member is citing, and that is to create level playing conditions to be able to incentivize people to bring their business to Manitoba to support our retailers in this province who sell goods to Manitobans.

And so, the—to the member's question: Is there a registration process by which online retailers register, you know, to essentially open an RST account or an RST registration? The answer is yes. So, these retailers—we have to have a way, of course, you know, to be able to have this tax remitted and that is the process by which that is done.

When it comes to the test of corporate, then the member's referring to practices that belong to the federal government, Canada Revenue Agency. Those determinations go down to the test of corporate presence, and that is a federal process to test whether a company has a corporate presence in a jurisdiction. And that corporate presence could be determined by, you know, real estate, warehouses, other operations. There would be other ways to test against that threshold of corporate presence.

I am aware, as the member will be as well, that there is ongoing work within Canada and indeed beyond the borders of Canada, led through the OECD to determine how digital services tax could be assessed to online sellers of goods who are—who have activities globally, and how—what is that principle of taxation that should be applied to create fair conditions in which these companies are not using advantages that they would have at that level of scale and size of operation to be able to skirt obligations that, you know, brick-and-mortar retailers and companies would have in jurisdiction.

So, that work continues. I would say to you that Manitoba is engaged in that work to the extent that we,

of course, have shared tables for taxation and taxation reform and ongoing work. My work as the Minister of Finance, representing this province at the table for the federal, territorial, provincial meetings—we have discussed issues like this in the past and I know that the next time that we gather, it would surprise me if this issue was not once again raised in some form.

Mr. Wasyliw: I appreciate this dialogue with the minister.

So, if I'm hearing him correctly, and perhaps he can confirm it, despite Amazon having so much business in Manitoba that they've opened up several large warehouses, they are not paying corporate tax in Manitoba for the profits that are generated in Manitoba. And, at the same time, Manitoba small businesses are required to compete against them while being required to pay corporate taxes in Manitoba.

So, I assume I've just characterized the state of things in Manitoba. I would assume that the minister would find that problematic, and I'm very interested in his plans to address this and just sort of correct the market.

* (15:20)

Mr. Friesen: Thank you, happy to respond to the member's question, and to correct the record, there's a number of wrong assertions he makes.

I want to be clear at the outset, though, that as the Minister of Finance, I won't name names. It would not be prudent for me to be identifying companies by name. Member is welcome to do so. I need to be more careful than that just in terms of disclosures.

However, to the member's question, we were talking about the federal government and the CRA's responsibility to determine things like corporate presence. As soon—in the example that the member raises—as soon as there is a physical warehouse within the jurisdiction of Manitoba, that is a corporate presence. So that corporate presence has then been established. And so, as—let's say it's a warehouse. And then as goods would flow into the warehouse and be distributed to Manitobans, then those goods would become subject to our retail sales tax.

But also, that same warehouse is paying all those other taxes. I think importantly for the member's question, that warehouse, then, is subject to corporate income tax. But that warehouse is also then subject to payroll tax, retail sales tax; of course, property tax and the education property tax. These are all taxes that that company will then pay.

The test, though, of—that the federal government determines in terms of what portion of the activities within that warehouse are taxable in Manitoba, that's still a federal determination. In other words, let's say that warehouse ships goods to Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta and BC. Only the goods that are distributed to Manitoba—Manitobans—stores or, you know, retail outlets or to customers at the end of that queue, only those amounts would then be subject to the retail sales tax. All those other taxes still apply.

Mr. Wasyliw: I guess the natural follow-up question is—so, if you have a multinational retailer who just does business online and all the products are delivered through some type of courier service, and they don't have a physical location in the province of Manitoba, we would not be assessing corporate tax on those transactions.

Do I have that correct?

Mr. Friesen: So, the member is probing an area that's important for, you know, tax law because as, you know, the world increasingly shifts to these online modalities for buying goods, it is a challenge that every jurisdiction, every Canadian province and territory has to grapple with.

So, a few key points I'll just make for the member. First of all, our rules are in no respect different than other provinces or territories. Second principle is the constitutional prerogative and responsibility of the federal government to assess corporate income tax is not a provincial prerogative.

The next point I would make is that we cannot assess—essentially, we cannot glean tax from an operation that does not exist in Manitoba. So, if Bombardier is located in Quebec, we can't apply PST to Bombardier if their operations are all in Quebec because they don't operate in Manitoba. But if there were—by the same argument, if there's a warehouse in Vancouver or Lethbridge or Regina and they send goods into Manitoba, of course: PST, assessed at the border. It's the same principle when you—if you purchase a car in Calgary and then you bring it to Manitoba and you go register that vehicle; they say, oh, well, wait, you haven't paid your sales tax in jurisdiction.

So the principle cuts both ways. But as I said, corporate income tax, yes. The moment there's a corporate presence in Manitoba, corporate income tax, all these other taxes apply.

Of course, the—you know, the post-secondary health tax, the payroll tax, the property tax, education

tax, corporate income tax, personal income tax for people who work at that warehouse, all of those taxes intact. Though I will just, once again, reference the fact—but jurisdictions continue, in co-operation, to continue to talk about tax fairness, and this is work that Manitoba will continue to participate in because we want to see good investments in the province of Manitoba. We want businesses to create their businesses here.

And indeed, only yesterday, we were citing confidence that banks are expressing in Manitoba as a jurisdiction in which to do business. A—improving taxation jurisdiction; a jurisdiction that's improving on its regulatory burden and the progress that this government is making against that cost of red tape to businesses and industries and individuals and organizations and non-profits who are doing business and interacting with the government.

And, of course, you know, we have our other advantages, as well, that we have built in. A low unemployment rate in the past has been a real source of strength for us. Of course, right now, we are concerned when employers tell us that they cannot find the necessary workforce.

But this is why our government has been working so hard to create the conditions in which Manitoba and Manitoba businesses can succeed. And I would call to the member's attention both sections of the budget and sections of the Public Accounts that talk about the progress that we are making in that regard. The strategic outcomes and strategic infrastructure investments portion of the Public Accounts actually talks about ways in which we are building our economy, investing in our communities, making life more affordable and how we are modernizing government.

As a matter of fact, yesterday, we spoke about that modernization of government. The member was wondering about, why send a cheque instead of doing something in a more progressive manner. And you will see there're all kinds of illustrations on page 17 of how we are moving to a modernized government environment which includes the adoption of technologies. And part in parcel of that is, of course, the balanced scorecard implementation that is a part and a portion of the documents that we are considering today.

* (15:30)

Mr. Wasyliv: On page 44 of the budget document, effective May 1st, 2022, fuel used in off-road

operations of peat harvesting equipment is now exempt from the fuel tax.

And I'm wondering if the minister could answer a few questions on that. First of all, why was this measure necessary? How much will it cost the Treasury in lost tax revenue? Who advocated for this? Who was asking for this measure?

And I would like to hear the minister's comments because it seems rather inconsistent with our climate change goals, and isn't there a concern that a fossil fuel subsidy could prevent these companies from innovating and finding new ways to harvest without the use of fossil fuel processes, and we're actually doing these companies a disservice by holding them back with an artificial corporate welfare subsidy?

So, if you could address those that would be much appreciated.

Mr. Friesen: Thank you for the member—or, for the question. I'll see if I can get to all the component parts of his question.

First of all, the impact, clearly stated in the budget: the budgeted amount was \$200,000 was the—with the anticipated impact. The—*[interjection]* Thanks, I'll get to that in a second, thank you—the actual industry itself of peat harvesting is actually a success story for Manitoba. It was a area of learning for me as the Finance Minister to discover that peat harvesting in Manitoba is very, very important. We're a major exporter of peat and peat products to areas like horticulture, gardening centres all across North America; I understand that a major export of peat goes to places like Texas.

So we're very, very pleased to see that this sustainable industry is located in Manitoba. Sustainable practices, of course, are in place to make sure that the industry is safeguarded and that supply is regenerated. This industry employs people in Manitoba. It generates corporate income tax and personal income tax and all the other taxes we've talked about.

In terms of the consistency of the exemption—so, the member's, of course, referring to the fact that in other sectors, as well, the government exempts fuels used in off-road operations to be able to incentivize industry and job creation and help the province grow.

So, in respect of peat harvesting equipment, the member will see on page 176 of the budget that marked fuel can be currently purchased tax exempt when used in off-road machinery and equipment utilized by farming and, in Manitoba, for mining and

commercial logging and commercial fishing and trapping. And we are simply, by this measure, extending the exemption to peat harvesting equipment, supporting this important industry in Manitoba. It is consistent with the tax treatment in the majority of Canadian jurisdictions.

It's—was brought to us by the industry; the peat harvesting industry made this application. They asked for this treatment. And, indeed, they cited that principle of fairness and said, we are no less important than other sectors; you have this treatment in other sectors. Was never done by the former NDP government, but our PC government was proud to bring this change that recognizes this industry and takes this modest step in terms of tax treatment in order to, I would say—I would suggest, in order to generate multiples in terms of taxation as this company grows and can forgo some of that cost it previously had to pay.

Mr. Wasyliv: Minister, on May 5th, 2022, DeFehr announced through the media that they were closing their plant on August 10th. Two hundred and twenty family-supporting jobs will be lost.

I'm wondering if the Province was aware of the closure prior to that date, if there had been any discussions with the owners about the closure, whether any alternatives had been explored to the closing, including a worker buyout of the plant. And has the government reached out to any of the employees? And is there any plan in place to deal with such a massive loss of manufacturing jobs? And is there any strategy in place to address the shrinking manufacturing base in Manitoba?

* (15:40)

Mr. Friesen: I think it was Mark Twain who famously said at one point that rumours of his death were greatly exaggerated. And I would say to this member that the rumours of a manufacturing decline are completely false in Manitoba.

I don't know why the gloom and doom from the member, but he obviously hasn't read the budget, and he obviously has not been paying attention in Manitoba. And so, I really welcome the opportunity to talk about the growth of manufacturing in the province of Manitoba.

Certainly, even I—I'll take this rare opportunity to speak at a local level as a member of the Legislative Assembly that represents the area of Morden-Winkler. I would invite the member to Morden-Winkler, and see how manufacturing right now is busting out. And

I'm talking about both manufacturing of things like agriculture equipment in my area of the province, but also manufacturing in things like plastics.

Icon Technologies is a company in the city of Winkler that just recently completed a 50,000-square-foot addition that is coming two years after a 50,000-foot addition, that is coming two years after a 200,000-square-foot build, to a company that is really uniquely placed, that manufactures custom parts for the entire RV industry and exports them globally.

This is just one small example of manufacturing. Manufacturing has been a hub in Manitoba.

So I'll answer a question in specific and then I'll go to the more general outlook, because he referred to that gloomy outlook, and I welcome the opportunity to correct the record.

I know the DeFehr company. Of course, we're disappointed to hear that the company is pivoting, but I would inform him that, to the one question he asks, of course, there would've been notice to the government because there would be a requirement in statute for a company with greater than 50 employees to make those plans known to the minister. However, not to this minister; that would've been the minister responsible for Labour. And so, that member would—or, that minister would have received that notice. I don't know in what time preceding the public announcement.

Nevertheless, page 111 in the budget clearly shows that as the COVID-19—as businesses were coming out of COVID-19, we had a very, very strong year of growth, including in the area of manufacturing. As a matter of fact, manufacturing sales are reported in this budget from December 21st of being 11.8 per cent up.

So I'm directly refuting the member's doom and gloom that somehow, manufacturing, he says, is on the decline in Manitoba. It is only on the decline in his own mind. When you actually look at the facts, manufacturing sales are up 11.8 per cent; it might be one of the largest jumps year-to-year recorded in the province in the last 20 years.

That's in addition to the second lowest annual unemployment rate last year, reported at 6.4 per cent. That's in addition to the record-setting retail sales topping \$24.1 billion. That's in addition to the largest farm cash receipts in history, beating last year's record by \$1.3 billion. Farm cash receipts annual growth ranks first in the country at 19.3 per cent.

And as I said, record-breaking manufacturing sales. I'm going to read a sentence from page 111, under economic review: record-breaking manufacturing sales eclipse the \$20 billion mark for the first time in Manitoba's history.

I then cite for him, as I carefully watch the clock, page 52: examples of large and medium-scale projects that were completed, under way or announced in 2021 including manufacturing projects there as well.

So, I would say to the member, it is exactly this government's leadership that is helping—businesses of course, and industries—do the heavy lifting, but they need the conditions in which they can succeed. And this government is working hard to create the conditions in which employers can build, can expand, can reinvest in their businesses and in their people and in training, and we will continue to do so while the member claims without any evidence, somehow, that the sky is falling.

Where we say, as a government, that indeed, the sky is the limit when it comes to manufacturing.

Mr. Wasyliw: Thank you, Minister.

Now, other provinces have been attempting to support Ukraine by looking at how their economies contribute to the Russian economy and by divesting from it. As the minister knows, Manitoba has a number of provincially controlled pension funds. Crown corporations also have billions in equities. Alberta has done a review of what investments are under provincial control in order to divest from any equities that are Russian-backed.

Has any initiative been done in Manitoba to assess Russian-held equities and, if not, would the Province commit to undertaking such a review and commencing that divestment?

* (15:50)

Mr. Friesen: I welcome the opportunity to respond to the member's question.

The member's referring to sanctions related to Russia. He's referring to the Special Economic Measures Act, which is a federal order in order to respond to the gravity of Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. Those regulations are in place; they impose an asset freeze and dealings prohibition on designated persons. There's a schedule that lists those persons. It includes both individuals and entities, and it is prohibited for any person in Canada, and any Canadian outside Canada, to do a few things.

(1) To deal in any property, wherever it's situated, held by or on behalf of a designated person whose name is on that list; enter into or facilitate a transaction related to such a dealing; provide any financial or other related services in respect of such a dealing; make any goods, wherever situated, available to the designated person; or provide any financial or related service to or for the benefit of a designated person.

Those persons are listed, that makes them inadmissible to Canada under the immigration act, and it imposes restrictions on certain sectors, such as the financial and energy sectors. With some exceptions, they prohibit a person in Canada and Canadians abroad from dealing in new debt, and it goes on into other various sub-areas.

So, I want to make clear to the member that Manitoba fully co-operates and is fully engaged in the work that is led by the federal government, and that work that proceeds from the enactment exactly of this Special Economic Measures Act. RCMP investigates, in Manitoba—because we are a financial hub in Canada, our diverse economy does include a very significant financial hub. We know companies that are located here in Manitoba, continue to headquarter here in Manitoba, companies like Canada Life, like Investors Group and People Corp and other companies as well. The credit unions, of course, that are both regulated in Manitoba and exist here.

All of these groups—financial institutions, investment companies—they would all have to essentially comply, identify any products, any transactions that would have anyone listed on them in this schedule that is attached to the federal order. And so I can tell the member that everything is in place, that will—that continues to help us identify if there are Russian interests, to make sure that Russia does not profit in Manitoba in a way that would advantage them in the conflict that continues in Ukraine.

I want to, though, take the last part of my answer to indicate to him that—or, give him an update on Manitoba's response to the Ukraine crisis. And I know this member in the past has criticized this province, and he said we were not doing enough, and we weren't paying enough, we weren't acting fast enough. And I reflect today that I think it was only a few weeks ago that a federal minister—I think it was Minister Leblanc—called Manitoba's response the gold standard in Canada.

And I want to flag, at this point in time, the excellent work of the deputy minister's task force that was struck to be able to co-ordinate this government's

measures and response. My Secretary to the Treasury Board sits on that task force and—as does the deputy minister for intergovernmental relations, Johana Botha, who many people will know from his key role in Emergency Measures Organization helping to lead the fight on COVID-19, and many others.

But essentially, right now, Manitoba has already welcomed 10,000 people: three times our per cap size. We have processed 6,000 Manitoba Health cards. There are record numbers of Ukrainians arriving. That number continues to increase—hundreds of hotel rooms used every single day. And efforts will continue to help resettle Ukrainians into Manitoba.

Mr. Wasyliw: Okay, I think the minister may have misunderstood my question.

There are provinces in Canada doing more—much more than Manitoba. And I cited an example. The province of Alberta has done a review of the equities under their control in order to see what Russian equities are under provincial control in Alberta for the express purpose of divesting from the Russian economy. It is now seven months after the invasion, so I take it from the minister's response, Manitoba has not done that review and Manitoba has no plans to divest from the Russian economy.

But I also want to ask the minister, because this is going to be my last question before I turn it over to my colleague, is that we know—it's been reported in the media—that there are Russian oligarch assets in Manitoba, that they control a manufacturing plant here in the city of Winnipeg. These are individuals who are on the federal sanctions list.

So, I'm going to ask the minister, has—after seven months—this government done a scan to advise itself of what Russian oligarch assets are present in Manitoba and is there a plan to address, you know, Russians, basically, oligarchs benefitting from the Manitoba economy? And why has it taken seven months to address it?

* (16:00)

Mr. Friesen: I'm happy to respond to the member's question and to clear up the record.

The member indeed actually wrote to me on this issue, and I wrote back to him to clear up any misunderstandings that he had on the issue of seizure and forfeiture of Russian assets.

In that letter to—oh, I can't use his name—in that letter to the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), I indicated that under the Special Economic Measures

Act, everyone in Canada and all Canadians outside the country must inform the RCMP of any property in their possession or control that is believed to be owned or controlled by an individual or entity placed on Canada's sanctions list, the list that I just referenced now.

I indicated to him in that letter that our government recognizes this sensitive matter; I advised him that Manitoba Justice was working with the RCMP in respect to the new sanction, when required. I indicated to him that in October of 2019, we had actually amended The Corporations Act to require privately held corporations to track beneficial ownership information and eliminate the use of bearer warrants.

I was at the table for—in Canadian finance, at the federal minister of—federal-provincial table, to be—to have these conversations on better rules for beneficial ownership that actually preceded the Russian conflict. I think then, probably in part prompted by the initial act of aggression of Russia against Ukraine, in its annexation of the peninsula.

I indicated to the member in this letter that we as a province continue to participate at the FPT table going forward, and then I said to the member, rest assured that the Manitoba government's unwavering support for Ukraine continues. I cited to him the work of the deputy minister's committee that I cited today. I talked about our support of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and of other organizations.

But I think, in addition to these things, I want to make clear to the member, he has cited activities in Alberta, but he got it wrong. Because Alberta did not take action in respect of companies; Alberta took action to terminate relationships that it had forged economically with three Russian regions.

So it used the opportunity to terminate that relation—those relationships, from a business standpoint. It rescinded those relationship letters, and they did it in order to demonstrate their support of Ukraine.

Let me indicate to the member clearly: he's not the RCMP. This is the work of the RCMP to investigate.

If the member has knowledge of Russian oligarchs operating in Manitoba, then he should report those suspicions to the RCMP. He shouldn't bring them to the committee table for the Estimates of expenditure for Finance. Get busy and phone 911, and inform the RCMP of your suspicions.

So, I have to caution him, if he's aware of anything that securities regulators, that the credit unions and their regulator, that the disclosures made by banks and lending institutions and life insurance companies and other groups headquartered in Manitoba, that they haven't gotten to, well, the member has an obligation, then, to make his suspicions known to the RCMP.

But for the purposes of the act that I referenced, this federal act, the value of these companies and these assets is listed at zero. They cannot be sold. They cannot be traded. They cannot be divested. They are frozen in order to ensure that those activities economically cannot continue in such a way to advantage Russia in this time of conflict.

Let me simply conclude my answer by stating, as I did, that the response of Manitoba is being heralded as the best in Canada in terms of locating Ukrainians here.

And I thank the deputy minister's committee. I thank the many civil servants who are actively engaged in the work, both at the welcome centre in Winnipeg, facilitating hotel rooms, doing transactions like per diems, making payments, scheduling medical appointments.

This work continues, though, in other places: in Steinbach, in Portage la Prairie, in Dauphin, in Winkler, in Morden, in Selkirk, in Gimli; I know that we're welcoming Ukrainians there as well.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): We will be switching our focus to Hydro, so I don't know—I want to offer the minister an opportunity to change staff, if needed, and let them. If you need it, that's fine. I'd like to keep it as brief as possible, but.

Mr. Chairperson: It's agreed to recess for three minutes—I'm sorry. No recess. There will be no recess.

Mr. Sala: It's great to be here in person again to have an opportunity to discuss Hydro, you know, face to face with the minister. And I want to say off the top, I'm just grateful to all the department staff and others who are here to support him today. Looking forward to an open and transparent conversation on Manitoba Hydro.

I'd like to start by building off of some of the things that were raised today in the House earlier, beginning with the Brad Wall report. I'd like to ask the minister, you know, this report was commissioned by his government. The report ended up delivering 51 recommendations, and this government actually offered a directive to Manitoba Hydro to support the

implementation of all of those recommendations. And we know that a project group was announced, which was given accountability for instituting or implementing those recommendations.

And I'm just hoping that the minister can provide us with an update on the work that's been done to implement the 51 recommendations that were put forward in the Brad Wall report.

* (16:10)

Mr. Friesen: I welcome the member to the table and look forward to our discussion on—sorry, Finance we just talked about—on Hydro, the duties of which now fall to me and form part of my responsibilities that include both Hydro, chair of the Treasury Board and Finance.

I want to also welcome to the table at this point in time another official who I will identify: Rob Marrese is seated with me at the table. He is the ADM—the assistant deputy minister—for Fiscal Policy and Corporate Services, and has responsibilities in this Crown Corporations Secretariat. So, with the movement in government to assign Crown corporations under the responsibility of ministers, we no longer have the department of Crown services, but we still have a—staff, senior staff, and the expertise retained, and works within a secretariat which resides within my department.

Happy to have the conversation about the expert report on Keeyask and bipole, a report that was published in 2020 November by the commissioner—a broad and deep-diving report based on public documents from the Public Utilities Board, the Clean Environment Commission, internal reviews performed by Hydro, documents from Hydro and the government, interviews and written submissions of past and present Hydro executives, government of Manitoba current and retired elected members, government of Manitoba staff, other stakeholders in the genesis, project plan development, approval and construction of the Keeyask Generating Station and Bipole III transmission line and converter stations.

And as well, of course, a set of recommendations that the member refers to that come from that body of work. I understand thousands of hours of interviews, thousands of pages of review, and the report itself in its full form I believe is thousands of pages as well. I have the executive summary in front of me this afternoon.

I want to first clear up the record. I know what the member and his party have been trying to do, to

somehow say the government has solicited for this advice, and this expert report, and now the government is beholden to do everything on the list. And he's wrong. The government seeks advice all the time; I think, far more so than the NDP ever did.

I can even recall reports like a major one on procurement that was delivered to the former government in 2014 that they never read. The minister at the time said he never read the report. They got a report in procurement, I think, from PricewaterhouseCoopers, paid the bill but never touched the report. We found it on a shelf. We implemented it. We actually looked at it and it talked about shopping smarter. And we said, that's a great report, and we called them up and asked if we could re-engage in the work, and we did so.

So, we know that the previous government was not good about taking advice. We've taken advice in numerous areas. Today in the House, there was a reference to the VIRGO report. There was, of course, the David Peachey report on health care that has largely helped guide a better consolidation of health services in Manitoba, that every expert for 20 years has agreed: we're too distributed, we're too complex and we're too top-heavy. Too much administration and not enough emphasis on the delivery of services.

So—and in all those cases, government has received those reports—I'm thinking right now of the Lynn Stevenson report. I actually signed that contract with Lynn Stevenson, who came into Manitoba during COVID-19, at a very, very tragic time where we saw happening in Manitoba what had happened elsewhere, with a very, very sudden surge, a wave of COVID cases in personal-care homes who needed more understanding of how to respond. And Lynn Stevenson wrote her Stevenson report at the time.

So, I have before me the expert report on bipole and Keeyask. And what is clear in the directive that was referred to this afternoon, respecting Manitoba's response to their project, is that the directive provides instruction to Manitoba Hydro to support development and implementation of Manitoba's response—Manitoba's response to the 51 recommendations, which is a different thing than saying, Manitoba's implementation, verbatim, of the 51 recommendations.

Mr. Sala: Mr. Chair, I'm going to read to the minister the directive that was issued by his government, which he just took—or, quoted a small piece from, just so that it's on the record and it's clear the level of commitment that his government made to enacting all 51 recommendations.

The purpose—the direct—or, the purpose: this directive provides instruction to Manitoba Hydro to support development and implementation of Manitoba's response to the 51 recommendations outlined in Commissioner Brad Wall's report on the economic review of Manitoba Hydro Keeyask and Bipole III projects.

Application and scope: this directive applies to the work of the assigned provincial project team and external panel in developing a formal response to the recommendations outlined in the—Commissioner Wall's report. Scope of work to be supported by Manitoba Hydro includes assessment of the 51 recommendations from the report, determination of an action plan for each, including stakeholder engagements, ongoing evaluation processes and prescribed reporting mechanisms and implementation activities, where applicable.

The directive: Manitoba Hydro is directed to take all steps necessary to support the work of the assigned provincial project team and external expert panel in developing Manitoba's formal response to recommendations outlined in Commissioner Brad Wall's report on the economic review of Manitoba Hydro Keeyask and Bipole III projects, including—Manitoba Hydro will support the assigned project team and external expert panel in conducting their assessment of the 51 recommendations from the report—here's the important part, minister—development and implementation of required action plans and required reporting mechanisms as determined by government.

So, I think it's clear in reviewing the directive that was issued by the minister's government that there was clearly a directive to implement and to develop plans on how to implement reporting mechanisms for all 51 recommendations.

And we are clearly hearing some—you know, some concern or that this government is getting cold feet about some of the recommendations in the report. You know, yesterday, in media, he mentioned something along the lines that he liked the report and it had some good recommendations, but we seem to be seeing a real walking-back of what his government had originally directed Hydro to do in support of implementing those recommendations.

And so, I'd ask the minister, I guess, at this point: if he's not interested in implementing all of the recommendations and he doesn't intend on ensuring that all 51 are implemented, which of the 51 recommendations are currently being worked on?

* (16:20)

Mr. Friesen: Yes, the member has chosen to read in sections of the directive to Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board in respect of the expert report on Keeyask and Bipole. That's his prerogative, but it's exactly as I've stated.

I've got a copy of the directive in front of me right now. It's a public document. There is a clear reference to the fact that Hydro should support development implementation of Manitoba's response—response to the 51 recommendations of the commissioner's report. It indicates the directive applies to the work of the assigned provincial project team, of which I'll speak in just a second, and the external panel in developing a formal response to the recommendations.

And the scope of the work supported by Hydro includes an assessment of the 51 recommendations, a determination of an action plan for each of the recommendations, including stakeholder engagements, ongoing evaluation processes and prescribed reporting mechanisms and implementation activities where applicable. And then it says Manitoba Hydro will take the steps to support the work of the provincially assigned project team and the expert panel.

So exactly as I said, the government solicits for advice from experts. The government has received this report on bipole and Keeyask and what went wrong. And the government has said to Hydro: We will work together at building a stronger framework, and I can't wait to get to the discussion of actually what the recommendations say.

I welcome the member's interest in it. I hope he has read the report and I hope he understands our shared interest as a Legislature in creating stronger safeguards for major capital projects, especially at Hydro. I hope that he is willing to be a mechanism and a means by which his party comes to actually face the cold, harsh truth of the ways in which they: hid information of Manitobans; hid project cost escalations knowingly from the regulator because they knew that those cost escalations at that time would factor largely into the decision of that regulator; hid cost escalations in the billions of dollars from Manitobans; entered into contracts that assigned risk inappropriately back to Hydro and away from contractors; mismanaged the business case that underlied—underlay—underlied—went under, supported, I should say, the actual creation of these assets.

I can recall when these conversations started and former ministers of the NDP government talking

about this as Manitoba's oil. And my members at the table will recall, Manitoba's oil, that this was our oil that we would essentially put into markets. They said, they promised Manitobans that these assets, when created, would cost ratepayers nothing.

So, I do welcome the member's interest in principle in this area of examination. I think it is key for us as legislators to be able to grapple with the content. I think it is reckless, I think it is obtuse, to somehow say there are no good pieces of advice that came from thousands of interviews and thousands of documented pages of testimony. Talking to hundreds of expert witnesses. It seems the NDP way to dismiss that; it certainly isn't ours.

Governance of this project, the purpose of the expert panel that he referred to, is to provide advice, guidance and direction to the interdepartmental project team responsible for developing the action plan. I can make the member aware that that panel consisted of Mark Podlasly, Tim Stanley, Chris Gaue.

I have met with this group, I have exchanged information, I've asked them the status of their work. Their work has now concluded. They have provided their advice back to the working group; the working group is analyzing that information.

Their work largely centred around capital projects and procurement, and there will be other whole areas I'll speak to in my next response.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the last part of the answer, there.

I'd like just to simply ask the minister, then, to elaborate on that, and just to share what that working group is focused on. Which recommendations are forming the focus of their work?

Mr. Friesen: Yes, I'm happy to continue my response where I left off.

So, that expert panel—and I just indicated the membership of that group—I'd be happy to share the impressive biographies of this work as well, because remember: in rejecting this entire expert report, that member is also rejecting the 120 years of combined expert capability, experience and capacity of this leadership group.

And I would be really happy to talk about the fact that Mark Podlasly is the director of economic policy at the First Nations Major Projects Coalition. This member, by discounting the entire report, is discounting this individual's capacity and expertise.

Tim Stanley's an engineer and president at Stratice Consulting. Chris Gaue's an engineer and former president of project delivery at Infrastructure Ontario.

So, by rejecting en masse all the recommendations—the NDP are on record, this member's on record saying, this report has absolutely no value. He says the people who worked on this report have no credibility. They've said it in the House.

Mark Podlasly, he says, Tim Stanley, Chris Gaue—I've met these individuals; I've shared time with them. I'm incredibly impressed with the depth of knowledge, the sincerity with which they have approached this exercise, the 'earnestwithness' with which they have applied themselves and delivered back information for consideration.

So, I would caution the member, when he's reflecting so incautiously on this two-year body of work, that he's very, very incautiously dismissing experts that are on the Canadian landscape, who consult across the world, who—one of these individuals told me about his work, I think, on three different continents. Very impressive, seeing capital projects up close and personal.

And what I was able to learn in my short time with them is, there are ways you can do this better. There are, as in everything, best practices that can be observed. There are ways to manage rest—risk, even of these proportions. There are ways to test better for project progress against completion deadlines. There are ways to enter into better agreements with contractors to translate that risk and penalty and accountability back to them.

* (16:30)

It wasn't done in this case. And in some cases, I remember those individuals saying to me it should have been obvious. It should have been obvious because these things aren't—they're complex, but they're not rocket science.

In other words, though, I wanted to go to the scope of their work, because the member asked about it. So, the scope of this work taken on by the expert panel was to provide direction and guidance and challenge the plans and actions of the project team.

So it was essentially bolting on their expertise to this internal group, which would have included people in the grounds services, secretariat, here in government, people in the Department of Finance, people at

Hydro, people at the Public Utilities Board and others as well.

The parameters of their work included the decision to enter into cost-reimbursable contracts. It included the impact of project labour agreements on project costs and the high proportion of construction work conducted by out-of-province companies, specific examination of contracts. And this—I would love to spend an hour on with the critic, because this is a story that has not been adequately told in Manitoba.

For years, the former premier—the former NDP premier—spoke about the incredible job creation at Keeyask. Only an hour ago in these proceedings, the former critic was talking about his concern about revenues not being realized in jurisdiction. Well, there's no greater example in the 21st century than on Keeyask, where so much of the workforce came from outside Manitoba and so much of that taxation was paid in other jurisdictions.

I'm happy to continue to share with the member other parts of the panels, guiding principles and parameters of their examination.

Mr. Sala: It's very disappointing to not get a clear answer on anything. I think people watching or anyone who's tuning into this would feel the same way.

I think these responses are the kind of responses that make people feel disenchanted by the political world, by folks doing these jobs that we're doing. And I hope that the minister can endeavour to provide information and actually respond to questions that are being answered, because the questions I'm asking are important questions that I think Manitobans deserve the answers to, especially given the impacts—the potential impacts of the recommendations that were put forward by the Wall report and, if they are to be implemented, there could be significant impacts on Manitoba Hydro, especially given some of the recommendations suggest things along the lines of selling off core assets, privatization and contracting out.

And I hope the minister can also understand why we would be skeptical of a report that was authored by an ex-Conservative-premier. And not only was he the author of the report, he was the second ex-Conservative-premier who was asked to lead the development of that report. So, I hope he can understand why it might be a little difficult for us as the opposition to accept its recommendations. I'm sure inside there somewhere, he understands our reasoning for that.

I'm going to move on now to ask another question that's timely that was in the media today relating to Hydro, and that is the recent revelation that the minister is receiving input and advice from Mr. Sandy Riley. I'd like to ask the minister about the nature of the advice that he's being provided and if he can comment on the type of matters that Mr. Riley is advising him on.

Mr. Friesen: Well, I thank the member for the question, and I'll divide my time and I'm happy to discuss further Mr. Riley's engagement with the government, but I did want to finish the answer I was providing to him that actually was giving the full scope of work of the expert panel.

So, the member suggests I'm obfuscating, but I'm actually reading into the record the scope of work of the expert panel. And that was the question he posed: What was the work of the expert panel and what was their—I'm paraphrasing—what were they supposed to examine, he said.

So, just to finish that answer, yes, the panel was asked to, you know, of course, look into that—the work of construction companies who were out of province. Panel was also asked to provide input and guidance related to the examination of the Bipole III routing decision—why a costlier west route through Manitoba than the less costly east route, and also asked to provide input and guidance on the failure of Hydro to disclose the escalating cost estimates for Keeyask to the PUB, which I directly referenced in my previous response.

In preparation for their work, the expert panel was told to review pertinent documents, consider best practices, which I referred to in my previous answer and have access to relevant information and personnel in Manitoba Hydro as it relates to the scope of the work, which I referenced in my first response on Hydro this afternoon, reading from the preamble of the expert report.

The timing is also mentioned. The member asked about timing, and it indicates here that a specific plan to address—notice that the term say to address each recommendation. It does not say a specific plan to implement each recommendation exactly as it is written. Doesn't say that. It's to address each recommendation to be given.

And then it talks about the measurable progress and how measurable progress will be made. And then it talks about specific information on decisions to enter into cost-reimbursable contracts, impacts of labour

agreements, commenting on those things—so essentially, going a lot towards the procurement side of the exercise.

And then it talks at the end about a formal response document publicly released that basically updates the public and updates the critic, as well, in a response to the Wall report. And again, it says in response to the Wall report.

So I can indicate to that member, that work is under way. This expert committee has concluded its—essentially concluded its work, delivered its work to the task force or the working group that exists. They are considering that and the update to Manitobans will come.

And I won't read any more on that document. We can return to that subject as the member would like.

On the subject of Mr. Sandy Riley and giving advice to government, yes, I mean, our government receives advice. It's not the only expert that we receive advice from. Just a couple of public ones that the member will know of: expert advisory panel in Environment, Climate and Parks, formed November the 8th of 2018; the Student Advisory Council in Education formed last year; the minister's advisory committee in Seniors—I'm very proud to have a constituent who sits on that committee formed in spring of this year; the Manitoba Immigration Advisory Council, formed in February of this year.

And I have, as an adviser in Hydro, Mr. Sandy Riley—I'm guessing, here, but I think probably Mr. Riley began to act in that capacity in March—maybe February, maybe March. I can go back and check my records. My special assistant who is here with us today—I must name him, Mr. Connor Verry—can help me check to see when those dates are on the calendar.

But essentially, why Mr. Riley? I think he's highly qualified to be acting in this capacity. He is a former board chair of Manitoba Hydro. He's an experienced and influential executive in Winnipeg's financial industry. He has extensive governance experience. He is a celebrated Manitoban, a recipient of the Order of Canada and the Order of Manitoba. He has belonged to the Fraser Institute, the Canada West Foundation, Allstream. He led the Pan American Games in Winnipeg in 1999.

* (16:40)

And we are happy to be working with him. We receive advice from Mr. Riley. He has signed

'confidentiality' agreements. He meets with me on occasion, and I enjoy our conversations and our shared interest in stabilizing Hydro and keeping rates low.

Mr. Sala: So, I guess the concern here is that we've got people who are not accountable to Manitobans who are offering advice and are, you know, mysteriously working in the shadows here, providing information to the minister that will ultimately affect decision making at Manitoba Hydro.

And so, again, I think it would be important for Manitobans to know, to understand what it is—which areas that Mr. Riley is providing guidance on. This is of concern, of course, because as chair of Manitoba Hydro, Mr. Riley was responsible for Hydro bringing forward a 7.9 per cent hydro rate increase during his time as chair. He had a particularly aggressive view of Hydro's finances and seemed to want to drastically increase Hydro's revenues.

And given this government's record on legislating hydro rate increases, raising costs on Manitobans, proposing yet another bill that will seek to legislate hydro rate increases on Manitobans, I hope the minister can understand why there's some concern about this individual and his perspectives coming to, once again, influence decision making at Hydro.

So, I'd ask the minister again if he can clarify which areas specifically the—Mr. Riley is providing guidance on to him, as minister.

Mr. Friesen: What I find particularly interesting today is the concern put on the record today by the critic for Hydro; concern about the individual who I've tapped on the shoulder to provide advice from time to time because of his expertise and his background in business and his high standing in the community and his willingness to do so with no remuneration, to simply be at the table and provide advice. Why?

Because I think if people know Mr. Riley, they do understand that he sincerely loves this province and spent his whole life building it. But why I find it concerning today at the table, that the member expresses concern, is that on December 2nd of 2020, his leader, who I can't name, but the Leader of the Opposition party said about Mr. Riley: Led by respected business person, Sandy Riley.

And in October of 2020, his—Leader of the Opposition said: Gone are the days when you could have Sandy Riley, a well-respected man in the business community, somebody with a lot of expertise,

somebody who I may not agree with at all times, but who was independent, end quote.

But even more surprising than these quotations, which clearly state that the opposition has high regard for Mr. Riley, for his independence, for his business experience; even more surprising than that is that on December the 4th of 2019, this critic for Hydro said, and I quote: Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we look at what took place—I mean, frankly, the chair of this board, Mr. Sandy Riley, one of Manitoban's most well-known and respected business people, end quote.

So, it must be uncomfortable today for the member to learn that his own words in Hansard convict him. I thank the member for these representations of his support for this adviser of mine on issues pertaining to Hydro. I thank his leader for those indications of support, for his independence and for his business experience, somebody with a lot of expertise, it goes on to state.

To the member's question about what kind of issues: well, there's a lot of issues that Hydro is facing. I think in the very first meeting I had with Mr. Riley, we ran a tally of what we thought were the fundamental challenges facing Hydro at this time.

And, indeed, probably every minister in this province responsible for Hydro since its inception has had a similar conversation with people. I've had that conversation with my deputy minister. I've had that conversation with senior officials in the government, with the assistant deputy minister, with the executive director. I've had that conversation with the CEO for Hydro. I've had that conversation with the previous board chair for Hydro, had that conversation with the current board chair for Hydro.

So the member would understand that we have challenges in this province because of the NDP's massive overexpenditures on capital projects that are now owing to a tripling of Hydro's debt in a space of time of less than three years, a debt that now sits at \$24 billion. That's a challenge of Hydro that Mr. Riley and I discussed.

We talk about the importance of energy policy. We talk about the work of Hydro to develop an integrated resource plan. We talk about the importance of the Public Utilities Board in future having a better ability to guide and to oversee and adjudicate when a government decides it's time to create a new dam and to test and to probe and to oversee and ask important questions on behalf of ratepayers, to make sure that a government like the NDP isn't led away in

their exuberance to do things that are not in the interest of ratepayers.

We talk about the transition to green energy. We talk about electrification. We talk about the contracts with the US states, including Wisconsin and Minnesota. We talk about spot markets. We talk about interest rates, and we talk about the need to keep rates low for Manitobans. Those are the things we talk about.

But let's make one thing clear: the member has made a fundamental error. He said that it is Mr. Riley who makes decisions. Mr. Riley provides advice; government, the minister, the chair, the CEO and others make decisions for Hydro.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the response from the minister.

The minister will, of course, know that we can respect someone's role in our communities, business community, any community, and have significant disagreements with those people at the same time.

And while Mr. Riley clearly has accomplished a lot, his perspective on Hydro's finances were put in question by the Public Utilities Board itself and the large number of independent experts who, in response to their 7.9 per cent rate increase request, returned with a 3.8 per cent rate increase.

So the concerns there, I think, are just about the perspective that he brings forward in terms of Hydro's finances, and those are perspectives that could have a significant financial impact on Manitobans at a time when many are facing an affordability crisis, and that worry persists regardless of the fact that he is an accomplished business person.

I would like to move on to another area of concern. We seem to have 10 minutes remaining here.

I want to ask the minister about Manitoba Hydro Telecom, which the minister will be familiar with, of course, as the Minister responsible for Hydro.

Manitoba Hydro Telecom was a subsidiary of Manitoba Hydro that was situated underneath the Manitoba Hydro International umbrella, as the minister would know. They were previously responsible for governing all of the fibre optic network that we've built across this province connecting hydro stations, and for leveraging the fibre optic network to expand access to broadband for Manitobans across this province, especially in rural or northern regions.

The minister will also know that his government has decided, or saw fit to, wind down Manitoba Hydro

Telecom, a subsidiary that was earning significant amounts of revenue for Manitoba Hydro that helped to keep rates low, and that there are a number of major questions to be answered about the status of that—the handover of that fibre-optic network, which was previously governed by Manitoba Hydro Telecom, over to Xplornet.

* (16:50)

I'd like to ask the minister to offer this committee, offer us here a status update on the work of Xplornet in expanding broadband access to Manitobans.

Mr. Friesen: I thank the member for the question. I'm happy to provide a response to him.

I do want to—and I don't say this in any way to obstruct, but I will advise the member that part of his interest will lie on this subject with the Minister responsible for Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services (Mr. Helwer), because it is that department that holds the contract, but I'm happy to answer questions here.

I did want to revert for one minute in the beginning of my answer, though, because I did not want to let an assertion that the member made earlier stand unrefuted. This government has brought no legislation that is intended to mandate or require the annual raising of hydro rates. We have brought a bill designed to do exactly the opposite.

This government, he knows, has made pledges on keeping life affordable to Manitobans. And we are making those pledges real with things like a historic education property tax rebate to Manitobans, but also through our affordability payments we've just announced recently to families with children and seniors of low income. And part of that affordability pledge includes Bill 36.

And Bill 36, I imagine, will be an area of our exploration in these proceedings. But we simply cannot start at the first day with these interactions, with this false proposal that the member makes.

I am reading from the explanatory note of the bill, and it clearly says—because there is a section in this bill that deals with electricity rates and how those rates rise over time—but what it says is that when approving rates with this bill, the PUB is to be guided by Treasury Board-approved capital expenditure programs and government directives to Hydro and debt-to-capitalization targets. And it says—and I think I'm reading from the wrong section.

There we go. And then it says that the rate of increase for a year cannot exceed 5 per cent—per cent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less.

I think it is deplorable that the official—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order.

I would just like to remind the minister that he's not allowed to be speaking about or referring to a bill that's currently before the Legislature.

Mr. Friesen: I have trouble accepting the guidance you're offering. I'm asking for a clarification, because the member himself referenced Bill 36 only 10 minutes ago.

Could you give me your advice again and indicate why the member could ask questions about Bill 36 but I could not respond to his questions on Bill 36?

Mr. Chairperson: I would like to explain that the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) mentioned Bill 36 within the context of a larger question, and what was the difference was that—was the minister was going into more detail specifically about Bill 36, and that work is to be done in the standing committee.

Mr. Friesen: Could you please provide guidance to me on establishing parameters within which I can respond to the false allegation that the member made about the bill that he referenced and still comply with the Clerk's wishes?

Mr. Chairperson: I would say to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) and just reiterate that the member for St. James did not ask a question specifically about Bill 36. He referenced it within the context of a larger question, and the minister is answering specifically and providing detail more specifically on 36, not the broader question.

Mr. Friesen: Then I would broadly respond to the member and say that he mischaracterized the bill, and so without citing provisions from the bill, I would say the bill is designed to keep rates affordable.

I hope that's within the parameters of what I can state without a direct reference to the name or number of the bill.

I'm looking forward to our discussions that will continue over the next day and beyond at the member's leading on the subject of bipole, Keeyask and other concerns pertaining to the Xplornet contract.

Mr. Sala: It's 5 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

CHAMBER

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:00)

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 of Executive Council.

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 would just like to thank the First Minister for her participation in this Committee of Supply for this budgetary process, as well as acknowledging her staff who participated, as well, and offer my thanks.

And with that, just want to conclude the debate.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I just likewise want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his questioning during this time in Estimates, an important process, obviously, in the legislative process.

So, appreciate that and his staff as well.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, we will now turn to the resolution for this department.

And we will now consider item 2.1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 2.1.

Mr. Kinew: Yes. I'd like to move an amendment—a motion, sorry.

I move, seconded by the member for Thompson (Mr. Redhead), that line item 2.1, 1(a), be amended so that the Premier and President of the Executive Council's salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Kinew: I would call this one a golden oldie or a blast from the past, but this would just roll back the 20 per cent increase to ministerial salaries that Mr. Pallister instituted in his first year.

So, just bringing it back to a previous level, there.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, the question before the committee is the motion moved by the official leader—the honourable official Leader of the Opposition.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour, say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: I do believe the Nays have it.

An Honourable Member: On division.

Mr. Chairperson: On division? The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: On division.

Mr. Chairperson: On division.

The motion is accordingly defeated, on division.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: We now move to resolution 2.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,511,000 for Executive Council, General Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

* (15:10)

This completes the Estimates of Executive Council.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is from the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

Should we briefly recess to allow the minister and critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next department?

Committee is in recess.

The committee recessed at 3:10 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:16 p.m.

INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION AND NORTHERN RELATIONS

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, just before we begin, I want to make sure the minister can hear me.

Minister, could you give me a nod or a thumbs up or say something? Minister, I cannot hear you.

Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): How about now? Can you hear me now?

Mr. Chairperson: I certainly can hear you now.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Okay, great. Yes, and I can hear you fine, so.

Mr. Chairperson: And, Minister, are you ready to start?

Mr. Lagimodiere: I'm ready to start, yes.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

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 Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations. At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and I would ask the minister and the critic to please introduce the staff in attendance.

Okay, Minister, you are welcome to introduce your staff, but not obligated to if you so choose.

Mr. Lagimodiere: I will introduce my staff. I'm joined here today by my deputy minister, Jerry [phonetic] Akerstream, and Frankie Snider, our assistant deputy minister of policy and strategic initiatives, and Joanne Castro-Velez, director of financial services.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Just to, kind of, pick up on where we, kind of, ended off the last time we were in Estimates. Again, we were doing this with most of us choosing to participate in person.

In regard to the healthy foods initiative, for the third year in a row, the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative was underspent: \$1.297 million was allocated for this program, yet only \$1.079 was spent. That's \$200,000 left unspent.

Can the minister explain why?

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, just give me a wave when you'd like to respond.

Mr. Lagimodiere: The underexpenditures were primarily due to underexpenditures related to COVID and communities not being able to come forward with projects that they had originally planned.

Mr. Bushie: Can the minister then clarify exactly the \$200,000 that was left unspent: is that going to remain unspent, or is that going to be allocated somewhere else within the program?

* (15:20)

Mr. Lagimodiere: Our target is to make sure that the entire budget is spent this year so nothing will be left.

Mr. Bushie: So which additional programs will that \$200,000 be spent on?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, the food security projects and programming is delivered by several community-based organizations including the Bayline Regional Roundtable, Four Arrows Regional Health Authority, Frontier School Division, Food Matters Manitoba and the Northern Association of Community Councils.

Additionally, the program supports initiatives through partnerships with the Northern Manitoba Food, Culture and Community Collaborative, and the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba. The initiatives target communities in more than 80 per cent of the province, including First Nations, Indigenous reconciliation and northern relations communities, and northern municipalities.

For example, over the life of the program, in 2018-19, approximately 2,488,000 pounds of healthy food has been accessed since 2010-2011, when the record-keeping program began. Projects have accessed over \$8.8 million in funds for external sources to support and complement activities in kind. Soft support from the stakeholders has been valued at approximately \$3.5 million.

So the additional expenditures will come from a combination of regular core programming, from discretionary spending through community proposals and community-based education programs.

Mr. Bushie: Well, thank you to the minister for that explanatory note and the mandate as to the funding and the expending criteria for the program, but it doesn't answer the question about the \$200,000 that is left unspent and where that \$200,000 specifically is going to be spent on, which projects and by what date.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Just to answer the question, we will allocate the dollars on an add-needed basis through community requests moving forward and we continue to work with all of the communities at the grassroots level to try and meet their needs. The anticipated expenditures—we continue to be—to use the existing criteria that are already in place—to meet these community needs.

Mr. Bushie: Last week, here in the Chamber, we had Bill 200, The Orange Shirt Day Statutory Holiday Act, before the Chamber, and it was voted down by the government, including by the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations (Mr. Lagimodiere), standing also in—to be clear—standing in his orange shirt to vote against that piece of legislation to make that a statutory holiday.

Can the minister explain why he voted against making Orange Shirt Day a statutory holiday?

Mr. Lagimodiere: As the Minister responsible for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, I have a role and responsibility to ensure that, if I'm voting for legislation, that it has the ability to actually deliver on what is being asked for from our First Nations leaders, from our survivors and from their families.

And we have been engaging with survivors—over the course of the summer, our department engaged with over 600 survivors in the province to see how they would want this day commemorated or recognized. We've had ongoing meetings with grand chiefs, with First Nations leaders. We continue to reach out to families—even the week that the bill was here, the day before the bill was to be voted on, we had several meetings set up for that day.

And through the extensive consultation, we learned that that extensive consultation did not occur with the opposition party, and the bill as presented would have presented a day that would be 'seen' as a statutory holiday only, and that is not the intent of the day in discussions with all of the leadership and the survivors that we met with. The intent of the day is more of a day of education, a day of engagement, of listening, of learning, of reflecting and having a day that is distinction-based to be able to recognize and commemorate those that were lost in residential schools.

Mr. Bushie: So, if I'm hearing the minister correctly, then, in the discussions and the consultations that he had in that time, then—the survivors, the leaders, the community members, the grassroots members—they,

in fact, voiced their concerns to you that it should not, then, be a statutory holiday?

* (15:30)

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, if you're talking, I need you to wave first so I can recognize you. Also, I cannot hear you. Honourable minister, go ahead.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Can you hear me now?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, I can. Please go ahead.

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, yes, that came across loud and clear, that they didn't want the day to be recognized as a statutory holiday. Even—I was shocked, you know. We had a very, very busy day on the 30th, attended many events throughout the city here. And I—the following day I went out to close our cabin down, and when I got there, I was surprised and very disappointed to see the number of people that were out at the lake at their cottages.

And when I asked them how they had spent September 30th, they told me that they came out on the 29th, out to the cottages, because it was a long weekend for them. And for survivors and family, this is a sombre day. And it should be a day of reflection and, as I said, a day of education and learning. A day where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people get together and sit down and talk about the impacts of the residential school system, where they talk about the children that were lost in these schools, where we talk about the ongoing effects of the residential school system, and we listen and learn to each other.

And, you know, we suggested that the day should be a day where the survivors, where First Nations individuals could sit down with the non-Indigenous community and explain the effects that the residential school system had on them, that the effects the residential school system continues to have on them, and how they were dealing with that.

And, you know, just, what's it like to grow or what has it been like to grow up being Indigenous? And have the non-Indigenous community engage and say, I understand; I get what you're saying. So that's why it's important that we focus on the day of education moving forward and not focus on the point that a statutory holiday would be seen more as a general holiday for the public where it's a day off; I can sleep in; I don't have anything I have to do today; I don't have to report to work.

Mr. Bushie: So, for the record, I'd like to reiterate the minister's comments where he mentioned that he had clearly heard that Indigenous community members

did not want to see this as a statutory holiday, and he says he clearly heard that in his discussions, which I would dispute.

And, at the same time, the minister mentioned his disappointment in going out to the lake and seeing a number of people out there closing the cabins, but at the same time, Mr. Minister, you were also at the lake. So that's a little disheartening for you to be able to call out people on that regard, when you yourself were doing that also.

And I would respectfully dispute the fact that you heard loud and clear that it should not be a holiday. September 30th, I was privileged enough to join families, survivors at The Forks, and then to participate in the walk to the RBC Convention Centre and participate in the powwow and the grand entry. And numerous times throughout that, I specifically heard the chant, why vote no? And that was clearly directed at members of the PC caucus and yourself, as to why you voted no to that piece of legislation and, instead, kind of hung everything on the fact that it had the word holiday in it rather than perhaps introduce an amendment, then, to look at a different definition of the word holiday.

And maybe that's a little bit out of touch on behalf of the minister's department to try and use the wording of a potential piece of legislation meant to do a lot of good and meant to encourage everything that you just spoke of.

But instead, use the word to try and defeat that, so at some point in time perhaps you can bring forth your own piece of legislation for whatever reason: political gain or whatever—what have you. But that's very disheartening because I was participating in that walk, to be able to see that and hear that, and hear those questions. And I've clearly heard those questions loud and clear throughout this whole process, months and months before I brought forth that legislation to make that a holiday.

And maybe the definition of the word holiday is something that we need to discuss because it clearly is a day to reflect, a day to have that opportunity to communicate, Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks alike. But during that walk from The Forks to RBC, I had the opportunity to talk to a lot of folks: a lot of folks from all across Manitoba; survivors themselves; family members; extended family members; people that were intergenerationally impacted.

And they also shared the fact that some of their family members could not be there. They could not be

there for a variety of different reasons, but top of mind is the fact that there was very large miscommunication as to whether or not they had to go to work or their office, or wherever they may have worked was closed, or their school or wherever they may have been, to allow them that time to come and participate.

So there was lots that still missed out, and they missed out because of that kind of miscommunication as to what the importance of that day is. And that clearly could have been communicated by the government voting yes, in favour of making that a statutory holiday so that everybody across the province would have been able to participate wherever they may have been; not necessarily at The Forks or at the RBC Convention Centre, but even in their own communities.

And that was very disheartening to hear that and see that and then have the government stand up, in their orange shirts, and vote no—vote no, saying you don't have that opportunity to talk, you don't have that opportunity to communicate, you don't have that opportunity to be with your family members, which is everything that residential school took away—took away that ability to be at home with your own children even. And a lot of people didn't have that opportunity because of—Orange Shirt Day by this government was just another day to them.

So, does the minister then, is he saying then that Orange Shirt Day should not be a statutory holiday here in Manitoba?

Mr. Lagimodiere: And just to set the record straight, I think it's important that the member opposite realize that facts are the key to understanding and sharing, and promoting misinformation is a disservice to all Manitobans, in my opinion.

He states that we are out of touch with what's going on when, in fact, we have done in-depth engagements, like I said, with survivors, with First Nations leadership surrounding the importance of this day and how it should be best commemorated. And we continue to have those ongoing discussions with leadership about this very important day.

The member himself had an opportunity to come to this office and meet with me, as the minister, and discuss why he thought we should make this a statutory holiday. It wasn't important enough for him to come to me, the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, to talk about this, as it is.

I said previously, we've met with more than 600 survivors. How many did the NDP meet with and get their input from? We talked to the day school survivors and their family members, to hear their opinions, their perspectives on this day.

We've talked to businesses out there, to all Manitobans that we can engage in. And every group we talked to, we continued to ask them, are there any other individuals you think we should engage with? And we continued to engage with these individuals.

* (15:40)

To have those—it's important to have those distinction-based commemorations and a remembrance of the day, and that's an important message that's come across. Not anywhere in the legislation proposed by the member opposite did they have anything about being distinction-based, or even recognizing any of the groups out here in Manitoba.

There are many ways to observe a day of remembrance, like we do for Remembrance Day. Years ago, I remember that Remembrance Day was a day where schools remained open. They remained open for a single purpose. That was to allow students to have half the day that was devoted to the education around the importance of Remembrance Day. There are many options that are open to us here. We are working hard. We will get this right.

It's not about just having a day called a statutory holiday. And, you know, the NDP going out there and telling everybody, hey, we could have got this statutory holiday through, and if you thought down the road that there are other things we needed to do with the holiday, then we could make amendments to the legislation down the road.

He knows himself, legislation is difficult to get through. It takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of effort from all involved in the government. And we will do this, and we will get it right.

Mr. Bushie: Well, of course, legislation is tough to get through when you have a government that does not want to work with Indigenous communities.

And I—again, just like the last time we were in Estimates, the minister chooses to be very condescending to members on this side—in particular, Indigenous members.

How many members and how many people and how many 'individuals' did I talk to? We do it every day of our life, Mr. Minister. We live that within our

communities and our families, including just yesterday: the Indian and residential school gathering for the southeast tribal council area. I had the opportunity to go and share a few words and talk with individuals in that room that I've talked to many times in my entire life.

I did not need to be a member of the Legislative Assembly to be able to get out there and have this communication and share these stories and hear those lived experiences. But I challenge the minister to say, is that what you needed to be? Did you need to be an MLA? Did you need to be a minister in order to have these discussions?

Because I recall, in your first day on the job, you a-kinned residential schools to doing the right thing. So you yourself were not educated. So you did not have that lived experience that you claim to have today that we all do as Indigenous people here in Manitoba.

So when you talk about, how much people did we talk to? We talk to those people every day, so the number is in the thousands, not the hundreds. Not a checklist to say, okay, I met this group of people, I met this dynamic, this corner of the province, so I checked off that list, I did the bare minimum. Because that's what your department is doing, is the bare minimum.

And then to have the—I don't even know what the word is—to say, come knock on my door, come and beg me to help pass this legislation. That's just ridiculous and that's insulting for you to be able to share that and make members opposite feel like they have to come and beg at your door to engage this legislation and to engage this dialogue.

And you would think—and I recall your comments, and I'm a little bit of paraphrasing here, that you were going to do better, you were going to educate yourself. And not much has changed. It's still clearly the Brian Pallister way of thinking to Indigenous communities. But, then again, that is who, kind of, appointed you there, so I almost expect nothing less, which is very disappointing.

But, Mr. Minister, when we talk about this day then—and even just in your comments you're talking about the confusion that people may have had and so what they wanted this day to be and, again, you're coming back to it being a day off. It wasn't that. It was not that at all and you're clearly hearing that, but you've kind of doubled down your commitment and you said you've heard the fact that Indigenous people did not want to make this or see this become a

statutory holiday here in the province, they did not want to have that opportunity to be able to to have that day to share.

But instead, you'll get it right. Your government will get it right, are the words that you're sharing and the tone that you're giving here. And again, making it seem like Indigenous people have to come and beg to your office and beg to your government to get it right on their behalf, when clearly you're hearing what needs to be done but not doing it.

And that's very disheartening to see and very condescending to see on behalf of Indigenous people and myself being an Indigenous person here in Manitoba, Indigenous MLA here in this Chamber, to be able to made to feel like I have to come and beg at your door and—well, what do you think, sir, what do you think? Do I have your approval?

You also have not reached out to members on this side of the Chamber to see what any kind of piece legislation would look like. Orange Shirt Day has been recognized in this province for a long time now. And again, the dialogue only comes about the week before September 30th. And after that, it's forgotten by your government.

And again, until I raised this today, I'm not hearing anything about it, but I did hear loud and clear from Indigenous people and Indigenous community members and including Indigenous leadership, that this piece of legislation was very important to them.

And you're getting bogged down in the definition of the word holiday, but you're not even giving that opportunity to begin that dialogue. So again, I ask the minister, is there an intention on behalf of this government to make this a recognizable statutory holiday here in Manitoba?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Just with respect to some of the comments made by the member opposite, I'm very disappointed in the comments that he's made, especially regarding the hard work and dedication of the staff in this department, who have gone above and beyond to engage, like I said, with survivors, with family members, with communities, with First Nations leaders.

And we continue, as I said, to work with the leadership to get this right. We want to have legislation that reflects exactly what we have heard. And tell you the truth, the day before your bill came to the House, we had a grand chief in this office who told us to take it slow, to get this right. The day before your bill came for a vote.

So, obviously, there's some miscommunication there between yourself and the community out there, if you're saying that, you know, everybody—everybody out there was on board with your bill. Obviously, when they're in the office talking to us, they certainly weren't.

* (15:50)

And the member opposite seems to forget that I'm also an Indigenous man. I'm a very proud Métis, member of the Anishinabe community. My father was a day school survivor. I know what it's like growing up experiencing the effects of a father that went through day school. It was tough. And I know what it's like to be second generation. I know what it's like to reach out to the Métis and get their response to this legislation and their concerns, reaching out to the Inuit in Manitoba and talking about their concerns.

We are committed to consultation. We're not committed to pushing something forward. And we would welcome the member to come to this office and tell me what his feedback has been from the people that engaged with—around the importance of this day and what they want to see and what he heard. We welcome that.

We continue to work on this, and we will get it right.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Just before we proceed, I do need to remind those in debate that all comments need to be made through the Chair and not directed to each other. So it's a friendly reminder. If it does happen again, I may interrupt, but I'm sure that won't be the case given this polite reminder that we do that, please.

So if you could just relay your comments through myself, the Chair, that would be in keeping with parliamentary procedure as adopted by this House.

Mr. Bushie: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for your direction on that matter. And a thank you for the—to the minister for the invitation to come into your office and do your job for you. I'm sure that'll come in due course.

I'd like a couple of questions on Peguis flooding. Peguis First Nation waited all summer to hear if this government would help build long-term flood-prevention infrastructure, yet they heard little to nothing. They experienced some of the worst flooding on record last year, and they're worried it will happen again. Does the minister know if any actions are being taken to help build long-term flood-prevention infrastructure for Peguis?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Mr. Chair, just for the record, I want to state that I did attend the Peguis community with Chief Hudson and councillors when the flooding was occurring, at my request, to see if we could attend and learn first-hand of the effects of the flooding in the community. Certainly, it was devastating to see the amount of water that was in the community and the number of homes and talk about the number of individuals that had to be evacuated from the community because of the high water levels.

We had a great tour with the chief touring us around for the day, showing us areas that were of importance to him, and following that, once the—we had set up additional meetings to come out; however, Chief Hudson had requested that we return after the flooding had subsided. We did subsequently return, myself and my deputy minister, along with the minister of M-I-T and a large contingent of his staff to talk about the flooding effects.

And I was very impressed with Chief Hudson and the council. And they didn't have the attitude of, oh, what are you going to do for me.

They came to us saying here are the problem areas; here are the areas that—the different options that we think might help to mitigate flooding in our community and surrounding area. And my colleague, the minister of M-I-T, is leading the consultation on this and is working with the Peguis community, along with the federal government, to come up with solutions—long-term solutions to the flooding in the area.

Mr. Bushie: So, as mentioned in previous discussions, in previous Estimates in previous years, the minister mentioned that his role is to ensure that the dialogue between various departments—in this case it would be the Infrastructure Department—that those communications and that dialogue was ongoing and that work was happening.

So I do want to ask the minister, to his knowledge, then, what actions are being taken to help build long-term flood prevention infrastructure for Peguis?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Again, it was—those long-term plans are currently being developed. We are still playing a supporting role with the department and Peguis First Nation. But those consultations are still ongoing between the Peguis First Nation and the federal government and our government.

Mr. Bushie: So when would we expect to see some potential solutions brought forward?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, Indigenous Services Canada and Peguis are co-chairing the flood mitigation plans, and there was a meeting set up to talk about this, but it so happened that the Queen passed away and the meetings were cancelled, and we are currently waiting to hear when they would like to set up another meeting. And we continue to look forward to work with Peguis in a collaborative and long term—to find collaborative and long-term solutions to their flooding.

Mr. Bushie: So, has the minister's department allocated any funds to this consultation process and, specifically, to Peguis?

Mr. Lagimodiere: As to the amount of funding that will be provided, that is a question best asked of the minister of MTI. Certainly, budgeting allocation for that wouldn't fall under our department, but we look forward to these upcoming meetings with Indigenous Services Canada and the chief of Peguis as the co-chair for the committee, to see what solutions they recommend or propose, and what involvement we might play in a supporting role.

* (16:00)

Mr. Bushie: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that clarification.

A couple questions on the Lake St. Martin consultation and the channel project.

In June, a judge found that the Province failed to live up to its constitutional duty to consult with First Nation communities regarding the Lake St. Martin channel. The Province then released a statement saying that, and I quote, we acknowledge that we have fallen short in our responsibilities to collaborate fully in the true spirit and intent of reconciliation, and we deeply appreciate this opportunity to hear directly from Indigenous leadership and listen to their concerns. End quote.

Can the minister outline what exactly the government got wrong in their original approach?

Mr. Lagimodiere: The question is—involves a fairly complex legal matter that I am not qualified to comment on. I do have limitations, and the M-I-T was leading the discussions here.

Our role has been to bolster relationships following these decisions. And with that, we have had some very good and very positive meetings at the community of Pinaymootang, with all of the First Nations that will be affected or involved around the northern outlet channel project.

And we continue to build strong working relationships with all of these communities.

Mr. Bushie: Yes, the minister mentioned that he isn't quite in a position to kind of speak to the—maybe the legalities of the statement that was brought forth. But it was specifically citing the true spirit and the intent of reconciliation, which is actually the—in the title of the minister's department.

So I would beg to differ that he isn't the minister qualified or responsible to answer that question.

But can the minister outline—if the original approach was wrong, can the minister explain how his government's approach has changed now, and what the approach is today?

Mr. Lagimodiere: Well, I thank the honourable member for his legal advice. And what we learned from this is that we have a very long way to go with respect to reconciliation. And we realize that there will be many challenges when it comes to reconciliation and many instances where we need to, you know, really reach out and do all we can to get the people at the table that need to be there.

Since these judgments, we have had several meetings with the First Nations involved, and we continue to build stronger relationships. We continue to listen, to learn and to develop action plans that will help enable us to move forward.

Mr. Bushie: In Estimates last spring, we learned that there was a lack of collaboration between departments regarding reconciliation and consultation policies.

Can the minister confirm whether that's changed, and can he outline specifically how departments are working together now on reconciliation and consultation with Indigenous groups and communities?

Mr. Josh Guenter, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Lagimodiere: In response to that question, our government has taken a new approach to engagement across government.

* (16:10)

We have a new ADM who is able to work across all government departments when it comes to reconciliation and consultation. We have—when First Nations reach out to us to engage on a specific topic, we reach out and try and determine all of the areas of government that may be involved with respect to their concern.

And when we engage them in meetings at the Legislature or wherever they choose to have these meetings, we try to ensure that we have representation from as many departments that overlap their concern as we can, so we can have a more-reconciliation that's more responsive from all departments in an all-at-once approach.

And it's getting a huge response from Indigenous, First Nations leaders across the province here. We're hearing that our government is setting the new standard for consultation and for engagement, something that First Nations and Indigenous communities and groups haven't seen for over 20 years, they tell us. They feel like they're—they have the ability now to reach out. And they're not afraid to pick up the phone and feel that, hey, this is going to go nowhere, this is a government that don't—won't listen to us.

I remember when I was first appointed minister and I started going out to First Nations communities and some of them were shocked, shocked to see that the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations would actually take the time to visit their communities, something they said that never happened in over 17 years with the NDP. They told me that whenever they engaged, they felt like all it was was a meeting that would fall on deaf ears.

And they are very pleased now to see that, you know, there's an opportunity, a government that's here willing to listen, willing to learn, willing to make plans to move forward and action their concerns. And I'm very proud of that, and I think everybody in our department should be very, very proud of the progress that's being made by this government and the very positive comments that are coming back to our department from all Indigenous leaders and communities.

Mr. Bushie: Thank the minister for patting himself on the back.

So, speaking about the extensive consultation and reconciliation work that the minister speaks about doing in his term as minister, but yet this year's annual report shows that consultation and reconciliation was underspent by 42 per cent, or almost a million dollars.

Can the minister explain why this is the case?

Mr. Lagimodiere: I don't know if the member opposite realizes or was aware, the last couple of years, we have been dealing with a global pandemic, specifically COVID, which is caused by a coronavirus, which happened to limit the amount of travel and not only to northern communities where, you know, of course, First Nations were trying to protect their membership

from outside individuals. With the lack of travelling and, of course, you have—you don't have the need for accommodation, you don't have the need for meals. But as soon as the pandemic hit, we knew it was important to continue our engagements.

So, we looked for alternatives that were out there that would still allow us to engage with communities and actually, the ability of Teams meetings, of Zoom meetings has allowed for very broad-based consultation meetings. You're, you know—in a Zoom meeting, you're able to engage with First Nations leaderships from many communities without having to travel to the community, and you can engage in many areas of Manitoba all at once.

So, there were savings on that end, but certainly, the amount, the extent and intensity of the meetings certainly didn't suffer because of the pandemic. This government department pivoted. It found ways and continued to meet its obligations for consultation and meetings.

Mr. Bushie: So I'm a little bit confused with the contradiction from the minister, then. In the previous answer, he just talked about how he was hearing loud and clear how great it was to see him out in the community and then when I questioned why he was underspending his consultation and his reconciliation budget, he blamed the pandemic for not being able to go out there and see the communities.

So, it's either one or the other. But, again, almost a million dollars in this year's annual report was underspent on consult-reconciliation, and prior to that, half a million dollars.

So, that's almost \$1.5 million over the two years. And while, of course, we are all very cognizant about the fact there was a global pandemic and you've used that many, many times as reasons for not reaching out and communicating with communities, but at the same time, you're also claiming that you are.

So, again, can the minister then commit—then—so the \$1.5 million over the last two years—can the minister commit to not underspending on reconciliation consultation in this next year?

* (16:20)

Mr. Lagimodiere: Just for clarification, what the member is referring to, the \$1 million being underspent, that's the department's—is underspent. The ministerial office has continued to be fairly aggressive out there in communities wherever possible, and

respecting their wishes and concerns surrounding the pandemic.

So, certainly, from the department's perspective, there was decreased project funding in resource—with respect to resource management boards with decreased expenditures there. There was decreased land and legal surveys of course, again, with restrictions placed on travel.

And, you know, the comments from the member opposite are typical and what I would expect from NDP when it—with respect to finances where results aren't a hundred per cent correlated to expenditures. And we have proven we can obtain results with engagement. We can obtain results in moving issues and concerns forward without tying that to expenditures.

And I have no doubt at all on my mind that if ever the member opposite would be elected and would be in this seat, there's no doubt that they would outspend us in every department.

Mr. Bushie: So, just to be clear, the minister has continuously talked about how much there is the need for reconciliation and consultation with Indigenous communities, yet 42 per cent underspent that specific line item in his department, and then talks about getting results, but at the same time talked about how much work needs to be done and is underspending the one main priority that his department may have.

A further question to the channel project is the announcement and—of the development of the environmental advisory committee and the \$3.1 million that was announced for that committee.

Just wondering if the minister can then share what the mandate of that committee will be.

Mr. Lagimodiere: Thanks for—the member opposite for recognizing that environmental advisory committee has been set up, and it's my understanding that leaders from the First Nations community involved will be asked to be on the committee or have representatives on the committee.

As to the specifics of what's happening there, that's a question best asked of the minister responsible for infrastructure and transportation.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Bushie: So, being that was a joint discussion between the department of infrastructure and the Indigenous Reconciliation Department, I would expect, then, that the minister is also aware of these details and aware of the makeup and the mandate of

this environment committee that was brought forth to—on the channel project.

So I also like to ask the minister, how much funds have flowed to this committee so far?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So the environmental advisory committee was announced August 17th of 2022 by MTI when they announced \$3.1 million to establish an environmental advisory committee—the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet channels project. And the committee was to provide advice and guidance in the planning, construction and operation of the project.

It was not a joint announcement with respect to that. It was a joint news release, which reflects the interdepartmental collaboration to work with the departments and the communities. However, the budgeting portion of this remains with MTI.

Mr. Bushie: As 'previously' mentioned by the minister on a number of occasions, he had mentioned that one of his roles as Minister for Indigenous Reconciliation and relations is to ensure that communication with Indigenous communities is, in fact, happening amongst various departments.

So, again, because this committee is also—has a large contingent of First Nation-Indigenous-affected communities by the channel project, again, I ask, is the minister aware of any funds that have flowed to this committee so far?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So we are aware of the fact that the committee has met, and we have been there in a supportive capacity. But with respect to the specific expenditures, that question would have to be asked by MTI.

* (16:30)

Mr. Bushie: So, again, in keeping with the thinking that the minister's department is to ensure that discussions are happening between various departments and First Nation Indigenous communities, can the minister, then, tell us what the timeline is for this environment committee's recommendations?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So this environmental advisory committee has been established with the idea it will continue to develop itself and is contingent on the needs of the community, and it is set up to be there throughout the planning, the construction and the initial operation of the channel, and, as such, it shows our government's ongoing commitment to not force First Nations into specific timelines but to be involved

and sensitive to the needs of the community throughout the entire process.

Mr. Bushie: So it was mentioned in the release that this environment committee will, quote, offer advice throughout the construction and operation of the outlet channels, end quote. But it does not say prior to any kind of construction taking place. So can the minister clarify that the environment committee's recommendations will also be made prior to construction?

Mr. Lagimodiere: With the greatest respect to the member opposite, the level of detail that he is requesting from us is outside the scope of this department. That level of detail is best directed to MTI and the minister responsible for that department.

Mr. Bushie: Thank you, Mr. Minister, for that clarification.

I have a couple of questions on the search for residential unmarked graves. The budget was \$2.5 million, and I believe it was entirely expensed according to your response from spring's Estimates.

Is there going to be any more money allocated for that program?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, the First Nations, Inuit and Red River and Métis Council on Residential Schools was established to support the Indigenous-led searches for burial sites of children who attended residential schools.

The council is co-chaired by the Province and Southern Chiefs Organization, SCO, and has representation from Indigenous leadership from organizations and government including the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Southern Chiefs Organization, the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, the Manitoba Métis Federation and the Manitoba Inuit Association.

And it's important that this remains an Indigenous-led procedure, and we will be taking our cue from the council in—as we move forward.

And with that, it has to stay an Indigenous-led approach, and so we can't comment on the fiscal needs of the council moving forward, but we are there to continue to work with them and to support.

Mr. Bushie: So, if there was an ask on behalf—and again, recognizing the fact that it is also based on the needs and the recommendations and the discussions with the council and the committee that was struck to oversee this.

If there was a desire then, or a need to ask—I don't want to put a dollar figure on it, because we really can't at this time—but if there was an ask or a need for additional funds to continue this search and this project, would the minister's—would the minister commit to doing so?

* (16:40)

Mr. Lagimodiere: As—we stated already, that, you know, with the discovery of the unmarked graves at the Indian residential schools, it was very important for us as a government to understand the role that we should play.

And after the discussions that we had with family, with survivors, with elders, knowledge keepers and leadership, it was clear; it was clear that the process should be Indigenous-led, family-centralized and distinction-based. And with that, we established the council and the committee.

And so, moving forward, it would be the committee who would decide any future needs that they might have. They would bring those needs forward to the government and, as in any other request for funding, that request would need to be forwarded to Treasury Board for consideration and approval.

But in the process, we continue to work with all levels of government to ensure that Indian residential schools are thoroughly searched the way they need to be, that they—that we follow the lead taken by our Indigenous leaders.

And the communities need to know that they are well supported by us as a government. And we—like I said, we will continue to work with them and all levels of government as needed.

Mr. Bushie: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Minister. And I absolutely agree that the needs of the communities and the committee are what need to drive the potential need for additional resources, which I'm sure at some point in time they would require, and I'm hoping that your department via Treasury Board actually support that when that comes to be.

On the other topic of residential school grave sites, in regards to the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation and the Brandon Indian Residential School cemetery, can the minister explain how his department is involved in that situation?

Mr. Lagimodiere: So, we were originally notified that the landowner was not allowing access to the land for a search, so we—we're working with the landowner,

with Sioux Valley and all other stakeholders including members of the council, the City of Brandon and the federal government to help facilitate hopefully a solution.

We continue to provide support to all those stakeholders involved, and we want to make sure that the approach is respectful to the survivors and to those interned at the burial sites.

* (16:50)

Mr. Bushie: To be more specific, a meeting took place in the third week of September with the landowner and the Province and it was decided at that time that a survey could be—proceed—the week of October the 3rd. However, on September the 29th, a day before Orange Shirt Day and truth and reconciliation day, I might point out, Sioux Valley Dakota Nation was informed by provincial representatives that they were going to be denied access to the site to complete the survey.

That doesn't really sound like working in collaboration, so can the minister then clarify why his department was the ones that informed—or the provincial representatives are the ones that intervened to deny access?

Mr. Lagimodiere: And just to, first of all, set the record straight with the comment that was made by the member, we did not intervene to deny access. Access was denied by the owner of the property and we agreed that the timing of this, on behalf of the owner, was very unfortunate. And September 30th is a very difficult time for survivors and families and would be particularly so to those who have family members possibly buried at this location.

As a department, we were forced into an intermediary role, again, when the landlord informed us that he would not grant access as promised. As such, we provided that information to Sioux Valley, and assured along with our federal colleagues that we would work together to facilitate a solution.

Mr. Bushie: So the minister mentioned that the Province is not the one that denied, but that they were forced—and the minister did use the word forced—into the intermediary role. I'm just wondering, how exactly was the Province and his department forced into that role by the landowner?

Mr. Lagimodiere: And we—by forced, I mean we were forced by the sensitivity of the situation. Our department had brokered an agreement with Sioux Valley's archeologist and the landowner to allow access to the property to perform the searches on that specific date. It was the landlord who relayed his denial to allow access to his property on that evening, and he would not relay that message himself to Sioux Valley. And out of respect for our relationship that we have with Sioux Valley on this matter, we wanted to ensure that we made contact, and—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 5, 2022

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