

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
ALTomARE, 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

Thursday, October 13, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Eighth Report

Mr. Dennis Smook (Chairperson): I wish to present the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development—

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on October 12, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 233)** – *The Engineering and Geoscientific Professions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ingénieurs et les géoscientifiques*
- **Bill (No. 237)** – *The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Poppy Number Plates) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les conducteurs et les véhicules (plaques d'immatriculation arborant le coquelicot)*

Committee Membership

- *Hon. Ms. CLARKE*
- *Ms. MORLEY-LECOMTE*
- *Mr. MOSES*
- *Mr. SANDHU*
- *Mr. SMOOK*
- *Mr. WISHART*

Your Committee elected Mr. SMOOK as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Ms. MORLEY-LECOMTE as the Vice-Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- *Mr. ISLEIFSON*
- *MLA LINDSEY*
- *Hon. Mr. GERRARD*

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following presentation on Bill (No. 233) – The Engineering and Geoscientific Professions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ingénieurs et les géoscientifiques:

Michael Gregoire, Engineers Geoscientists Manitoba

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 233)** – *The Engineering and Geoscientific Professions Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ingénieurs et les géoscientifiques*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 237)** – *The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment Act (Poppy Number Plates) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les conducteurs et les véhicules (plaques d'immatriculation arborant le coquelicot)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

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

The honourable member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Smook).

Mr. Smook: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Seine River (Ms. Morley-Lecomte), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Acting Government House Leader): I'm tabling a change in the sequence for the consideration of departmental Estimates in the Committee of Supply for today, October 13th.

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to table the following reports: Entrepreneurship Manitoba 2021-2022 Annual Report; Materials Distribution Agency Annual Report for 2021-2022; and the 2021-2022 Vehicle and Equipment Management Agency Annual Report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And I'm pleased to table a following report: the Auditor General's report, audit of information systems privileged access, dated October 2022, in accordance with the provisions of section 28(1) of The Auditor General Act.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Ministerial statements—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes time was given.

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Saturday, October 15th is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Day.

Many families and individuals mark this day by lighting a candle in the memory of their beautiful little ones whose lives ended far too soon.

The Walk to Remember was held earlier this month in St. Vital Park in Winnipeg, and provided grieving families an opportunity to support each other on a path that nobody chooses to walk but many find themselves on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, an estimated 10 to 15 per cent of pregnancies end in miscarriage in the first trimester, up to 5 per cent in the second trimester. This represents many broken hearts living and walking among us.

There are hundreds more families that live with the soul-crushing pain of the death of their infants. Often there are no explanations or answers for the passing, which only adds to the grief.

My husband and I have experienced the loss of three pregnancies. Each one represented the hopes and the dreams of an expanded family and each were loved the moment we had confirmation of their existence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government recognizes the heavy grief that is carried by Manitobans who have experienced pregnancy and infant loss, and we are grateful for the programs offered through the Women's Health Clinic. Counselling for individuals

and groups as they navigate this heartbreak is key to healing.

To all of the parents in Manitoba who are hurting today, I see you, I acknowledge your sadness, and I grieve beside you.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): Losing a child at any age of pregnancy or infancy is devastating. National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day, which is observed on October 15th, honours the lives lost to miscarriages as well as sudden infant syndrome, stillbirths and newborn deaths.

It is a day to counter the negative stereotypes surrounding infant loss through constructive conversation and action. Parents who experience infant loss should have enough time and opportunity to grieve their infants. They should not be silenced or denied time off from their regular day-to-day activities.

Currently, parents who experience miscarriages or stillbirths still have to cut into their sick leave, lose part of their paycheque or risk their jobs to take time off to heal. This is an impossible choice for many and could lead to long-term trauma if parents are not allowed time to grieve.

In some cases, mothers who have had a miscarriage in their first trimester might have difficulty asking for time off if they had not disclosed their pregnancy to their employer. Fathers, on the other hand, have to bottle up their grief. Such situations compound the problem and make life more difficult for grieving parents.

To this end, I urge the PC government to support Bill 219, which makes it possible for parents to take up to three days paid leave following a miscarriage or stillbirth. Grieving parents should not have to choose between mourning their children and putting food on the table.

Ekosi, Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, the loss of a partly grown fetus during pregnancy or an infant during the first few months of life can be very traumatic.

It is important to recognize how traumatic this can be. I will share the experience that Naomi and I had with a loss occurring after about six to eight weeks of the pregnancy. It was exhausting physically and psychologically. As Naomi expressed it to me, the body needs time to heal after a miscarriage and for the hormonal cycles to get back to normal. Naomi continues even today to mention—a few years later—that for her, her body was growing a fetus and the loss of that fetus caused hormonal changes resulted—resulting in feelings of deep emotional loss.

A cousin of mine and his wife lost a child to sudden infant death syndrome. It, too, was deeply impactful and I think may have been a trigger which led to the breakup of their marriage.

There is no easy way to deal with their—these impacts. They are often underestimated, misunderstood or overlooked. It is important that there's wider appreciation of what happens with pregnancy and infancy loss so that all can be supportive of families who are going through this process and trying to deal with a pregnancy or infancy loss.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Bruce Benson

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture): I rise today to recognize Bruce Benson, Gimli commercial fisherman, journalist, author and creator of the Flag of Humanity.

In 2008, Bruce was hiking the Appalachian Trail with his 13-year-old son. As they walked, he began to ponder what kind of world his son would inherit. He concluded the world is messed up in many ways, but almost always based on the differences between us, between us humans. He began his work on creating the Flag of Humanity, celebrating the commonality of being human.

The mantra of the Flag of Humanity is: No matter a person's religion or lack thereof; no matter a person's skin colour, nationality or politics, these differences are as nothing compared to what we have in common. We are human.

* (13:40)

Flags are powerful things. Every nation on earth has one, and over the course of human history flags or banners have played an important part in every political or social change.

Bruce has travelled with the flag to many countries, at events too numerous to mention here today: crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, a parade in mainland China and, most recently, the Old City of Jerusalem.

Gimli flies the Flag of Humanity on a flagpole at the beach year-round and for five years it has been flown periodically on the Province's flagpole at Memorial Boulevard. It is flying there once again today.

Madam Speaker, join me in recognizing and applauding Bruce Benson's quest to unite humanity and focus on our commonalities as humans and not our differences so that we may pass on a better world to our children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Johnson: I know I can't hold up my Flag of Humanity—it would be considered a prop—but that's what's on all the desks here today. So, I just like to thank the member for donating these so we all have a copy of it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Further members' statements? Who's next?

All right, the honourable member for Notre Dame.

Gang Action Interagency Network

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I would like to recognize the work and important gains that community members are making in the lives of young Manitobans. The Gang Action Interagency Network, or GAIN Manitoba, is a network of agencies working on grass-roots solutions to prevent and reduce gang involvement in Winnipeg.

Despite its very limited resources, GAIN has a monumental task. Its mission is to raise awareness, collaborate and funnel those community resources to address the needs of clients—usually young people living in poverty in Winnipeg with very little family or social support in the orbit of gangs.

GAIN helps communities with strategies for gang prevention, intervention or exit options for clients. GAIN has one-on-one relationships with these young Manitobans and connects them with supports whenever possible.

GAIN is now running a program along with Della Steinke, a local tattoo artist, to remove gang-affiliated

tattoos from former gang members trying to start new chapters in their lives. Since 2016, Ms. Steinke has personally been donating her time, skills and materials to do the long and painstaking work of gang-affiliated tattoo removal for clients.

Removing these prominent gang-affiliated symbols on visible areas like face, hands and neck have helped many clients find and keep employment and stay on new life paths.

Another project which GAIN offers is the NewPaths Mentorship Program. This seeks to improve the justice system's ability to reintegrate young offenders with the discovery of their identity through mentorship. One of the program's main objectives is to support participants as they create their own safe, positive, and healthy path towards employment and sobriety. GAIN, along with its multiple partner organizations, aims to improve the justice system's ability to reintegrate young offenders.

As GAIN is a community-run and -funded organization, I encourage all who are capable to assist in donating to this amazing program that has helped so many.

And I would like to welcome Ryan Beardy, GAIN co-ordinator, who is able to join us today, and sincerely thank him and all others involved for their tireless efforts to help heal and offer hope to those who are working to forge a better life.

Thank you, Madam—thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Lac du Bonnet Community Events

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): It is my pleasure to rise today to deliver a private member's statement to congratulate all of the organizations that hosted amazing community events in the Lac du Bonnet constituency over the summer.

I would like to also applaud and give a big thank you to all the wonderful volunteers who play an essential role in making these events happen. Now that we are transitioning into fall or winter months, there are still many great events to look forward to. Some of which include the annual Lac du Bonnet Ice Fishing Derby and the Canadian Power Toboggan Championships in Beausejour and Brokenhead. Plus, there are plenty of community fall suppers, curling bonspiels, hockey tournaments, craft shows, poker derbies and fundraisers throughout the constituency on any given weekend. If you can, please support our

communities by supporting their events and please take the time to thank a volunteer.

We are fortunate during all seasons in the Lac du Bonnet constituency. We have nine golf courses, some rated the best in Canada; amazing trails, like the Pinawa Trail, the Red River North Trail, the Blue Water South Trail and, of course, the Mantario Trail. Whether you enjoy hiking, cross-country skiing or snowshoeing, there is a number of picturesque trails for you to choose from. There are also groomed snowmobile trails all throughout the constituency and within our great parks, which are very well maintained by local snowmobile clubs and their volunteers.

There is no shortage of family friendly outdoor activities to enjoy in the Lac du Bonnet constituency. I encourage all of you to visit and immerse yourself in nature's splendor that is eastern Manitoba.

I also would like to take this time to congratulate all the recipients of our government's sustainable building communities program. Our government was able to double its funding from \$12 million to \$25 million. Close to \$1.2 million were received within the communities of the Lac du Bonnet constituency.

Again, I encourage all to come to the Lac du Bonnet constituency for a visit or a stay. We have something for everyone.

Thank you—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member's time has expired.

South Valour Residents Association

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's my great honour today to acknowledge the incredible work that the South Valour Residents Association is doing in my community. It was founded in 2020 with a mission to foster community well-being in South Valour by connecting residents and building an inclusive and supportive community in which everyone belongs.

The South Valour Residents Association is focused on community safety and connection, and they take a proactive approach that emphasizes community activities to create a sense of belonging, cultivate shared green space and help people get to know their neighbours. The goal is to empower residents to see safety as a shared resource among community members.

One of the first projects they took on was a survey of residents to see what concerns they could help address. In addition to having a safe and connected

community, what they heard was that residents wanted shared green spaces.

As a result, the South Valour Residents Association has hosted neighbourhood cleanups and is involved in the work to protect and manage trees in the community. They have also partnered with the U of W to study grassroots, anti-oppressive approaches to community safety.

One exciting new initiative for the South Valour Residents Association is the Community Public Art Project. Members of the community are working with an artist to co-design an art piece. Studies have shown that art projects like this help promote community safety and foster connection. They also had a great response to their first street party back in August, and I am excited that this will be an annual event in our community.

The South Valour Residents Association is committed to being inclusive and open to anyone who would like to get involved.

I would like to invite all members of the Chamber to join me in thanking SVRA board members: Stacy Cardigan Smith, Rachel Andrushuk, Elizabeth Jackimec, Teresa Prokopanko, Hillary Gair, Kyle Wiebe and Jason Chartrand for the important work they are doing in support of my community.

Thanksgiving

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): It's still Thanksgiving week, so I would just like to share a few words of gratitude. You know, this is a season of change and loss and celebration and a couple—I'd like to mention a couple of people we've lost lately.

One is that I'm grateful for the life of Ron Mazur. Ron was a wonderful, tender, thoughtful person, a community who fought for green spaces. At one point he worked—I don't know how exactly he ended up being involved in returning the Bell of Batoche, which had been liberated from a museum. He worked with the Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph to return the bell. But Ron is a really wonderful person and we just want to send our love to his wife, Joyce, who's mourning his loss.

My aunt Jean, who was 93, died recently. She was my father's last remaining sibling, so it's a real break with the past for me. She used to ride a horse to a one-room schoolhouse in a town that doesn't exist anymore in Manitoba. But she was a wonderful historian and made a real contribution to education, both in Manitoba and in Quebec.

And there—of course, there are celebrations as well. And October, for me—I mean, there's Thanksgiving, there's Halloween, three of my children have birthdays, which means that this is a big, big month for sugar consumption, but they're terribly excited about it.

* (13:50)

But I also want to recognize somebody who's celebrating—who's celebrated both a historic wedding anniversary and it's his birthday today, the member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

Now, I should—you should know, I'm not going to reveal his actual age, but it might surprise you all to know that the member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux)—being leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party really ages you—the member for Tyndall Park is actually the oldest person in our caucus, but it's simply that the wear and tear of age takes its toll on us.

So, I just want to thank you, Jon, for your service and wish him a very happy birthday.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I'm not sure how to respond to that. I'm just going to leave it. I'm good.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today Joshua Bruan, who is my guest—a grade 11 student from my constituency of Rossmere.

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today, Josh. Enjoy your time here.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health-Care System Reduction in Service Concerns

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Patients and front-line workers at the Grace Hospital are speaking out. In fact, they're sending out an SOS. This is after PC cuts have led to 13 nurses leaving the ICU at the Grace Hospital. That's just since this summer.

This comes, of course, after this government cut nine beds at the Grace Hospital, and now we see the wait times growing month after month, and year after year. It's time for this government to stop cutting health care at the Grace Hospital.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) stop cutting the Grace and start to invest in front-line health care?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I want to thank all the health-care professionals on the front line at the Grace Hospital for their commitment and their passion to serving Manitobans during this difficult time, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Nurse staffing challenges are an issue that many jurisdictions across Canada are facing, and it's actually being felt globally and it's not unique to Manitoba, but our government is taking action, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That's why we're adding more nurse training seats, on track to reach 400 new nurse education seats, investing in seats in the North, welcoming new graduates to the health system, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we will continue to do what needs to be done to address the staffing shortage.

Mr. Kinew: What's unique to Manitoba is that we have a PC government that continues to cut health care. That's why we lost 13 ICU nurses from the Grace just since this past summer. That's why we lost nine beds at the Grace.

We saw them cut the Mature Women's Centre at Victoria General. We've seen them close QuickCare clinics and public access clinics across the city. They've even cut CancerCare access points from our provincial health-care system.

The list of cuts goes on and on and on. And it seems like each and every day, this government adds more cuts to the list.

When will they finally listen to the people of Manitoba and stop cutting health care?

Ms. Gordon: We are listening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is why I was so pleased to have the opportunity to meet in person with the ED nurses at Health Sciences Centre, talking with nurses in the North, in Prairie Mountain, in Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority. And those discussions will continue—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —but what is unique to Manitoba and what is unique to this government, that the NDP never did is that—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —we have a \$6-an-hour premium to staff for all hours worked in an ICU. It also applies to staff

in personal-care homes; a one-time ICU recruitment and retention initiative grant—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —annual lump sum payment, up to \$2,000—

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

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

Mr. Kinew: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this past summer, 13 'intensive'-care units left the bedside at the Grace Hospital, and this government's only response has been to cut nine more beds from the Grace Hospital.

People in Kirkfield Park are upset. They look at that data, which is contained in the health authority's annual report—an annual report that, each year, documents new and damaging cuts to our health-care system instituted by this Premier.

Folks in west Winnipeg and across the province are wondering when this government's going to cut health care.

What does the Premier have to say to them?

Ms. Gordon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition continues to put inaccurate information on the record, but I'm pleased to correct the record.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am aware—and I'm not surprised that the Leader of the Opposition hasn't tabled that page from the annual report, because what he would see on that page is that those beds were temporary. And—but he doesn't want Manitobans to know that.

But what I do want Manitobans to know is that the NDP seem to have forgotten their own record. It's not surprising. I would not want to—I would want to forget it, as well.

The last two years the former NDP government was in power, Grace Hospital has—had the worst wait times for care in all—

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

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, with a follow-up question.

Infrastructure Spending Flood Protection Budget

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Health care in Manitoba today, under the PCs, is worse than it's ever been in history.

Lake Winnipeg is also at some of the highest levels since the 1970s. Now, we know that this means that there's a real threat of flooding for communities along the lake, and that's why it's so important to invest in flood protections right now.

Yet we've seen this government underspend their infrastructure budget by millions. Last year, the government underspent the budget for flood protection by \$11 million. That's about 30 per cent.

Which steps are the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) taking to protect communities along Lake Winnipeg from flooding?

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition should realize that, in our department, we are doing everything possible to make sure that our water levels in every lake in Manitoba are monitored. And we are looking at resiliency projects to make sure that we actually invest in these projects, that we protect communities like Peguis, like Fisher River.

We will continue working—and working with First Nation communities to make sure that we have solutions and they're at the table with those solutions, Madam Speaker—Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Kinew: You know, it's important to invest in measures to protect against flooding. You know, we saw this earlier this year, overland flooding in communities like Siglavik and the region around Gimli.

The PCs have failed numerous instances to get these sorts of flood protections built. We know that the channels project in the Interlake is going nowhere under this government, in spite of the fact that ranchers in the Interlake and on the west side of Lake Manitoba are very concerned that flood conditions right now look like they did previous to other record flood years. Along Lake Winnipeg, there are also concerns.

And we see in this year's Estimates books that this government has underspent flood protection budgets by \$11 million. They underspent by 30 per cent in a record year of—

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

Mr. Piwniuk: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the member—the opposite—the Leader of the Official Opposition wants to talk about underspent in infrastructure, let's look at their record—the NDP record, which the honourable member from Concordia was part of.

They underspent in 2007 by \$79 million. They spent—underspent in 2008 by \$98 million. In 2009, they underspent by \$120 million. In 2010, they underspent by \$132 million. In 2011, they spent—underspent by 122.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these—the member—I'm not even going to take any comments from this member because the fact is, they could have got it done when they—

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

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

* (14:00)

Mr. Kinew: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need a calm and rational approach to dealing with the flooding issues around Lake Winnipeg throughout the Interlake. What we see defies logic and defies reason.

In the Infrastructure budget this year, this government has underspent by \$11 million. That's 30 per cent of the flood protection budget, and that is during a year of record-high water levels.

Now, around Lake Winnipeg there are many concerns. Throughout the Interlake and on the west side of Lake Manitoba, people are concerned that the flood conditions right now look a lot like they did prior to the flood of 2011.

The government is not taking action, and they're not taking the issue seriously enough.

When will they stop underspending, when will they stop the cuts and when will they start protecting from floods?

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

Mr. Piwniuk: This gives me the opportunity to actually thank my staff.

You know, this has—had been the historical record second worst flooding in Manitoba history. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Piwniuk: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we actually—there is about over \$200 million—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Piwniuk: —of damage that was done by this flood. And when it comes to the parks staff, to my staff, the EMO staff, they worked around the clock, and they did a very good job. And then my staff who are also with MTI, who are now fixing a lot of the infrastructure, they are doing a great job and I want to thank them.

Proposed Highway Access Road in Brandon Minister's Meeting with Developer

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've proven this week that the minister personally overruled the significant safety concerns that his department identified just to award a permit to a party donor.

Yesterday, the minister admitted in Estimates that he and another MLA met in private with the developer VBJ Developments. The minister then refused to answer any further questions or provide details on the matter. So I'd like to give him the opportunity in question period here today.

Why did he keep those meetings secret and why won't he tell us who met with VBJ and on what date?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Mr. Deputy Speaker, while the member for Concordia continues to take an aimless walk in the woods of innuendo and conjecture and allegation, let us welcome him back to the path.

He's talking about a project that was prioritized by the City of Brandon, by the Brandon mayor, by the Brandon council, who believe in this project to bring economic development, to bring housing, to bring retail development to Brandon, who actually passed a motion in council to support it.

So, let me be clear for the member that while the rules were followed, he better pick up the phone and call the City of Brandon to figure out whether or not—if they—if he even knows what the level of priority is that Brandon has attached to this important project.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: Let's be clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, VBJ Developments are not registered lobbyists in Manitoba, but their donor—their owner is a major donor to the PC Party and to the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) of Manitoba. They gave the maximum allowed, in fact, to the Premier's leadership run.

The minister has admitted that he was willing to overrule his own department's safety concerns after he privately met with that developer.

Why did the minister keep these meetings secret, and who else in their Cabinet met with VBJ, and when? What is the minister trying to hide?

Mr. Friesen: That member is making ridiculous assertions that, somehow, every single piece of advice provided by civil service is automatically adopted by governments. That's not reasonable. That's not the way the rules work.

Civil servants, executive managers of departments, develop ideas; they develop initiatives. They present them to the minister for contemplation, for adjudication, and ministers and governments make decisions on the basis of that advice in all cases.

In this particular instance, safety is being followed. When it—with respect to this project, safety is No. 1. If at any point in the future, safety is not observed, the project will not go ahead. Those conditions have been written in.

Let them continue to make their baseless allegations. We know the NDP—

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

The honourable member for Concordia, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wiebe: I can understand why the Minister of Finance doesn't want the Minister of Infrastructure to answer, because he still doesn't deny that he personally overruled a serious safety and environmental concern after he met with a major donor to the PC Party and to the Premier.

The minister says that he met with an MLA and with VBJ to be lobbied about this permit, which the minister ultimately provided to that developer.

So, I ask again: Why won't the minister answer for himself and tell us, why were these meetings kept secret and who else in Cabinet met with VBJ? What is he trying to hide from the people of Brandon and the people of Manitoba?

Mr. Friesen: It's quite something coming from the member for Concordia, who sat at the table when the NDP were in power, when Christine Melnick personally sent directions to her civil servants to tell them to show up at the Legislature and be part of a political stunt.

Quite something coming from the member of Concordia, who was there at the table when Steve Ashton gave personal contracts on Tiger Dams.

This government will take no lessons on transparency when it comes from the NDP. We are standing with the City of Brandon, who has prioritized a project for economic development, and we stand with that city and its plans to expand these services for the city and its residents.

Privatization of Aviation Services RFP for Consultant Review

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): This government has privatized much of Manitoba's aviation services, including wildfire suppression, air ambulance and air transport services.

In fact, they've privatized so much of Manitoba's air services they're now hiring a private consultant to review all of the privatization that they've done.

On October 3rd, the PC government put out a request for proposals to provide aviation consulting services for contract management services to Manitoba, which I will table.

Can the minister tell us how much this RFP will cost Manitobans?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I'm happy to provide a bit of a history lesson and some context to the members of the opposition.

When our government formed government and undertook to review the arrangements for aviation and health care in the North, we realized that it was a broad array of arrangements that did not seek to get best value, did not set minimum safety standards. And our government took exception to that.

On the basis of expert advice, we intervened. We created a system that created better reliability, better service, better continuity and higher safety standards.

This member should know when she asked that question that she's taking exception to that higher level of standard that we've insisted on for people in the North.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for St. Johns, on a follow-up question.

Request to Keep Services Public

Ms. Fontaine: Clearly, the minister doesn't talk to anybody in the North, because we know that Manitobans have seen the impacts of PC privatization of air services. We've heard horror stories of people having to wait dozens and dozens of hours for air ambulance just to get the care that they need and they deserve.

It's clear the government is aware of the issues that their privatization has caused, as they now have put out an RFP for aviation consulting services to evaluate all of their privatization.

Will the PCs reverse their privatization and keep Manitoba air services public? Will they commit to it today?

Mr. Friesen: Manitobans know that the NDP are interested in ideology. Manitobans know that we, as a government, are interested in service, in safety and in being able to provide better services to Manitobans.

We're talking about a 24-hour-a-day service, 365-day service of primary aircraft that have become more available. They are supported by additional backup aircraft that never existed under the previous government.

The previous—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —government took no steps to modernize. *[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: They watched their fleet deteriorate to the point where pilots couldn't fly—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —and the aircraft were constantly grounded. No wonder they want to yell down the answer.

We stand on the side of safety, they stand on the side of ideology.

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

* (14:10)

Ms. Fontaine: Air services have declined ever since the PCs sold them off to the highest bidder. Manitobans are having to wait longer for air

ambulance services, and just last week, a mother and her little newborn had to wait over 24 hours for a medevac after her child experienced seizures.

Rather than address the issues with Manitoba's privatization air services, the PCs are instead giving even more money to private consultants. This makes absolutely no sense.

Will the minister commit to reversing his government's privatization of air services and keep them public?

Mr. Friesen: This government inherited a aviation service for the North that was in disarray, that had been mismanaged by the NDP. This RFP provides for the following: safe—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —care standards, and universal standards for all the operators; a—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —modern critical-care service.

We now have airplanes that address the needs of Manitoba, including neonatal incubators and bariatric stretcher platforms. These were never in place. People sat near the runway, waiting for planes that did not come.

Now we have service standards, we have accountabilities and we have better value for Manitobans. And we stand on the side of that, not on the side of ridiculous allegations that the NDP are raising.

Government Network Services Bell MTS Contract Extension

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): In 2020, on behalf of the Manitoba government, Paul Beauregard awarded a contract extension to Bell MTS for government network services worth \$37.5 million. This contract was awarded without competition and despite the fact that Paul Beauregard was a former MTS executive.

Now, through FIPPA, we've learned that this contract will expire on December 31st of this year, but Bell MTS will have the opportunity for another extension. And I'll table the document.

Can the minister tell us whether Bell MTS will award yet another extension?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I want to caution the member for reprehensible behaviour that he's exhibiting in this Legislature. It really goes beyond the pale to be identifying the

names of senior civil servants who worked for this government.

I ask that the member apologize to this Legislature for calling out the names of senior civil servants who gave their time and their expertise to help lead this province.

No wonder his colleague, who tried the same stunt, was investigated and convicted for breaking our respectful workplace laws.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a follow-up question.

Mr. Wasyliv: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2020, Brian Pallister and Paul Beauregard interfered on a data network contract with the Province. Instead, Bell MTS was given a contract extension significantly richer than the original deal.

At the end of 2020, the extension will be over. But Bell MTS had the opportunity for yet another extension. So, FIPPA documents, which I will table, show the tender deadline was September 14th, 2022.

The question is simple: Was Bell MTS awarded another contract extension?

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's more than obtuse; that's just belligerent. When given the opportunity to apologize and desist, he doubles down.

No wonder an investigator that was independent found that the NDP MLA over there breached the Legislature's own respectful workplace policy when he made comments previously about a senior civil service—a civil servant. At that time, the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) was investigated for bullying, harassing, offending and embarrassing a senior civil servant.

Will that member take this opportunity to think twice, reflect, dig deep and apologize to this Legislature and to that individual?

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

Mr. Wasyliv: Situation is very, very simple, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Given the previous interference by Paul Beauregard and Brian Pallister, we are asking for transparency from this government. Manitobans deserve to know whether the PC government is extending contracts—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wasyliw: –without any competition.

The minister should explain whether Bell MTS received another contract extension and if this extension was granted without competition.

Will he do so, today?

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you always hope that people will learn something from history. You at least hope that they will learn something from an independent investigation into their own misconduct. But it's clear today that the member Fort Garry—Fort Garry has learned nothing from the previous investigation into the conduct that was reprehensible by the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), who was actually cited for contempt and his attempts to go after senior civil servants.

I wonder, who is the next senior civil servant who should live in fear that this minister's going to start naming them in the Legislature? Members—is it from Infrastructure? Health? Is it from Economic Development? Who does he want to cite for—in this way in the—

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

Carbon Pricing Plan Government Intention

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Shortly after being sworn in, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) said that she would develop a carbon—a Manitoba carbon-pricing plan before December 31st of this year.

So, it's simple: I'm asking the minister, again, can he confirm that this government will, in fact, meet the commitment that they have made, and will they be bringing forward a carbon-pricing plan by December 31st of this year?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks): As the member knows, we continue to have dialogue with the federal government when it comes to carbon pricing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We know that the Premier's had several discussions with the Prime Minister and his office, as well, regarding carbon pricing.

As a matter of fact, we've also—and I know the Premier's asked about affordability as well, just recently. I'm sure the member's aware of, as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We'll continue to have dialogue with the federal government as we move forward on this very important affordability issue.

Ms. Naylor: Mr. Deputy Speaker, dialogue is a very fancy word for wasting hundreds of thousands of dollars on needless legal battles, and then finally abandoning that challenge of the federal price on pollution.

The Premier committed publicly to bringing forward her own plan by December 31st of this year.

It's so straightforward: Does the minister intend to bring forward that plan as promised, yes or no?

Mr. Wharton: As I said in my first response, it's quite clear that we're continuing to have dialogue with the federal government, and we'll continue to have discussions in a collaborative manner to ensure that Manitobans, going forward, are also respected when it comes to affordability.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that Manitoba families are hurting right now. We know that the impact of the carbon tax is influencing how they operate in their daily lives. We'll protect Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Wolseley, on a final question.

Ms. Naylor: We know this minister has problems with deadlines, which is why this government put forward an amendment through BITSA to push off accountability at Efficiency Manitoba, but this question is really straightforward.

The Premier has committed to bring forward their own carbon price plan by December 31st of this year. Is that still the case, or have they abandoned this plan? Will the minister tell Manitobans today?

Mr. Wharton: I'll certainly look forward to answering her question on whether or not the NDP ever met deadlines.

We know, when it comes to the environment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was no plan, let alone a deadline. We have a plan to ensure that we move forward in a sustainable way for Manitobans. As a matter of fact, if the proposed carbon tax is implemented in 2030, as it is now, at a buck—\$170 per tonne, the average Manitoba family will be paying \$1,145 more than they get back.

* (14:20)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're on the side of Manitobans.

Individuals Within Labour Organizations Call for Inquiry into Sex Assault Complaints

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We're concerned this government isn't taking our call for an inquiry into the cover-up of sexual harassment and sexual assault in labour seriously.

There is no right door for survivors to go through, because when they file a grievance against a powerful representative and the investigations may be botched, the survivor is punished, fired, forced to sign an NDA to silence them for life—not just one time but many times over.

I table a report, the Canadian labour council investigation into former CUPE Manitoba president Terry Egan, who has faced multiple complaints, along with an article with multiple sources that say the report was a whitewash and the CLC lied.

People who've signed NDAs can only speak freely if a court lets them, like at an inquiry: Is the government permanently closing the door on one?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): As I stated yesterday, that our government takes the issue of workplace safety very, very seriously. That is why we introduced policy change—a systemic change to the culture and the policy within the Manitoba civil service.

That is why we have some of the strongest policies on place, why everybody needs to undergo harassment training and that there is a path forward for survivors to go with allegations and to have their cases heard.

And I would urge that member to understand what the process is and to endeavour to follow that process.

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

Mr. Lamont: You know, we're really, really concerned with the fact that in scandal after scandal in Manitoba, where everyone knows about something terrible going on, just how hard it is for people to get justice or even to speak up.

At the police headquarters, we know there was bribery. That's no secret. The RCMP recommended charges. But in Manitoba, nothing happens and there's no inquiry.

Peter Nygård—police recommended charges. He's been charged in Ontario and Quebec, but in Manitoba, nothing happens, no inquiry.

With countless Indigenous injustices, there's a grim silence of shared shame. Everyone knows, but no one knows why it can't be addressed because no one will look into it.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) or the Minister of the Status of Women meet with me and the people who want this inquiry held to hear their stories?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Acting Minister of Justice and Attorney General): We could not agree more with the member when he cites the fact that it is very important to maintain a respectful workplace. This is exactly why I referenced the conduct of the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) before and asked the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) to do better in his comments.

But I want to caution the member, when it comes to allegations about Crown services and how they determine the threshold for placing charges, I want to make absolutely clear to that member that he is talking about the basis of our judicial system, which is the independence of the courts and the independence of investigation.

That duty is the sacred duty of Crown prosecutors and not that of the member for St. Boniface.

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

Individuals with Learning Disabilities Accommodation and Support Services

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): In spite of the fact that many Manitobans are working hard to help those with disabilities, all too often, individuals with learning disabilities are stigmatized, are bullied and are not provided the accommodation to succeed in Manitoba.

Tomas Ponzilius, who's here in the gallery with us today, has a learning disability. He can attest to these ongoing issues from his personal experience.

I ask the Premier: What actions is she taking to create awareness of this issue and to help end stigmatization and bullying of those with learning disabilities and to ensure that they receive reasonable accommodation when it is needed?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Accessibility): Our government, of course, finds it absolutely reprehensible whenever anybody bullies or mocks a person with disabilities. There is nothing more reprehensible than that. And I extend my sincere apologies to the member in the Chamber today—in the

gallery—if he has ever been on the receiving end of bullying because of a disability.

Our government is raising awareness. We are working with the community, and we are working with advocates to ensure that everyone in the province of Manitoba is treated respectfully, that they have a path forward, whether it be a path to independence or a path towards employment, a place that they can live and work and experience and achieve their highest destiny—

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

Fertilizer Use in Agriculture Industry Sustainable Use of Nutrients Agreement

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): I understand this morning the Minister of Agriculture, and also the Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks (Mr. Wharton), joined Fertilizer Canada and the Keystone Agricultural Producers to sign a memorandum of understanding regarding nutrient stewardship. Manitoba has led the way in responsible fertilizer usage and was the first to sign an MOU with Fertilizer Canada.

Can the minister explain the importance of this agreement and what it will mean for Manitoba producers and agriculture in Manitoba?

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture): And I'd like to thank my colleague from Dauphin for the opportunity to speak on this matter.

But first, I want to thank all the farmers who are leading the way with responsible and sustainable agriculture practices. Manitoba farmers are familiar with the 4R approach: the right source at the right time and the right place at the right rate—a little play on words. For sustainable agriculture, the right time is here, the right place is here, the right time is now, and the right source is our hard-working farmers.

I hope I speak on behalf of all members in the Chamber here today when I want to thank these farmers for their efforts and wish everyone a successful remainder of their harvest.

Agricultural Crown Land Leasing Beef Producer Concerns

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Manitoban farmers are concerned about access to Crown lands. Beef producers have told this government over and over that lease system is not working.

When will the minister address these concerns with changes to the Crown lands system?

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government is a listening government. And if the NDP don't believe, maybe they would believe Brent Benson, president of the Manitoba Crown Land Leaseholders Association.

In an article written by the Manitoba Co-operators about rent reduction of the Ag Crown lands, Brent Benson says, and I quote: It appears that Minister Johnson is actually listening to producers, and we are hopeful that the consultation process—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnson: —will develop more positive—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, order, order.

Members can only refer to other members, including themselves, by their portfolio or constituency name. That is confirmed by the clerks. So, I would request that the adjustment be made by that member.

The honourable member for Agriculture, you have a few seconds left.

Mr. Johnson: I would like to table that article.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Brent Benson is right. We're listening. There is more positive change to come. Manitobans are encouraged to engage in our survey on engaged—

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

Mr. Brar: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I request Minister of Agriculture to listen that I have met with many producers, including in Parkland and the Interlake. No one producer has told me that they can live with the changes this government has put in place. This PC government is prioritizing money over people.

When will the minister listen and take action and address his government's changes to the Crown land system?

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm hoping that the member can look at the date of the papers that I just tabled. This is a very recent article, and I just want to quote that again.

The article is written by the Manitoba Co-operators about rent reduction of any Crown lands. And Brent Benson says, and I almost quote, it appears that the Minister of Agriculture is actually

listening to producers, and we are hopeful that the consultation process will result in more positive changes to come.

Agriculture Department Office Closures and Staffing

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the PCs have 'guttin'—guttin' Manitoba Agriculture.

* (14:30)

Hundreds of positions have been left vacant. Dozens of offices closed. Lending activity to producers declined by 11 per cent last year. Altogether, it means less service and less support for our farmers.

When will the minister address the cuts his government has made to the Department of Agriculture?

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture): I know the member has met with Manitoba Crown Land Leaseholders Association, so maybe he needs to meet with them again and realize that we are a listening government.

We're acting, we have a plan. They have no plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Sale of Social Housing Units Investment in New Units Needed

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Six thousand people are waiting on a social housing list. Meanwhile, this government has sold off 1,800 units.

Hundreds of units sit empty because this government has cut the maintenance budget by 87 per cent. Meanwhile, we have how many people homeless?

This former minister sold hundreds of units to the private sector. This government is following Brian Pallister's playbook.

Why won't the minister reverse her government's cuts and ensure social housing is there for those that need it?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I'd like to remind the member opposite that it's our government that has built 745 new social and affordable housing units since we formed office at a tune of \$110 million.

That is in addition with having to deal with the billion-dollar maintenance and repair budget that we had inherited from the NDP. They didn't spend their repair—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —and maintenance budget fully every year, and therefore we had a billion-dollar deficit, a— [interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. Squires: —stock that was sliding into disrepair that we've had to come in and fix.

We've got a long way to go in repairing all of our housing stock, but that is something that our government is committed to, and we will work towards that year over year while building new social and affordable housing units.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time for questions is over.

PETITIONS

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of this petition is as follows:

The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library has been served notice by Red River Valley School Division to vacate the premises currently situated in the auditorium of École Héritage school by March 31, 2023.

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

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

JRL and Red River Valley School Division have flourished from a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider granting the auditorium to JRL by March 1, 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 St. Pierre Jolys and the RM of De Salaberry.

(3) To request the Minister of Education and Minister of Francophone Affairs to recognize that an MOU between the Red River Valley School Division and the JRL is mutually, financially, culturally beneficial.

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

(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.

This petition is been signed by Mona Péloquin, Catherine Robertson and Simone Lacasse and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are there any further petitions?

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, the background to this—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 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 Manitoban 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 document 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 heritagehood.

(4) JRL and RRVSD have flourished from 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 neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, are provided with free access to public library and 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 31st, 2023.

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

(3) 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 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 many Manitobans who use it on a regular basis.

(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.

Louise Bridge

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

The background to the petition is as follows:

* (14:40)

(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 110 years.

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years, has deteriorated extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate the 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 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) 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 its firm commitment to partner with the City on replacing the Louise Bridge in its 2015 Throne Speech. Unfortunately, provincial administration—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.

(10) The City expropriation process has begun. The \$6.35 million street upgrade of Nairn Avenue from Watt Street to the 111-year-old bridge is complete.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the new 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 during—in the future.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Home-Care Services

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

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 services 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 in 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 Alex Hernandez, Tess Jalocon and Maria Bañas [*phonetic*], and many other Manitobans.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): I wish to present the following petition 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 services 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 in 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 many Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are there any other petitions? Seeing none, grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie): On House Business, can we resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It has been announced by the—*[interjection]*

The honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen).

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Acting Government House Leader): I ask that the House resolve into the Committee of Supply at this time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The—it has been announced by the Acting Government House Leader that the House resolve into the Committee of Supply.

Committee rise, Mr. Deputy—or, Mr. Deputy Speaker, please just take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE AND PARKS

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Environment, Climate and Parks. Questioning for this department will continue in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): As a follow-up to yesterday's question about wetlands, I wondered if the minister could tell us if any wetlands have been lost over the last year, and how much?

* (15:00)

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks): I certainly appreciate the

patience of the table today, and the member from Wolseley.

We take—obviously, our government takes wetland preservation very seriously, so we want to ensure that we're able to put on the record the actions that this government has taken and will continue to take when it comes to sustainable wetlands.

Going back to 2018, we introduced—our government introduced The Sustainable Watersheds Act, which, essentially, will allow no net loss of wetlands benefit. So, again, we're enshrining in legislation no net loss of wetlands.

Class 4 and 5 can't be drained, as well. Class 3, if there is an issue with a class 3, it would have to be—or drained—it would have to be set back to a 2:1 ratio; so essentially, we'd put two back for one that would be lost.

Also, too, as well, the member would know, back in 2017—or if not, certainly you'll know now—that in 2017, the GROW Trust, as well, was introduced to the tune of \$204 million. And, again, that's a sustainable GROW Trust. And we talked about trusts last week and how they work, and this is another example on how our government's investment will continue to protect our wetlands as we go forward; 2021, we also talked about watershed districts, too, as well, and added and conserved over 990 hectares of class 1 and class 2 wetlands.

So, great work, great news on wetlands, and looking forward to your next question.

Ms. Naylor: So, just to have it on—clearly on the record, the minister—I just want to confirm that you're saying that, since The Sustainable Watersheds Act of 2018, there in fact has been no net loss on wetlands? And have there been any net gain of wetlands in Manitoba since that time?

* (15:10)

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member from Wolseley for the question.

As we continue to gather some further information, I will put on the record and provide some further positive news when it comes to our watershed districts which, again, play a vital role in enhancing, you know, the—our watershed and our areas that we're trying to protect.

Back on June 10th of this year, our government put out a news release essentially saying that the Manitoba government will invest over \$3 million in

important work in Manitoba's watershed districts, essentially, again, expanding on that.

And I wanted to just read into the record, if I may, some of the partnerships that we have and some that are actually new this year, in this fiscal. And some of the watershed districts that we're speaking to, currently are partnered with us, are: Alonsa; the RM of Arborg; the RM of Argyle; RM of Armstrong; RM of Bifrost-Riverton; the RM of Boissevain-Morden; City of Brandon; the RM of Brenda-Waskada; the RM of Brokenhead; town of Carberry; town of Carman; RM of Cartier; RM of Roblin-Cartier; RM of Coldwell, RM of Cornwallis; City of Dauphin; and the RM of Dauphin.

And certainly more to add into the record, but I'll pass it back over to the member from Wolseley to refresh her last question, so I can get some more details on the record for her.

Ms. Naylor: For the record, I don't feel that there's been a clear response about net gain of wetlands in Manitoba, in terms of what results have been achieved and how much net gain there's been. I know I asked that question when we met yesterday and again today.

But since that clarity isn't coming, I'm going to move on to ask about something that's referenced in the annual report on page 13. It says that Manitoba implemented over 115 government-wide initiatives to reduce emissions and become more resilient to climate change, and that these were—you know, was making significant progress on the Climate and Green Plan.

So, could the minister tell me—I don't need a list of 115, because there's other questions to be asked—but if the minister could name at least some of these initiatives, perhaps the most substantial ones, how much they cost, what was the actual GHG reduction amount from these initiatives and, you know, perhaps, the—yes, the cost per ton of those GHG reductions?

Mr. Wharton: So, to be clear, then, the member from Wolseley is putting on the record that watershed districts are not an important program for the NDP. So, I just want to make sure that that gets on the record.

Water is water is water, Mr. Chair. We know that, and watershed districts play a vital role as we move forward. So, I just want to make sure that that is on the record that the member doesn't care about over 100 watershed districts and growing throughout this great province.

I'll also take the opportunity to answer the question. As I said in my preamble before, I said that I would gather some information to ensure that the member from Wolseley had accurate information, and I'm prepared to put that on the record now.

While individual wetlands may be altered, compensation and other protections ensure that benefits stay on the landscape, helping landowners and producers to farm the best and conserve the rest, and the best stewards of our land. Last year, 1,700.82 acres of class 3 wetlands were altered, more than \$200,000 in compensations paid to enhance and conserve wetlands on the landscape.

Win-win, Mr. Chair, and certainly a responsible choice as we go forward to protect our wetlands.

Ms. Naylor: Just want to remind the minister that Manitobans do deserve answers to these questions and help understanding the budget. And, yes, it took two different days and me asking the question multiple times, but thank you for giving me the answer that I initially asked for yesterday. Because, in fact, we are quite committed to wetlands and their protection as well as very interested in the work of watershed district boards.

So, I'm going to come back to the question I asked. Maybe you've had some time now to gather some information.

But if the minister could name some of the so-called 115 government-wide initiatives to reduce emissions that were supposedly undertaken in Manitoba just last year, we're all very interested in hearing about some of these projects: how much they cost and to what degree did they reduce GHG emissions.

* (15:20)

Mr. Wharton: I've—have areas here that the member was questioning on, so I'm certainly pleased to put on the record that we have increased ethanol content in gasoline from 8.5 per cent to 10 per cent and biodiesel from 2.5 to 5 per cent.

The efficiency trucking program will save 25 million litres of fuel and reduce GHG emissions over the lifecycle of the equipment.

Manitoba Hydro's last coal fire generating unit was shut down and natural gas units in Selkirk were phased out ahead of schedule in 2021. These actions, again, have reduced GHG emissions by approximately 56,000 tons.

Despite the challenges from the pandemic—and we know that it was two years of a challenge for all of us—Efficiency Manitoba was able to effectively achieve 69 per cent of their planned net electric savings, and 60 per cent planned net natural gas savings, as well, also contributing to net GHG reduction.

And also, the Manitoba Conversation and Climate Fund, that currently is sitting at \$1.5 million but started out in 2020 at 600 K, also is helping to reduce emissions and advance the uptake of clean technologies and practices in Manitoba as we move forward collectively to ensure we continue to reduce our GHG footprint here in Manitoba.

Ms. Naylor: So, the minister referenced the Conservation and Climate Fund, which we know was launched in 2020, and my understanding is—so, based on the budget, \$1 million was allocated last year for nine projects which covered innovation and clean tech, conservation, water quality, circular economy development and sector emissions reductions.

Mr. Chair, \$1 million is a fairly insignificant amount of money for, you know, these large—supposedly large projects.

Can the minister say how much money all those applicants actually have requested over the past three years since this fund was launched?

* (15:30)

Mr. Wharton: Again, I'll just start. There's a lot of information here to provide the member and the table today.

So I'm going to start back, again, in 2021 with the Conservation and Climate Fund. When we started that fund, again, it was just under 600 K. And next fiscal, in '21-22, just under \$1 million. And '22-23, now, the Conservation and Climate Fund is to be sitting at \$1.5 million, as I mentioned earlier on in a response.

Second to that, too, as well, we have to remember that this is a multi-prong approach our government is taking. And again, we have a plan and we know that the members opposite in the NDP don't have a plan, never had a plan, so we'll continue on with our plan for Manitobans.

And No. 2 is, again, the climate and green fund, which again is to the tune of \$6.37 million. And also, the waste reduction and recycling support, again, another \$8.7 million. And I ask the member to stay tuned for some more exciting news from that fund itself. Again, going towards GHG benefits.

And also, the Low Carbon Economy Fund, LCEF, as it's known, to the tune of \$66.8 million.

So, you know, we're totalling over \$80 million in investments to help reduce greenhouse gases. I think it's a wonderful start. I know in six and a half years, we've moved the needle a lot compared to the former government who, quite frankly, doesn't have a needle to move forward.

So, we're proud of our investments. We'll continue to make investments to ensure we reduce our greenhouse gas footprint.

Ms. Naylor: I'm not sure if the minister recalls because I understand he was not the minister at the time, but when the conservation climate fund was launched, the new criteria for projects, to apply for this funding, really pushed a lot of environmental groups out of the way. And I asked many times about this in QP for many of our environmental NGOs and other organizations who have really been leading the way in Manitoba in many years who suddenly didn't fit the criteria to apply for these new projects.

But that aside, \$1 million last year and \$1.5 million this year actually isn't very much money.

So, I'm going to repeat my original question, which was: How much money have all applicants requested and applied for over the three years? Just so we can get a sense, you know—have you given out, like, 1 per cent, 10 per cent of what environmental groups have been looking for for their projects?

Mr. Wharton: Could you repeat the last part of that question, please?

Ms. Naylor: All applicants that have applied through the Conservation and Climate Fund: I'm looking for a total of what the application—what they've applied for, if we add it all 'udd,' have they looked for \$10 million and \$1 million was spent? How many people didn't get that money?

* (15:40)

Mr. Wharton: And we all know, everybody sitting around the table know, the need for funding support has never been greater. We know that; we've seen that, particularly the outcomes of COVID and the challenges that not only Manitobans are having, but the world is having.

So, we also know that many programs throughout government—doesn't matter what stripe of government—are typically oversubscribed. Well, I can tell the

member that this particular fund is the same. Conservation and Climate Fund is oversubscribed.

However, as I did mention before, the fund continues to adapt. We continue to adapt to the needs as we go forward, and we will continue to grow that fund as the need continues to grow as well.

The member may or may not be aware, but we did a similar process with—in Municipal Relations. When I was the minister there, we essentially moved to an online application process that streamlined the process for Manitoban NGOs and rolled in a number of outdated legacy programs that, quite frankly, were cumbersome for applicants to navigate and simply get a—you know, put in a application.

So, we moved forward with the Building Sustainable Communities funds grant process through that single-application process. We do the same in Conservation, with the Conservation and Climate Fund. It's a fund that now also has the support of staff, much like we had in Municipal Relations, where staff were there to support applicants and NGOs to ensure the application is done appropriately, so that nobody is left behind.

So, we'll continue to, as we have from fiscal '20-21 to fiscal '22-23, grow the CCF fund as we go forward. As the need is growing, so will the government's commitment to NGOs.

Ms. Naylor: So, in other words, if I want to know how much money all applicants have requested through the conservation climate fund, we'll have to FIPPA it to find that out.

The next question pertains to the environmental compliance and enforcement. I see on page 53 of the annual report that there are 55 FTEs in that department, and that there was a number of environmental compliance actions taken.

But it's very confusing when you look at the environmental legislation enforcement summary for that year. From what I can tell, there's no—there were no warnings and no prosecutions for contaminated sites remediation, no warnings or prosecutions for The Dangerous Goods Handling and Transportation Act, no warnings or prosecutions for the dangerous goods handling and transportation regulation, no warnings or prosecutions for the Hazardous Waste regulation, and a small amount of warnings for environmental accident reporting, for The Environment Act, for pesticides regulation and litter regulation, but no prosecutions. Only a \$2,540 fine—well, actually, sorry, I'm probably reading that wrong, but a minor amount

of fines with—after 11 warnings and only two prosecutions for storage and handling of petroleum products.

So it seems like, in 2021-2022, I don't know if, magically, all Manitobans stopped breaking environment legislation, but I kind of doubt that's what happened.

So, can the minister explain why no—almost no enforcement took place of all of these regulations and acts over a year?

* (15:50)

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, I first off want to start off by thanking the department, particularly the environmental enforcement department led by our staff and their team, which are doing a wonderful job at ensuring that Manitobans are—No. 1, of course, they're being educated while the 55 FTEs are in the field and, again, ensuring that compliance is being upheld as they continue to go door to door as they have been, even during COVID where challenges were obviously faced. The department continued to go and ensure that Manitobans were being compliant and further education.

So, to the question from the member from Wolseley: it's quite clear to us here on page 53 that the department's work in educating and ensuring enforcement and compliance is in place is working.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

And I think this is a good-news story, and I think the member would agree with me. If these numbers were off the charts, then I think we would recognize that there'd be a challenge, but I think it bodes well for what the department has been doing.

I know the members opposite have an issue particularly with the way departments are being run, and that's shameful, but I can tell you that I stand behind the department for what they're doing. They're educating Manitobans, and that is the direct result of these numbers being where they're at.

Ms. Naylor: Thank you for that answer.

And in particular, I'm interested in the fact that there were no prosecutions or warning around pesticide regulation when both the minister and I heard very clearly on committee the other night that any number of companies have been lying and using illegal pesticides for lawn care. That was reported by one of the speakers that the minister had invited to be here to support his bill.

So, it's just shocking to me that no warnings or prosecutions have been used to address what we heard was a clear problem in Manitoba.

But I'm going to ask a little bit now on a different topic. Back in 2020, there was a lot of fanfare about the Youth Advisory Council. There was, you know, an announcement that the government was going to invest in a Youth Advisory Council for the Climate and Green Plan. There was a big announcement when the youth were selected and the work was going to begin. And since that time, almost three years, we've heard nothing.

So, I'd like to know what the results are of that work, what advice has been given and if the government has implemented any advice from the Youth Advisory Council.

* (16:00)

Mr. Wharton: Certainly appreciate the question, particularly about youth and their involvement in climate change. And particularly, the YAC, or also known as YAC.

And I can share with the member that, when we were up in Yukon this past summer, we had the opportunity to meet with a youth advisory group from Yukon. And it was just a wonderful opportunity to not only understand from their perspective of what they feel needs to be done to move forward with the challenges we're having with climate change and in the environment, but actually have some actual, solid takeaways to work with with YAC here, and again, our Expert Advisory Council, who YAC report back to, as well, and government. So, some lessons learned up there.

And during the last two years of the pandemic, of course, neither organization has been working to the capacity that they should be. We will continue to and we are continuing to enhance opportunities for our youth to be involved directly with—and more—actually have—provide more information and detail to the Expert Advisory Council as we go forward, and based on lessons learned when we were up in the Yukon during our conference on climate up in—up there.

So, to the member's question: YAC is a very important part of our government. Matter of fact, we started the Expert Advisory Council under this government, and we started the Youth Advisory Council under this government.

We'll continue to enhance and grow their mandates, both the EAC and the YAC, to ensure that we're

getting a fulsome and, essentially, a—knowledge from all aspects and all generations, which we know is going to be very important for the next generation to lead us as we get into our twilight years of our lives.

Ms. Naylor: So, just for clarity on the record, I'd like the minister to confirm that the Youth Advisory Council, selected by his government, is still active, still meeting regularly, to this date, and if he could also share some specific advice that has been given and been implemented by his government.

* (16:10)

Mr. Wharton: Certainly want to read in the record some of the great work that YAC has been doing and where the path forward will lead and certainly, little bit, be repeating some of the first answer, but that's okay; we'll get it on the record for the member.

So the YAC mandate included meetings with the EAC as we shared—as they shared views from the youth perspective, as I alluded to earlier, and also assisting the EAC on a transportation and water initiatives and advising the EAC on how to communicate and engage with young Manitobans on climate. And that was an area that we were discussing earlier when I was up in Yukon, on how lessons learned can be beneficial as we go forward from our youth. The YAC successfully completed this work and drafted a report on communications and engagement.

Also, we have new members that were selected to join returning members as well, in '21-22 term, again, which officially began in January of 2021. And members were asked to provide their perspectives on Manitoba's green economic recovery, skills and training and to refine their communications and engagement recommendations from their previous report.

And then YAC, as well, worked on our green economic recovery, again, was shared at the green economic restart workshop event held in September of 2021. And in addition, the YAC recommended development of green jobs, a contract hub for Manitoba youth, and would help link youth to green employment opportunities.

And also, the YAC term was extended again to March 31st, 2022, and, again, to account for COVID—late start due to COVID-19, and the work of the YAC has proven both practical and applicable in ongoing work of the department, including energy strategy and the green transportation strategy, which I alluded to earlier.

And I also mention that we're—the department has continued to enhance the structure of the YAC to ensure closer alignment with the Expert Advisory Council. We want to make sure that lessons learned are applied and also that there is no silos being developed, because we know how important YAC is and the information they can provide the Expert Advisory Council and our government.

So, commitments are to be carried forward, including, again, a youth-focused climate survey through Engage Manitoba, which is a great portal getting information for Manitobans, and also followed by a youth-focused climate change engagement campaign.

So, lots of great work by YAC, and we're looking forward to continuing to enhance their structure as we go forward.

And, Mr. Chair, may I? Would I—would it be okay to call for a two-minute bio break, please?

Mr. Chairperson: The minister has requested a leave for—just a quick recess for, let's say, five minutes. Is that all right with the committee? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 4:13 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:17 p.m.

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

Ms. Naylor: I'd like to ask the minister about the endowment funds and the 64 designated improvement projects. And I'd like to ask the minister if he can update us on the progress of those projects: How many have been completed and which projects have been completed?

* (16:20)

Mr. Wharton: In March 2021, the department invested \$20 million with The Winnipeg Foundation to establish Manitoba Provincial Parks Endowment Fund to support park improvements in programming.

As a matter of fact, the member will recall—I believe it was our first day in Estimates—we talked about endowments and how they worked. And I think the member now has a better understanding in how that generates sustainable cash flow for endeavours like our parks.

Again, this funding is not a reduction of the department. It's actually—it's an investment that will

continue to provide benefits to parks across the province in perpetuity.

The funds are not designated to replace existing based provincial park funding. So it's an enhancement, too.

Again, the funds include a portfolio of several funds where Winnipeg Foundation manages and provides oversight over all the funds.

Manitoba Parks Endowment portfolio funds are, and I'll put them on the record as follows: Provincial Park Endowment Fund, provincial parks incentive fund, Birds Hill Provincial Park fund, Clearwater Lake Provincial Park Fund, Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park fund, Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park fund—Cheryle D. Christensen fund, Paint Lake Provincial Park fund, Spruce Woods Provincial Park fund, Upper Fort Garry Heritage Provincial Park fund and Whiteshell Provincial Park fund.

Again, these funds are designed to encourage and receive private donations. Additional donations will grow the fund. We know that there are many Manitobans seeking to make philanthropic contributions and leave a legacy of support for Manitoba provincial parks. We've seen that in the past and we know it will continue in the future.

And since the fund was established, more than \$1.6 million in additional funding has been invested in our treasured provincial parks.

Annual revenue produced by each fund may be used to support projects that include, but are not limited to: development and maintenance of trails, boardwalks and associated infrastructure; public-use facilities such as amphitheatres, shelters, day-use sites, playgrounds, equipment, docks and launches; park road maintenance; habitat restoration and enhancement; historical assets and cultural sites; infrastructure to support programming; modern machinery and operational equipment; municipal servicing of infrastructure; campground enhancements; an interpretive infrastructure to support programming; maintenance projects to extend and/or enhance infrastructure facilities; or assets outlined, again, above, are eligible for project costs.

And furthermore, some of the other projects directly related to this year as well: some upgrades to the yurts at Camp Morton and Stephenfield; accessible campsites in St. Malo; dock upgrades in Grass River; Centennial Trail improvements in Whiteshell.

And one that I'm really proud of are the mobi-mats that were installed in Birds Hill this year. We've also installed mobi-mats last year in Grand Beach. I can tell you that the mobi-mats have made a difference for Manitobans with disabilities, and just a fantastic initiative and, again, I thank the park and their staff—park staff for their initiative moving forward, particularly with the mobi-mats.

Ms. Naylor: I just want to note that this is an enormous amount of public money that has been moved out of government departments and is being overseen by a foundation, and that non-government, non-public servants are making decisions about where this money goes.

I noted that in '21-22, the endowment fund generated \$863,607, yet only \$519,673 was spent. Can the minister explain why?

* (16:30)

Mr. Wharton: Again, the member from Wolseley is following the speaking lines of her—of the NDP by, again, throwing foundations under the bus; simply, they repeat that foundations like St. Boniface Hospital Foundation, Concordia Foundation—they don't seem to have any trust in foundations, which is shameful.

And now we're talking about a world-renowned foundation like The Winnipeg Foundation, who every year, year over year, contributes to the health and well-being of all Manitobans through many trusts and endowment funds and generating revenue for those funds, sustainable revenue, so that Manitobans can enjoy many things. Like, particularly, our provincial parks.

So, I just want to make sure that that's on the record, Mr. Chair, that the NDP do not support foundations, whether it be Winnipeg Foundation or any other foundation.

On that note, we do. Our government does support The Winnipeg Foundation and what they do. We know, and we had this discussion before, that \$20 million generated \$1.1 million last year. Now the question was, \$565,000 was spent; that was a partial fiscal year. St. Boniface—or pardon me, The Winnipeg Foundation's fiscal did not align with the government's fiscal. So, there was a lapse of approximately half a year.

So, the numbers that the member alludes to is a partial-year funding, and certainly we know that, going forward, once we get better aligned with that foundation and how they roll out, we are looking

forward to that fund and that—essentially, that foundation supporting Manitobans, supporting our parks.

And also, the question on not-civil servants but—nobody getting involved in the actual decision making; well, actually, quite frankly, we go to Manitobans. We go to Engage Manitoba. We have and we continue to, and will continue to go to Engage Manitoba, to ensure Manitobans have a say on where that—the outcome of that fund will be spent in their provincial parks.

And then, certainly, it comes back to the department, and the minister's office has the opportunity to go through those recommendations by Manitobans, and we move forward in a sustainable way by—from the advice of all Manitobans when it comes to investments in our parks.

So that, I believe, will answer the member's question. But again, it's shameful that the NDP continue to put on the record that they do not trust foundations in Manitoba.

Ms. Naylor: The minister is spending a lot of time putting a lot of fiction on the record today, and there is a significant difference between handing over public dollars to a—to—sorry, to a foundation to distribute versus private fundraising by a foundation.

But, you know, I know the difference. We'll move on.

I have one final question about the endowment fund: Are these investments divested from fossil fuels, and was there any communication between the environment and climate department with the Winnipeg Foundation to ensure that these investments were divested from fossil fuels?

* (16:40)

Mr. Wharton: We're going to refer—but I will read on the record though, I'm going to refer the member to go to The Winnipeg Foundation site—website and check out responsible investment. So, I'm just going to read it in the record, so that I believe this will certainly answer the member from Wolseley's question and concerns, and how they look at investment.

So, for many years, investors have included environmental, social and governance, or ESG, considerations in their analysis. This is to say that some ESG assessment is inherent in traditional investment practices, and today it would be very rare to find a reputable firm not taking these factors into account.

Responsible Investment, or RI, is more rigorously defined and refers to the integration of ESG research and data analysis with normal financial information to support investment decisions.

Each of Winnipeg Foundation's investment managers have a different mandate and stated policy approach to ESG integration. Socially responsible investment is not new and each of the investment managers will employ—is well aware—is also well aware of how it impacts the companies in which The Winnipeg Foundation invests.

It also has three pillars below. I welcome the member to check out The Winnipeg Foundation website, under investment portfolio.

Ms. Naylor: I'd like to give my remaining time for questions to the member from River Heights with the understanding that he will conclude at 6 minutes to 5 to give us enough time to close out today.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I know the minister has some interest in addressing the problem with radon contamination or pollution in many homes in Manitoba, and I'm just wondering if the minister can provide an update?

And I'm particularly concerned about situations of people who are on low incomes, who would have difficulty affording a sort of \$3,000 mitigation, which is about what it often is, and they need something other than just a Manitoba Hydro loan at 6 and a half per cent or so.

Is—what's the minister's plans in that respect?

Mr. Wharton: I'd like to thank the member from River Heights for following up on that question.

I know we had a brief discussion in the House a while back and we shared stories. I shared the story that I'd actually gone out and bought a radon kit because I live in the Interlake and there were concerns of soil type potentially having radon gas. And fortunately, it came back negative. So, certainly, it gives you a little bit of comfort knowing the effects of radon gas.

And really what we've done is—and what I continue to do is, again, work with Public Health on this issue. It is a Public Health issue.

However, you know, we need to continue to have those conversations on how best we can look at supporting, you know, potentially a program or something going forward for less fortunate Manitoba families, to ensure that, you know, Manitobans are

protected. Safety, as you know—the member from River Heights knows—safety is one of our No. 1 priorities, if not our No. 1 priority.

So, we'll continue to have those conversations with Health as we go forward to see if there's a whole-of-government approach on how we can work a fit for what the member's asking.

So, I appreciate the question.

Mr. Gerrard: My next question, and it's probably going to be my last one—I need you to wrap up your answer by five—4:55—has to do with the most significant environmental pollutant for children, which is lead.

And I know there was a second Intrinsic report, and that report talked about, among other things, doing screening of children to look at lead levels.

But I wonder if the minister has a follow-up and a response to the second Intrinsic report?

* (16:50)

Mr. Wharton: I thank the member from River Heights for the question.

I just going to, again, just do a little bit of a catch-up here on the good work our government has been doing with respect to lead.

Again, the Province completed extensive lead soil testing in 40 Winnipeg neighbourhoods. Over 2,000 samples were taken from 43 schools and 147 parks; 94 per cent—94.1 per cent of results were below guidelines. Additional testing in Winnipeg, in the city of Winnipeg, helps us determine where increased lead concentration may still be present in soil, and provide the Province and site owners with evidence-based actions that can be taken to reduce the risk and exposure. And Manitoba Health has developed new educational material for public on—for the public on sources of lead and how to mitigate exposure.

And again, to the question on the outcome of the last eccentric report, effective May 1st, 2022, elevated blood levels lead—elevated blood lead levels will be recorded, reportable to Manitoba Health on an interim basis, to help identify significant sources of lead exposure and determine next steps to address them.

And again, the independent report and new educational material developed by the Province to help identify, prevent exposure to all sources that it—lead, at—again, are—they're available at the website.

So, good work has been done on the second part of that follow-up; we continue to ensure that Manitobans—children, particularly—are safe, and we'll continue to do that on a go-forward basis.

Mr. Gerrard: Those are my questions. I pass it back to the MLA for Wolseley.

Ms. Naylor: I think we're ready to ask the question.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being—hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions.

Resolution 12.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$31,426,000 for Environment, Climate and Parks, Parks and Trails, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.3: RESOLVED there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$20,726,000 for Environment, Climate and Parks, Environmental Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,270,000 for Environment, Climate and Parks, Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$17,754,000 for Environment, Climate and Parks, Water Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,672,000 for Environment, Climate and Parks, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 12.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Naylor: I move that line item 12.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks's (Mr. Wharton) salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: This—oh, sorry. Now I got to go back there—12.

Resolution 12.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,225,000 for Environment, Climate and Parks, Finance and Shared Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Environment, Climate and Parks.

Is it the will of the committee to call it 5 o'clock?
[Agreed]

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. Adrien Sala (St. James): It's good to be back here. You know, we're coming off the heels of two evenings of committee hearings on Bill 36, where we had an opportunity to listen to dozens of Manitobans come out, who took the time to create presentations on Bill 36, to learn about the bill, and to come have their voice heard here at committee. And, you know, those who were paying attention to that—those committee hearings—would know that it was nearly unanimous in opposition to the bill.

We heard just presenter after presenter speak about their deep concerns with Bill 36. We heard a range of folks, not only private citizens but we heard some of the biggest businesses in the province express their concerns, which we raised yesterday in the House.

I wanted to give the minister an opportunity to share what he's learned from listening to those presenters that came to committee last Thursday and last Tuesday night.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): Mr. Chair, I'm seeking a clarification from the clerk.

When we began these proceedings for the Department of Finance and Hydro, the clerk gave advice to this table that we were not to speak on a bill that is before the Manitoba Legislature; a bill that has now progressed through first reading, second reading and through the committee phase and will be reported back to the Legislature for third reading report.

So, I'm asking for a clarification as to whether the line of questioning that the critic is undertaking is in conjunction with the rules because it sounds to me, based on the advice that we received in a previous Committee of Supply section, that he is contravening the advice of the Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: I would—to say the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) is in order. His line of questioning is not going into detail about the bill, but he is referencing the events of the meeting generally.

So, in that case, he is in order.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Chair, thank you for that clarification.

Not reflecting in any way on your authority or your role in these proceedings, I'm asking for additional clarification based on the member's question and anticipating further questions. There would be a need for me to actually address the member's question in response by citing sections of the bill, but in previous sections of these Estimates, I have been told that I cannot cite sections or speak with specificity about sections of the bill.

So I'm trying to understand how we can both accommodate the member and his right to bring questions at this committee—a committee that is considering the Estimates of expenditure for the Department of Finance and of Hydro—but these Estimates—the books—the supplement to the Estimates of expenditure for 2022-2023, there is no reference in these materials to a bill that has completed committee stage in the Legislature.

I know from previous proceedings, when I was the critic for Finance—in probably 2014—I remember being called out of order for citing the budget and was instructed that I could not make reference to the budget as a reference tool for the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review at the time.

So I just need clarification as how I could, in good faith, answer the member's question that will go to content without citing content from the bill, a bill that is not referenced anywhere in these documents; the supplement to the Estimates of expenditure for 2022-2023 for Manitoba Finance.

Mr. Chairperson: I would advise the Minister of Finance that he is free to answer the question posed by the critic, as long as he doesn't go into details of the bill. [*interjection*]

The honourable Minister of Finance.

Mr. Friesen: Okay, thank you for that clarification, Mr. Chair.

I will endeavour to keep my comments and my responses high level and you can provide additional guidance, as I said. There's no attempt here to reflect on your authority or your role in these proceedings. Just simply looking for that explanation. So, you can interrupt or provide guidance as you see fit, if you see me straying from your stated instructions.

The member asked what I learned in committee. Well, we learned that some people in Manitoba expressed an opinion that they felt like the bill would

cause 5 per cent increases year after year, so I welcomed the opportunity in committee to be able to correct those individuals.

And without citing the passages, and I won't read from the bill itself, but clearly, I cited those passages that indicated to those people who stated those concerns that the bill in way—no way, shape or form required annual increases of 5 per cent. Rather, I was able to show them and point to them those sections of the bill that showed that there was a test to make sure there was a lesser increase and that the provisions of the bill actually work to hold down, not push up, annual increases. And some members who presented at committee actually thanked me for that information and indicated that they were unaware, previous to that explanation, how that bill's mechanism worked.

We heard from other people who said that they felt that the PUB would be interfered with. Some people stated that: interfered with. And I was able to cite to some members who presented at committee sections of the bill that I won't refer to which indicated that actually, in many respects, while the PUB would continue to be that independent body that would fully consider and be responsible for rate setting and, based on applications by Hydro for their next rate, they would fully adjudicate, they would fully have hearings; even so, there were other provisions that actually extended the PUB's authority.

I won't cite those sections of the bill in this—in these proceedings, but those sections even went to things like accountability for charges. And there's a term that we use to refer to charges that the PUB can lay against a utility if they don't follow the orders that are issued to them. And those charges can actually be assessed on a daily basis. And that is referred to as an administrative penalty. And so this bill contains those things. And some of those members who were at committee said, oh, I wasn't aware of that, and thank you for making me aware of that.

It showed me that while we believe in these proceedings, we believe in Manitoba's structures that invite, probably in the broadest way in Canada, people to be present at committee, it clearly showed us that the NDP had been hard at work to obfuscate, to present the bill in a way that was not accurate. And those admissions by presenters, time after time, that said, oh, I wasn't aware of that, or that wasn't clearly explained to me, or thank you for clarifying the record on this or that—it showed me that there had been a concerted effort by the NDP to undertake to obfuscate and to re-present the bill in its own terms.

I think that's disappointing. I think that there's enough for us to debate in principle, on principled issues. There are differences of opinion that the critic and I can have. I think it goes too far when the member alleges and when his party alleges that, somehow, you know, this government has a scheme.

I don't even understand what would be the rationale for such a scheme. We've been very clear about what the bill does. It's designed to stabilize Hydro at a key moment when it's critical to do so with accumulated debt—debt that will be paid off by future ratepayers. At the same time, it holds down annual increases. And, at the same time, it gives a broad mandate for the PUB.

The member can dispute that, and he can debate it, and I will defend every day his right to do so. But I have to say, it is discouraging that they resort to tactics like misleading the public in Manitoba in order to accomplish their political goals.

Mr. Sala: Very disappointing answer from the minister, and I'm sure that anyone who's tuning in here would be very disappointed to know that he has failed to reflect on what committee—what presenters to committee had to say and the important perspectives that they had to share.

I think it's also just worth putting on the record that the minister seems to believe that there's some type of NDP conspiracy that has led to dozens of presenters coming to committee, that they were somehow here at our beck and call or that we had given them misinformation to present to committee and that somehow we were driving people here to speak about the bill negatively.

* (15:10)

That's patently wrong, clearly, and it's just also concerning to see that he continues to see the world through that lens and that he has failed to reflect on what those presenters brought forward.

Some of those presenters—specifically, the representative for the Manitoba Industrial Power Users Group—I would think, from this government's perspective, would be really important.

Yesterday, we shared in the House a quote from the representative from the Manitoba Industrial Power Users Group. The quote was in relation to the impacts—the rate impacts that would occur if this bill were to pass. And I'm going to quote it for the minister, and I'd like to ask for his comment on this quote—and I can assure him that the representative for

the Manitoba Industrial Power Users Group was not an NDP plant.

I will quote him: That will drive industry from Manitoba. It will destroy energy-intensive industry in this province. It will destroy jobs. It will destroy economic activity. End quote.

Can the minister provide comment on this quote from the Manitoba Industrial Power Users Group, please?

Mr. Friesen: There's a line from a Shakespeare play—and I think it might be Macbeth, but I might be mistaken—where one of the characters says: Methinks she doth protest too much.

I think this is the second protestation that the member has given. It was kind of awkward for him at the committee when, in his closing statement, in response to no accusation from anywhere at all, he started denying that the NDP had any hand in orchestrating or engineering to bring people out. And he was giving these successive statements to say, we in no way, shape or form talked to any of these people; I've never seen these people in my life.

I don't know what he was raising these concerns for. No one had made allegations of him. And it seemed to me that he was protesting too much. And we hear him protesting the same now.

Were there similarities in script in a lot of the presentations? Yes, but that reflects in no way on the right of people to come and give those scripts and read from those scripts if they choose to do so. Some people spoke extemporaneously, and that is their right and ability to do so. Some people read from scripts, and that's their right, and if those scripts, you know, aligned very closely with the scripts of others, that's all right as well. Because it's their right to come to committee, and I'll defend their right all day long to come to committee.

The member seems to be advancing a narrative that somehow the government just won't listen; the government just won't listen. I want to show him three specific ways in which the government specifically addressed concerns of the Manitoba Industrial Power Users Group as it has advanced this bill.

And I thought it was interesting that Mr. Friesen, not referring to myself, but the representative from MIPUG, as it's called, didn't reference any of those and yet the members of MIPUG specifically cited and thanked me in a meeting this summer for addressing concerns and being responsive to hear their concerns.

The first area: this member will know at—that at a previous iteration that had accommodated some of these concerns about Hydro and about rates, rates in the future—that need to protect those low rates—there were four targets set for debt equity. This bill waived that requirement for four targets and replaced them with two targets: two stage gates to achieve a better debt-equity ratio, in response to concerns raised, in part, by MIPUG.

This bill contains, in contrast to a previous bill that addressed similar concerns, a three-year rate period. So, one rate application could suffice for three years. A previous bill contained a five-year rate application. This change was made in response, in part, to representations from MIPUG.

And this bill, in contrast to a previous bill—similar to it in some ways—eliminated the setting of hydro rates in an interim way by Cabinet, simply because in the interim period, there would have been no one to set the rate. We eliminated that by requiring Hydro to go back to the PUB and confirm their interim rate and to do so, to bring a general rate increase application for the next two years until the enactment period described in this bill, which is 2025.

I've just cited for the member three ways in which the government, through this legislation, has directly heard from and responded to individuals and groups who made applications to the government about this bill.

But let me end by saying this: if the member wants to have a conversation about who we believe the better party is, to be able to facilitate economic growth, provide the conditions that give confidence to business and industry and individuals in their own households, we will put our record against them any day and every day and all day long, because this is the former government who stubbornly refused to even index the tax brackets; who held their foot on the neck of the poor by not increasing the basic personal amount; and who increased the payroll tax and a series of taxes and culminated it into raising the PST.

This member has nothing to say in lecturing us on—

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

Mr. Sala: The minister was speaking about, you know, this idea that his government is inspiring or inspires confidence in industry and business in this province, and yet I just finished reading a quote to him from a representative of some of the largest businesses

in this province—some of the biggest job creators in this province—that the bill he's advancing and supporting, along with every single member of the PC caucus, is going to destroy jobs and economic activity in Manitoba.

He can congratulate himself on making a terrible bill slightly less terrible, as he just did, but that doesn't change things at all. The reality is, as he heard from a wide range of people and specifically from representatives of some of the largest businesses in this province that this bill will destroy jobs and will destroy economic activity.

I'll ask him again, can he reflect on the comments by MIPUG's representative that this bill will destroy jobs and economic activity in Manitoba.

* (15:20)

Mr. Friesen: I welcome a conversation with this member about what we believe the real threat to jobs and growth in Manitoba would be. And I would submit to that member that the real threat to jobs and growth would be a government who does not effectively participate with and interact with industry and business leadership and groups, with chambers of commerce, with business advocacy groups like the CFIB and others, in order to continue to create the conditions in a province that foster and lead to economic growth.

The NDP did not even do the basics. They did not even index their tax brackets. That meant that even the lowest income earners paid tax in this province thousands of dollars previous to what they would in places like Alberta or Saskatchewan. As a matter of fact, when we took government, the disparity between Manitoba's basic personal amount and Saskatchewan's was \$6,000. That's a tax on the poor. That's a tax on the poor.

But the payroll tax—the health and post-secondary tax—that was a tax on all businesses. It was a tax that directly discouraged growth, because when a business got to a certain threshold, they got a surprise in the mail and it wasn't a letter of congratulations by an NDP Finance minister to say thank you for creating jobs.

It was a tax. Taxed on growth, taxed on new hires, taxed on payrolls. That is why Budget 2022 has made progress by raising those thresholds, pulling hundreds of job creators off those lists, who no longer pay the payroll tax, or pay it to a far lesser extent.

The provincial sales tax was raised by the previous government. First widened—which, in that year, took in \$155 million more in one year, in 2014—and every year thereafter compounded as the price of goods and the effect of nominal GDP was factored in. But beyond that, the tax was raised by 14 per cent—an increase from 7 to 8 per cent PST is not a 1 per cent increase, it's a 14 per cent increase—resulting in a billion dollars of additional revenue to the NDP and still they could not make progress against their deficit targets. No wonder bond-rating agencies and investors said about Manitoba: the NDP don't have a revenue problem, they have a spending problem.

So the member wants to lecture today on what he believes are the conditions that create growth. I would say the greatest threat to a province and its future are a government that finds itself unable or unwilling to create the conditions that foster growth, that help hard-working families keep more of their income, to have greater after-tax income, to allow them to make decisions about how they will raise children and how they will invest their money and pay down their debts and get ahead in society and care and make contributions in a charitable way.

The NDP represented the greatest threat to the future of Manitobans, as they do in respect of Bill 36, because they tripled the debt of Manitoba Hydro in the space of six years—a debt that stands at \$24 billion.

I met with a chief economist yesterday after our proceedings, and I asked that chief economist—one of Manitoba's—Canada's leaders—does debt matter? I said, because the critic for the NDP said it doesn't matter. The chief economist from one of the biggest banks in Canada said, I assure you that debt matters very much, and especially in the context when interest rates are rising and the cost of carrying debt becomes more expensive, as it is now.

Hydro's carrying cost for debt service is now \$1.1 billion. The member says, who cares? Hydro's debt is \$24 billion. He says, who cares? We know this will result in higher rates if left unchecked, and he says, who cares?

We don't take that point of view. That's why we stand on the side of Manitobans, protecting low rates, giving the PUB a broader mandate and helping Hydro to stabilize more in future with reasonable debt-to-equity targets over time.

Mr. Sala: The minister can continue to misrepresent our position on Hydro debt as much as he'd like, but

he knows that we on this side of the House—the opposition—support what the Public Utilities Board found in their needs for and alternatives to hearing. They very clearly identified that Hydro could sustain those investments and outlined exactly what would be required to help ensure that those debts were paid down.

We believe in the Public Utilities Board. We believe in their role, we believe that they have done an excellent job in ensuring that Manitobans pay as little as possible for their electricity and their utilities. We do not believe in destroying the Public Utilities Board and disempowering them, as this government seeks to do.

So, the minister, again, can continue to misrepresent as much as he'd like, but he's not fooling anybody.

I'd like to ask him to provide some comment on something that was said by Mr. Friesen of the—of MIPUG. He stated that the financial targets identified in the bill will result in a more than a doubling of hydro rates by 2040, and that it will require Hydro to raise \$7.5 billion in new revenue.

Can he provide comment on that?

Mr. Friesen: I'd be pleased to offer a response to the member.

But just before I do so, he did in his previous question cite his concern about economic development in Manitoba. I refer him to page 52 of the budget and budget documents, which shows the kind of large- and medium-scale projects that are completed, under way or announced right now in Manitoba.

This includes: Vale announcing a \$150-million investment to extend mining activities in Thompson by 10 years; CentreVenture and University of Manitoba community renewal corp undertaking the development of 2.4 acres of—Market Lands site just west of City Hall, building a \$40-million, 10-storey housing development; Maple Leaf Foods, \$182 million, 73,000-square-foot—that's like two Costcos stuck together—expansion of its Lagimodiere Boulevard facility in Winnipeg; Neo Financial Technologies, a second headquarters in the Exchange District, 300 new jobs; Sio Silica Corporation, that was formerly CanWhite Sands Corp., issued an environmental licensing to the—establish an operation in the RM of Springfield; HudBay Minerals announcing plans to significantly increase operations in Snow Lake; Parrish & Heimbecker, a \$50-million grain-handling facility, now open outside Dugald;

CHARBONE Corp.; Bell MTS, a \$400-million investment in fibre-optic infrastructure in Winnipeg and outside of Winnipeg; Merit Functional Foods, \$150-million, 100,000-square-foot canola-based protein production centre; HyLife, broadening its vertical integration of its hog processing; Simplot, doubling processing capacity; Roquette, construction of the world's largest pea production facility right outside—right in Portage la Prairie; McCain Foods, in Portage la Prairie and upgrading its potato processing plants in Carberry and Portage; Maple Leaf Foods, capacity expansion; Canada Goose Holdings, a new factory; Ubisoft, opening a new Winnipeg studio.

Mr. Chair, I assure the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) that the economic future of Manitoba looks exceedingly bright.

Last night, I had the opportunity to attend a function that was attended by key business leaders in the city of Winnipeg and across the province of Manitoba. I assure that member not one of them cited a concern that linked Bill 36 and its provisions to any sudden demise.

And I would say those are the real experts who know economic development, business, investment, risk management, and I would put their collective reputations—200 of them—before the opinion of an associate from MIPUG. He's welcome to his opinion. I respectfully disagree. I respectfully disagree.

* (15:30)

So, when the member says, well, what do you think of his opinion? He's welcome to his opinion; I disagree. So, that would be my answer for him.

However, to his question about the threat of increasing hydro rates, has the member studied the NDP hydro rate increases from 2004 to 2015? I wonder if that member has actually looked at the request and the PUB approval. Because in 2004, the PUB approved a 5 per cent increase for Manitoba Hydro; in 2005, a 2.25 per cent increase; in 2007, a 2.25 per cent increase; in 2008, a 5 per cent increase; in 2009, a 2.8 per cent increase; in 2010, a 2.8 per cent increase; in 2011, a 2 per cent increase. In 2012, I believe two increases, 4.4 per cent and there might have been another. In 2013, a 3.5 per cent increase; in 2014, a 2.75 per cent increase; and, in 2015, a 3.95 per cent increase.

The cumulative increase is 56 per cent, but that is not compounded. That member knows the principle of compounding. So I'll be happy to bring back to this table what these numbers actually look out—it looks to

me on the basis of this that this is a doubling of rates by the NDP, but at a time when inflation was, at points, at a record low; certainly, multiples lower than now. So, here's the record. The NDP doubled hydro rates.

And there's one more thing to add to the record. If the provisions of Bill 36 holding down annual rate increases had been in effect, those rate increases by the NDP would have been \$1.2 billion less.

Mr. Sala: Interesting language from the minister. Appreciate the response there.

I'd like to just ask sort of one more question reflecting on committee and give him an opportunity to, you know, to confirm that he is actually listening when Manitobans come forward with their concerns. We had, again, dozens and dozens of people representing a broad range, a diverse range of Manitobans: environmentalists, representative of big industry, huge coalition of Manitobans who are against the bill.

So I want to ask him: Does what he learned at committee, does it in any way encourage him or does it give him pause to think that this bill should be scrapped? Does the minister—after having heard dozens and dozens of Manitobans speak about their concerns with the bill, does the minister in any way feel differently about the bill, feel differently about its contents? Does he believe that he should consider recommending that this bill be scrapped?

Mr. Friesen: So, the member's allegation is that government doesn't listen. But in a previous question he asked, I was able to respond to his question and indicate—and give him simply three examples of how Bill 36 has actually incorporated the advice and interactions and consultation that we've done with various groups, including MIPUG, which you've referenced. I gave them three examples of how this bill is actually different from predecessor bills based on the advice that we heard.

The member also does not cite the fact that those previous bills were heard by committee; no, the previous bills were debated and there was opportunity even during debate because the public knew about those bills and had input or wrote to the minister's office. The minister conducted consultations on the bill. The minister would have held a bill briefing with the members of the opposition, who would have cited concerns and raised questions and asked civil servants, some of whom will be around this table today, about the bill.

But, if the member is trying to advance a narrative that this government just doesn't listen, I refer him to page 25 of the budget, which makes clear that the budget for 2022 was informed by more than 51,000 Manitobans participating in budget consultation processes—even more than in the previous year.

Many of these by my predecessor on this role, as he held this role before me—I believe I can say his name now because he's no longer a member of the Legislature, so Mr. Scott Fielding, who was the member—was the minister of Finance who attended those meetings. There were 7,400 responses received on an online survey; 10,300 people participated in quick polls. Engagements and consultations occurred through telephone town halls, virtual meetings, online surveys and through email and written submissions. It shows you that this government was listening.

I could cite examples for the member of points in the past where the government has actually listened, as well. When we took government and realized there was too much money being spent not on the creation of public schools, but we felt that there could be more schools built if we could somehow harness savings in the construction process.

And, indeed, the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart) led that work when he was the minister of Education in 2016 and 2017. And it was that minister and that work that went out and said, well, the previous NDP government had an ideological aversion to alternative service delivery. So we investigated it. *[interjection]*

And even now, the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) mutters at the—or, Fort Garry mutters at the table, that's all about privatization—but, in fact, what it was about was trying to build more schools because the minister of Education at the time's observation was that the NDP didn't build enough schools. And they could have done more if they would have harnessed better savings, the efficiencies changed their procurement practices. And, indeed, the member who is now the Minister for Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services has done a lot of that heavy lifting when it comes to modernizing procurement rules.

But the fact is, the government said, we believe we're going to go a P3 route. Well, I tell you, I think the NDP did not know what to do with themselves when we gave an update six months later and said we investigated it, we looked at it, we turned it around and said, we believe we can get the same efficiencies out of the conventional process. We didn't advance it.

And I think they'll—were scratching their heads and—scratching their heads, and they didn't know what to message in the media because we acted on the basis of evidence.

Likewise, these members saw a bill based on education reform—and we believe it's important to continue to modernize education—that we didn't advance because we listened to Manitobans.

So the member's in a tough spot, trying to at once advance a narrative that this government never listens, listens to no one and just charges ahead with blinders on, come what may, damn the torpedoes, you know, whatever happens.

But the fact of the matter is, I've given him in these proceedings specific examples of how we have listened—in Budget 2022, when it's come to policies in the past and including, as I said, the 50,000 people plus who were consulted in the process that led to Budget 2022.

So we'll continue to listen and we'll continue to respond to Manitobans. And we're still committed to the goals of keeping hydro rates low, stabilizing Hydro and providing for broader powers to the PUB to avoid debacles like the NDP caused in the past.

Mr. Sala: Sounds like the minister's listening to everyone except for the 50 or so people that just showed up to tell him to scrap the bill.

* (15:40)

I'd like to move on to ask the minister about rate increases in the future—what we might expect. We have not had a general rate hearing in Manitoba for some time. And I'm wondering if the minister and his government are intending on legislating another hydro rate increase on Manitobans as they did in 2021—the 2.9 per cent rate increase that was imposed on Manitobans in the middle of the pandemic, in the middle of an affordability crisis.

Is this government planning on legislating another hydro rate increase in the near future? Or do they intend on holding a general rate hearing to determine any future rate increases?

Mr. Friesen: So, Mr. Chair, I see the trap that the member is trying very inelegantly to lay for me, and I will endeavour not to step into that trap that has not even been covered with leaves. He's still got the sticks sharpened and pointed and sticking up from the bottom of the trap, but he hasn't set that snare very well.

The member knows full well that the government has no role in this bill to set rates for Manitoba Hydro. The government has a role in that Hydro, as a Crown corporation, is owned by the Province of Manitoba. We like to say it's owned by the people of Manitoba. It is responsive to the ratepayers. Manitoba Hydro answers to its board of directors and its chair of the board. It's led, executively, by its CEO and executive officers.

But—I—so, let's just say, categorically, no, is the answer to the member's question because in this governance structure, it is the regulator who sets rates for Manitoba Hydro. What the member is referring to is a one-time occurrence in 2020 when, through the budget implementation and tax statutes act, there was that interim mechanism.

The previous bill described this beginning of a new era where Hydro would bring a better application based on an integrated resource plan. And this is actually referred to on page 7 of the annual report of Manitoba Hydro where it indicates, and it says here: We—I'm quoting—we started development of Manitoba Hydro's first ever integrated resource plan, IRP, a foundational, empirical document that will guide the actions we take and investments we will make to meet the energy needs of our customers for the future.

An—our IRP includes input from thousands of customers and interested parties across Manitoba as well as through data and research on our available and future energy resources, and the different things that could affect them. When complete, our IRP will ensure the plans we make and act on are reflective not only of the input we gain from customers and other stakeholders, but also understood and firmly rooted in a practical reality today and in the years to come.

Manitoba Hydro's vision for the future involves partnership and guidance. In keeping with trends across the industry, across the world, we have begun to put the pieces in place toward building a new kind of relationship with customers, one of a trusted energy adviser in helping customers understand the changing energy landscape and the new options and choices it could represent.

We are building on the history by consulting with customers. Our collaboration with Efficiency Manitoba continues. We're working hand-in-hand with the Province, too, as they develop a provincial energy policy framework. Our integrated resource plan is pivotal on this front—comprehensive, thorough, far-reaching basis of knowledge and expertise.

So the member seems to imply that this is easy-peasy and should've been done yesterday. But I assure the member, this was never done in the past. An IRP represents a significant jumping-off point where a far 'brader'—broader array of evidence and opinion is used to determine rates based on the state of capital and infrastructure, based on current world financial situations, based on representations from individuals and consumer groups and industry, and others who present at those hearings.

What the previous bill did was, said, there needs to be a couple of work for this—years for this work to be completed. That decision was made in conjunction with Hydro and the PUB and others. It was meant to simply provide that ability for them to get there. However, we found a better way through Bill 36 that involves absolutely no interim rate setting by the government of Manitoba.

Let me be clear: the PUB sets rates, the Crown corporation Manitoba Hydro brings a rate application. In November, they will be back at the PUB to present evidence to confirm their interim rate application, and for the next two years previous to the trigger date stated in this bill, they will continue to bring rate applications. There is no role, there is no function, the government does not set the rates for Manitoba Hydro, and I hope the member has it clear.

Mr. Sala: It is very painfully clear that the minister was not listening to the presenters that came before committee, who repeatedly stated to him in no uncertain terms that the bill will turn the Public Utilities Board into a rubber stamp. Those are words that, I think, multiple committee presenters used. And the reason is, is because the bill creates aggressive financial targets which will force Hydro to raise, well, according to the Manitoba Industrial Power Users Group, \$7.5 billion that will force aggressive rate hikes year after year after year.

The minister's own bill, the minister's—his own piece of legislation states these financial targets. I would hope that he would have more clarity on what they entail and the impacts of those targets, but apparently not.

I'd like to ask him about the energy policy that his government has contracted. There is a long-term energy policy framework being developed right now in co-ordination—or, collaboration with Dunsky Energy + Climate Advisors. Many stakeholders have been engaged. Obviously, this will have long-term implications for Hydro and for energy in Manitoba.

And yet, while this transformational policy is being developed, the government is seeking to ram forward a piece of legislation that will fundamentally alter the way that the Public Utilities Board operates, and will fundamentally drive higher and higher rates.

Can the minister provide comment on the wisdom of advancing Bill 36 and passing this bill prior to his government learning about what the Dunsky energy policy framework has to say about the future of energy and Hydro in this province?

* (15:50)

Mr. Friesen: We found a very helpful chart that was actually created and prepared by the Public Utilities Board, and the member may want to avail himself of this chart. I'd be happy to provide a copy to himself and his analyst, as well.

And what it shows is not just the information that I read into the record about annual increases under the NDP for Hydro, and not only the 'inferetmation' I read in about the fact that those rate increases were significant, some of them 5 per cent, but there's more information on here.

There's information that indicates that sometimes the PUB approved hydro rates even more than Manitoba Hydro requested. In 2004, under the NDP, I wonder if the member knew that Manitoba Hydro requested a rate of 3 per cent, the PUB approved 5. In 2008, Hydro requested a 2.9 per cent increase, and the PUB approved 5 per cent.

And you can see across these charts—it actually talks about the difference rate between application and approval; even gives the board order, so he can look them up. But it also indicates the CPI that was going on at the time. In those years I just cited, CPI was less than one third of what it is today.

If left unprotected right now, on the current landscape—and this is the issue that the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) refuses to address at all costs—in this environment of 7 and 8 per cent CPI, ratepayers for Manitoba Hydro are exposed. That member knows that the mandate of the PUB is to balance the interests of the Crown corporation and fair and reasonable rates. But in an environment of CPI increases, inflation, Bank of Canada increases, these protections are necessary.

This bill holds down any annual award of the PUB. It protects ratepayers. Because I've clearly shown that when CPI, in 2004, was 2 per cent, if Hydro could be awarded a 5 per cent increase in

a 2 per cent environment, it means that 15 per cent could have been possible in a 6 per cent CPI if Hydro were applying now for a rate, but for the provisions of this bill that would not let such an award happen. It creates parameters. It is the guardrails on the sides of the bowling alley at the five-pin. The ball still rolls towards the pins, but it can't go to the gutter. It protects ratepayers.

So, when the member says, why bring it now? Because protections for ratepayers are urgent now. However, Moody's warned—members never mention this. He says there's nothing to fear. Debt has no consequences, he says. Debt-service rate of \$1.1 billion at Hydro has no consequence. He said all things are on a glide path to peace and stability. But Moody's said that Hydro continues to constitute the province's single largest contingent liability at this time.

So I think the member is saying he wants to get on the horn and phone Moody's and DBRS and Standard & Poor's and say, you guys have it all wrong. You highly paid analysts and managers of Manitoba's account, you simply don't understand. There's nothing to see here. Debt has no consequences. Interest rates have no consequences, and carrying costs for debt have no consequences. And yet, chief economists, bond rating agencies and investors say otherwise.

So it's no wonder that this member says, oh, just kick down the road any provisions to stabilize Hydro and protect ratepayers. We say no. We say concurrent, not consecutive, because it happens right now. The IRP is very, very important. That work is under way. Environmental policy is under way.

Bill 36 to protect Manitobans, to protect low rates, which would be much higher were it not for the protection of this bill, arguably. So I invite the member to comment on this evidence I've presented at the table.

Mr. Sala: Yes, we strongly disagree that the right response to concerns expressed by bond rating agencies is to kneecap the Public Utilities Board. That's not the right approach.

I just—I'd like to ask the minister about some comments he's made in the past. One of the main arguments that this government has advanced about the need for this bill—we haven't heard them talk a lot about this lately—is their concerns about value for money from the Public Utilities Board hearings.

Of course, throughout the course of committee presentations, we heard many people state that Hydro hearings cost a typical residential customer \$2.50 a

year. And those numbers, I believe, came from the Public Interest Law Centre. And the Public Interest Law Centre also calculated that the same customer received \$50 per year on their hydro bill annually as a result of the PUB hearings.

So, it's clear that the Public Utilities Board does create fantastic value for Manitobans in helping to keep our rates low, and they do that for an incredibly small amount of money on each of our overall bills, on a yearly basis.

The minister, in the past, claimed—and I'm going to quote him right now—he said to The Canadian Press, March 23rd, 2022: It's not in our interest, on an annual basis, to have a hearing that costs \$10 million.

Documents filed by Manitoba Hydro with the PUB in July showed that the average cost of hydro rate hearings was less than \$5 million annually.

So I just want to invite the minister to comment on what happened there. Did he misspeak, or was he intentionally introducing misinformation onto the record?

So, if he could provide some clarity on why he was claiming that costs for the PUB were \$10 million a year, when, in fact, the evidence suggested that it was much, much less than that. Will he clarify whether or not he misspoke or did he intentionally introduce misinformation on the record?

* (16:00)

Mr. Friesen: It's quite something to hear the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) make an allegation at this table about deliberately misleading and Bill 36.

And I think this would provide an excellent opportunity for the member to do some introspection. Because if anyone's behaviours should be called in question in respect to statements made pertaining to Bill 36, it is that member for St. James, who has knowingly gone into the Legislature, day after day, and knowingly gone to the press and has said that this bill requires annual increases of 5 per cent a year. He called it a requirement for 5 per cent, knowing full well, as he does, that the bill makes clear that increases are held to CPI increases, or 5 per cent, whichever is less.

For the member to knowingly repeat those statements day after day, to tweet them out and put them on social media, to send those responses to his constituents, to say them to the press, is disappointing and is troubling.

I've said to him in these proceedings, it is one thing for he and I to disagree on policy or approach. I think we, essentially, at the end of the day, want the same thing in Manitoba: we want the low rates for hydro to continue, because it's a competitive advantage and we need it; we want economic development; and neither of us wants to see Hydro fail.

But it's quite challenging for me to hear the member make an allegation at this table.

If the member wants to talk about deliberately misleading Manitobans and Bill 36 in the sentence, I would be very, very happy to have that conversation. So, I invite him to do some introspection, to do some soul searching and to ask himself if he feels good about his behaviour and his conduct in respect of misleading Manitobans on Bill 36. I don't think he should feel that good about that.

Quoting from Manitoba Hydro's website, there's a cost breakdown based on recent regulatory filings. On Manitoba Hydro's website, which I would gladly provide the link for the member for.

It's www.hydro.mb.ca/regulatory_affairs—and it says how the costs break down.

Manitoba Hydro regulatory costs in millions of dollars, intervenor costs: \$1 million; PUB adviser costs, \$3.1 million; other PUB regulatory matters, \$500,000; PUB administration fees, \$700,000; internal Manitoba Hydro staff, regular and overtime, \$4.1 million; other costs: \$600,000. Get your pencil ready: \$10.1 million total actual average regulatory costs.

The member wants to go buy a Ford F-150, but he only wants to pay for the front half of the pickup truck. The problem is, if you go and buy the F-150, you have to buy the whole truck. And describing the cost as only half the truck is disingenuous. He's referring to hearing costs that pertain solely and explicitly to PUB regulatory amounts. But those amounts do not also accommodate all the other categories of expense. It is not free to do a regulatory hearing, and those are the true costs. So, let him dispute it; let him go to the website.

I asked the CEO of Hydro if she stood by her statements of those costs, and she did without equivocation. I remind that member the CEO for Hydro has years of experience on this job and formerly at BC Hydro, and I would say knows what she is talking about.

Mr. Sala: No more questions for the minister.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there any further questions?

Okay. Seeing no further questions, we'll now move on to consideration of resolutions of the bill—the Estimates.

Resolution 7.2: RESOLVED that be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,078,000 for Finance, Crown Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,129,000 for Finance, Fiscal Policy and Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,455,000 for Finance, Communications and Engagement, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution: 7.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,460,000 for Finance, Treasury, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,475,000 for Finance, Compliance and Enforcement, for the—
[interjection]

Resolution 7.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,465,000 for Finance, Compliance and Enforcement, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,100,000 for Finance, Treasury Board Secretariat, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,300,000 for Finance, Policy and Planning Secretariat, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

* (16:10)

Resolution 7.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,522,000 for Finance, Intergovernmental Affairs, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution seven point one—oh. RESOLVED that there be—*[interjection]*—7.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$125,000 for Finance, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.11: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$906,597,000 for Finance, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is 7.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 7.1. At this point, we request the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item.

Okay, the floor is open for questions.

Seeing none, we'll move on to resolution 7.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,507,000 for Finance, Administration and Finance, for fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Finance.

The next set of Estimates to be considered for—by this section of the Committee of Supply is for Tax Credits.

Is it the will that we should break—recess to allow the minister and the critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next set of Estimates? *[Agreed]*

The committee will now recess.

The committee recessed at 4:13 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:22 p.m.

TAX CREDITS

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Tax Credits.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): No.

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

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): No.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member for those comments. At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us at the table, and we—*[interjection]*—according to our rule 77(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 the questions has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

And there is no questions.

We'll now proceed to the resolution.

Resolution 33.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$515,571,000 for Tax Credits, Tax Rebates and Fees, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Department of Tax Credits.

EMERGENCY EXPENDITURES

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Emergency Expenditures.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): No.

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

And does the critic from the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): No.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for those comments.

The floor is now open for questions.

Seeing none, we'll move on to:

Resolution 27.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$100,000,000 for Emergency Expenditures, Emergency Expenditures, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Department of Emergency Expenditures.

ENABLING APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of Enabling Appropriations.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): No.

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

And does the official opposition critic have an opening statement?

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): No.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the member for those comments.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Sala: No questions, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no questions, we'll move on to resolution 26.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,250,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Enabling Vote, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$869,656,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Internal Service Adjustments, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$40,000,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Green and Carbon Reduction Fund, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 26.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$256,401,000 for Enabling Appropriations, Capital Assets-Internal Service Adjustments, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of Enabling Appropriations.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Families.

Is it the will of the committee to briefly recess to allow the minister and the critics the opportunity to prepare? [*Agreed*]

We will—the committee recess.

The committee recessed at 4:27 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:37 p.m.

FAMILIES

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 Families.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, and the floor is now open for questions.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): So, yesterday, I had just asked the minister a question in regards to Lions Place. I know the minister stated that she does have a meeting subsequent to their meeting last week with Lions Place, I believe, scheduled for today, assuming later on this evening.

But my questioning yesterday was specifically regarding Lions Place remaining social housing.

So, my concern, and I can appreciate that the minister is meeting the residents and that—their committee where they're at, and wanting to hear them and meet with them and work with them to find a solution which best fits their needs.

This property is for sale, and my concern is that—the absence of a commitment to ensure that whatever the outcome might be, that these residents—again, most of which are seniors, low-income seniors—do have the opportunity to remain in their homes and for

their rents to remain social rents—so, socially affordable housing.

So, I'm wondering if the minister can articulate for us whether or not she is committed to ensuring that it remains social housing for those residents, who are predominantly seniors, at Lions Place.

* (16:40)

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Families.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Well, I thank the member for the question, and I thank her for her advocacy on this very important issue—I apologize. Can I retract and restart over?

I thank the member for the question—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Families.

Ms. Squires: I thank member for their question and really appreciate their advocacy on this issue, and we share a commitment to the creation of social and affordable housing in the province of Manitoba and ensuring that all Manitobans have a safe and affordable place to call home.

Our government has demonstrated this commitment by working with several partners on the creation of affordable and social housing, including partners in the federal government. We've—that's why we signed on to the National Housing Strategy. We've been working with the City, other non-profit housing providers, and looking at many different tools to ensure there are housing options for people in the province, including rent supplements, Rent Assist and other tools to keep people in their homes and help people find safe and affordable housing.

In relation to this specific project, we are working with the group, and we had a very productive meeting today. All the requests that have come so far from the group have been met, and we will continue to engage with them. Currently, what they're wanting to do is establish and form a working group which would have federal government represented at the table, City at the table and other non-profit housing providers, as well as the Province. And I have assured the group that I will—the Province will be at the table, and we are excited to explore options.

But let's be clear: they are the leaders. They're taking the lead on where—what the next steps are. And we are certainly engaged and wanting to work with

them, but they are taking the lead, and they've asked us to sit at the table of the working group to discuss myriad options, and that's exactly what we're doing.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for her response, and I do think it is a good sign and a positive step from the minister and her department that they are engaging so quickly with Lions Place. I know the request was made not long ago. And I'll be blunt and say that, you know, there are times, as the MLA, I'll reach out to different departments—or, ministers, rather—more specifically, on particular issues, and I appreciate that the minister is addressing this expeditiously.

I am concerned that the minister is not willing to fully commit to ensure that this remains a social housing building. You know, I hear from constituents that live in that building, on a regular basis. I have friends in the community who live in that building. There are folks who've lived there for 25 years. There are folks in their 90s who live in that building and are, you know, feeling very precariously housed right now.

So, while I appreciate the minister's engagement with the group and the fact that there are many folks coming together to work on this, my hope is that the minister takes very seriously what's at risk for these residents—again, predominantly seniors who are vulnerable.

And I'm going to move on from this question as I don't think I'm going to get that particular commitment from the minister, but I sincerely hope that we can remain communicative on this issue, on the best interests of these folks in mind.

I do want to get some clarification around agreements, historical agreements, with Lions Place. Previously, the minister had shared with me, I believe in question period, that agreements with Lions Place ended in 2018, yet the former minister had told media at the time that an interim agreement was struck in 2018.

Can the minister explain this?

* (16:50)

Ms. Squires: So, in 2018 our government entered into a two-year subsequent agreement to provide rent supplements to the social units within the building. The member may know that there are some social units and some are affordable units. The social units were the ones that had expressed a need for a subsidy, and

so we had entered into an agreement to do that for two years.

Right now, the rents are still being offered at that social housing rate for the tenants but without government subsidy because of the good financial health of the landlord, currently with a fairly excessive surplus.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): It's my understanding that Manitoba Housing started an assessment report on Manitoba Housing properties.

My question is, was this done and what did it find?

Ekosi.

Ms. Squires: I apologize, I didn't hear the last part of that question.

Ms. Lathlin: Manitoba Housing started a housing assessment report on Manitoba Housing properties. Is this done, and what did it find?

Ms. Squires: Yes, work did commence in September of 2020 with the issuing of a request for proposals, which resulted in a successful—two successful proponents, and we anticipate their final report and completion of their work winter '23.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): With five minutes left, I'm actually going to ask three questions, and the minister of the department can do the best to address all three in the response.

The first one is about EIA. A lot of those who are struggling with addictions are struggling in the application process for EIA. What is the minister doing to advocate for those who are struggling with addictions and make this process a little bit easier?

The second question is, how did the Province settle on the goal to reduce the child poverty rate by 25 per cent by 2025? Is there evidence to guide this, and what measures have been taken to ensure that we've already made positive progress towards this goal?

And the last question: The department is seeking to advance reconciliation by increasing the number of department staff who participated in reconciliation training. Can the minister share what is in this training, who it is conducted by and what is the status of reconciliation training in the department at this time?

Ms. Squires: I thank the member for that question.

In regards to working with people who are struggling to access EIA and are potentially also afflicted with an addiction, we're trying to meet people

where they're at and moving EIA—the transformation is all about meeting people where they're at and having a very client-centred approach—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

CHAMBER

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): 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 Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Today, I have with me is my deputy minister, Sarah Thiele; my—I've got three assistant deputy ministers here. One is Cynthia Ritchie, and we have Kristine Seier and Blair McTavish as my staff from MPI. And then also, I have my political staff with me, is Andrew Clark, and Kyle Reenders, who is my executive assistant.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Thanks for that.

Is the—is there any staff on opposition side coming? Not yet?

An Honourable Member: Yes, he'll be joining me shortly.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Okay. Do you want to proceed with—*[interjection]* Okay.

The floor is—sorry. I will—I'll note that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, and the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Bushie? *[interjection]* The member for Keewatinook, my apologies.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Still refer to me as Mr., if you like.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I—just a few questions I want to start off with, would be the outlet channels project.

I'm just wondering if the minister can just let the committee know what the project cost is as of today? The project budget, I should say.

Mr. Piwniuk: When it comes to the channels, the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet channel project, the amount that—the total costs after—once we've actually finalized sort of the design, it's going to be at \$600 million, is the total cost of the project.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): The member for Keewatinook, and I would also ask that you introduce your staff at this time.

Mr. Bushie: I'm joined by Chris Sanderson, the knower of all, I believe, was his title that we introduced him yesterday.

An Honourable Member: Vault of knowledge.

Mr. Bushie: The vault of knowledge, I believe, is what it was. So, thank you for correcting me on that one.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for the \$600-million price tag that was attached to the outlet project budget. And I'm just wondering: Is that an increase from the initial budget?

* (15:00)

Mr. Piwniuk: I want to thank the member for the question.

When it comes to the—when the—before this, the amount that I gave you was a 600-million project—\$600-million project. But the first part on class D design, it was first at \$540 million.

And at the time when there was some changes to the—that we had taken into consideration when it came to mitigation of—significant mitigation of items that we actually—were actually worked with when it came to the federal government's requirements, when we're doing the actual environmental licensing application.

And see—these are the—some of the reasonings for the change in pricing. And there's base—basically, there's no—the base cost estimate has not risen. There's some efficiencies that we've—actually were able to determine when it came to the design.

But the things that had to be changed on the project itself to create the \$600-million increase was realigning the channels to avoid regional effects on groundwater, honouring the—both channels with minimized erosion, incorporating the base full of channels to minimize effects on fish, and each operation incrementally increasing flows through the channel or on

multiple days to minimize sediment transfer, and commit to no let-net-loss wetland benefits in accordance to The Water Rights Act.

So, this was all part of the consultation with First Nation community, along with the requirements from the federal licensing application that has come back to add these features that would bring the price up to the \$600 million. When it comes to—and then we also included the Indigenous economic development fund, too, of \$15 million, was also part of that \$60-million increase in the price of a \$600-million total budget for the project.

Mr. Bushie: So, the original price tag of \$540 million, which is now, as was confirmed, \$600 million.

Can the minister provide the list and breakdown of that \$60 million by all of the issues that he just—and the items that he just raised, the breakdown as to what, per item, per cost, that would be?

Mr. Piwniuk: Again, well, when it comes to the \$60-million breakdown, the \$15 million is the fund, is the Indigenous economic development fund that we've set aside to be the opportunity to develop economic opportunities in the communities most impacted by the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet channel project.

And it also gives the opportunity for First Nation communities to apply for the grant money that would be able to help, you know, and give them opportunities to get more competitive when it comes to actual opportunity to work on the channel, to bid on the channel, to—you know, it's going to be tendered. And we want the opportunity to have some opportunity for First Nations to—when it comes to maybe some training opportunities from small-amount investments so that they can be competitive in the bidding process.

But also, this also gives an opportunity for First Nation communities to—if they're in the fishing industry, much like some of the communities around the lakes that were impacted, they can also use that \$15-million application grants for when it comes to the fishery industry. I know there's many—when we were visiting First Nation communities this past summer, there was many of them in the fisheries industry and fishers, and they want—they—this is an opportunity to be able for them to continue investing in that industry.

So, this gives them the opportunity on the impact of these lakes and the impact of the flooding, but also

the impact of, you know, when we actually—during the construction of the projects itself.

The other \$45 million is, again—is the amounts of all the different—when it came to enhance the project itself, the changes, for the—for—to reduce the environmental impact of the design. And when the water actually is flowing at—when—years for we—to use the channel, we want to make sure that—we were making sure that we went beyond the design D stage, to make sure that whatever the federal government required to continue moving on to the application for the environmental assessment application. But also the other portion was to make sure that there was the least amount of impact when it comes to the fishing industry, the environment itself.

* (15:10)

The sediment that gets—again, is moving through the channel, we want to reduce it by—have parts of the design that would slow down the water flow to make sure it's more of a natural flow of water, where it's like—almost like a river.

Mr. Bushie: So, if I'm understanding correctly, then, the \$15 million was part of the fund that was announced a couple of weeks ago for Indigenous and First Nations work, as the minister just mentioned, and the other 45 was for the other contingencies that he also mentioned.

I'm just wondering then—the \$600 million price tag was announced—or, the increase to \$600 million was announced quite some time ago, and I'm just wondering why the announcement just over a couple weeks ago about the \$15 million and why wasn't that announced in the beginning, or is that more so an afterthought, or is that in addition to?

So, I guess, the question really is, the \$15 million that's meant for—as you said, to allow First Nation and Indigenous communities to, perhaps, set themselves up to bid on work. So a part of the design is also part of work.

Are there Indigenous and First Nation communities that are going to be engaged as part of the design of the project prior to construction?

Mr. Piwniuk: The member—for the question that he had about the \$45 million and the \$15 million: the \$15 million was—since I became minister back in January, that \$15 million was actually allocated already at that point in time. It was just, basically, we also needed to make sure that the approval process

was kind of worked into the fund, like, the \$600 million.

And again, that \$600 million was presented to me soon after I became the minister back in January, and the \$15 million was always there.

And for the last six years, we have been consulting with First Nations communities, our team, who have—when it comes to the channels, have made numerous meetings with a lot of First Nations communities.

The unfortunate thing about the—you know, there was two years, of course, that, with COVID, it was very hard for our team to get into First Nations communities. As everyone knows, a lot of—there was a lot of restrictions when it came to COVID. And so, the thing is, the First Nations weren't very comfortable having people coming from the outside inside into their communities, especially when they're the most—like, before the vaccination came out, they were probably the—one of the most vulnerable populations when it came to the COVID virus. And so, there was very—you know, we had to do a lot of consultations, too, on Zoom meetings, too.

And so, the—this is what all came out of this—all these meetings over the six years, was to listen, to be part of the 'integrative' of the project itself, to making sure that all these features that were addressed, that were concerns for the First Nations communities and from the RM—there's a few RMs in the area, when it came to groundwater, the aquifer.

All those things had to be worked into the project to satisfy the Government of Canada when it comes to the environmental review process. And again, these things all had to be incorporated in the actual final design of the project, and that's where we came up with the \$600 million in this past—like again, since I became minister. That number was there when I first became minister.

Mr. Bushie: So, the—have the First Nations and the First Nations leadership, then, been involved in the design phase here for the channel project?

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, the question for the member of Keewatinook: Yes, when it came to the consultation process, we listened to First Nations communities, the concerns, the issues that they had, and definitely throughout the period of time, we incorporated those concerns into the project.

Because at the same time, one of the biggest concerns that—when we went into a lot of communities,

that included, like, communities—when it comes to—we—the water coming in from—to Lake St. Martin, the water that's coming into Lake Winnipeg, they—these communities along these two lakes basically are concerned about the sediment that was going to be coming potential if we don't design it properly.

And these were the—some of the components that were put into making sure that the floor of the water coming through the channel was basically going to come much like a natural water—a water stream. And that's kind of how we designed the channels in that period of time, by consulting with First Nations communities.

And right now, when the—yes, and so the Indigenous input that was given to our department was realigning the channel to avoid regional effects on groundwater. And that was more probably with the—a lot of it comes—also with the municipality, and armouring both channels with 'minimizing' erosion, incorporate the base flow of channels to minimize effects on the fish, and for each operation incrementally increasing the flow through a channel over multiple days to minimize sediment transport.

So that's kind of—was all put into—and then also commitment to not—net loss of wetland benefits in accordance with The Water Rights Act. So where we're trying to do with the channel is not to lose any wetlands when we're making the design of the channel.

The other thing is, right now, as when the NDP were in government in the day, they basically used the emergency channel. And that emergency channel was put through during the NDP days, and a lot of sediment was brought through during the 2011 flood, and major impact to the lakes.

And so, this is where we, as our government, is working to make sure that we can move this project forward, and we're doing the consultation with First Nations communities, also answering all the questions that, during the environment process, that we are answering a number of questions over the years to the federal government to make sure that this—the process of getting this approval—the environmental licence approved, so that we can actually, then, actually construct the channels.

And the concern is that we are getting floods—the water—the amount of water that we had this past year, if we would have continued getting rains in month of June, like July and August and going into September,

we were fortunate that the water levels in all the lakes are coming down.

But the biggest concern now is that if we didn't have that, and we went into winter with a lot of moisture and a lot of snowfall, the concern that we'd have is that we would have to probably use those emergency channels again. And this is why we want to make sure we do it right.

And when it comes to at the table, we have First Nations communities at the table to create the solutions so that every community is protected by this flood mitigation and that we actually get this thing done right.

* (15:20)

And, at the same time, we want to make sure that, you know, we also have other communities that are waiting for this approval so that we can start working on other regions that are looking for the same type of mitigation or protection when it comes to Peguis.

So, the thing is, we want to make sure that everybody's on board so that we can actually construct this channel and so that we can move on to work on the next project, because there is other vulnerable communities out there that we need to protect.

And we want to make sure that the federal government's at the table here to make sure that they're leading on this, especially when it comes to Peguis, because the fact is, the Peguis, you know—as you are aware, during the flood of this past summer, it's Indigenous Services Canada that's responsible for making sure that if there's any evacuations, if there's any—when it comes to flooding, they're the first ones on the scene.

We, as EMO—Emergency Measures Organization—of our department, our division, are there to assist when it—

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

Mr. Bushie: So, is the minister saying that with the extensive consultation that he's had on the project, that the impacted First Nation communities, in fact, have given their consent to the design project so far—to the designing of the project so far?

Mr. Piwniuk: And I just want to—the question that the member from Keewatinook had was that—I just want to say that the Manitoba government remains strongly committed to fulfilling our duty for Crown-Indigenous consultation before environmental approvals to receive and before construction begins.

Our investment to the environmental advisory committee will ensure Indigenous communities—and this means that communities—First Nation communities—will be at the table even after the construction—during the construction and after the construction when it comes to the actual—any communities that live around the lakes have input on how the channel is operated. And this is about that environmental advisory committee.

So, from the time that the consultation was done, the time that construction is being—starting to be completed to the time that actually—when we're actually operating the channel, we do have the—that committee to be part of—at the table to making sure that they are actually being listened to, they're actually having input, and they're also part of the solution when it comes to the ongoing of—the operation of the outlet channel project.

And we are consulting with 39 First Nation communities in Manitoba right now, and the fact is it's in thirty—not just for Lake Manitoba; it's communities around Lake Manitoba, it's communities around Lake St. Martin and along the Lake Winnipeg, and that includes Peguis, when it comes to Fisher River First Nation, and all—Pinapootang [*phonetic*] and all the communities going down the Nelson River, too. Because this is the impact that all—everything that is up from Lake Winnipeg flowing to Hudson Bay are part of this 39 communities.

Mr. Bushie: So I still didn't hear an answer there about whether or not the affected First Nations communities and—I guess, when you put the number of 39 more so than the geographically closer ones to the channel project, have those communities then signed off on the design that's been proposed to be able to do the channel project? Have they already given their consent to the minister?

Mr. Piwniuk: I just want to answer the question to the member that we are not asking for consent. You know, we are working right now on a continuous consultation with First Nations communities. And we're actually on a two—stage 2 of a four-stage consultation to address every community issue to making sure that they are being addressed. The concerns are—the questions are being answered. And this is also the consultation. The information, the answers, the questions, all go into the federal government when it comes to the environmental licensing of the project.

So this is what's all part of the process for making sure that this project gets approved by the federal government, but also, at the same time, that communities,

ongoing, during the consultation where our department's going many times to different communities to making sure that every concern and—you know, there might be some communities that might have some more questions. We will continue addressing those questions and concerns. And it's part of the process of a four-stage—and right now we're on the second stage—completing the second stage of a four-stage process.

Mr. Bushie: So I'm hearing, then, that the consultation process is more so just a, kind of a, almost for show, then. It doesn't really matter what the feedback may be, because it's still going ahead, regardless of what the feedback from flood-affected First Nations may be, in terms of consultation versus consent and support of the project. Sounds to me like their concerns are, in fact, not serious—going to be taken seriously because the project is still moving forward, in the minister's words, by that any means.

I do have a question about the \$3.1 million that was announced for the environment committee. Can the minister tell us who exactly makes up that committee?

* (15:30)

Mr. Piwniuk: I just wanted to address the comment that the member from Keewatinook had to say. You know, our department has been working with First Nation communities and consulting. We've actually—I've actually been to many of the communities, and we actually had—Pinapootang [*phonetic*], we actually had seven different communities right there to listen to; to concerns about the addressing their concerns. And a lot of that stuff has come back.

You know, the concerns that they had during the 2011 flood—again, that was during the NDP days. They had a lot of complaints that had—how they were treated back in 2011. And the fact is, it's—it was their own government. And the member from Concordia was there in part of that government too, to say that, you know, they—lot of the concerns and complaints were coming from those floods.

And this time, we are out there. We're listening to all the concerns that they had, the issues that they had during the 2011 and 2014 floods, and the thing is we want to be there to be part of the solution. And our department is consulting with First Nation communities. This is part of a reconciliation that we're going to be working with First Nations.

I have some really good relationships with a lot of First Nation communities now in Manitoba; I've always had. In the western region I had some really

good relationship building. I've had a lot of relationship building with Chief Hudson, with the chief of Fisher River, with the chief of Lake Manitoba.

We—and they even said they feel that now they're finally being listened to, and they felt good that we were actually consulting with them. But they didn't feel good like that in the past, and that was the NDP government at the time.

So, if you're going to put—complain that we're not consulting, well, the thing is what they were complaining about, the member from Keewatinook, is your former government that's—they were most concerned about.

And we met with, you know, President Chartrand, and we were able to, you know, talk to him about the opportunities. Working together to making sure that maybe a population in the region, especially when it came to St. Laurent, is a—is—the consultation is with them. The Interlake Reserves Tribal Council, we had these right there.

We've now dealt with the RM of Grahamdale, the Fisher River First Nation, Peguis First Nation, Lake Manitoba, Lake—Little Saskatchewan and Pinaymootang. We talked to all of them and basically, they basically said we're finally feel like we're being heard; they feel that they're finally at the table and they're feeling that they're part of the solution. And we're reassuring them when we move forward that we—they will be part of the consultation when it comes to how the channel is operated.

But, you know what? They never had that in the past with this NDP government during the flood. They did a lot of complaining about how they were treated during the 2011 flood.

So, I would just say that we will continue consultation, and it's an ongoing process, and the thing is, we all have to be on the same page, be part of the solution and working with the federal government because we've all got to be in this together.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I take it from the minister's non-answer that he is taking this issue under advisement and will get back to the member from Keewatinook with regards to the makeup of the environment committee, which he asked in his question.

In a similar vein, the residents around Moosehorn in that area, the RM of Grahamdale, folks are very concerned in that area about the process that was undertaken for expropriation and the environmental

impact of the channels project on themselves and the place that they live.

In the same vein as the Indigenous communities that are impacted by this channels project, the people who live there, many are multigenerational families who have been farming on that land and are producers who understand the dynamics of the land, who understand the environmental balance that has been—that exists in that area and, you know, have identified serious issues that they foresee coming with the placement of the channel and the way that it's being undertaken.

They, from the very beginning, have asked to be—have a seat at the table, to be heard. They've asked for very reasonable ability to, you know, give input about the location of the channel, the impact to the water table and the impact to their lives.

And they've also asked for a fair deal when it comes to the expropriation that's being asked of them, and they are willing to do their part as Manitobans to ensure that we have a comprehensive flood mitigation system that can handle years like we saw this year, years like we saw in 2011 and years that we imagine we'll be seeing more of in the years to come.

So, they're willing to do their part and they came out to community meeting after community meeting, and they report a feeling of being pushed around or bullied by this minister's department. And I don't think it's the minister's intention to come across that way, but when people aren't listened to, when they aren't respected, that's the feeling that they come to.

So my question is, there are a few properties that are still yet to be settled with regards to the expropriation. Some landowners are still asking to be moved and to be compensated for those moves because of the location of the channel.

I'm just wondering if the minister can detail the consultations that he's undertaken with those individuals, whether he's, you know, sat down personally with them and listened to their concerns, whether he's aware of them. And maybe he could shed some light on next steps for those who are feeling that their voices aren't being heard in this process, want to do the right thing, want to do their part to ensure that this project moves forward, but want to be ultimately heard.

So, if the minister can comment on that, that'd be appreciated.

Mr. Piwniuk: This is for the question that the honourable—the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie)—the question was the advisory council. And what I was reading off was: the Manitoba Métis Federation, the Interlake Reserves Tribal Council, RM of Grahamdale, Fisher River First Nation, Peguis First Nation, Lake Manitoba, Little Saskatchewan, Pinaymootang, Lake St. Martin First Nation, Canada IAAC organization, Dauphin River First Nation, the Dauphin River community and Kinoshjegen [*phonetic*] First Nation.

So, these are the—they'll be representatives from all these communities to be part of the advisory council going forward during the construction and also ongoing when it comes to the operation of the channel.

Yes, and so, I will have a break here just to get some information about the question that the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) has asked.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): Sorry, minister, were you asking for a break there?

Mr. Piwniuk: Just to get my answer for the member for Concordia.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): I'm not sure we follow, so we'll roll along. The honourable member for Concordia, with a question, or is the—

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I can—yes—thank you.

The Acting Chairperson (James Teitsma): [*inaudible*] does have his hand up, if we get him up.

Mr. Wiebe: Mr. Chair, I appreciate it.

Again, I—you know, I understand how the process works. I want to give the minister an opportunity to get the information he needs from his officials.

Maybe as a quick follow-up or an addendum to that question, simply to ask whether the minister would be willing to personally sit down with folks, affected landowners around Moosehorn, that would, I think, probably appreciate that attention, that one-on-one attention, and a conversation—phone conversation meeting would probably be appreciated.

So, maybe I'll just throw—put that on the record.

* (15:40)

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, Mr. Chair, I'm not quite sure where the member is getting his information from, but, you know, when it comes to consultation, the

Grahamdale municipality regular monthly meetings are with our MTI staff on a regular basis, on a monthly basis. And there's a dedicated MTI staff member who actually lives in the Grahamdale area to—they could reach out anytime, who's the—you know, basically the person to go to if there is concerns and issues in the area.

And our staff have been working collaborately on road realignments and road improvements with the RM, and we've done everything.

And the thing was, since I became a minister, there has never been a request from any of these people to even come and talk to me about this.

And as—the only thing that we're—you know, I've been requesting—requested by was to meet with First Nation communities because everything else, if there is any—if you're hearing of one person or anything, please let them contact our office. I'd be happy to sit down with individuals who have any concerns because that's what I do. I've been sitting down with anybody who—any RM who has requested my presence to talk and discuss. I've never declined an RM since I became minister. I have never declined talking to individuals who want to talk to me.

So, I'm not quite sure where you're getting this information from. But our staff are out there, and they are basically ongoing conversations with everyone out there. And if a person's coming to you, it's probably more of a political—you know, probably one of your allies who are just causing issues.

But we've—if they want to talk to me, I'd be happy to sit down as the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, to listen to their concerns so that we can make sure at the end of the day we're all at—we're all benefiting from this flood mitigation.

And yourselves, I don't understand from your—you guys are talking about getting this project done really quickly and having it done because scared that there's—a flood is going to happen. That's our concern. But at the same time, we want to make sure that we move this forward and that this project happens. And we're doing everything possible to move this ahead because it is Manitoba's livelihoods that are at stake here, and we want to protect everybody.

Our EMO department had done great jobs out there this past summer and spring because we actually were inundated by every direction. This is why we want this project to move forward here with no delays, with consultation with First Nations and making sure the federal government—I've been with—meetings with

Bill Blair, talking to him regularly, and he understands that sometimes it's his other department, which would be under Minister Patty Hajdu to—and then the Environment Minister to make sure that this project gets done. He understands the impact that people in British Columbia had from the flood. He understands the dilemma that we were facing, because that's his department.

But when you have three other departments that are making the decisions on this, it's very concerning, it's delaying things and they all have to get on the same page to make sure this project gets passed so that we can move forward to protect other communities that are very vulnerable right now, like Peguis.

Mr. Chairperson: I do just want to remind the honourable minister to direct his comments through the Chair. I appreciate it's easy to forget to do that, so just a friendly reminder.

Mr. Wiebe: I do just have to put on the record that is an absolutely shameful response by this minister, to suggest that the people that are living in this area are politically motivated, that this is some kind of stunt, and to suggest that he hasn't heard of this. He sits right next to the member who represents that area, the member for the Interlake, who I know his office has been contacted many times. I know the minister's office has been contacted multiple times.

You know, we went out to grand—or, to Moosehorn to sit down with residents who were affected, myself and the Leader of the Opposition—and to suggest, you know, I mean, we are bringing this information forward in good faith, you know, as His Majesty's loyal opposition, to give the information to the minister.

You know, he started off by saying he'll meet with anybody—that's a good start. But to suggest that this is politically motivated is an insult to those people who are—who face years of uncertainty and disruption to their lives; who, as I said, have made it very clear they're willing to see this project through because they understand the impact that flooding has on our province. So they understand it. But he sits next to the Minister for Agriculture; he can talk to him about the impact that it's having on those constituents there, and I'm sure he'll get an earful from them, as well.

So, I appreciate the fact that he's made that. I will extend that invitation to those folks who've reached out to us, to the minister, and make sure that that meeting does happen.

Finally, I do have a number of what I'm hoping are short, quick questions that we can get to about projects around the province, but I did just want to close the conversation around the channels project by asking about the timeline that the minister—any light that he could shed on the timelines that he has indicated publicly.

I understand from public comments—pardon me—that there is a two-year extension with regards to the environmental assessment. I wanted to know if the minister could give us an overall project timeline, when construction will actually begin and when it's expected to be finished?

Mr. Piwniuk: I'm sorry, I should have known better to talk through the Chair.

Mr. Chair, the—for the member's questioning about the timeline, the environmental licensing is—we're actually in round two of the information requests by the federal government. So we have no control of the timeline of when this—when these questions are asked again of a round two.

There's extensive amount of questions and answers that they want for the environmental process and in—again, we—again, when I've talked to three different ministers, I am telling them how important this—to get the approval on this project because once the approval is done and we get the go-ahead on the environmental licence for—on the federal side, then we can actually start construction—constructing of the channel, and the channel is going to take three to four years of construction.

* (15:50)

So, this is why it's important that we can move on this. And, again, I have no control of the federal government when it comes to the process.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so I take it from the minister's answer that essentially they're throwing up their hands.

And, you know, he did his apology tour with the minister of Indigenous affairs, went around with the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and said, oops, we messed up, and now has no timeline for this project to be complete. And that doesn't seem that concerned about moving this forward more quickly through the environmental process, let alone the consultation process and then on to actually getting it built.

As I said, I want to move on to a few other issues that the minister, I'm sure, won't be surprised that I will raise, one being with regards to noise that's

generated in—on the Perimeter Highway, from the Perimeter Highway.

We've been contacted by both folks on the south end of the city and on the north end of the city who are concerned about noise. They have department information and independent information with regards to noise levels that indicate that these are excessive, particularly on the South Perimeter where a new project is being undertaken with regard to the overpass at St. Mary's. Residents there are suggesting there may be an opportunity to enhance noise mitigation.

You know, it is done on other projects, other provincial projects. You know, I would imagine this would be one that, you know, would be on the minister's radar.

I'm just wondering if he could shed any light onto—into any work that he's done to investigate these concerns that residents have with future projects or existing projects, and maybe offer some solutions to those folks who are looking for some kind of noise mitigation.

As our city grows closer and closer to our major trade route, which is the Perimeter Highway, what options do those folks have to mitigate the noise that's coming off of the roadways?

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, just again with the—thanks, Mr. Chair. When it comes to the noise when it—of the Perimeter Highway—first, you know, we have to—I just wanted to let the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) know that when it comes to—as the—as he said, the city continues to grow out towards the Perimeter Highway and there's more development that's happening, it's really up to the developer for any future, you know, developments in and around the Perimeter Highway to actually be part of the—when it comes to the development is to be responsible for noise barriers if that's part of their project, that's their responsibility.

But when it comes to existing properties that were built prior to any development, were built, like, say in the St. Mary's—when you look at the St. Mary's interchange or the Highway 59 by East St. Paul, west—like, East St. Paul, Birds Hill area, again, we actually have—we actually follow the 1984 guidelines for the City of Winnipeg, and that's how we estimate—like that's what we—how we determine the noise levels, and that is by the Winnipeg—City of Winnipeg guidelines.

We do actually have an independent study that gets done by an independent firm to do these certain studies, and when it comes to, for example, the

Highway 59, it's been done three times, and it actually as—was below the guidelines of the—what the City of Winnipeg's requirements are. And at the same time we're doing a fourth one just because maybe—the last one was done during COVID, maybe the volume of traffic was a little bit lighter back then. I'm noticing now that our transportation areas are now getting to a point where we're back to—

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, your video feed has gone out, and it is required that you have that video feed on. Could you just check your settings and make sure that you could turn on your camera, please?

Thank you, minister. Please go ahead.

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, sorry, it was my battery that was going dead, so I had to plug my computer in, so what it does is it closes me off for—as a video. So, sorry about that. I appreciate—apologize for that.

But yes, so anyways, when it comes to the fourth study that we're going to do in the East. St Paul-Birds Hill, to make sure that the—if it happens to be that the traffic volumes are—noise is higher than the guidelines, that's something that we would have to take responsibility at some point to work with the residents in that region.

* (16:00)

And so—but at the same time, going forward in any new development—again, that's going to be a responsibility. Like any city in North America, it's the developer who comes up to the interstates, to our freeway systems. They're responsible to make sure that part of their development is the cost of noise barriers.

Mr. Wiebe: And, again, I think the minister is well aware, not only because I continue to read the petitions about this everyday with regards to the South Perimeter, but as he correctly identified the North Perimeter and the Highway 59-101 interchange, I guess the concern is that once the highway was elevated that changed the dynamic as to where the noise was transmitted.

I know that, as part of the South Perimeter study that was done with regards to the upcoming interchange there were noise—a noise—there was a noise study that was done. I would ask the minister to review that and suggest that, you know, when these projects are being designed—design build, this can be part of the project. We did this, you know, during Chief Peguis Trail the first phase, understanding it

goes through a community that there needed to be noise mitigation.

Other major cities, you know, when you have a highway or a freeway that impacts a community, you know, we need to make sure that we're dealing with the noise there. And, actually, I mean, I'm sure the minister's well aware there are some solutions that don't involve putting up a wall, you know, that might be acceptable or might help with the issue as well, that residents might be open to.

Just staying on the same theme, the minister may—may not come up to the North Perimeter too often, but he—and that's not a slight on the minister—but he's certainly welcome to come up Highway 59 or come along Highway 101, and through that interchange. And I know I've been approached by some truck drivers and others who are using the North Perimeter, that the interchange—you know, I think this is part of the usual shifting and settling of a new project like that—but there are significant speed bump problems, right, huge dips in the highway that have now been marked but are still a significant problem.

And I've actually seen and heard of some, you know, trucks moving through there, you know, going 100, you know, maybe 109, and they're hitting those, and some are reporting that they're almost losing control because they've gotten so bad. Again, this was a project that, you know, started by the NDP and completed by this government, but, you know, was done in a way that there is some, I think, responsibility of the design builder to make sure that this project is safe.

So, I'm wondering if the minister can report back to the Legislature what steps he's taking to deal with that issue and other places, I guess, on the Perimeter where there are, you know, these kind of, you know, bumps and dips and issues where, you know, our roadway—roadways aren't safe. If we want to treat it like a real—a true corridor up to interstate standards, as the minister always says, you know, these need to be dealt with.

Can the minister talk about some of the steps he's taking?

Mr. Piwniuk: Hey, when it comes to the Perimeter Highway, you know, it's—the member from Concordia had a smart aleck remark, saying that I'm not on the North Perimeter. I wonder if he's ever on the North Perimeter.

When he talks about the Perimeter Highway volume of traffic, when it comes to the—like, the access

points of Sturgeon Road and some of the interchanges that—like some of the points that we had on the Perimeter Highway, I'm on that Perimeter Highway more than he probably is.

Because the fact is that the North Perimeter—I've been to many communities: Beausejour, a number of times; I had a wedding, my brother lives down in Beausejour. I remember going driving on Saturday afternoon and seeing that—you know what, to tell you the truth, the member for—Mr. Chair, the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) should realize that our Perimeter Highway is probably busier than Highway 29, where I went down this past weekend, with the amount of traffic that our Perimeter Highway has. The Saturday that I was there, I couldn't believe the traffic that was on that Perimeter Highway. So if the member says that I'm never on the Perimeter Highway, he has another thing coming.

When's the last time—I think he only hears about Highway 6, but he never hears about the other highways that his government did not do anything about. And now that we have years and years of deferred maintenance that we have to rebuild these roads, because they underspent in many parts of infrastructure.

And when it comes to the interchange of not—of Highway 59—the interchange that was done, started with his government and finished with our government—it's part of the warranty that the contractor—we still have warranty with that contractor.

Just like, you know what, it's basically the Red River Valley. The member has to realize that, with the Winnipeg gumbo, the—when it comes to the Red River Valley, there is a lot of shifting. There's a lot of settling.

And also, when they built the airport, they should realize how much settlement that was that—at the airport took a couple more years more to build under their watch, to making sure that—you know, that it is the challenge of the Winnipeg Red River gumbo. That does happen. It's natural that it settles.

There has to be—and that's why warranty is so important when it comes to major projects like that. And I'm reassured by my staff that it is under warranty, and they're aware of all the issues and concerns, and they will be addressed by the contractor.

And like I said, you know, that I—like I said, I take offence by saying that the member, especially when he lives in the city of Winnipeg, doesn't even know how much traffic there is on the Perimeter Highway.

And he's concerned about an interchange-like, a point—an access point in Brandon for the safety, and meanwhile, he's fighting for us—my engineers, who say that the Winnipeg Perimeter Highway—the engineers are saying that these access points have to be closed. And I'm taking their advice.

I see it for myself. I've almost been in an accident, where the member, all he can say is that he doesn't want the access points. He's listening to some of the people in that area, but Winnipeg drivers do not want another traffic light, like the NDP had put on the Perimeter Highway. Instead of doing interchanges and underspending their budget, they overspent in every other department except for Infrastructure. They could have had a lot of these interchanges done, and we could have been more of a freeway.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I apparently inadvertently touched a nerve there. I'm sure the minister drives the Perimeter Highway on a regular basis, and so he's aware of this problem. And I'm glad that he's indicating that's going to be done.

I'd like to know just a little bit more information about the timeline with regards to getting that work done.

And it is good to hear that the builder, who I think we do have a good track record with and is one—again, you know, this is an NDP project. The minister wants to talk about—we built that interchange, you know. Like, the current chair of this committee and member for Radisson (Mr. Teitsma) were happy to jump in a convertible and drive that opening day of the interchange, you know, while my constituents were waiting when it was their turn. But anyway—but, you know, he was happy to do that but it was, of course, an NDP project, right?

* (16:10)

And it was one of the ones that I was proud of, to push forward to make sure that we did it right. We did it once and we did it right. But now we want to make sure that it's up to snuff. And I'm glad to hear the minister has driven it, knows it and knows that it is an issue.

I do want to talk very briefly about the access points to the Perimeter Highway. And the minister knows that we've talked about safety, we've talked about upgrades to Highway 101 and how important it was to ensure that we are—you know, we're in lockstep

with the government on this; that we want to see it as a trade route.

And we want to address the concerns that are brought forward by those who use it for work and for business and for moving goods across the country, and for the residents.

But the concern that we have is that the minister seems to have chosen winners and losers and, you know, we just reviewed a map—a highly detailed map that was provided to us from the residents that live down Sturgeon Road and in that area that, you know, say, look, you can go around the Perimeter right now, and we can show you every single access point that remains open while ours are closed.

You know, I visited the Dasmesh School on the North Perimeter very recently. You know, students—a growing school, a great school providing education to the Punjabi community and beyond. And they were very proud of the work that they're doing. But they said, look, we lost our access point, our school bus now has to drive, you know, a few miles down a gravel road just to drop our students off. And in the mornings, it's a busy place. There's cars, there's buses, there's all of it.

And there's businesses that have approached us that have said, why are we being punished when other businesses, you know, were prioritized to keep their access points.

You know, we suggested that the minister, instead of looking at just closing these access points, should look at what are the solutions to upgrade and enhance access points for those businesses and for those communities, and those people that live off of the Perimeter Highway. And not least of which are the people who have been impacted by the lack of emergency vehicle access, including people who have waited for hours and hours and hours because they aren't able to get the same kind of service, and emergency vehicles don't know how to access them.

So, the minister knows all of that, and I think he understands that. And again, I'm not trying to be confrontational. The minister has heard my concerns about this. He's heard the people's concerns about this.

What I'm trying to find out is if the minister is, you know, in the same way that he now touts that he's upgrading the interchange at St. Mary's and other projects that are on the horizon. We applaud those projects. But what is he doing to make sure that access for these businesses, for these schools, for these residents is upgraded and enhanced to ensure that we

have a safe Perimeter Highway, but we have access for everybody on the Perimeter?

And—but you know, and I should mention the, you know, the impact on our producers who, just this last harvest season, have been out on the highway—out on the Perimeter Highway, you know, driving their machines—their big machine. There's no way the minister could think that that's safe.

So, I leave that with the minister, but I just want to ask if he has any input as to what upgrades are next for some of these access points? And will he, at the very least, consider reopening some of the more critical access points with those upgrades that we've been asking for?

Mr. Piwniuk: I just want to thank the member for that question. But this is—gives me an opportunity to talk about the process when it comes to looking at the Perimeter Highway, making it more of a freeway status of a highway with how busy it's becoming.

But we have to first look—and the reason a lot of this is being done now, is that you have to look at the young man who lost his life on the South Perimeter Highway by the Brady Landfill. And he's a young man, Ethan Boyer, who his parents have now lost a loved one, who's never going to be coming home now. And all the more reason when you talk about a school bus, we don't want a school bus to be in that same situation as the young man who had lost his life because of the unsafety and the access points that come out on the Perimeter Highway.

And the thing is, when the—what came out of that whole tragedy was that we actually looked at a safety review, and that was done on the South Perimeter in 2018. And then it went into a study, a functional design study, that was actually completed on the South Perimeter, and that is why, because of this young—tragedy of this young man—individual, that is why we've actually closed them even on the north side.

Because, again, I just want to say that I was almost in an accident on Sturgeon Road. And I just couldn't believe, to think in a freeway system like this, which is busier than some interstates in I-29, and the thing was, a person who decided at the last minute to turn down Sturgeon Road, decided to slam his brakes on and turn a bit and we all had to slam our brakes. And I'm surprised that none of us got rear-ended. I'm surprised the guy did not get rear-ended and pushed into the oncoming traffic. And I just thought, this is so ridiculous that this is still open.

And a couple weeks later, my colleague, my predecessor, closed that access point down. And, meanwhile, it was your critic role that questioned why that access point was shut down. And I applauded the decision of the former—my predecessor, the honourable member for Springfield—Richard [phonetic]—'chot', that actually did that.

And I'm, to this day, is making sure that we are to look at solutions from now on, and the solutions would be—because once the North Perimeter study is done—it's going to take a couple of years to get that study done. And the thing is we're going to have solutions of what ever—every major North American major centre has is that they have—connect the interchanges or the lights right now—currently, the lights that we want to remove off the Perimeter Highway in the future, we're going to have service roads.

And Sturgeon Road is four miles between Highway 6 and Highway 7. And the thing is, any other American city, it's quite common to have interchanges four miles apart. And we're going to be doing service roads, for example, there or anywhere else is to make sure that—a solution is to make sure that people can get onto major arteries to get back on the Perimeter Highway, and that's kind of what we are going to be focusing on.

And then already the South Perimeter study has shown that these are the interchanges that we have to work on and continue the process to make the Perimeter Highway—the 1 million Winnipeg Perimeter Highway freeway initiative.

Mr. Wiebe: The minister indicated earlier that he is, as he said, willing to meet with anyone and, you know, in the same way that solutions—

* (16:20)

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Concordia has the floor.

Mr. Wiebe: Sorry, we were distracted by hijinks on Zoom.

In the same way that, you know, people on the ground being affected by the channels project, are simply willing to come to the table and share their expertise, I think the folks, specifically with regards to Sturgeon Road and other access points around—along the north and west perimeter, have indicated that they shared their information with the—during the consultation process, but I think they'd really appreciate a meeting with the minister.

Sticking with the theme of highway safety, the minister may have seen an article in *The Carillon* with regards to Highway 12, and that's at the intersection of 210 and 12 where we've seen a number of significant incidents and accidents. It's a growing area—busier and busier area. I know that the minister has recently made an announcement with regards to upgrades north of Highway 1 on Highway 12. And I think those will be appreciated by the community out there.

I also know that north of Steinbach there have been a number of upgrades. Blumenort—I think they got—recently got a set of lights to mitigate the safety there.

Just simply asking if the minister's aware of this issue, whether he's looked into this, and whether he can shed any light into the recommendations coming from his department with regards to lights, or some kind of controlled intersection at the corner, by the intersection of Highway 12 and Highway 210?

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, just before we get into the—that situation on Highway 12, just—I just wanted to let the member know that when it comes to the North Perimeter functional design, the study that's going to be done on the North Perimeter, the people in the area, that's where we're going to have Engage Manitoba, so that we can have input. And these—when these studies are done, from—everybody that lives on the North Perimeter has the opportunities to engage in, so that when this functional design study gets done, that there have—we have everybody's input. And that's a process when it comes to anything.

And that's kind of leading me into when it comes to Highway 12. We know it's an unsafe intersection. There has been statistics of accidents there. We've actually addressed some of those concerns. We've actually put flashing lights on the overhead on the stop signs, rumble strips, speed reduction on 210 leading towards the Highway 12. The thing is, we just don't want to put a light on that intersection because the fact is there's an interchange there, and the interchange—to come over the interchange then down to a traffic light would make no sense.

But at the same time, we are actually looking at a service road safety review, and then we're also doing a functional design study. And my colleague, the honourable member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lagassé), has addressed this this past—actually, one of the first months that I became minister. And he actually took me on a tour of all the issues in his area, and that was

one of the main intersections that he was very concerned about.

And so we're—we totally—the department really know—understands the situation. And we might have to 'rediroute' the intersection to make it closer to work within the actual asset that we have already is that interchange that is already—that goes into Ste. Anne. We will probably continue working together to direct the traffic so that we can utilize the structures that we already have designed. And I was just there during the announcement, and there's possibilities of rerouting the traffic there, and that's what our department will come up with a final design to making sure that people in the area are safe. This is our No. 1 priority—is keeping Manitobans safe.

And we'll continue investing in all our infrastructure throughout the province.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, I understand the minister is saying he's aware of the problem. I do think that this requires immediate action. I know that, you know, despite what he's saying about the member for Dawson Trail, we haven't seen him be proactive here in the House with regards to this issue, and this is a major issue for his constituents, people of Ste. Anne, the kids who are riding the bus out there. And so, I hope that the minister takes this very seriously.

Again, very quick question—hopefully a quick answer—in the same area. I think I spoke with the minister about this personally, but the bridge on Highway 210 coming into the town of Ste. Anne, you know, it's—there have been significant accidents, collisions that have happened there. And I think the minister is aware. That's identified, I think, in his department as a real trouble spot or an area that needs some attention.

Wondering if the minister can shed any light into maybe steps that could be taken, reduction in speed. He knows that the highway comes in, there's a significant turn or bend in the road and then a very narrow bridge. Anyway, if the minister could shed any light into that trouble spot, as well.

Mr. Piwniuk: Like, again, when it came to going back to the comment after the—my—I answered the question. We've—my—our department is taking immediate action on that intersection of Highway 210 and No. 12. We, like I said, we're putting flashing stop lights ahead so that people are aware that there's a stop sign. We're putting rumble strips and speed reduction on Highway 210.

And so—but we are also looking at a major change, looking in a study, and we're also going to also look at a possible functional design. And—but at the time where we're doing that functional design in the safety review, when we do the actual stage of functional designs, we also have engaging, like, the public in that area to exactly what they would like to see to.

* (16:30)

So this is kind of our process to when we do any kind of functional designs, making sure that they're—they—everybody in the community, people using the highway going to Steinbach, have opportunities to address their concerns and what they would like to see that could 'ultry' help the safety of that area.

Again, the—when it comes to the interchange that we've spent millions of dollars on, we want to make sure that we let the traffic flow properly. But, again, we're going to have to make, possibly, reroute the intersection of 210 closer to the interchange.

And the bridge on 210, MIT met with them this week, and we're reviewing the speed reduction on that bridge that goes into the town of Ste. Anne.

Mr. Wiebe: I do genuinely appreciate the minister looking into that and moving on that issue.

Maybe I don't have a specific question. You know, we've brought up many times in this House the issues with Highway 6 for obvious reasons. Not least of which that, of course, we lost a member of this Chamber due to conditions on that highway. But because there's a coalition, a broad, you know, political, across-party-line coalition of residents from Thompson and from surrounding communities who've come to us with concerns with Highway 6, I know the minister has, you know, indicated or understands, I think, the issues at hand: more passing lanes, more rest stops, you know—these are just a few of the ideas that have been brought forward by those community members.

Likewise, we're hearing from members on the ground. We talked about vacancy rate yesterday across department. We're hearing from members of the department who are out there clearing our highways in the winter, and they're saying all bets are off this with regards to service times. They're just saying they're so far understaffed, the number of trucks they have on the road is so far under what they need that there's a real concern that if we have another bad year, or even if we don't, that folks are really going to be on their own when it comes to travel on

the highways and in the safety they can expect after a snowstorm.

So, I don't have a specific question. I guess, maybe, if I was to sum it all up, maybe the minister can comment on steps he's taking. Again, Highway 6 is a concern, but we know this is just one of many places that without attention, you know, we're going to see more accidents happen.

The minister talks about safety. What are we doing with Highway 6 and other access points to the North?

Mr. Piwniuk: The member for the—from Concordia was talking about Highway 6 and then he had the opportunity—I know, you know, the tragic loss of your colleague—our colleague in the Chamber, Danielle Adams, was a big loss. And I know it was devastating for the family, and our condolences again go out to her family, everyone that was affected, that she had—that touched the lives of so many people and so many of her constituents.

And again, I know the importance—I have to obviously say I've never been to Thompson before. It was one of the few towns that I have not been to in Manitoba, until June. And I wanted to see for myself, to see what the highway was really—the condition of the highway.

And one of the things I was—I've been up to Flin Flon, and I've been up to The Pas when I first became MLA, and the embarrassing part was that the furthest north—I've been around the world—the furthest north I've been before I became an MLA was Swan River. Because when I was a family member, the only day trip that we can do was probably Swan River rodeo, and we were dairy farmers, so we couldn't get very far in a day.

So, the thing is, I've fallen in love with the North. You know, it's been—and it's been a great opportunity—I've been to Churchill back in 2015. And I see the potential in northern Manitoba, and the importance of our people that live in Thompson, everywhere, all Manitobans—how important Highway 6 is.

And I was—you know, one thing I was surprised about was how straight the highway was. I was expecting it to be very curvy, much like highway—Flin Flon is. But, there was a lot of straightaways. And right now, we actually—one of the worst stretches of the highway just south of Thompson, but it was the stretch that we were actually, while I was there, they were starting to chew up the old pavement and we were going to be doing about, I believe it was

a 21-kilometre stretch of the—probably the worst stretch of highway, and that we were investing, you know, amount of—the amount of money of like—I think it was like \$10 million this year.

But for the next three years when we have a three-year budget, we're going to be spending \$51 million on Highway 6, and that includes for every portion of the highway that we're going to be redoing, we're rebuilding it to, again, RTAC standards, which is five levels of pavement, but we're also adding more and more strollers to the highway. So, we're going to continue as we build on Highway 6, but we're also considering, through my direction, is looking at—you know, we always do a study of the traffic flow volume to making sure that it warrants to do passing lanes.

And I really do believe that portion that really needed to be looked at was as you were getting closer to Thompson, the roads became—you know, the terrain was a little bit rugged with rock, there were more curves in the highway and more traffic as we got closer to Thompson. Because a lot of—I guess a lot of traffic comes from the lakes that go towards Thompson. So, the idea here is probably to look at designs and my direction through the department to look at some passing lanes.

* (16:40)

You know, we have actually seen, as we're doing Highway 3—which, again, there's a lot of volume of traffic coming from Morden-Winkler through Carman. And we have done passing lanes in Highway 3, and this past year, we did a number of passing lanes on Highway 3 between Carman and Brunkild, and we'll continue doing passing lanes, especially with volumes of traffic that comes from places like even Brandon. North of Brandon on Highway 10, we have done passing lanes. We've also done a number of passing lanes on Highway 16.

So, this is where we're going to look at Highway 6 now, to do more passing lanes so that people who are behind slower traffic have the opportunity to pass, so that they can continue going the speed—safe speed towards the city of Winnipeg from Thompson.

So, and I just did an announcement in Thompson—Burntwood bridge, I guess it's called—that we're going to be looking at the gateway to the mining industries up north of Thompson. So, we are going to be investing a lot of money in the North when it comes to Highway 6, the safety.

And at the same time, when it comes to the recruitment, we know the challenges of making sure that

our maintenance when it comes to—and now—*[interjection]*—it's called the Miles Hart Bridge. I was corrected here. I guess we changed the name. And we're actually doing a major project. I think there's like 50,000,000—

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

Mr. Wiebe: Well, where does the time go, Mr. Chair? Looks like we're nearing the end of the day, and yesterday we got cut off.

So, I did want to make sure that we gave the minister a chance to finish his thoughts from yesterday with regards to his meeting that he had with VBJ Developments. He mentioned that there was a difference between the meeting that he had with Waywayseccappo and the meeting that he had with VBJ. He also indicated that he had met with one of this colleagues.

And I think he wanted the opportunity—from, judging just by the body language in the House, he wanted the opportunity to answer the question during question period but was protected by his member from—or the member—the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen).

So, I'm going to give him the opportunity to explain the difference between those meetings and just indicate when the meeting was, who was present at the meeting and whether any staff were at that meeting.

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, Mr. Chair, just to put the record on the—correct record on the record here, that when it came to the bridge that I did announcement, it was a \$36-million bridge on the north side of Thompson and it was—I just want to make the correction that the new—the bridge now is called the Miles Hart Bridge. So that was the bridge that we're doing \$36 million to revitalize the bridge, to rebuild it, and then so that we have full loaded when it comes to the transportation corridor that goes north to Lynn Lake.

The importance—and I never had the opportunity also, not to answer the—finish answering the question when it came to the maintenance of the operations that we have in the North. And the concern—the very big concern right now is making sure that—recruitment. We are so focusing on recruiting. Again, our always goal was to make sure that we have capacity of—we have allocation of 1,825 positions that are allocated to the department.

And again, it fluctuates based on the season, because we do have, basically, seasonal employees in

the summer, and then we have additional, you know, a—different seasonal workers in winter, especially for snow-clearing situations. And right now, we have recruited 957 positions since—from April of 2019 to August 31st, 2022. So, 957 positions. And plus, we've also been training 40 new equipment operators for snow clearing. So, that's the importance of, kind of, the winter that we had last winter.

We wanted to make sure that we're recruiting and making sure the concerns that the member had when it—or, the member was concerned about their group, the Highway 6 group that came to my office, that I met with them twice—once here in my office here at the Leg., and once I met with the chamber of commerce when I did my northern tour in June of the city of Thompson, when I did that announcement on the bridge.

And so, yes, we are recruiting on a regular basis to make sure that we have the substantial amount of snow-clearing operators for the future, for this coming winter. We know that there's some predictions that we could be facing even a more of a colder, snowier winter, but I can't imagine anything worse than we had last year. And, who knows, because we could get back-to-back—and hopefully, they're totally wrong, and we have one of the mildest winters. Our department would like to focus on building highways instead of flood—fixing up flood situations.

And, yes, going back to the opportunity that I was—because of, I guess, these—closing of the day, when it comes to the Wayway project—the situation there, is an existing business that's on a highway that it's really concerning of the volume of traffic that is going to that business. There's some days that the business has sales of gasoline, which really attracts—had attracted a lot of people during this past summer into their business, which was good. You know, I'm sure they're selling a lot of—you know, they're—as much as they're probably losing a little bit of money on gas, they're probably gaining it on the—that's where a lot of gas stations get the—actually make money is on the convenience and all the services that they provide in their convenience store.

So, but there was a concern on that highway that—when people were trying to get to—north to the lakes, to Clear Lake, to Riding Mountain. A lot of people from Brandon go that route; a lot of volume of traffic that lives along Highway 10 and are connected to bedroom communities like Minnedosa and Forrest and many—Erickson. And a lot of people from the Westman, in Parkland come to Brandon to shop.

* (16:50)

So, the concern was the safety of Highway 10, the access point. And the thing was—what we were wanting to do, the part I would have like to have done, and that was—so the condition with the RM when the business was put there, was to have a service road—that really weird—the service road—like we're doing on the Perimeter Highway, because it's a highway from the Trans-Canada Highway that has a lot of volume of traffic—was to do something on each side of the road and having an intersection where-it would be the airport.

But—

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

Mr. Wiebe: When did the minister meet with VBJ Developments and who was present at that meeting?

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes. Just to finish off the two different projects. So, I sort of concluded what was the situation with Wayway, but Wayway wanted to—want more direct access, and we're listening to, you know, the RM, the City of Brandon, what do they really want? And this is what our department is working with the City of Brandon, what the plan is.

And we're going to be working with Wayway, we're going to be working with the municipalities, we're going to have a joint meeting to making sure that if we want to do a design where they want three line—lanes and stuff like that, functional design, we've got to design it. We've got to make sure it's safety in mind so that it's much like Main Street.

Do we want that to happen north of the Trans-Canada Highway in Brandon just like we have north of the Perimeter Highway on Main Street, but with more boulevards and turning lights. That is kind of what we're up against, is how does the City of Brandon want to grow? And that's where we had a lot of discussions, and so the meetings I had with the City of Brandon, we had some joint meetings with some of my colleagues and the thing is the opportunity here was to focus on what does Brandon want to see as a city?

And as the member of Concordia will—is aware, my office meets with many stakeholders, such as rural municipalities, city councils, town councils, developers, First Nation groups, the industry associations, special interest groups and individual citizens.

In fact, since being appointed the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, my office has met

with more than 75 occasions with groups such as these, and to—not to mention that hundreds of phone calls, emails, and virtual meetings that were made and attended to ensure that we were meeting groups and individuals during the pandemic—

An Honourable Member: On a point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Concordia, on a point of order.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, I've given the minister ample leeway to—you know, to consult with his officials. He knows the answer to this question because he was there. So, he knows what—when the meeting happened and who was present. He doesn't need to read a prepared statement and he doesn't need to consult with his officials.

I think he owes it to this committee, to the House, to the people of Brandon and the people of Manitoba to simply ask the question. Otherwise, I think people have good reason to be suspicious of what this minister has been up to.

So, I ask again, will the minister simply ask—answer the question: When did the meeting happen and who was present?

Mr. Chairperson: I rule that it is not a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts. Points of order should not be used to extend a debate.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister does have the floor.

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, like, what do we do is we consult with many stakeholders and groups and we have meetings all the time. And, in this case here, when it comes to the development of the future of the city of Brandon, we've actually had many meetings and with many of my colleagues, the city of Brandon, and understanding that—the need.

And when it comes to municipal relations, to economic development, we've meet with many of these individuals in the city of Brandon and we've—we'll continue meeting with all my colleagues and because, you know what? We're not going to be silos like we saw with the NDP government.

They were silos, Mr. Deputy Chair. They didn't work together. They were disconnected. They couldn't even get along, the NDP. They fought all the time, and my colleagues, we actually want to actually have focus on the government of—at a whole, and making sure that there's no silos, that we work together as opportunities to make sure that, like our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) wants economic development and we're going to work together—

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

Call in the Speaker.

* (17:00)

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, October 25th.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 13, 2022

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