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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLEIN, Kevin E., Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice, Hon.	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, Hon.	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>	Morden-Winkler	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills? Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Just tabled a revised Estimates order which will be revised again, I'm sure, some time shortly. In effect only for today.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Seeking leave. Could you ask if there is leave of the House to allow for a ministerial statement on the International Day of Forests?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to allow a ministerial statement on International Day of Forests? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

International Day of Forests

Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development): As we celebrate International Day of Forests, I'm proud to highlight the progress our government has made in advancing sustainable forestry practices and strengthening our relationships with First Nations communities.

This government signed the 2 Billion Tree program with the federal government. This program aims to plant 2 billion trees by 2030, which will help to mitigate the effects of climate change and protect our natural environment. By investing in reforestation and sustainable forestry practices, we are not only protecting our natural resources but also creating jobs and economic opportunities for Canadians.

Forests are vital to our environment and our economy and, as a government, we recognize the importance of protecting and preserving them. That is why we have signed forestry revenue-sharing agreements with First Nations communities such as Pine Creek First Nation, OCN First Nation, Moose Lake First Nation, which ensure that they receive a fair share of the revenue generated from forestry operations on their traditional lands. These agreements are

an important step towards reconciliation and building stronger partnerships with Indigenous peoples.

We know that forests are essential to our well-being and the well-being of future generations. That is why we are committed to promoting sustainable forestry practices and protecting our forests from threats such as climate change and invasive species.

On this International Day of Forests, let us all reflect on their importance and the role they play in enhancing our lives. Let us continue to work together towards a sustainable future for our forests and our planet.

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Today is International Day of Forests. The day has been celebrated for more than 10 years, since the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed March 21st the International Day of Forests in 2012. The day was created to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of all types of forests. Countries are encouraged to undertake local, national and international efforts to organize activities involving forests and trees, such as tree-planting campaigns.

When we drink a glass of water, write in a notebook, take medicine for a fever or build a house, we do not always make the connection with forests. And yet, these and many other aspects of our lives are linked to forests in one way or another.

Forests provide us so much more than just resources. They are a habitat for wildlife and biodiversity, and they offer people a chance to get outdoors to experience nature and all the wonderful benefits it has. The sustainable management of forests and the use of resources are key to combating climate change and to contributing to the prosperity and well-being of current and future generations.

The UN has declared the theme for this year's International Day of Forests to be Forests and health. Forests give us so much to our health. They purify the water, clean the air, capture carbon to fight climate change, provide food and life-saving medicines to improve our well-being.

Yet despite all these priceless ecological, economic, social and health benefits, this government continues to put our forests at risk. They privatized the water-bomber fleet; they refused to hire enough initial-attack workers—

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

Order. Order.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: The member's time had expired. I heard a leave request. Is there leave to allow the member to complete his statement?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

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

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

Leave has been granted.

Mr. Lamont: Forest day began as a casual conversation in Oxford, England, in February 2007, between two scientists who felt the world was underestimating the importance of forests in mitigating carbon emissions and saw a glaring need for the latest forestry research and thinking to inform global policy positions and UNFCCC negotiators. They did not foresee at the time that the conference would become one of the most influential global events on forests and climate change today.

Manitoba has the potential to be a world leader in fighting climate change, but for decades it has been a laggard. Instead of action, governments have split their time between greenwashing announcements, while refusing to act, and in some cases, being outright obstructionist.

It's certainly unfortunate this government decided to dismantle and sell off the Pineland Forest Nursery near Hadashville, Manitoba, which had been growing seedlings for the province for reforestation since 1953. It means the extensive reforestation and re-wilding Manitoba needs will be that much more difficult.

In 2019, a team of scientists published a paper showing that restoring 'natural' forests is the best way to remove atmospheric carbon. In one year, a mature live tree can absorb more than 21 kilograms, or 48 pounds, of carbon dioxide.

The beauty of trees has inspired artists and scientists alike. Joyce Kilmer wrote that I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree, but the Nobel-Prize-winning

physicist Richard Feynman also described trees in a different light.

In 1983, he told an interviewer, people look at a tree and think it comes out of the ground, that plants grow out of the ground, but he says, but if you ask, where does the substance of the tree come from? You'll find trees come out of air.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

World Down Syndrome Day

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Madam Speaker, are you happy? I know I am. Yesterday was the first day of spring. The sun is shining brighter and stronger. The birds are chirping just a little bit louder.

Yesterday was also the International Day of Happiness. And this year's theme was Be Mindful. Be Grateful. And Be Kind.

So my wish for you and every MLA in this House is that we'll all be grateful, kind and, yes, happy.

And while I might not get my wish, Madam Speaker, I can tell you that there is a group of people in this world that are incredibly and incandescently happy. A full 99 per cent of these people report that they are happy with their lives; 97 per cent like who they are; and 96 per cent like how they look.

Who are these exceptionally happy people? They are people with Down syndrome. Today we are celebrating World Down Syndrome Day, also known as crazy socks day. Down syndrome is a chromosomal arrangement that's always been part of the human condition, present across all races, all genders, all socio-economic conditions in approximately one in every 800 births.

Chromosomes look a lot like socks, so that's why I'm wearing crazy socks today, to raise awareness for Down syndrome and to promote acceptance, inclusion and love for these valued and cherished members of our community.

People with Down syndrome aren't just happy for themselves. They make the rest of us happy too. They help us to be kind and considerate. They make us smile. And they warm our hearts.

When prenatal parents receive a diagnosis of Down syndrome for their unborn child, their first reaction may be one of sadness or even shock. It does take time for them to process. But when people with

Down syndrome were asked what advice they would give to such expectant parents, well, they wanted the parents to know that their children—that their child will be happy, that their family will be better off because of their baby and that their baby will love them.

So let's be sure to welcome them and make sure that they feel included and loved.

Fire Prevention Services in the North

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): The North is facing an increase in the number of fires affecting our communities. Families are losing homes and the—lives lost in these preventable disasters.

In the past months, there have been multiple tragic fires in northern communities including Thompson, Cross Lake, Tataskewiyak and Shamattawa. Families have lost their homes during the winter with nowhere to go, and emergencies such of these have not been addressed systemically by this government.

The North is lacking greatly in fire-safety education and protocols, meaning that while disasters have been severe, there is no doubt that some could have been contained and prevented with better fire-safety measures. Emergency services in the North are greatly disadvantaged as they are not being provided with enough support to maintain rapid, effective fire-response calls.

* (13:40)

It is disheartening to know that fires which are affecting the North are being dealt with in drastically different manners. Many northern communities are considered lucky to have the ability to fight fires, and are not able to muster the response that even communities such as Thompson are able to provide.

Sadly, it is too common for communities who lack these resources to adequately fight fires, and the result is that when fires do occur, it is seemingly a miracle if loss of property is the only result.

A lack of infrastructure, such as working fire trucks, fire halls, fire hydrants or even the presence of running water is not universal in the North. This means that communities often must share resources with any others that are close enough to offer a response.

It is truly a heartbreaking thing, as all of these communities deserve the confidence and assurance that, should an emergency such as a fire occur, the community and its members will be safe. As northerners, we know how to—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Leave?

Madam Speaker: Leave has been requested. Is there leave to allow the member to complete his statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Redhead: As northerners, we know how to band together and solve problems. However, it is the responsibility of this government to make sure the North has the resources and support to fight disasters such as the recent blazes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

St. James Hockey Volunteers

Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate): I'm proud to rise today to recognize the many Manitobans volunteering in minor hockey programs across our province and in the community that I serve.

It is commonly known that children who play team sports learn more about communication, loyalty, social skills, leadership, self-esteem and the importance of working together as a team. Sports not only help children feel better physically, but they can also help them with emotional and mental development.

Hockey in Manitoba and especially in the area I serve, Kirkfield Park, is possible only because of the dedication of many volunteers, the volunteers for the St. James hockey association and so many others across our province.

Volunteers are a tremendous asset to young people in our community; from tying skates in the dressing room to fundraising, 7 a.m. practices, outdoor practices, coaching and making sure the music in the dressing room is just right for the children playing the game.

We know it takes a team to run a team, and the unwavering commitment of volunteers at St. James hockey does not go unnoticed. You each play a significant role in the lives of young people throughout our community, as do many other associations across our province. You are making a difference in the lives of our future leaders and, most importantly, in future volunteers.

On behalf of the residents I serve in Kirkfield Park, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all volunteers across Manitoba for their hard work and dedication during the 2022-2023 hockey season.

Our community is truly grateful for your willingness to give up your time and resources to ensure our players have had a safe and enjoyable year. The kids won't remember the wins and losses, but they will

remember those who made a positive impact on them throughout the season.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Government's Planning and Management Record

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I want to speak briefly about an area of major concern at the moment, that the government has been creating conditions where bad things happen. The government has been creating things where bad things happen because we've had a burst of homelessness without an adequate homelessness strategy. It is a strategy to address chronic homelessness months down the line.

We are seeing this happening in our emergency rooms where the government has created a situation where there's very long waiting lists. It's making it an uncomfortable situation for nurses to work and for doctors to work, and the result is that we're seeing bad things happen in the emergency rooms in our province.

Time and time again this is a government which has not looked ahead at the things that it's doing. Time and time again we're seeing that the government is creating conditions where, instead of good things happening, bad things are happening.

I hope the government will start to recognize the major mistakes that they've made and start to change direction. But I fear that that's not what they're going to do.

Thank you.

Scotty and Elaine Nystrom

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I am honoured to rise today to recognize the incredible work being done by two volunteers in my community.

Scotty and Elaine Nystrom have been volunteering with the Bourkevale Community Centre for more than 10 years. They got involved because the community centre was right next door to them, so they're able to see and appreciate what a great asset it was to the community, and they wanted to be part of it.

During COVID, with gathering and travel restrictions in place, many more people were looking for local, outdoor ways to entertain themselves and their families. Scotty saw this need and decided to use old cross-country ski groomer to create some ski trails around the community centre. Thanks to a grant, they were able to get updated equipment to make the trails more professional and open them to the public.

In an effort to keep the trails accessible to everyone and remove financial barriers, Elaine reached out to Winnipeg Trails and arranged for a mobile ski library to be brought to the community centre. The strong response from the community encouraged them to seek out funding to set up a permanent ski library at the community centre, which now provides free, high-quality skis to anyone in the community to use on the trails.

Volunteering at the community centre is very important to Scotty and Elaine, because the centre and its services belong to community members and are there to offer value to our community. Their answer to the needs they see in their community is to find a way to fill them. It's volunteers like Scotty and Elaine, who believe in giving back, that make communities all across Manitoba so strong and vibrant.

Scotty is here with us today, so I want to take a moment to thank him and his partner Elaine for their more than a decade of service to our community in St. James.

Thank you, Scotty and Elaine.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Carberry Health Services ER Closure Inquiry

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Health care is in a crisis here in Manitoba, and it's because of this Premier's cuts. She keeps cutting health care, just like Brian Pallister. As a result, we've got hallway medicine here in the city, and we've got highway medicine across the rest of the province.

Residents of Carberry want to know if their emergency room is going to close this coming September. They're concerned because they know that seconds count when it comes to an emergency.

Can the Premier tell the people of Carberry whether they are going to lose their ER?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): I always appreciate a question about health care because it gives me the opportunity to put some facts on the record, Madam Speaker.

And the facts are that we are making record investments in our health-care system in the province of Manitoba—almost \$8 billion in the budget this year, a 9.2 per cent increase—\$668 million more than last year—and a 22 per cent increase since we took office in 2016.

Those are more investments for Manitoba's health-care system, not less.

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

Mr. Kinew: Imagine how those tired talking points sound to the people of Glenboro, who've seen their ER cut its hours. Imagine how they sound to somebody in Wawanesa who lost their EMS station just very recently, since the start of 2023. And imagine how—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —those very tired talking points sound to people all across Highway 2, where there are no more emergency services any more. I'll tell you how they land: they don't land very well at all.

And that's why the people of Carberry are very concerned, because all throughout their—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —region, they're seeing closures, and now Prairie Mountain Health has come to town and told them that their ER may be next, come September. That's why people in the area are standing up and speaking out. They want answers.

Will the Premier provide one, and let people in Carberry know whether they are going to lose their ER this September?

Mrs. Stefanson: Manitobans know we don't want to go back to the dark days of the NDP government, Madam Speaker, where they closed down almost 20 ERs right across the province. We don't want to go back to those dark days. We do recall also the NDP mentioning and saying and running on ending hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million.

We know—fast forward to 2015, Madam Speaker—that we had the longest ER wait times in the country. We don't want to go back, and Manitobans don't want to go back, to the dark days of the NDP government.

* (13:50)

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

Mr. Kinew: Imagine how those tired PC talking points sound to somebody in Eriksdale who's fighting right now against this government, trying to keep their emergency room open. Imagine how it sounds to families who have been waiting hours and hours in emergency rooms right here in this city.

Everyone in Manitoba will tell you health care today is worse than it's ever been, and it's because of this Premier's cuts; cuts that she's made and doubled down on, just like Brian Pallister.

That's why people in Eriksdale and Wawanesa and Glenboro and Carberry and so many other communities are speaking up—well, almost everybody from Glenboro is speaking up, I should say.

But folks in the community want to know a simple answer: Is the Premier going to close the emergency room in Carberry this September, yes or no?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, we know that Manitobans, again, don't want to go back to the dark days of the previous NDP government where they shut down almost 20 ERs across this province. Manitobans don't want to go back to those days.

That was a time, I will remind the Leader of the Opposition, it wasn't just after a pandemic. Right now, we are faced with significant health human resource challenges, not just here in Manitoba, but right across our country.

And that's why we've invested \$200 million to make an investment in more than 2,000 new health-care workers. That is a step in the right direction.

And what did members opposite do, Madam Speaker? They voted against it. Shame on them.

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

North End Water Treatment Plant Cost Overrun for Upgrades

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Now, this Premier may fake that there are big announcements, but everyone in Manitoba knows that there's no follow-through with this PC government. You just can't trust them, especially not in an election year.

Just like Brian Pallister, this Premier wants to say that infrastructure investments are coming. But where are the construction projects being advanced here? We just don't see them.

When it comes to the North—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —End treatment plant—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —this government said the cost was supposed to be \$552 million. They repeated that in

their budget a few weeks ago, but we know that's not true. All tabled documents that show that the North End water treatment plant is now \$360 million over budget.

Will the Premier tell the House if the upgrade to the North End treatment plant will happen?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, speaking of trust, Madam Speaker, Manitobans don't want to go back again to the dark days of the NDP government, where they knocked on the doors just prior to the election and they went right across this province and they told Manitobans that they wouldn't raise the PST. And what did they do as soon as they got back into power? They jacked up taxes on the backs of Manitobans.

We will never do that to Manitobans. We have way too much respect for them, unlike members opposite.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, I'd invite the Premier to take a look at the documents that I've just tabled. What they prove is that this government knew last August that the North End treatment plant costs were over budget by more than \$360 million.

Again, I can tell that the Cabinet ministers sitting around her are surprised. Perhaps they've been kept in the dark, like the rest of Manitobans, about the overage on this hugely important project.

Once again, Manitobans are tired of fake announcements. They want to see shovels in the ground. They want to see projects moving ahead. But the mismanagement and huge cost overruns, this time to the tune of \$360 million, are putting all that into jeopardy.

Will the Premier tell the House if the upgrade to the North End treatment plant is fully funded?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, it allows me to put some facts on the record.

And the facts are that the NDP had 17 years to upgrade that North End wastewater treatment facility. They chose not to do it. Where they didn't get it done, we will. We'll get it right.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, we know why this project has gone so over budget. It's because that this Premier, just like Brian Pallister, keeps delaying and delaying and

delaying when it comes to necessary infrastructure investments. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: What we don't know is why she apparently didn't tell her Cabinet colleagues or the rest of the people of Manitoba that this needed infrastructure project was already over budget to the tune of \$360 million. Do any of them know the answer? Clearly, they do not.

That's why you have a hard-working Manitoba NDP standing up for you in this Chamber. The only question that the Premier needs to answer—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —is: Is she going to tell this House whether her government is going to cover the full cost of this six-\$360-million overage to the North End treatment plant project?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, this is a project that the NDP had 17 years to implement in the province of Manitoba, yet they didn't do it. It was one of the first initiatives since I became Premier that we took on and worked collaboratively with the federal government and with the City of Winnipeg.

And we went out and we got it done, Madam Speaker.

Nurses in Manitoba Overtime Hours Worked

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, for the past seven very long years, the Pallister-Stefanson government health-care cuts have had a devastating impact on the personal lives of our doctors, our nurses and allied health-care professionals.

Data obtained from recent freedom of information requests, which I will table, indicates that overtime hours for nurses in rural Manitoba are completely out of control.

Will this Premier, also known as Pallister's failed Health minister, admit that her PC government's cuts to nurse training was the wrong decision?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I'd like to pose the question to the member for Union Station: When will the NDP and the member for Union Station apologize to all Manitobans, to internationally trained medical graduates, who were unable to get licensed in this province in the 17 years they were in office?

Hundreds of them have written to my office. Many of them have met with me in person to ask when the

members opposite will be apologizing to all Manitobans. I need to know. I need an answer. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, when will this minister and her government apologize to the nurses that kept us safe during the pandemic, and now all they get from this tired government are empty words while the system crumbles around them?

Data from the Interlake-Eastern shows that for the first eight months of 2022, there were nearly 60,000 hours of overtime worked. Nurses are struggling all across our system and they need help. They need help right now to stop from burning out.

Does this minister think it's appropriate that nurses worked 60,000 hours of overtime in just eight months?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, what I think is inappropriate is that, in 17 years, the members opposite sat on their hands and did nothing to help internationally-medical graduates, international medical nurses to gain licensure in this province.

When will the members opposite apologize to Ms. Sigua, who they sent packing, Madam Speaker, during their term, and said, you will not be licensed in this province?

When will they apologize to those nurse and those physicians who did not get licensed under their administration?

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

MLA Asagwara: So, Madam Speaker, it's clear that the minister won't apologize to nurses in the Interlake-Eastern.

I wonder if the minister will instead apologize to nurses working in Southern Health, because those nurses in the first eight months alone worked over 70,000 hours of overtime: 70,000 hours of overtime is equivalent to eight years in time.

* (14:00)

That is why nurses are burning out. That's an equivalent to an extra three dozen nurses working full time for an entire year.

Does the minister think it's okay and acceptable that nurses in southern worked over 70,000 hours of

overtime in just eight months, and will she apologize to those nurses today?

Ms. Gordon: NDP failures: that is what Manitobans do not want to go back to, Madam Speaker. When will the members opposite apologize to the international medical graduates, physicians, nurses, allied health professionals that they failed to license in this province?

Madam Speaker, don't take it from me. This came right from the registrar and CEO of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. The exam that was in place under that administration was holding back many qualified, internationally trained physicians from coming to this province.

Madam Speaker, all that Manitobans want is an apology from the NDP.

Rental Rate Increase Government Intention

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): The PCs have hiked rent by 10.6 per cent since they took office. Thousands of renters in Manitoba are paying significantly more for their rent today than they were just a few years ago, thanks to the PCs. That's made it harder for Manitobans to make ends meet. Manitobans are worried the PCs will announce yet another rent hike this year.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) tell this House: Does she plan on raising Manitobans' rent again this year?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Madam Speaker, we've had a budget before this House for a couple of weeks now—we've had the budget implementation tax statutes amendment act before this House.

We've heard hardly a single question from the Finance critic of the NDP. Finally, he gets up today—first time, I think, this week. And what does he ask about? Something not directly related to the budget.

Well, I'm here to tell you that the budget is what he should be talking about. And the budget is what I'm going to be talking about, because the budget is something that is going to give significant tax relief to Manitobans on their income taxes. It's going to give significant tax relief to property owners by increasing the education property tax benefit. And it gives significant benefit to disability support professionals, who are now going to get \$19 an hour under this budget.

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

Mr. Sala: The budget that this minister is bragging about doesn't mention renters even once. That's a shame, Madam Speaker. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: The PCs have made life much harder for Manitobans; they've hiked rent by 10.6 per cent since they took office, costing Manitobans thousands of dollars, and they raised taxes on renters by \$175 a year, all while giving big handouts to large corporations.

They've also approved hundreds of above-guideline rent increases. Now renters are worried that the PCs will hike their rent yet again.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) tell Manitoba's renters: Does she plan on raising their rent again this coming year?

Mr. Teitsma: I know that the members opposite pretend to be concerned about the lives of Manitobans, but clearly their opposition to this budget shows that they are not concerned.

Now, what I will say is, what we did for renters is when we were giving tax relief to property owners through the education property tax benefit, what did we do with rent increase guidelines? We froze them. Did we freeze them for one year? No, we froze them for two years. That's the way that we deal with renters.

And not only that, but then we've brought forward a renter property—sorry, a renter tax benefit that's available just to renters on your personal income tax form. That is significant benefits and significant savings for renters.

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

Mr. Sala: The PCs raised rent on Manitobans by 10.6 per cent since taking office. That is a fact. And they cut renters tax credits and hiked their hydro rates.

To make matters worse, they've also approved hundreds of—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —above-guideline rent increases. One of those increases, Madam Speaker, was a whopping 118 per cent. The PCs' attack on renters needs to stop.

Will the Premier stand up in her place today and tell Manitobans if their rent will be going up this upcoming year?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): We've just learned, and we've just been able to confirm, that the critic for Finance did not read the budget, because he would have read that we've got an increased renters tax credit. We have also quadrupled the Rent Assist program since we formed office.

We are indexing those benefits in our budget and we're increasing the number of Manitobans who are eligible for Rent Assist.

So we have been working very diligently to give supports for people who are renting, unlike the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), when he sat on the RTB, he jacked up rent many years. Each time when he sat on that board, he jacked up their rent.

We'll take no lessons from members opposite.

Speed Zone Variance Backlog Transportation Department Vacancies

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Manitobans care about road safety. Slower speed limits reduce collisions and they save lives. Many communities are asking to change speed zones for safety, but the backlog in this minister's department keeps growing.

I'll table a FIPPA document that shows the current backlog is at—currently at 77 requests. This document also shows the time to come to a decision is taking much too long—up to two years, Madam Speaker.

Can the minister explain why has he left the speed variance request backlog grow so high?

Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, when it comes to road safety, it's No. 1 priority when it comes to our department, MTI department.

And our staff are out there reviewing every—when it comes to every community, looking at all options out there, making sure that our—the flow of—goods and services flow throughout our communities. And it's a balance, Madam Speaker.

We're looking at long-term investment in our highways, Madam Speaker. We're going to be spending \$4.2 billion in the next five years making sure that our flow of traffic flows safely and making sure that there—supply chain issues are going to be addressed here too. But safety is No. 1 when it comes to our pedestrians, specially when they cross in larger communities.

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

Mr. Bushie: Thanks to the large backlog, this government is taking up to two years to come to a decision on a speed zone variance request. That means that communities are potentially having to wait years just for an answer to have their safety concerns addressed.

We know why this backlog has grown: the department currently has over 660 vacant positions. I will table these documents today.

Instead of filling these positions, the PCs are planning on paying private contractors to review requests. That's the wrong approach.

Will the minister commit to hiring Manitobans instead of paying private contractors?

Mr. Piwniuk: I'm not quite sure where the member from Keewatinook is getting his information, Madam Speaker.

We are recruiting in our department many staff when it comes to recruiting. And, of course, we also have issues like any other department, any other industry in this—in North America when it comes to retaining human resources. And we're doing the best we can to making sure that we recruit, and we're actually putting positions out there on a regular basis, Madam Speaker.

And when it comes to highways, Madam Speaker, this government—the NDP government, back in the dark days of the NDP, underspent by a billion dollars for eight years. You know, they could've addressed a lot of these issues too.

But this government here, this PC government, we're going to get the work done and we're going to get the job done and we're going to invest in these highways, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Bushie: Well, that information comes from the minister's own documents. The PCs left 660 positions vacant in Infrastructure, a nearly 40 per cent vacancy rate, Madam Speaker.

Manitobans deserve better. They've cut so deep that even requests to vary speed zones are backlogged. That means that Manitobans are waiting up to two years just for an answer to their concerns about safety in their communities.

What is this PC government's solution? To pay private companies to do this government's job. That's just wrong, Madam Speaker.

Will the minister commit to stopping cutting Infrastructure staff so the speed zone variance backlog can be cleared today?

* (14:10)

Mr. Piwniuk: Our department and myself—since I became Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, Madam Speaker, I've been actually meeting with every municipality that actually had a request to meet with our department and making sure that their staff is working with our staff when it comes to consultation, making sure that we listen to communities, much not like what the NDP did back in the dark days of the NDP. They never listened to any municipalities.

What—they were unrespectful to—when it came to municipalities, Madam Speaker. They forced amalgamations that happened. They did not listen to municipalities at all.

We're going to listen. We're going to get the job done. We're going to partner with their—municipalities and the federal government, making sure that we get stuff done, Madam Speaker.

Home-Care Services Minimum Safety Standards

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, unlike this PC government and their Seniors Minister, our team understands that the No. 1 issue for Manitobans is to fix health care.

Despite a flurry of last-ditch, pre-election announcements from this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) in a sorry effort to convince voters that she's changed, Manitobans know that they can't trust the PCs.

FIPPA documents that I'll table here show that the minister's own department advised him that, I quote: Home care has no standards or benchmarks. There is no minimum set of standards to ensure safe and appropriate care.

If this minister has no standards, how can Manitobans have confidence that home-care clients and loved ones will get the home care that they need?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I think the initiatives that this government has taken in regard to supporting seniors speaks for themselves. You know, the seniors strategy that was initiated—excuse me—brought forward a number of initiatives that support seniors—most recently, the hearing aid program, which the seniors continue to congratulate this government on.

And they voted against everything. They won't support the budgets that are bringing it forward.

Madam Speaker, this government continues to support the needs of seniors and always will.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Notre Dame, on a supplementary question.

Pay and Working Conditions

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, facts—sorry, facts do, indeed, speak for themselves. This minister left \$24 million last year and cuts to this department that could've gone to home care instead.

Madam Speaker, the facts show that—how much damage the PC cuts have done to home care. Vacancy rates for home care are only getting worse. They're up to over 20 per cent in 2022 and 10 per cent higher than in 2021. The number of clients helped is down by a thousand, and the number of hours of care is down by over a quarter million hours.

Our population is aging and the need for home care is increasing.

When will this minister hire more home-care workers? When will this minister show some respect to home-care workers and address the poor pay—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Johnston: Our home-care workers are unsung heroes. They work awfully hard for the people of Manitoba, and contrary to what the member might indicate, is that there are a lot of seniors that are satisfied with the dedication and the commitment done by home-care workers within our system.

Madam Speaker, there are 50,000 seniors that are served by our home-care program. There is an investment by this government of \$300 million in home care, and we continue to support it, and we'll continue to support it further.

We continue to work to ensure that we are doing what needed to be done to recruit, and we will continue doing that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Notre Dame, on a final supplementary.

Request for Seniors Advocate

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, our elders took good care of us, and they deserve to receive the same quality of care from us as they age. A Manitoba NDP government will support families, investing in

health care and seniors every year, not just in the desperate weeks leading up to an election.

Will this government commit to establishing an independent seniors advocate to investigate problems, such as those in home care, and hold this government accountable for their mistreatment of seniors?

Mr. Johnston: It's ironic. It's ironic that this government would turn around and say that they didn't realize that there was going to be an increase in the seniors population in the country, in Manitoba. They had 17 years to deal with the explosion that we're dealing with. But this government is dealing with it.

This government initiated a seniors strategy, which is going to make—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnston:—sure that seniors are taken care of in this province, Madam Speaker. Huge investments—and they're not election stunts, they're to serve the people of Manitoba.

Home-Care Services Staff Vacancy Rate

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): We're hearing there's an ongoing crisis in home care and that workers aren't even getting the top-ups and breaks they've been promised in contracts. We've heard from folks like Eric De Schepper what an incredible respite charitable home-care workers provided to his wife in their time of need, when the WRHA failed him.

As I table, Southern Health is facing vacancy rates of 25.6 per cent for home-care workers. We're hearing from them that they are not honouring the new contract; they're refusing to pay evening and night premiums, overtime; refusing overtime for the rest period; and fighting a two per cent long service step due April 1st, all under a signed contract.

Why is this government still nickel-and-diming front-line health care workers?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): This government recognizes that there are vacancy rates, and that's why we are taking the initiatives that the government has to, to ensure that we're fulfilling the needs of seniors. We're on recruitment, we're doing everything that we need to do to ensure that we are able to fulfill those obligations.

And we won't stop, Madam Speaker. We have invested a significant amount of dollars to ensure that we support seniors, and we'll continue doing that.

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

Mr. Lamont: It's not just Southern Health where home care is in crisis. According to these FIPPA documents which I tabled, 20 per cent of the home-care positions in Interlake-Eastern are vacant; in the North, in Flin Flon, it's 23.3 per cent; in The Pas it's 61 per cent; and in Thompson it's 66 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the minister can boast about billions of dollars that go into the system, and yet the system gets worse. One of the reasons why it's getting worse is because they've created an environment where there isn't responsibility, where money goes in but there's no accountability for the results that come out.

Those aren't my words; that's the member from Steinbach in 2008, going after the NDP, so it doesn't seem that much changes. If the government wants to talk about helping home-care workers, why aren't they doing everything they can to respect the contracts that have been signed, to fill vacancies to ensure proper care and dignity for vulnerable Manitobans? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, contracts that are agreed to by both parties, the government certainly will honour and certainly will do everything it can to ensure that the employees that work for this government are treated fairly, as we have.

And also, (2) we will do everything we can to encourage their satisfaction in delivering the services that we expect them to deliver.

Psychotherapy Services Regulation Plans

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Last year, on November 29th, I asked the Minister responsible for Health what their timeline was to improve and regulate psychotherapy, and the minister indicated we would be made aware soon.

It's been five months. No updates have been shared, and we were disappointed that it wasn't mentioned in the budget.

Manitoba is already behind with mental health-care services, compared to other provinces. What is this government doing to ensure psychotherapy is properly regulated, and that all Manitobans have access?

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

As part of our health human resource action plan, our government has committed \$200 million to add 2,000 new health professionals. Some of those health professionals are psychotherapists, psychologists. We are working with the various colleges and associations on negotiating those incentives and adding those seats to our health-care system.

* (14:20)

Look forward to adding more big news, as the NDP calls our announcements, so that Manitobans can hear what our government is doing.

Community Living disABILITY Services Funding Support Announcement

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Budget 2023 is providing historic help for Manitobans, and I understand this morning—just this morning, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) were joined by many community organizations, service providers, front-line workers and advocates for a historic announcement that will create foundational and meaningful change for children with disabilities, adults with intellectual disabilities, their families and their support workers.

Can the Minister of Families outline how our government is providing historic investments for the disability sector?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Accessibility): It was a great honour this morning for the Premier and I to spend time with those working in the disability sector and the wonderful people that they serve, people with lived experience who depend on the sector to provide them with the dignity that they deserve.

Our government announced historic investments: \$104 million in additional funding for Community Living disABILITY Services; \$82 million of that is going towards wages so that we can make sure that all the direct service professionals are receiving \$19 an hour as a baseline for the important work that they do.

This is something the NDP never did. They failed to give disability support workers a single raise during their time in office. Our government is getting it done.

Foot-Care Services in Thompson Request to Restore Services

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): For years, the people of Thompson and surrounding communities have been without foot-care services because of this government's cuts. There's a huge demand for

foot-care service in the North. Over 2,400 people have signed a petition demanding this service be restored.

This minister should know better, since she agreed to meet with a group of concerned seniors at my request.

Will this government reverse their cuts and previously—and restore foot-care services in Thompson?

Thank you.

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I certainly appreciate the member's lobby and position. I was very comfortable in meeting with him and the people that he had brought in to express their issue and concerns.

As I had indicated, the seniors strategy is a living document and I have taken that presentation from him to heart and am further investigating what solutions may be available to us to satisfy the need expressed.

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

Mr. Redhead: The presentation, as the minister says, was actually first-hand accounts of the impact that this government's cuts have had on northerners' health. They expressed concerns about their foot-care services being cut, and they presented people actually passing away because of this government's lack of commitment for northern health care.

And the minister did say that he would look into this service being restored. I don't know what else there is to look into other than restore this service. This service has been in place for well over two decades in Thompson until this government decided to amputate that program.

Will they restore this service today?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the northern regional health authority provides medically necessary foot care. It is an insured service and available through the northern regional health authority.

And so, once again, medically necessary foot care is available through home care or through a referral through a primary-care provider.

I was pleased to be part of that meeting with the Thompson seniors' association. We shared this information and we continue to look at issues that they've brought forward under the seniors strategy, as the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care has stated, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Redhead: The minister just indicated that medically necessary foot-care service is available. What we are asking for in the North is preventative foot care, so we don't need that medical necessary piece.

This is for quality of life of the North, the northerners. Does this government even care about the North? You keep cutting programs.

Will they restore this service today?

Mr. Johnston: As I'd indicated to the minister—further to the discussion we had in my office, I had indicated that I will review exactly what the concerns raised are, and do further due diligence with the Health Department to determine whether or not there's a further solution to address those concerns. And I'd indicated to the member that I will do that, and I will do that.

Home-Care Services Northern Manitoba

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Access to health-care services is a real struggle for people living in the North. Under this Pallister and Stefanson governments, cuts to health care have already made that challenge so much worse.

Families that have been trying to get home care for their aging parents are being told they won't be able to get the support service hours that they require. In the meantime, the government touts its self-managed care, which is complicated and puts more stress on people that are already trying to live with stressful situations.

When will this minister admit the real damage done by the PC cuts, and actually fix health care in the North—and apologize to Manitobans? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): As I've indicated to the House on many occasions, this government, through its seniors strategy, has—is going to address home care even further than we already have. As the member indicates, we have initiated the self- and family-care program, which allows further support for seniors.

And I'd indicated that we will be making further announcements in regards to further supports for home care. And I would say to the member that I'm sure that he'll be happy to support these further initiatives as we budget them going forward.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

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

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

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

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

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

(4) The JRL and Red River Valley School Division 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.

* (14:30)

(6) The students that are bused in from the neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleeferfield [*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:

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

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

(3) To request the Minister of Education and Minister of Francophone Affairs to recognize that a Memorandum of Understanding between the Red River Valley School Division and the 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, 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 signed by Victor Maendel, Rosie Maendel, Delilah Maendel and many other Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 133(6) when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

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.

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, pedestrian use of Provincial Road 224.

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

SANE Program

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) The Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, SANE, program is run out of the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg and provides critical support to sexual assault survivors. The program also helps collect evidence for potential prosecution.

(2) Demand for the SANE program in the province is rising, with 764 sexual assault survivors receiving treatment from April of 2022 to January of 2023, a nearly 50 per cent increase since 2017 and '18.

(3) The SANE program has only one full-time nurse and just over a dozen others who are on call to conduct sexual assault examinations in their off hours.

(4) The provincial government has failed to increase funding or hire additional staff to support the SANE program, breaking its April of 2022 promise to spend \$640,000 annually and hire five additional nurses and a provincial co-ordinator.

(5) The provincial government's refusal to support the SANE program has resulted in severe staffing shortages, leading to at least 14 sexual assault survivors being sent home with the instruction to not shower or wipe themselves until they return and staff are eventually available to treat them. It has also been reported that survivors often don't return, and the number of people being turned away could be significantly higher.

(6) The provincial government has compounded its failure to provide supports for sexual—for victims, rather, of sexual and gender-based violence by refusing to proclaim a bill passed in 2021 that would hold the provincial government accountable for providing resources available to child survivors of sexual assault. The bill, sponsored by the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak, is entitled, The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act.

(7) The SANE program's staffing shortage is just one example of how the provincial government's cuts to Manitoba's health-care system and front-line health-care workers, including nurses, is causing Manitobans harm.

(8) Urgent action is needed to immediately fix the SANE program staffing shortage and to ensure that

sexual assault survivors are supported with timely access to care.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to stop breaking its promises to Manitobans and to provide the basic and respectful health care for sexual assault survivors through the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, SANE, program by ensuring it is properly staffed so that no prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence is compromised by the failure to collect evidence.

This petition has been signed by Shelley Kowalachuk, Rick Couture [*phonetic*], Alecia McLeod, Kevin Rebeck and many Manitobans.

Right to Repair

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

(3) The Biden administration in the US has formally backed the right to repair movement in January 2022, following the European Union's lead.

(4) Right to repair enables consumers access to the parts and repair manuals needed to fix and modify their products, appliances, including cellphones, washing machines and refrigerators.

(5) Right to repair also allows consumers and electronic repair businesses access to the most recent versions of repair manuals, repair-replacement parts and software and other tools that the manufacturer uses for diagnosing, maintaining or repairing its branded electronic products.

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

(7) In addition, right to repair ensures manufacturers replace electronic products at no cost or refund the amount paid to the consumers to purchase

the electronic product, where they refuse or are unable to provide manuals or replacement parts.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) According to census 2021, Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada and there are 33,315 people in Manitoba whose native 'languagel' is Punjabi.

(2) Thousands of Punjabi newcomers are coming to Manitoba as students and as immigrants, looking to call this province home. People of Punjabi origin contribute a great deal to the social and economic development of Canada and Manitoba in fields such as education, science, health, business and politics.

* (14:40)

(3) In coming to Manitoba, Punjabi newcomers make sacrifices, including distance from their cultural roots and language. Many Punjabi parents and families want their children to retain their language and keep a continued cultural appreciation.

(4) Manitoba has many good bilingual programs in public schools for children and teens available in other languages, including French, Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish. Punjabi bilingual programs for children and teens as well as Punjabi language instruction at college and university levels could similarly teach and maintain Punjabi language and culture.

(5) Punjabi bilingual instruction would help cross-culture friendships, relationships and marriages and prepare young people to be multilingual professionals.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take steps to implement Punjabi bilingual programs in public schools similar to existing bilingual programmings and take steps to implement Punjabi language instruction in other levels of education in Manitoba.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Lead in Soils

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

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

(1) In December of 2019, the provincial government's commissioned report on lead concentrations in soil in Winnipeg was completed.

(2) The report found that 10 neighbourhoods had concerning levels of lead concentration in their soil, including Centennial, Daniel McIntyre, Glenelm-Chalmers, north Point Douglas, River Osborne, Sargent Park, St. Boniface, West End, Weston and Wolseley-Minto.

(3) In particular, the predicted blood lead levels for children in north Point Douglas, Weston and Daniel McIntyre were above the level of concern.

(4) The Weston Elementary School field has been forced to close down many times of concerns of lead in soil and the provincial government's inaction to improve the situation.

(5) Lead exposure especially affects children aged seven years and under, as their nervous system is still developing.

(6) The effects of lead exposure are irreversible and include impacts on learning, behaviour and intelligence.

(7) For adults, long-term lead exposure can contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, kidney problems and reproductive effects.

(8) The provincial government currently has no comprehensive plan in place to deal with lead in soil, nor is there a broad advertising campaign educating residents on how they can reduce their risks of lead exposure.

(9) Instead, people in these areas continue to garden and work in the soil and children continue to play in the dirt, often without any knowledge of the associated risks.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take action to reduce people's exposure to lead in Winnipeg, and to implement the recommendations proposed by the provincial government's independent review, including the creation of an action plan for the Weston neighbourhood, developing a lead awareness communications and outreach program, requisitioning a more in-depth study and creating a tracking program for those tested for blood lead levels so that medical professionals can follow up with them.

This has been signed by John Paul Garcia, Cristina Garcia, Emma Damsel and many other Manitobans.

Health-Care Coverage

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 petition is as follows:

(1) Health care is a basic human right and a fundamental part of responsible public health. Many people in Manitoba are not covered by provincial health care: migrant workers with work permits of less than one year, international students and those undocumented residents who have lost their status for a variety of reasons.

(2) Racialized people and communities are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, mainly due to the social and economic conditions which leave them vulnerable while performing essential work in a variety of industries in Manitoba.

(3) Without adequate health-care coverage, if they are ill, many of the uninsured will avoid seeking health care due to fear of being charged for the care, and if—some will fear possible detention and deportation if their immigration status is reported to the authorities.

(4) According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, denying essential health care to undocumented irregular migrants is a violation of their rights.

(5) Jurisdictions across Canada and the world have adopted access-without-fear policies to prevent

sharing personal health information or immigration status with immigration authorities and to give uninsured residents the confidence to access health care.

(6) The pandemic has clearly identified the need for everyone in Manitoba to have access to health care to protect the health and safety of all who live in the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to immediately provide comprehensive and free health-care coverage to all residents of Manitoba, regardless of immigration status, including refugee claimants, migrant workers, international students, dependent children of temporary residents and undocumented residents.

(2) To urge the minister of health and seniors care to undertake a multilingual communication campaign to provide information on expanded coverage to all affected residents.

(3) To urge the minister of health and seniors care to inform all health-care institutions and providers of expanded coverage for those without health insurance and the details on how necessary policy and protocol changes will be implemented.

(4) To urge the minister of health and seniors care to create and enforce strict confidentiality policies and provide staff with training to protect the safety of residents with precarious immigration status and ensure that they can access health care without jeopardizing their ability to remain in Canada.

And this petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) The population of those 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) The large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are also living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority, N-R-H-A, previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and the surrounding area.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of 'podiatric' care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need of foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson, effective April 1st, 2022.

This has been signed by many Manitobans.

Community Living disABILITY Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Currently, people with specific or non-specific disabilities, or a combination of disabilities, such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, auditory or language processing disorders and/or non-verbal learning disabilities, will be denied 'access'—access to services under the Province of Manitoba's community living and disability services, CLDS, if their IQ is above 80.

(2) People with these or other borderline cognitive functioning issues also have extremely low adaptive skills and are not able to live independently without supports.

(3) Recently, it has become widely recognized that access to CLDS should not be based solely on IQ, which is only a measure of a person's ability to answer questions verbally or in writing in relation to mathematics, science or material which is read.

(4) Very often, persons with specific or non-specific disabilities or a combination of those disabilities have specific needs related to their executive function for support when they are adults or are transitioning to adulthood, which is not necessarily connected to their IQ.

* (14:50)

Executive function is the learned ability to do the normal activities of life, including being organized, being able to plan and to carry out plans and adapt to changing conditions.

Those who have major defects in executive function have a learning disability requiring assistance under CLDS to be able to make a contribution to society and be self-sustaining.

Provision of CLDS services to individuals with specific or non-specific disabilities or a combination of these disabilities or executive function disability, would free them from being dependent on Employment and Income Assistance and have the potential to make an important change in the person's life.

Newfoundland and Labrador have now recognized that access to services should be based on the nature of the disability and the person's needs, rather than on IQ.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to change the requirements for accessing community living and disability services so that said requirements are based on the needs of individuals with specific or non-specific disabilities, including executive function or a combination of disabilities, rather than solely on the basis of their IQ.

Richard—signed by Richard Oakden, Douglas Adams, John Gross and many, many others.

Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) According to census 2021, Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada and there are 33,315 people in Manitoba whose native language is Punjabi.

(2) Thousands of Punjabi newcomers are coming to Manitoba as students and as immigrants, looking to call this province home. People of Punjabi origin contribute a great deal to the social and economic development of Canada and Manitoba in fields such as education, science, health, business and politics.

(3) In coming to Manitoba, Punjabi newcomers make sacrifices, including distance from their cultural roots and language. Many Punjabi parents and families want their children to retain their language and keep a continued cultural appreciation.

(4) Manitoba has many good bilingual programs in public schools for children and teens available in other languages, including French, Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish. Punjabi bilingual programs for children and teens as well as Punjabi language instruction at a college and university level could similarly teach and maintain Punjabi language and culture.

(5) Punjabi bilingual instruction would help cross-cultural friendships, relationships and marriages and prepare young people to be multilingual professionals.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to take steps to implement Punjabi bilingual programs in public schools similar to existing bilingual programs and take steps to implement Punjabi language instruction in other levels of education in Manitoba.

This petition has been signed by Paige Johal, Harpreet Brar and Keshav Katia.

Thank you.

SANE Program

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

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

(1) The Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, SANE, program is run out of the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg and provides critical support to sexual survivors—sexual assault survivors. The program also helps collect evidence for 'portential' prosecution.

(2) Demand for the SANE program in the province is rising, with 764 sexual assault survivors receiving treatment from April 2022 to January 2023, a nearly 50 per cent increase since 2017-18.

(3) The SANE program has only one full-time nurse and just over a dozen others who are on call to conduct the sexual assault examiners—examinations in their off hours.

(4) The provincial government has failed to increase funding or hire additional staff to support the SANE program, breaking its April 2022 promise to spend \$640,000 annually and hire five additional nurses and a provincial co-ordinator.

(5) The provincial government's refusal to support the SANE program has resulted in severe staffing shortages, leading to at least 14 sexual assault survivors being sent home with the instruction not to shower or wipe themselves until they return and staff are eventually able—available to treat them. It has been reported that survivors often don't return, and the number of people being turned away could be significantly higher.

(6) The provincial government has compounded its failure to provide supports for victims of sexual and gender-based violence by refusing to proclaim a bill passed in 2021 that would hold the provincial government accountable for providing resources available to child survivors of sexual assault. The bill, sponsored by the MLA for The Pas-Kameesak, is entitled The Reporting of Supports for Child Survivors of Sexual Assault Act.

(7) The SANE program's staffing shortage is just one example of how the provincial government's cuts to Manitoba's health-care system and front-line health-care workers, including nurses, is causing Manitobans harm.

(8) Urgent action is needed to immediately fix the SANE program staffing shortage and to ensure that sexual assault survivors are supported with timely access to care.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to stop breaking its provinces—promises to Manitobans and to provide basic and respectful health care for sexual assault survivors through the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, SANE, program by ensuring it is properly staffed so that no prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence is compromised by the failure to collect evidence.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY*(Continued)***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS****House Business**

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Pursuant to rule 34(7), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for La Vérendrye (Mr. Smook).

And the title of that resolution is Commending the Provincial Government for Investing in Diabetic Supports.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that, pursuant to rule 34(7), the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for La Vérendrye.

The title of the resolution is Commending the Provincial Government for Investing in Diabetic Supports.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: I have a leave request specifically relating to the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 254.

For reference, by long-standing Manitoba practice, government members sit on the committee—at the committee table to the left hand of the Chairperson while the opposition and independent members sit to the right-hand side.

To better accommodate our virtual infrastructure in room 254, could you please canvass the House for leave to allow opposition members and independent members in the section of the Committee Supply meeting in 254 to sit on the left-hand side of the committee table whenever the minister of the department currently before the committee is participating virtually.

This agreement would remain in effect until the conclusion of this Session.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow opposition members and independent members in the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in 254 to sit on the left-hand side of the committee table whenever the minister of the department currently before the committee is participating virtually?

This agreement would remain in effect until the conclusion of the Session.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you to members of the House.

And, Madam Speaker, could you please resolve into Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)****ROOM 254****HEALTH**

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Good afternoon. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Health.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): Yes, I do have an opening statement.

Mr. Chairperson: You may proceed.

Ms. Gordon: On behalf of the Department of Health, I'm very pleased to present the financial Estimates for the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

I would like to make the following introductions of my team who is joining this committee. Karen Herd, Deputy Minister of Manitoba Health; Scott Sinclair, our incoming deputy minister; Sandra Henault, assistant deputy minister and executive financial officer, Manitoba Health; Sil Komlodi, associate deputy minister, Performance and Oversight Division; Barb Wasilewski, assistant deputy minister, Health policy and planning; Louis Barré, assistant deputy minister, Public Health Division; Robert Schafer, assistant deputy minister, Insurance Division.

I commit to Manitobans that through this budget we will continue to deliver a positive health-care experience for Manitobans with a focus on quality health services.

That care is delivered in a system that is focused on continuous improvement to address capacity, performance and accountability.

We also want to ensure that care is delivered by an empowered, adaptable and highly skilled workforce. At the same time, we oversee the system in a

manner that ensures us care is sustainable for current and future generations.

* (15:10)

The health system is recovering from the impacts of the pandemic. There's a global health human resource challenge, so we will continue our health human resource action plan to meet the significant demand for health-care professionals across Manitoba, and we will continue our commitment to address surgical and diagnostic wait-lists arising from the COVID pandemic using innovative solutions brought through the Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force.

The proposed 2023-2024 Health budget in core represents the largest investment in health care in our province's history, just over \$6.7 billion as it resides today. More specifically, the Department of Health now reflects a 2023-2024 expenditure in core of \$6.778 billion and 729.3 full-time equivalent positions. This represents a \$503.5-million increase from the 2022-2023 budget, or an 8 per cent increase.

In terms of summary financial reporting, the 2023-2024 Health sector summary budget is set at \$7.133 billion.

Budget 2023 includes key investments and enhancements in the delivery of health services. I will now take a few moments to describe some of these investments.

Manitoba Health takes the fiscal imperative of this government very seriously. This means weighing carefully our options that maximize patient outcomes and quality of care, along with protecting the sustainability of the health-care system.

A substantial driver of this increase, around 47 per cent of this, is for front-line health-care remuneration. This includes the estimated financial cost of the successful conclusion of major collective agreements in the health sector for nursing and support staff. It also contains a volume increase estimate related to physicians.

Another substantial portion of Health's increase is due to the largest ever percentage increase in the drug budget so that we can continue to keep up with the rising cost of pharmaceutical treatments. The drug budget includes two major programs: Pharmacare and the Home Cancer Drug Program.

Pharmacare is a universal comprehensive income-tested prescription drug program for all Manitobans, regardless of age. It covers 100 per cent of eligible drug costs once the income-tested deductible is reached.

The Home Cancer Drug Program budget was established in 2012 and has provided oral chemotherapy drugs to eligible residents at no cost with no deductible in order to work consistently with the intravenous drugs provided through CancerCare Manitoba, also at no cost to clients.

The drug budget increases in Budget 2023 ensure that we continue to provide Manitobans with innovative and life-saving drugs and therapies.

The Manitoba government also continues to recognize that significant financial resources are needed to address the pandemic backlog challenges. Budget 2023 provides a total of \$130 million, an increase of \$20 million over Budget 2022, to aid in the recovery from COVID-19 related to surgical and diagnostic backlogs. This will be available to Health through an internal service adjustment within Enabling Appropriations.

Manitoba's made significant progress on eliminating the COVID-related backlogs in many key areas, including ultrasound, pacemaker, cath lab, cataracts, oral surgery and dentistry, as well as urology and CT scan.

There is more work to do, but significant progress has been achieved.

An additional investment of \$9 million is provided to maintain the elevated ICU bed levels that first increased under COVID-19. Combined with Budget 2022 totals, this results in an \$18-million total investment to maintain these elevated ICU bed levels to this day.

Work is also concurrently under way to assess the ongoing ICU bed needs in our province. This means that our ICU configuration plans, once the COVID pandemic is declared over by the World Health Organization, will adjust to the most up-to-date and evidence-informed assessment of critical-care beds.

Health has also made large commitments related to the health human resource action plan focusing on recruitment training and retention of health-care providers across Manitoba. Thirty-six initiatives were announced November 10th of 2022 that build on existing actions that are already under way; \$129.6 million will be available to Health through an internal service adjustment within Enabling Appropriations.

There are also strong linkages between the health human resource action plan, with our clinical and preventative services plan. Under the training pillar of the health human resource action plan, a

notable announcement was made a few weeks ago by Minister Guillemard and myself regarding \$2.1 million to Assiniboine Community College to offer a one-time 25-student cohort for its practical nursing diploma program in the community of Neepawa.

The benefit of the ACC program is that nurses from rural communities are more than likely to stay or return to rural health settings. These graduates of this program will be eligible to fill positions at the new hospital under construction in Neepawa, which is well on track to a completion scheduled in 2025.

On the recruitment pillar of the action plan, also notable, is that we have completed a request for expression of interest for physician recruitment services, which will help us arrive at recruitment firms specializing in physician recruitment through a finalization of that selection process via a request for proposals.

We are also working with our regulators to streamline and modernize the path to credentialing in Manitoba. The College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba recently publicized the steps it has taken through our work with them to modernize and streamline registration processes for nurses, IENs already in Manitoba, retired nurses wishing to return to nursing practice and recruitment mission nurses.

This announcement included details of its expedited pathway for the targeted recruitment of internationally educated nurses, in addition to significant updates to how applicants may demonstrate language proficiency, clinical competency and return to practice. As part of the modernization efforts, applicants will now have three additional ways to demonstrate English language proficiency, including current or recent registration within the past two years as a licensed practical nurse or registered—

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

I'd like to thank the minister for those comments. I'd also like to remind everyone in the Chamber here—not Chamber; in the committee room—that when referring to another member, that they—the name should be the constituency or the title. You cannot use people's names.

So, we will now continue.

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

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I'd like to welcome the minister, welcome all folks, all the clerks

and all the folks who are making Estimates possible today and for the duration that we will be conducting Estimates.

As always, I'm pleased to be here and to bring attention to what is Manitobans' absolutely No. 1 priority, that is health care. And so I want to be clear about the Estimates that we are going to be asking questions about in the budget.

This is very plainly an election budget that the government has brought forward, and an election budget is about trust. After seven years of underfunding by this PC government, this year is no exception.

Premier—the current Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has unfortunately continued Brian Pallister's attack on health care, which is having devastating impacts on the health care and health outcomes of Manitobans.

* (15:20)

We see that Manitobans are left to deal with chaos in our health-care system. We see even today the impacts of this government's cuts, mistreatment of health-care workers and mismanagement with health-care workers that we depend on, continuing to leave our health-care system in droves.

The minister we hear on a regular basis talk about announcements. Unfortunately, we know that this government's pattern is to make announcements and not follow through on any commitments.

We also know that this government has no actual strategy to repair the damage they've done to health care. Their cuts, closures and consolidation, and promised, you know, couch tours instead of sitting down with front-line health-care workers, like nurses, have thrown our system into absolute chaos. And I want to also be clear in saying that that all started before the pandemic and has only since gotten increasingly worse.

And so, I would like to start the Estimates process here asking some questions around appointments in the minister's department.

So, can the minister undertake to give—*[interjection]* Oh, thank you, okay.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 21.1(a), contained in resolution 21.1.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Asagwara: I'm actually heading off now to meet directly with real-life, front-line health-care workers, nurses and doctors, that know, unfortunately, the hard truth of this PC government's cuts to health care.

And I'm going to turn questions over to my wonderful colleagues, who are incredible champions of health care in the North and the communities they represent, as I know they also have a lot of unanswered questions.

Thank you.

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I welcome the opportunity for us to have a discussion and ask some questions, particularly in relation to northern health and northern health care. I know that recently they've appointed a new CEO for the northern regional health authority with the former CEO retiring, moving to a different area.

Can the minister explain to us what all consultations took place between various groups throughout the North before the new CEO was hired?

Ms. Gordon: I'm not part of the hiring process for the CEO for the northern regional health authority. That is an internal process that is delegated to the health-to the human resource team at the northern regional health authority.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for—the honourable member for Flin Flon.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for that answer.

I do have some concerns around the recent hire. I know I'd had conversations earlier with the grand chief from MKO, recognizing that probably, I don't know what the exact number, but the majority of residents in northern Manitoba are, in fact, Indigenous.

I know that he had hoped that perhaps, maybe, there would be some move towards having an Indigenous CEO to lead the Northern Health Region.

Has the minister had any discussions with either the grand chief or the MKO or any of the other

northern chiefs that represent the majority of people in the North about that particular issue?

Ms. Gordon: I recall seeing the ad go out publicly, anyone in Manitoba and who—anyone who felt that their qualifications met the requirements of the position can—could apply. And it was a public and transparent process. And, again, the applications were open to all.

But I do want to focus the—today's committee on what we're here to discuss, which is Budget 2023 and the Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure for 2023-24 for Manitoba Health. If we could refocus the questions to the Estimates, please.

MLA Lindsey: Unfortunately, these questions are questions that are important to people in the North and are part of the importance of the budget process, which is why we get to ask questions in a global nature without specific—always saying something to do with a number.

So, we know that the Northern Health Region—if it had offered an apology to the northern Indigenous folks because of the racism that was felt to be directed specifically against Indigenous peoples—so, can the minister tell us what actions her department has taken to address any of those racist—racism issues in the Northern Health Region?

Ms. Gordon: Neither I nor my government will tolerate racism in any form, especially within our health-care system. It is important to our government that First Nations leadership and health professionals have a direct role in developing and implementing health-care plans that prioritize First Nations people on and off reserve, as well as northern and remote communities.

I have met with Grand Chief Garrison Settee of MKO and Dr. Barry Lavalley of KIM to continue the discussion of improving health and wellness services in northern Manitoba and for advice on other ways to fight racism in our health-care system.

Shortly before that, I hosted a northern health-care sustainability meeting in Thompson, where over 30 northern leaders and stakeholders were there to talk about how to fight racism in our health-care system. And that was one of the top issues that we discussed.

Manitoba, as you know, is at its best when First Nations leadership and health professionals are at the table helping make the best decisions for their people and communities.

Our government continues this relationship by investing the largest amount in Manitoba's history: \$812 million in Budget 2021 to improve health care in rural and northern Manitoba.

* (15:30)

A significant portion of that investment will be used in the creation of a northern intermediary health-care hub. We are excited to be working with our First Nations and northern partners to reduce the need to travel to Winnipeg and allow for better care closer to home.

Moving forward on our joint statement to end anti-Indigenous racism in health care, our ongoing joint KIM and northern regional health authority co-planning process on sustainable health-care delivery in the region. We want to create a wisdom council. We want to add elders as part of the northern regional health authority care team. The addition of a social worker who will focus on supporting Indigenous patients in the emergency department. Spiritual care includes access to Indigenous ceremonies like smudging. Expanding cultural training, which includes First Nation-inspired, land-based education for staff and our board of directors. These are all on top of initiatives under way with the Province and the feds, which they can speak to.

We understand and we all want these solutions implemented without delay, but it will take work and time to solve this very complex, multifaceted issue. We are committed to working with all of our partners, especially our Indigenous communities and leadership to find and implement sustainable solutions that meet the health needs of the people we serve in support of our vision of healthy people, healthy North.

And I want to also acknowledge the monumental work done by Manitoba's chiefs, councils and the Manitoba First Nations pandemic response team in keeping their communities safe over the course of the pandemic.

Over the last two years, over 300,000 vaccine doses have been administered to First Nations in Manitoba, and 89 per cent are fully vaccinated in our 63 First Nation communities in Manitoba.

It is important to our government that First Nations leadership and health professionals have a direct role in developing and implementing health-care plans that prioritize First Nations people on and off reserve as well as northern and remote communities. Manitoba is at its best when First Nations leadership and health professionals are at the table helping to make the best decisions.

We're going to continue to consult with Indigenous and First Nations communities. We're going to continue to meet around the table of solutions. We're going to talk about the issues such as that—those that have been raised by the member for Flin Flon (MLA Lindsey), around racism in the health system. We take it very, very seriously and our government wants to root out and eradicate all forms of racism in health care.

And I know the member is focusing his questions on the North, but we want to root that out and eradicate racism all 'across'—cross Manitoba. We're not just focused on the northern regional health authority, we're focused on Winnipeg, the southern regional health authority, Interlake, everywhere—we want this to be reduced.

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

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): The minister's final comments were in respect of rooting out racism everywhere, which is great.

I would suggest to the minister, if—and we have said this many, many times in the House—in the House, outside the House, across our territories, across Canada—I would suggest that she can start by being very cognizant of the language that she uses in respect of Indigenous people.

In her comments, she said our Indigenous people. I know that, for myself, I have stood up in the House many, many times to correct government members when they say our Indigenous people. It is very important the language and the discourse that is used.

And I will share, you know, our Indigenous peoples is very patronizing and it actually finds itself, its history, in Indigenous peoples being the ward of the state. That's—that is the language where that comes from.

So I would ask the minister to make sure that she no longer uses that narrative, that it is just Indigenous people, not our Indigenous people. We as Indigenous peoples don't belong to anybody. We have always been here. These are our territories. We are sovereign nations. We are independent peoples and we don't—we're not the property of anybody.

And along that line, I would ask the minister to share what the plan is, in respect of her government and her administration's plan, to increase abortion access in the North. I know that several of our members have brought up for many years now, but certainly in the last little while as well, the lack of

access to abortion in the North and the detrimental effects that that has for Manitobans living in the North that are not able to access what is essential health care and what is a human right.

So I would ask what the plan is in respect to the PC government ensuring that there is access to abortion in the North.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for St. Johns for the question.

Since 2019, our government fully covers Mifegymiso for Manitoba residents, regardless of where they live in the province.

To help with accessibility, all Manitobans can access the drug at their local health-care practitioner, community pharmacy or nursing station. And we also provide virtual accessibility options for individuals to talk to their care provider.

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech to the minister for that response; however, the minister will know that Mifegymiso is only one component of abortion access, right? And the minister should know that Mifegymiso is only—is not universally available because there are criteria to be able to prescribe Mifegymiso. One of the criteria is that you can—you are pregnant eight weeks or under. So anything above eight weeks, as the minister should know, requires a surgical abortion.

And so, I appreciate, and I will put on the record here, that the government pays for Mifegymiso, and I will put on the record that that is because of the NDP and the work that myself and other members did here alongside doctors who were in school—I think that the minister will remember this—who started a campaign to ensure that Mifegymiso was made universally free to folks. So that work was done because of our lobbying and for folks at becoming doctors. So I think that's really important.

* (15:40)

But again, the question about access to abortion, and let me just say this as well: like, Mifegymiso—not everybody, and the minister will know this, or should know this, that in order to prescribe Mifegymiso, doctors have to go for training. And the minister will also know that there are doctors in Manitoba that will not take the training because they don't believe in abortion.

They will know—the minister will know that there are pharmacies—not many, thank God—but there are pharmacies in Manitoba that will not dispense, they

will not carry Mifegymiso and they certainly won't dispense it if there is a doctor's prescription. They just won't do it.

So I know that the minister referred to Mifegymiso as if it is the end-all and be-all in respect of abortion access, but actually there's quite a bit of obstacles in accessing Mifegymiso. So, put that aside.

Again, Mifegymiso is only one small component to abortion access. So my question to the minister is, what is her department's plan moving forward in respect of abortion access?

And right now the question, because we're concentrating on issues in the North, so my question in respect of accessing abortion is specifically about the North. But actually, as well, accessing surgical abortions in the city and other cities like Brandon and—is actually increasingly more difficult as well.

So—but for right now, I would ask the minister: What is the department's plan to increase access to abortion in the North, other than Mifegymiso, which is only good until you are eight weeks pregnant?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine) for the question.

I do want to, for a moment, point to our clinical preventative services plan, and there is a specific chapter within that plan that speaks to women's health, and I just want to share some information from that chapter in terms of how the clinical preventative services plan was developed.

So, nearly 300 provincial clinical team members analyzed data, reviewed leading practices and models of care from other jurisdictions and developed a plan to improve health services for Manitoba patients. Eleven teams organized around speciality areas of care like primary health and community services, mental health and addictions, chronic and complex medicine and women and child health; reviewed data, models of care outcomes, analyzed the needs of specialized populations and assessed opportunities to improve access, co-ordination and quality of care.

Cross-clinical working groups with expertise in Indigenous health, quality of patient safety, digital health, diagnostics and emergency medical services and patient transport worked across all teams to ensure the recommendations were integrated into a provincial plan that is appropriate for the needs, acuity and geography of Manitoba's population.

The health-care needs of any population are constantly changing, and the plan was adapted to

ensure the services delivered, and the providers who deliver them, are able to adapt while ensuring a continued focus on accessible, equitable and quality care provided by skilled health-care professionals.

And I just want to share with you some of the next steps. Clinical planning workshops have focused in on the success of health systems in other parts of the country and around the world, identifying the improved outcomes of easier access to care that have been achieved by implementing integrated health systems.

Planning is patient-focused, taking careful consideration of the need to improve the experience and access of Manitoba's unique patient population while looking at leading practices in use in other jurisdictions, as well as innovative practices and pilot projects already in operation in parts of Manitoba's health system.

So, across the provincial clinical teams, opportunities have now been identified to lay the foundation for improved models of care, guided by leading practice and evidence, to build the capacity necessary to ensure the appropriate expertise and optimal technology exist to deliver care while monitoring and measuring improvements in patient quality and safety.

Elements of the proposed model of the future included necessary enhancements to capacity in order to allow for consistent access to clinical expertise, including enablers like digital health and diagnostics to allow for both appropriate patient transfers to higher levels of care and repatriation of patients to be cared for closer to home; and that they continue to be refined and tested against the needs of the population so that Manitobans can continue to—or, health-care providers can continue to meet to refine the model of Manitoba's population.

So, we have developed our clinical preventative services plan by taking the advice and the direction of health-care providers in the system, Mr. Chairperson, that looked at one of the speciality areas being women and child health. And we are moving forward with the advice of those individuals, and the Manitoba government and all regional health authorities remain committed to providing the best possible care for women and their families.

I have a list of notable increases that have occurred since our government took office in 2016 in women's health. And I want to point out one of them in particular that just happened about a month ago: more than \$300,000 in continuing annual funding was invested by our government to support the

Provincial Eating Disorder Prevention and Recovery Program at the Women's Health Clinic, which offers outpatient community-based treatment.

* (15:50)

So, Mr. Chairperson, our government has not remained static in terms of supporting—

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

MLA Fontaine: That's a really disappointing answer. Like, it's super disappointing.

It's disappointing in the fact that—I mean, what do ministers make? They make, like, \$150,000, something like that? And you would expect that a person who's elected to represent their constituency, but then has, like, the absolute privilege of being named to Cabinet to be a minister—you know, there's been, you know, a little over 800 people in the history of Manitoba—in the history of Manitoba—that have ever been elected to sit in these rooms, to have these positions in Cabinet. Very, very few folks, you know, that gets a privilege, the awesome privilege, to be the minister of Health.

And as I have said many, many times in the Chamber, all of us, even just a backbench MLA like myself, I—it is such a sacred responsibility that we have to work on behalf of and for Manitobans. And so to hear the minister read off some report but not be able to answer the question that I'm asking that actually affects Manitoba lives, is quite—is disappointing; it's so disappointing.

Nowhere in that—in the minister's answer did she even utter the word abortion, which is—you know, we've seen previous ministers before her that couldn't utter the word abortion. Like, abortion is not a dirty word; it's not a bad word. It is health care.

Manitobans have abortions. They have the right to have abortions. They have the right to access abortions. They have the right to have as many abortions as they want, and the fact that this minister can't even say the word abortion is quite disappointing and then cannot even answer my question about what is she going to do to make sure that abortion in the North is accessible, that there are actual services to have abortion.

Folks should know in this room, even though I am the only woman in this room, sitting at this table, everybody should know that accessing abortion is time sensitive; it's time sensitive. And Manitoba—folks that live in the North have to deal with a variety of

different issues that put obstacles in their way to be able to access, even on a—when all the stars align, there are obstacles in the way to be able to access health care. But when you are pregnant and you are choosing not to progress with that pregnancy, it is time sensitive.

So I'm asking the minister to earn her \$150,000-plus a year salary and answer Manitobans, answer the question, on what she's doing to ensure that Manitoba citizens—

Some Honourable Members: Mr. Chair, a point of order.

MLA Fontaine: —can access abortion in the North.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: On a point of order.

An Honourable Member: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I've never had somebody, after all these years of having health—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: The member for Virden.

An Honourable Member: Well, no. It's for Turtle Mountain.

Mr. Chairperson: Turtle Mountain.

Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Yes. All these years that we've—I've been in as an MLA for nine years, with—we had Health ministers that I had to, you know, sit here in these chairs—Chambers and listen to people, you know, asking questions. But I've never seen such a disrespect for our Health Minister right now.

I value her expertise, her wisdom. She comes from the health-care sector herself. My wife, who's also half Jamaican, I feel that there's a disrespect here from the member from St. Johns here, and I'll stand up and say that because I think our minister—I think there is something to be said here that the minister from St. Johns—I mean, the MLA for St. Johns, has gone over the edge here when it comes to our minister from—for Health.

Mr. Chairperson: The member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine), on the same point of order.

MLA Fontaine: On the same point of order, I really don't care. Do you realize how bad health care is in Manitoba? Do you realize how bad health care is in Manitoba? Do you realize there are Manitobans that

cannot even have their babies in their home community because there's no infrastructure for them to have their babies?

Do you realize that? Do you realize that Manitobans have died under your watch? Under her watch—

Mr. Chairperson: I'm interrupting this point of order. It's not a point of order, it's a dispute over the facts.

And, basically, we're here to discuss the Estimates books. It's not a debate, and a point of order—it's not a point of order. We will continue, and the behaviour is something that we need to take a serious look at.

We won't get any place by yelling and shouting each other. There's no point of order; it's a dispute on the facts.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: We will continue now.

MLA Fontaine: So, I think I had actually already finished my question, and so the question remains, what the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) is doing to ensure that Manitobans have access to health care, in the form of abortion, in the North.

Ms. Gordon: I want to also reiterate what you have said, Mr. Chairperson, that we are here to consider the Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure for the Budget 2023-2024, for the Department of Manitoba Health.

I encourage the member for St. Johns to focus on the Estimates process and to respect the time and that all the members around the table, on both sides, have dedicated and committed to this process so that we can go through the Estimates for Manitoba Health, and to stay on topic and not turn this highly respected process into a circus, Mr. Chairperson.

And so I want to also respond to the question, that Budget 2023 includes nearly \$8 billion, an historic investment into our health-care system, which provides \$660-million more to strengthen health care for Manitobans in the North, in rural communities, in Winnipeg, all Manitobans. Health care always—has always been a top priority of this government. The budget affirms our commitment to health care by making it stronger and more sustainable for all Manitobans in the years to come.

Mr. Chairperson, \$130 million in funding dedicated to reducing surgical and diagnostic backlog; \$120 million to the Pharmacare program, including extending the coverage for insulin pumps for adults

with type 1 and type 2 diabetes; the health human resource action plan. We're continuing to implement the \$200-million investment for our front-line workers. We're providing \$1.2 billion in multi-year capital investments for expansion and improvements on rural hospital or other health infrastructure, in addition to the renovations of several Winnipeg facilities, including St. Boniface Hospital, Grace Hospital, CancerCare Manitoba and the Health Sciences Centre.

This budget demonstrates our commitment to creating a better, brighter and stronger Manitoba. Mr. Chairperson, 22 per cent increase in health-care funding since our government took office in 2016.

And here are some of the announcements. I know, the members opposite called them big announcements, and I actually want to thank them for that, because I never thought of using that term, but they're big announcements: 80 new physician training seats, 40 undergraduate physicians, 10 international medical graduate seats, 30 two-year post-graduate medical seats for internationally educated medical students.

* (16:00)

Premiums offered to family and pediatric clinics to extend patient hours; \$450,000 for physician mental health supports through the peer support program; \$6.6 million for the creation of a specialized CAR T CancerCare therapy program; \$5 million to create the new emergency-care services vectors to virtually support patient transfers; \$200 million, again, for the health human resource action plan, to add 2,000 additional health-care professionals to end the mandating of overtime; \$12.5 million for new nursing simulation training centre at Red River College Polytechnic; \$482,000 for respiratory therapy program; new training seats at the University of Manitoba, raising the seat total to 20—an increase of 20 per cent.

And then, my all-time—all of them are my favourite, but I'll tell you, when I met six-year-old Sam [*phonetic*]*—*this one really stood out for me—TRIKAFTA. Expanding coverage for the cystic fibrosis medication to patients age six and older; \$50 million for the Health Sciences Centre Operation Excellence, to increase Health Sciences Centre surgical and diagnostic capacity by 25 per cent; \$750,000 for the Health Sciences Centre Children's Hospital inpatient monitor upgrades, to support 26 inpatient monitored beds; \$2 million for the Swan River CT scanner; \$800,000 for—

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

MLA Fontaine: So, I will note again that the question is about abortion access, which is a very serious issue for many, many Manitobans. And once again, the minister took her full five minutes, read from the book, and not once uttered the word abortion.

I mean, I don't know how—this is now my third question asking about abortion. The minister should be able and should be willing to answer these questions; they are important questions for Manitobans in accessing essential health care, and the minister has now wasted 15 minutes not answering these questions.

I'm going to try again—again, I'll remind the minister what the three questions were: What's the plan to increase access, or have access, to abortion in the North?

But I'm going to add to that; maybe we'll get an answer: Can the minister tell the committee how many Manitobans accessed the abortion bill—or pill, Mifegymiso, in the 2022-2023 fiscal year? And can the minister also advise how many Manitobans received surgical abortions for 2022-2023 fiscal year?

And would she have a breakdown of which sites performed those services?

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Ms. Gordon: I can now respond to the member for St. Johns' (MLA Fontaine) question.

I do want to refer the member to the clinical preventative services plan, which is a public document that is available on the worldwide website Internet. Google Chrome—it can also be searched there—and on page 61—specifically page 63—lays out very comprehensively the service standards and provider roles for women's health right across this province. So I would encourage the member to take a look at that section as we now return our focus to the Budget 2023 Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure Budget, again 2023-24, for the Department of Manitoba Health.

Thank you, Mr. Acting Chairperson.

MLA Fontaine: Yes. I think it is, you know—again, I can't stress how disappointing it is to hear the answers from the minister, the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon), who is responsible for a pretty, pretty big department.

And to give answers like that is absolutely just shameful, to take all of that time and just really play

around with a process here where we're trying to get answers that—on issues that affect many, many Manitobans. It's quite shameful, the answers that the minister is providing.

Again, I will ask one more time before I hand it over to my amazing colleagues here, who actually, you know, care about Manitobans in the North and know what's going on in the North and I'm sure have many, many amazing questions to ask the minister.

But again, I would ask: What is the plan to have access to abortion in the North? What was the—how many Manitobans accessed the abortion pill in the 2022-2023 fiscal year and how many Manitobans received surgical abortions in the 2022-2023 fiscal year?

Mr. Dennis Smook, Chairperson, in the Chair

Ms. Gordon: We will take the question from the member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine) under advisement.

MLA Lindsey: I realize that my colleague from St. Johns asked repeatedly about abortion in northern Manitoba and the access to. The minister has refused to answer that question repeatedly.

* (16:10)

So, she wants to talk specifically numbers, so can the minister please tell us how many surgical abortions took place in northern Manitoba in the last year and the year before that?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for Flin Flon (MLA Lindsey) for the question.

We will take that question under advisement, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Lindsey: So, then, I'm assuming the minister doesn't really want to talk about the numbers and budget.

Can the minister, then—if she can't tell us what the number was for last year, can she explain in her budget what—the increase or decrease in the amount that will be budgeted to perform surgical abortions in the North, so that women in the North actually have some sort of equitable access to that health care?

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for Flin Flon for the question. It gives me an opportunity to provide some—to raise awareness about how funding is allocated to the regional health authorities.

Global funding is provided to the health authorities. We don't fund procedure by procedure.

The regional health authorities receive global funding. They then carry out an assessment of the needs of their specific communities within their regions and determine how much funding is allocated for the various subappropriations.

And I'll give you an example. If—see—member wants to turn to page 51 of our Estimates document for Manitoba Health, there are several subappropriations that are funding—funded to health authorities. One of—and so the member has asked about the increases that we've made. Well, he'll see there, on page 51, the increases that have been made in acute-care services, funding to service delivery organizations.

There are increases to long-term-care services, funding again to service delivery organizations, more increases to home-care services, funding to service delivery organizations, community health services funding to service delivery organizations and emergency response and transport services, funding to service delivery organizations.

And at the top of page 1, it actually gives a breakdown of what the services mean. So acute-care services: provides funding to health authorities; CancerCare Manitoba and Shared Health to provide services delivered within acute-care settings. Funding for the acute-care sector encompasses operating funding related to compensation, supplies and drugs required to operate acute-care facilities and programs.

Long-term-care services: provides funding to health authorities to deliver services to provincially licensed personal-care homes. Funding for the long-term-care sector includes operating funding related to compensation, supplies and drugs required to operate long-term-care facilities.

Home-care services: provides funding to health authorities and Shared Health to provide home-care related services required to enhance patient care in their homes. Funding for the home-care sector is largely comprised of compensation and supply costs.

And it explains community health services: provides funding to health authorities and Shared Health to fund services provided through community health agencies.

Emergency response and transport services: provides funding to Shared Health for emergency response services across the province as well as funding to health authorities for the northern patient transport program.

And so if the member turns with me—I see that the member doesn't have the actual Estimates document at his disposal right—that is what we're here in committee to consider: the Estimates documents for 2023-24 for the Department of Manitoba Health.

But when he does have that document in front of him, he could turn to page 51 and remember the section that I pointed to that shows significant increases in all the areas that I have pointed out and that, once again, global funding is provided to the regional health authorities. They assess the needs of their individual communities. They do that in consultation with the stakeholders, and I would imagine that the northern regional health authority does the same as the other RHAs and consults with their stakeholders to identify the areas of need and where the global funding they receive will be allocated.

And so, again, we do not provide—we do not fund procedure by procedure; we provide global funding, which is shown here in the document we're here in committee to consider, and the regional health authorities then decide, in consultation with their stakeholders, how the funding will be allocated.

And we support the work of our regional health authorities and our leadership team. I want to thank them for their commitment to Manitobans and to all the health-care providers. We refer to them as our health-care heroes who provide care to Manitobans on a daily basis.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for the answer, but I'd thank her even more if I actually got an answer to a question. She continues to just read from documents without actually answering any of the questions that have actually been asked.

So let's talk about the Northern Patient Transportation Program. We know that it's been a number of years since it was established. The policy has never actually been updated; it's still written in its original—I believe it was 1995—iteration.

* (16:20)

I know that when the NDP was in government, they had expanded some of the areas that were covered for northern patient transportation because some of the procedures that were being performed, like MRIs, didn't exist back in 1995, so other things were covered and amounts changed. Unfortunately, what they didn't do was update the policy.

We know that since this government has come into power, that the amount of money that has been spent—never mind the amount budgeted, because most of the numbers that, even the member from Steinbach, when he was the Health minister, most of the numbers that were in the budget weren't really meaningful numbers when it came to what was actually spent.

Because year after year, they underspent that—specifically, that particular budget. And there was millions of dollars removed from that budget as early as the first year after the PCs took over. We see the problems that it's presented for people in northern Manitoba accessing health care.

So, can the minister then give us a breakdown of, not the budgeted number, necessarily, but the actual money that has been spent on northern transportation for the last couple of years, and give us the number of patients that have also accessed that service, so that we have a comparison as to if less money was spent—was there less people that had to access health care somewhere else, or was there, in fact, more people than just less money spent?

Ms. Gordon: I do want to thank the member for Flin Flon (MLA Lindsey) for raising the northern patient transport program because I do want to look at the record of the NDP, in terms of that program.

Under their watch seven years ago, the northern patient transport program was crumbling and underutilized because it was terribly underfunded.

And our government, since taking office, has more than doubled the funding of the program to \$18 million. Now 20,000 northern Manitobans—twice the amount, Mr. Chairperson, under the NDP—are served every year. Double the funding, double the results.

And when we talk about the budget—the budget sits in the northern regional health authority—the majority of individuals who access that service are from that region. And during the pandemic period where people were staying closer to home and may not have been accessing the northern patient transport program, perhaps—I don't have the exact numbers or can corroborate what the member is saying—perhaps they may have underspent in pandemic years; we can check that.

But I know one of the things we did—we moved very quickly to do for individuals living in remote northern and rural communities—was to allow for the introduction of virtual tariffs, where an individual living in a remote northern or rural community could

access care virtually by providers throughout that were anywhere in the province. And we've continued those physician virtual tariffs as well, because the feedback we received from Doctors Manitoba—and from patients, for that matter—is that they wanted to continue to have virtual access to their care providers, instead of having to travel far away from home and their support system.

And if I can just talk, again, about the \$812 million our government has allocated to the clinical preventative services plan that will allow for the creation of an intermediary hub, and the focus of that is care closer to home, so that individuals are not having to travel. But when they do, because we recognize there are some acute trauma and serious cases where a person does have to leave their community, that our northern patient transport program is there for them; it is properly funded. Again, 20,000 northern Manitobans are served every year.

And we no longer have a crumbling and underutilized program as we did under the former NDP government, and we look forward to making more investments in this program in the years to come, Mr. Chairperson.

There are some other investments that I want to point to under the clinical and preventative services plan, in addition to the \$812 million, which is—all within that funding: 90-bed new hospital in Portage la Prairie; 60-bed new hospital in Neepawa; \$70 million to enhance and add 30 additional beds at Brandon Regional Health Centre; \$32 million to enhance and add 23 additional beds at Steinbach's Bethesda hospital; \$64.4 million to enhance and add 24 beds at Boundary Trails; \$31.6 million to enhance and add 30 additional beds at the Selkirk Regional Health Centre; \$5 million for a new emergency department in Dauphin; and \$10.8 million to enhance and add 12 additional beds at the Lakeshore General Hospital in Ashern.

So, you can see, Mr. Chairperson, that we are making investments all over this province. And again, a significant portion of the \$812 million will be used in the creation of a new intermediate health-care hub in northern Manitoba, and currently teams are engaged with Indigenous leadership and stakeholders to help lead the co-planning for all the projects.

We are excited to be working with our northern partners to reduce the need to travel to Winnipeg and allow for better care closer to home.

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

MLA Lindsey: Well, it was an answer, I guess.

* (16:30)

It didn't answer the question, but the minister did touch on a couple of things in her answer that I have to question further on, because one of her catch-phrases is care closer to home. And she talks about an intermediary health facility that somehow is magically happening; I'm assuming in Thompson, because we certainly haven't seen any investments in health care in Flin Flon, and I'm not sure that my colleague from Thompson sees any investments there, either.

So, you know, I wonder what the minister thinks care closer to home actually means in the North. I mean, to get from Flin Flon to Thompson is a four-hour drive on a good day and buses don't really operate back and forth with any kind of regularity. In fact, there may not be buses going there much longer, period.

I know I've had constituents that had to find a ride to—from Flin Flon to The Pas when they were suffering acute appendicitis. Sat in The Pas for a number of hours to determine that, yes, in fact, they did have appendicitis because, of course, Flin Flon doesn't have any of the modern diagnostic equipment anymore.

Unfortunately, the one and only surgeon in The Pas wasn't there that day. So then they had to find a way to get this gentleman to Thompson because, apparently, there was a surgeon that was available in Thompson. Of course, there was only one surgeon in Thompson and he was busy dealing with some other issues, so this poor person finally got care—I think it was like 12 hours after he initially presented at the emergency room in Flin Flon—and his condition had obviously worsened in that period of time.

So, can the minister explain how she believes there's care closer to home for anybody in the North? I've given her one example but, I mean, there's people that are coming from Lynn Lake, people coming from Leaf Rapids that their hospitals are completely shut down now, thanks to this minister and this government. There's no care there and that is their home.

So, can the minister explain how, in any way, shape or form, that is care closer to home?

Ms. Gordon: Again, I know the member for Flin Flon (MLA Lindsey) doesn't have the actual Estimates document at his disposal today, so I do want to flag for him, on page 23 of that document that we're here to consider—the Supplement to the Estimates of

Expenditure for Budget 2023-24 for Manitoba Health, page 23.

It states at the top: Implement an integrated provincial health system that is aligned with the Manitoba clinical and preventative services plan.

And it also has a heading that says key initiatives and investments. And there's a long list of investments that are made—provided across the province and—that the member for Flin Flon (MLA Lindsey) can take a look at in terms of his question and the services that are being provided.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): Minister, I just wanted to ask you a question about systemic racism within hospitals.

I just currently got back from a walk-in clinic accompanying my 20-year-old daughter because of the treatment that she received when she tried to get treatment. She was basically—she's a young, beautiful Indigenous woman, and the doctor treated her like a pill popper. She wanted something for time management.

So I went in and skipped question period so I can accompany her and protect her, right? So, I come from a town of The Pas, and just about every week I get a call or people stop me when I'm shopping or just driving and—or even come to my apartment here in Winnipeg—to talk about systemic racism within The Pas.

And I even had to deal with casework where one individual had to be fired because of the words used towards a patient—a cafeteria worker, okay?

So, I know there's initiative to, you know—you were working with MKO. Dr. Barry Lavallee—he was leading that initiative.

So, tell me exactly, you know, what is this going to do where people such as my daughter, this afternoon—Indigenous girl is not going to be treated like a pill popper when she just wanted pain management for a third-degree burn on her leg. And what's going to happen in my hometown where I—even I've been treated badly as an MLA? I was wearing a baseball cap and sweats. Nobody recognized me, but I was treated badly and I told the doctor that he should redo his bedside manner course—in kind of a nice, rude way.

So, please tell me and share me, how is that going to be rolled out with staff medical to understand the

Indigenous issues that were there, you know? Like, I even got treated with discrimination because the fact that I'm treaty and I get medicine for free—some of it for free. And, you know, it's that attitude that needs to disappear.

Ekosi.

* (16:40)

Ms. Gordon: I want to thank the member for The Pas-Kameesak for bringing this situation forward. Our government and myself, as the Health Minister, condemns all forms of racism and discrimination in the health system. And I was very pleased to be part of the group of stakeholders who, on September—in September of 2022, signed a declaration to eliminate all forms of Indigenous-specific racism.

And it is, as I said before, my opening remarks, we need to root out and eradicate all forms of racism and discrimination, and it is going to be a process that requires many, many steps. And I do want the member to know that a steering committee and action plan has been developed.

Manitoba's Disrupting Racism Steering Committee was created to support the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and strategies intended to progress Manitoba's health system towards dismantling systemic and structural forms of racism, and to eliminating racism and discrimination in all health-care interactions.

Now, the plan—the action plan—has been endorsed by all the CEOs of the seven service delivery organizations, and the steering committee includes representation from each service delivery organization: Manitoba Mental Health and Community Wellness, the University of Manitoba Rady Faculty of Health Sciences, First Nations and Inuit Health branch Manitoba, and the Manitoba association of newcomer serving agencies.

So, four working groups have been established. The racial climate survey, engagement, policy and communications have been created, focused on the initial foundation of a more inclusive, equitable and safe health system.

Over the next year, the working groups will expand both in membership and scope as their work continues. So, they are working towards improved access to information; enhanced learning; engaging the community, staff and patient-public groups; developing and implementing policies and procedures; and creating and sharing resources.

And the committee has many, many members—Charlene Lafreniere, who's the chief Indigenous health officer for Northern Health Region. We also have Dr. Marcia Anderson, who's the executive director of Indigenous academic affairs Ongozi-mimizwin [*phonetic*] Indigenous Institute of Health and Healing, she's the vice-dean of Indigenous health, social justice and anti-racism at the Rady Faculty of Health Sciences University of Manitoba. And many, many members—Doretta Harris, who's the Indigenous health—Southern Health-Santé Sud; Bonita Kehler, integration manager, WRHA Indigenous health.

So, many members, what—I was also pleased was to see the feedback from Dr. Marcia Anderson when our government announced that we would begin collecting race-based data at all our health facilities. So, feedback from individuals such as yourself, the member for The Pas-Kameesak (Ms. Lathlin), and your family member is critical to us rooting out and eradicating these forms of racism and discrimination from our health system.

They are not accepted by our government. We stand against all forms of racism and discrimination and also, specifically, against Indigenous peoples and First Nations peoples and we stand shoulder to shoulder with the community against all forms of racism and discrimination. We want it to stop. It needs to stop.

And you should not, whether you want to wear a baseball cap and sweats or a three-piece suit, have to deal with any form of racism and discrimination. And I thank you for speaking up and making your experience and the experience of your family member known.

Miigwech, thank you.

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): I'm curious to know what the 2022 budget specifically for the northern regional health authority was and also the current budget for the northern regional health authority.

But the reason why I ask is I'm curious, was the 2022 N-R-H-A budget spent in its entirety? Or was there a surplus or a deficit specifically to the northern regional health authority?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Gordon: I thank the member for Thompson for the question.

Can I just clarify the years again, please: which years of the budget would you like?

Mr. Redhead: The question, really, is of last year's budget and what the current budget is for the northern regional health authority.

But—because the numbers should have been in by now, what I'm seeking here is for last year's numbers for the N-R-H-A specifically, what their total allocated budget was and was there a surplus in that budget come the end of fiscal year or was there a deficit within the spending thing?

Thank you.

* (16:50)

Ms. Gordon: I am able to confirm that the northern regional health authority in '21-22 was budgeted 224 million, seven-eight-nine, two-eight-four in their budget. They spent all of those dollars, Mr. Chairperson, and, in the end, the amount that was spent was \$230,061,851 for '21-22.

I do not have the final numbers for '22-23 because, as you know, we are still operating in that fiscal year. That does not end until March 31st and then the numbers will be available. I do not have '23-24 numbers because that is what we are discussing today in the Manitoba Health budget that has not been approved as of yet by the honourable members opposite.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

MLA Lindsey: Before we close off questioning for today, and I'm sure there'll be many more days where we get to ask questions, hopefully for northern health in specific, there's some new health centres, new hospitals being built in two of the fastest growing communities in Manitoba, particularly in northern Manitoba: Cross Lake and Norway House.

So, I know that the minister thinks that those are Indigenous communities so therefore the funding should all come from the federal government because, somehow, this provincial government isn't responsible for Indigenous people who are Manitobans.

Even if one was to accept that particular argument, which we don't, both of those communities have large non-Indigenous communities as well.

So, can the minister explain to us how much money has been budgeted for construction at those facilities? How much money has been budgeted to install equipment in those two facilities? And how much money is being budgeted to ensure that there's health-care providers in those two facilities?

Ms. Gordon: Mr. Chairperson, I do thank the member for the question because it gives me an opportunity to

talk about some of the visits I made across the North and across rural Manitoba, where Indigenous people live all across the province and some of the projects I've had the opportunity to tour, for example, Norway House's health centre.

Those projects—we would have to go to them and find out how much money they received for their projects because some of those projects were being funded federally, for example, for the construction, for equipment, for health-care providers. We are coming alongside some of those projects to look at specific areas that—within the projects that can be funded under Manitoba Health's budget.

We're having those discussions, but if it's specific projects, I think the member will need to be—to identify what the projects are that he would like information on because not all projects that are occurring in the North are being funded through the Manitoba Health budget.

So I am—I'm pleased, though, to be talking with Indigenous leaders and stakeholders and receiving multiple invitations to go and tour some of those projects and see the amazing work that is being done up in the North, supported by our government and supported by Manitoba Health. And construction is occurring—

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

ROOM 255

EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): I do.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Ewasko: Welcome, everybody, to the Estimates on this—a bit chilly day here in Manitoba, but things are starting to warm up as we start the Estimates process for the 2023 budget, which was a historical budget, and continue to see that our government continues to make strides toward a vision to have all

Manitoba children and students succeed no matter where in the province they live, their cultural background or their own personal circumstances.

The hallmark of a successful education system is one that provides a strong, cohesive continuum of learning from childhood to adulthood in safe, secure environments. Investments in child care and kindergarten-to-grade-12 education are critical to preparing young Manitobans for their future.

It's been now 14 months, roughly, that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) had joined the Department of Education with the Department of Early Childhood Learning, and so now—and I've had the privilege and the honour to be the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning now for, as I said, shortly after—just a little over 14 months.

So, in '23-24, our government will continue the work on advancing Manitoba's K-to-12 action plan; our path forward to implementing the recommendations of the Manitoba commission on K-to-12 education, with a focus on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes in Manitoba; and, of course, also Indigenous inclusion and education. Our government is making unprecedented investments in K-to-12 education, with \$100-million investment in the K-to-12 system. This equates to a 6.1 per cent increase in funding for the '23-24 school year, plus \$106 million in new annualized money.

With the investments in the K-to-12 sector announced in Budget 2023, we delivered on the \$1.6-billion four-year funding guarantee. Our government will be protecting students and will be creating, through Bill 35, both a registry of teachers and an independent body to improve accountability and transparency related to educator misconduct in K-to-12 schools.

In a spirit of collaboration, co-operation and truth and reconciliation, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning will focus on the Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy, and advance the implementation of Mamāhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With—An Indigenous Education Policy Framework.

There is an urgency to prioritize and strengthen Indigenous education, Indigenous languages and Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing. In addition, the department is focusing on recruiting more Indigenous teachers, strengthening achievement and well-being for Indigenous students and deepening our commitment to truth and reconciliation for all.

In 2023-24, our government will also 'continue'—continue to focus on early learning and child care. Last year, the Premier made the fantastic decision—as I've said already—in amalgamating Early Childhood Learning with the K-to-12 system, which, to me, just makes sense, Mr. Chair. And I think all of Manitoba—all Manitobans feel the same way.

Our government is moving toward, on a—forward on a number of priorities for the ELCC sector. This includes increasing the number of funded licensed spaces, expanding eligibility for subsidy, supporting wage increases across the sector and, of course, reducing parent fees. A more responsive, equitable and high-quality child-care system will be enhanced throughout the five-year Canada-Manitoba Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. Our government is working to ensure that parents and caregivers have access to more choices, flexibility and affordability, and to strategically attract and retain more early childhood educators in the sector.

Manitoba also remains committed to enhancing diversity and inclusion within early learning environments, supporting French language and Indigenous programming.

Our government is focusing on making life more affordable for Manitobans. That is why our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) announced, alongside the Prime Minister, that Manitobans will pay a maximum of \$10 a day child care for a regular day of care, three years ahead of the 2026 agreement with the federal government. At a funded child-care facility, you will pay \$10 a day per child for regular hours of care starting April 2nd, 2023, which is only 12 sleeps away, Mr. Chair. Fees are also being reduced to a—\$10 a day for school-aged children attending three periods per day.

Our government also committed to creating 23,000 new spaces by 2026. That is why I announced over 23 new daycare centres in First Nations communities and rural RMs. These new centres will be built using our innovative, ready-to-move model, and help create just over 1,700 new child-care spaces across the province.

Our goal is to ensure an equitable, aligned and effective provincial education system where students receive high-quality education and programming to achieve improved outcomes and well-being throughout early learning and child care, K-to-12 education and beyond.

In practice, this will mean the following: parents and caregivers have more information and opportunities to be involved; early childhood educators, teachers and staff have professional knowledge, tools and resources to provide high quality learning and to prepare our children and students for a rapidly changing world; more teachers and early childhood educators—including French immersion, français and Indigenous educators—are attracted to and retained in the profession; child-care, school and system leaders are supported in their roles in building a learning community, supporting educators, improving child and student outcomes and, of course, engaging parents.

In 2023-24, we will continue to foster inclusion to ensure a welcoming, safe and respectful learning environment where all children and students thrive and have a sense of belonging. Indigenous and francophone children and students, those with diverse learning needs and from newcomer communities will see their cultures and languages represented and advanced. Diverse and unique experiences, perspectives, skills and talents will continue to be valued, encouraged and responded to through inclusive mindsets and practices.

By continuing to work together, we can realize a system where equity and excellence exists in every school, in every classroom, for every student. A vision where all Manitoba students, again, succeed, no matter where they live in this great province of ours, their cultural background or their own personal circumstance.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity.

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

Now, does the critic for—or, the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Transcona.

Mr. Altomare: Thank you, everybody, for being here this afternoon.

I'd like to welcome the minister and his staff to the process. This is a very important process at this point in the education system here in Manitoba. I have been on record as saying, Mr. Chair, that this—we are truly at an inflection point as we emerge from the shadow of the pandemic, one that calls for real leadership in this sector.

I will tell you school divisions have been absolutely reeling from not only the impacts—the physical impacts of COVID—of course, some people did get sick—but also what it's meant to the resources that have been strained and the challenges that have been presented to people in the education system. As all can imagine, Mr. Chair, the challenges are numerous and require leadership—and require visionary leadership.

* (15:10)

We talk about, in education, the opportunity to influence not only our kids but also influence the direction of our society. This is one—something—a real responsibility, Mr. Chair, that we can't take lightly. I believe in the efficacy of everybody that's working in the department, but I will say that the department has been diminished in size, and that has diminished its efficacy and ability to respond to these challenges right now, very real, that are being faced by school divisions and by other institutions that provide education here in Manitoba.

That's a concern of ours; it's a concern of mine. I recall a time, Mr. Chair, when the department was able to provide a lot of—especially for smaller school divisions—a lot of leadership around the professional development pieces, and especially around priorities that were determined by the department.

I am hoping that is still able to happen. Smaller school divisions simply don't have the resources available to them, Mr. Chair, that larger school divisions do in providing that type of leadership. I'm hoping that that is still available and something that, like I said earlier, smaller school divisions can access.

I'm also wondering, Mr. Chair, of a number of things. As I said earlier, as we emerge from this, we have, not only the provincial government that's responsible for education, and also democratically elected school boards. Those school boards work with the Province to provide a pathway for kids, provide a pathway for kids, families and communities. They are the ones that are close—they are the closest to their communities and the kids that they serve. They have a unique perspective, obviously, and a unique responsibility to ensure that their local needs are met.

Now, I can give you some examples, Deputy Speaker, but we'll get to that later on when we get to some of the questioning. I will say that the government missed an opportunity. There was the funding announcement that came in February and there was an immediate reaction to it, one that clearly indicated that

many school divisions were not satisfied with the funding announcement.

Now, between that time and the time where we reached the budget, Mr. Chair, there was an opportunity for the Province to respond and say, we're hearing your concerns. The Province did not take that opportunity to address those concerns.

We are at a point now where many of our school divisions are below the 4 per cent threshold when it comes to having a surplus available to them. Many are now contemplating what it's like to have zero surplus. This is very concerning, Mr. Chair, very concerning, because it doesn't allow for a school division to react to the very real, not just challenges, but also expenses that they face on a daily basis.

So, let me give you an example: a trustee shared with me that if we get a stone in our shoe right now, we don't even have the dollars to address that. That's an interesting metaphor, because that's what a surplus is intended to do, to—for those contingencies. So, what does that look like now?

Well, for a small school division, Mr. Chair, it looks like getting that part for that school bus is a real, real challenge, you know, because they don't have anything in surplus to deal with that. Because all of the money that's been budgeted for—rightly so—for student learning and for school operations, is accounted for and now they don't have the ability to really pivot and get what's needed so that they can get that child or family to school.

So, these are some of the challenges that are being faced. These are, like I said earlier, Mr. Chair, was an opportunity here for the Province to step in and do something truly innovative. And what I mean by that is, because of this issue now where we have many school divisions in Manitoba that are running below 4 per cent surpluses, an opportunity for the Province to step in and say, we're going to talk to you; come up with the funds necessary so that you can deal with the day-to-day expenses that do come up. And there are many. Some of these challenges—just for a second here. Sorry.

Some of these challenges are due to the fact that many people want to come to Manitoba. Manitoba is known as a very welcoming place. And what is the first thing that they experience when people arrive to Manitoba? The experience of going to their local school, when they have a family, obviously. And when they have children, because that's what—that people want to do, that's why we've come here.

That's why they're here: for safety, to be educated in an environment that they're escaping from that's often violent and quite damaging to a young person's development.

I know that many Ukrainian immigrants arrive here now—or, refugees, sorry, I misspoke—with trauma. Other refugees arriving from outside of the world with trauma, couple that with the challenges of COVID, and all those things that really, the education system, Mr. Chair, really soaks up and really does its very best to respond to.

What is needed was truly a visionary piece around how we help trauma-affected children that are now coming into our system. Last night, we were talking to a school division within the city that has seen the largest influx of Ukrainian refugee kids into the school division and have been meeting with the Province and the department, Mr. Chair, asking for support so that they can provide the services for these kids.

The school division is doing its very best job, Mr. Chair, just like—I mean, that's what we do as teachers. And now I am confident also that the department has heard that message, but now has to respond with some real action so that these challenges can be met.

I always have faith, absolutely. But I will tell you: seven years, Mr. Chair, of persistent underfunding is impacting school divisions right now. It—I've talked and asked the minister about this—numerous occasions in question period, around the cumulative effect of underfunding. And right now, after seven years, school divisions are really feeling it. They're feeling it because they're having to make impossible decisions—decisions that impact the daily experience of that child, that family, with their school.

I hope coming out of this process of Estimates that we get some commitments from the department and the minister to address these needs, to ensure kids have a robustly funded education—public education system that meets their needs. Knowing that the challenges are numerous, the challenges are there, and that school divisions want to work in partnership with the department to get these challenges met.

I appreciate the time for the opening statement.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the official opposition critic for their opening statement.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for department in the

Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of line item 16.1(a) contained in resolution 16.1.

At this time, we will invite the minister's staff to join us at the table, and we ask for the honourable minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

* (15:20)

Mr. Ewasko: Joining me today for Committee of Supply, I have Dana Rudy, who is my deputy minister, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, to my immediate left. And two over, we have Jonny Lyon, who's my special assistant. And joining us also at the table is Andrew Henry, acting executive financial officer.

Also joining us in the room today is Sarah Whiteford, assistant deputy minister, Early Learning and Childcare; Tina Choy-Pohl, director, Education Funding Branch; Jeff Kehler, executive director, Governance & Policy; Sonya Penner, assistant deputy minister, Corporate Services; Janet Tomy, assistant deputy minister, Student Achievement & Inclusion.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Minister, and welcome to all attendees this meeting.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Altomare: Like I said earlier, it's—I'm looking forward to a robust and fruitful Estimates process.

I just want to refer to—I think it's—I think it says—yes, it's page 13 of the department strategy map. Am I allowed to hold that up? Yes? Okay.

I—just curious; how is this strategy map communicated with school divisions? Page 13.

Mr. Ewasko: I'd like to thank the opposition critic—my friend, the MLA for Transcona—for the question.

And I, too, know that this process—the Estimates process—it does feel good to be able to be in person this year, to be able to go through this process. And, I mean, Manitoba is definitely one of those great provinces that follow the democratic process to be able to sit with the opposition critic and other members to bring forward questions in this budgeting process called Estimates.

So, to answer the member's question—but, before I get to that, I would just like to state also for the record that I am truly honoured and blessed to be the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning, and I am absolutely surrounded by a great team in the department, and I've had the opportunity to tour some of our locations where we've got many great people working in the department throughout the city and—not only throughout the city but also through the province.

So, the member asked the question in regards to the road map that's in regards to our structure and how that's communicated with our sector, or our education partners. And so, through the framework, through continuous learning forum, we make sure that this is shared with each school division, one on one, with the department and their officials, as well.

And, you know, part of the reporting guidelines, it's something that has to be shared, as well, but I think even without those reporting guidelines, I believe that we would be meeting closely with those school divisions to make sure that we're sharing this.

In regards to the Early Learning and Child Care sector of the department—section of the department, we do have a consultation table and we make sure, also, that we communicate in a monthly newsletter as well. And I know that the department, you know, we have an open-door policy, and we do have—take on many meetings throughout the year with our education partners, and we will continue to do so moving into the future as well.

Mr. Altomare: Thank you for that piece.

As a—just a follow-up to that, this is a very important piece of the Estimates book and this is a very important piece in the department, I certainly would assume that. Is there an expectation that—to ensure that school divisions are somewhat aligned to this, or is there a way that this can influence a school division's direction? Or does this exist separate from what school divisions are doing?

* (15:30)

Mr. Ewasko: So, through the department strategy map, we do have meetings with the divisions to discuss the framework for continuous improvement. And that's based on, of course, the department and the meetings that generally happen, focus on the progress towards various different targets. And it also gives us an opportunity to collect data to ask them questions and to have sit-downs and talk about things like graduation rates, grade 9 credit attainment.

These—the annual planning and reporting guidelines is a strong piece of policy to be able to align our systems. And so, a lot of the actions or the supplemental actions are also articulated in the K-to-12 action plan as well.

Mr. Altomare: So, I would like to clarify, this is, then, developed with stakeholders?

Like, school divisions, faculties of education, independent schools?

Mr. Ewasko: Yes.

Mr. Altomare: How often does the minister speak with school divisions throughout the province?

Mr. Ewasko: And—so, the department and I meet with school divisions on a daily, on a weekly, on an annual basis, as well.

And within that—and I know that the member had joined me for the Manitoba association for school boards—or, the Manitoba School Boards Association AGM just late last week as well. These meetings, you know, much like some of our other education partners, we meet with, you know, quite regularly.

I know that the member is asking specifically the minister, and I don't have a problem answering openly and honestly, because we're a transparent government and I like to believe that we're a transparent Department of Education. I think the meetings with specific school divisions—I would like to have more meetings and endeavour to have more meetings with individual school divisions.

In some cases, it seems that some of the meetings with school divisions have happened more than some, but, that being said, the department is in constant communication. And, again, whether that's daily, weekly and, for sure, annually with each and every school division to make sure that we're working on that framework for continuous improvement.

Mr. Altomare: So, when the minister talks about continuous improvement—I notice in the Estimates book, on page 21, it talks about strengthening communication across the system.

I want—and he did mention something about meeting on a regular basis, but with the strengthening of communication, did that mean that before, there were—was very little communication happening?

Mr. Ewasko: I appreciate the question from the Education critic on strengthening communication across the system.

And I think that our level of communication from the department to our different education partners has always been really good. I think that there's always room for improvement, and that's why we strongly feel that we should build on that continuous improvement.

And communication across the system is paramount to make sure that we continue to, again, strive towards success for all students in this great province of ours, again, no matter where they live, their cultural background or even their personal circumstance. And so, with that, I mean, so, we've got the various key initiatives, we've got the K-to-12 education council, we've got the Minister's Consultation Table and the Child Care Parent Advisory Committee.

We strongly work towards our communications and engagement framework, which optimizes communications and engagement activities with stakeholders. That's part of the department's communication and engagement framework. The framework outlines principles and processes for communication and engagement, and provides guidelines, tools, templates, links and standard operating procedures for engaging with stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders.

We do stakeholder briefings. We've improved the website. We've done and continue to do quarterly newsletters.

* (15:40)

We have—of course, we've got the upcoming K-to-12 action plan annual report which, definitely, we are continuing to improve that line of communication more broadly. Discussing and communicating the strategies map through these different communication venues.

I know that I had heard, as the Education Minister and Early Childhood Learning Minister for now the past 14 months, that prior to us forming government in 2016, that they felt that—a lot of our education partners really felt that the lines of communication was not as great as the previous government had said that it was. I think the fact that we have these different venues to be able to share information back and forth with our education partners—I think has increased. And, definitely, we will continue to improve upon those.

You know, our department's Internet site: we're improving access to the information policies and the resources about this public education system, and early—and child care by modernizing the department's web presence. In 2022-2023, the department's website

was updated with progress on the implementation of Manitoba's K to 12 Education Action Plan. Ongoing communication is also planned.

And these are things, as the member knows, I've shared with him on multiple occasions, that didn't exist under the previous government. And I know that, since forming government, we did the K to 12, we did the commission for the K to 12—or, the K-to-12 commission—which saw, you know, over 30,000 Manitobans take part and participate. And out of that K-to-12 commission, we came forward with the K-to-12 action plan, which I have shared copies with the critic. That's a living and breathing document.

And what does that mean? That means that we're working, we've got a plan, and it's a continuous improving document as well, to make sure that, as we continue to move through the K-to-12 action plan, we want to make sure that those pillars that are within are—we're championing, and we're making sure we have those discussions with our stakeholders, our education partners, to make sure that they have the ability to meet with us, to chime in on how they feel that things are going.

We want to make sure that we have that high-quality learning for our students. And, again, planning for student success; we want to make sure that we've got that student engagement. And well-being is another one of our pillars. Excellence in teaching and leadership is another pillar. And, of course, responsive systems.

And so, that goes to the department's Internet site. I think that—you know, and I'm sure the member knows, because, you know, from him being 33 years in the education system himself, he knows that there's always—we're lifelong learners.

And so, to say that the department knows absolutely everything there is to know about education, that's why we work together on making sure that we're building these strong systems so that, at the end of the day, we're making sure that success for all students in Manitoba are achieved.

And that goes with the department, as well. That goes with our school divisions, that goes with our trustees, our teachers, our support staff, our custodians, our bus drivers, our parents, our students, our business officials, our superintendents, everybody within the system—this one great big team—and we have to make sure that we're all working together.

And, again, making sure that, at the end of the day, at the centre of everything is success for students and children.

Mr. Altomare: I'm glad to hear that the department and the minister himself is meeting with stakeholders on a regular basis. With all of this communication that's been going on lately—and I'm sure it's been a tsunami of communication because I'm receiving many of the same statements and demands for my time around this very important sacred trust that we call public education—one that we're stewards over, Mr. Chair—and, like I said earlier in my opening statement, one that we're, you know, I don't believe anyone takes lightly around this table.

So, I am curious to know: What are the top five concerns that the minister has been hearing from Manitoba school divisions and stakeholders?

Mr. Ewasko: So, to—before I get quite to the answer to the member, would like to also talk about—new this year, that we're establishing a provincial implementation team to further deepen shared understandings of our collective work. And that's going to take in all school divisions.

* (15:50)

We're also establishing an education council to strengthen intersectoral communications, as well, which, again, a lot of these—so I know that I, you know, talked about the K-to-12 commission, 30,000 Manitobans had chimed in. From that, we came out with the K-to-12 action plan, which, again, I read some of the pillars that were part of that.

But then, also—and I know that I shared the document with the member as well—about a week after that, we came out with the *Mamāhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With*, which is the—which is sort of the—within those four pillars of the K-to-12 action plan, we have *Mamāhtawisiwin*, which, then, is the Indigenous education inclusion document, to make sure that, throughout the curriculum and throughout school divisions and schools, that we're making sure that *The Wonder We Are Born With*, our Indigenous education inclusion, is woven within those four pillars of the K-to-12 action plan—both of which are living, breathing documents. And then, of course, we came out with the framework for learning document.

And these things, Mr. Chair, didn't exist under the previous government. They found that—they felt that the status quo was rolling along okay and they didn't want to go and talk to education partners. Matter of fact, majority of the time, their doors, I think, were

closed. I know that the member from Transcona knows that my office door is definitely open to him, especially because, you know, Manitoba is a small place; it's a 16th degree of separation. And even though I have not had the pleasure of working with the member from Transcona within his education capacity, and nor has he with me, again, Manitoba is a small province, especially in the education world. We've got many mutual friends that speak highly of him, and so I take their word at that.

So, the member mentions about the top five issues that we're hearing, and the nice thing is, I mean, I can share—definitely share these with him, and in no particular order because I think that they're all very important—and this comes from that open collaboration and working with our education partners, making sure that pretty much on each and every committee that we have within the Education Department, all the education partners have a seat at those tables.

And so, of course, you know, we've heard about new schools. And within those new schools—I know the member is mainly—you know, I think I read the news release a few weeks ago accurately, but I think the department of—second half of my department, Education and Early Childhood Learning, I think is all under his critic portfolio now, or is that—he can answer that later on. But within those new schools, we're also making sure that we're increasing those child-care spaces. And so, you know, we've announced over 20 new schools to be completed by the year '26-27. That's one of the topics, of course.

Another topic that we hear about in the department, and I hear from many of my education partners throughout the province, is student outcomes. And that came out loud and clear from the K-to-12 commission, which is why—which drove us towards the K-to-12 action plan and, of course, *Mamāhtawisiwin*, to make sure that we're focusing on those numeracy, literacy and Indigenous education inclusion rates, as well.

Education funding model—you know, we're definitely hearing that; we have heard that, and we're taking part and making sure that we're actioning that. And many of the comments that I'm hearing is, you know, this has been going on for well over 20 years. And they say, you know, to myself—MLA for Lac du Bonnet, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning—can you tell us why it's been for over 20 years and why the NDP didn't move on it?

I said, I cannot jump in a DeLorean and back the truck up and find out why they didn't do it, but they

just didn't want to do it. And I just think because it's complicated.

And the member from Transcona knows that it's a complicated—the funding formula is complicated, because he knows as well as I know—and I know that he's just recently been elected to this great position—he knows himself. This is probably part of the reason why he got into this, to put his name forward to be an MLA, is because he knows that if the—if it was so easy to have been done, that the NDP would've done it, because they like to take the easy road through.

And this is not an easy thing. Many complicated pieces that goes into the funding formula. So, what are we doing? We're continuing to work with our education partners to make sure we're getting this right. Because each and every student, each and every taxpayer, each and every parent, caregiver, each and every education professional—whether that's a teacher or support staff or administration—wants to make sure we're getting this right. So we're working on that.

Student safety. I don't know if—you know, I might have enough time, Mr. Chair. Well, for this time, anyways. And I can talk more about this, but—student safety is paramount. Keeping kids safe—again, centre of everything we do in the Department of Education. And I strongly believe in the heart of hearts of every education professional within the system, the children are at the centre. And we need to make sure that we're strengthening the systems and the services to make sure that we're—that they are achieving success, but also, we're keeping them safe.

Bill 35, just introduced the other day, going to make sure that—I'm hoping, for unanimous—

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse—order. I just want to remind the minister that you cannot talk about bills that are currently within—or, in front of the House.

Mr. Ewasko: It's a rookie mistake; and I believe this coming October will be my 12th year here, so, sorry about that.

But, at the end of the day, student safety is paramount, and we need to make sure that we're doing everything possible to ensure that.

Then, of course, student presence and engagement. We hear this from stakeholders, partners, community activists. Making sure that, at the end of the day—the member from Transcona knows, I know—that students learn best when they are present and they are at school, in front of and working with those hard-working teachers and support staff, making sure that, again, at the

end of the day, their successes are at the heart of the topic. And so, student presence and engagement is definitely one of the top five things that we've heard.

So, I've listed five for you.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Altomare: I want to thank the minister for the answer to that question. Interesting that he brought up the education funding model.

The reason people are clamouring for an equitable education funding model is because they've seen the percentage of the provincial contribution, Mr. Chair, diminish, and diminish quite precipitously these past seven years. Before 2016, the provincial portion of the education funding model was close to 70 per cent, and school divisions did not feel that they were being shortchanged at all.

As a matter of fact, they felt that they had a true partner in the provincial government in doing so, and having the funding necessary to provide the programming that the minister talks about. And when he says they're putting children at the centre, that requires real, tangible investments. Especially coming out of the pandemic, and especially with the challenges that are being faced now by many kids as they are—get back into school.

These are—I just want to correct the record on that. The reason for the ed funding clamouring right now is because they're seeing this government reduce their portion quite substantially, and their responsibility for that. In 2016, it was \$1.62 billion. As we approach this year—and what I find interesting, Mr. Chair, is that I can't find that anymore on the website, regarding the FRAME documents for the past year, which I find very interesting and actually quite concerning, because I can't bring current numbers to this. I—that is quite concerning because, if you look at it—the last time I looked at it—the provincial share was approaching \$1.7 billion after seven years. So, it—to have these conversations, we need to have accurate numbers available to us.

* (16:00)

Now, I do know that many school divisions have communicated with the department and with the minister around funding concerns to the point where they're employing—imploing the minister and the department that chronic underfunding has forced them to make some very difficult decisions.

We have regularly seen in the past three weeks of this budget season, Mr. Chair, school divisions having

to make decisions that impact directly student programming. Even a division such as Pembina Trails cutting full-day, everyday kindergarten because they simply don't have the resources to maintain a very important program.

And I know the minister has taken pride in the fact that early childhood education is now included in the department. Here is a real opportunity to really bridge that with school divisions and communicate with school divisions the opportunity to see full-day kindergarten throughout the province. That requires real investment, not just from a school division but also from the Province, Mr. Chair.

These are things that need to happen. And I know many school divisions have communicated this with the minister. They've also communicated that they feel that a lot of their communication that they're getting is one-way, coming from the department only, and even when they meet with the minister, their concerns are not being acted upon.

So, what are they left to do, Mr. Chair? Make impossible decisions. This is the impact.

So when we talk about education funding, there—and the education funding model, the reason it's such a concern now is because of the diminishing presence of the Province in this. School divisions now—there are school divisions, Mr. Chair, right now, that are approaching a 50-50 split in funding between the Province and the local levy, when they know that the local levy has been frozen.

And school divisions now cannot just make money appear 'depite'—despite the demands of, Mr. Chair, increased enrolment—more demands for students with additional needs. These are the very real pressures being felt by the system.

And that is why there is a real clamouring right now for a new funding model because, currently, as shown through the FRAMES that we have access to, this government isn't living up to its obligations when it comes to truly partnering with school divisions regarding this issue.

So I have a question for the minister: Can he tell us why he's not listening to these concerns from school divisions and not acting upon these very real pressures that are being felt by the system?

Mr. Ewasko: Thank the member from Transcona for the question, because it gives me an opportunity to basically, in a couple ways, sort of reframe some of his questioning.

Right off the bat, I'm just going to educate the member. And please don't take that as a disrespectful thing, because in some of these things, coming into—coming in as the MLA for Lac du Bonnet, I didn't quite know all of this, even though I lived in the world of education prior to this.

So, the member is asking about the FRAME and the numbers, and he put on the record that he can't find some of this stuff on the web. And I know that he's frantically looking for something as we speak, but that being said, I'm just going to calm the waters on this one.

So, the '21-22 FRAME is online, and the member and myself did go over some questions last year, as well. The '22-23 is usually posted May and June annually, so, stay tuned. And that is not something that is brand new to the system. This is—has been happening for quite some time. And, again, the '21-22 FRAME is online and the '22-23 is posted this coming May, June.

And then, of course, the '23-24, which is this coming school year, which we have put in \$100 million of new funding to the K-to-12 system, which is a 6.1 per cent increase. And that is something, Mr. Chair, that we have seen an enrolment of—only a 2.4 increase in enrolment from our '21-22 school year, which then the funding is looked upon for the '23-24 school year.

* (16:10)

So we're looking at from '21 to 2022 and it's in Hansard—it's going to be in Hansard—a 2.4 increase in enrolment. And, again, I appreciate the member giving me the opportunity to be able to put on the record that this year alone, we've increased funding to the K-to-12 system by 6.1 per cent—to the tune of \$100 million.

Another piece of information that it's unfortunate that the member from Transcona—but I really don't think it's necessarily the member from Transcona; I think it's got to be somebody from within the depths of the NDP that want to put misinformation out there. When we talk about the FRAME—and we talked about this last year, and I tried to make sure that this was fairly clear—but we talked about the FRAME budget, and the member talks about the different percentages of provincial funding going to Education, and he knows that we, on the government side—the Progressive Conservative government—has made a promise in 2019 to take education tax off of property, and we're doing that.

And this fall, we'll see a 50 per cent reduction of education tax off of property. In the 2021-22 FRAME budget, it shows that the provincial contribution is 67.5 per cent, which is the provincial contribution, which excludes the education property tax rebate. When we include the education property tax rebate—keep in mind, this is the year prior—it brings the provincial contribution to over 75 per cent.

Now, I can't remember, of course, because I wasn't around—or, I wasn't born yet—I better make sure I clarify that—in the late '50s, when farm—you know, the one-room schoolhouses that were created, there was a split of—an 80-20 split on provincial contributions and then local levies and local contributions.

And, as time had, sort of, continued to go, under governments of other stripes—so, I'm not just painting the NDP with a nasty brush, here—that ratio had started to reduce. And so, I'm proud to be part of a PC government that has seen the contributions from—the provincial contributions go up dramatically and—to the tune of, you know, we're over 75—75.6, to be exact.

And he saw that, actually, in the FRAME report last year. And at the bottom of page 4 of the FRAME report—because I just—it's something that is just embedded in my memory because I had to say this multiple times—the member refused to take a look at the bottom of the page where there was an 'asteriks' talking about, and if you took into account the provincial—the education property tax rebate, that the provincial contribution would be over 75 per cent.

Now, again, I mean, fairly high rate of contribution coming from the Province. You know, we're looking at \$100 million this year alone—\$100.2 million. And that's broken down: a \$94.8 million—or 6.1 per cent increase—to public schools, and an increase of \$5.4 million—which is another 6.1 per cent increase—to independent schools. That's in the news release, so nobody needs to rush away for a pen.

Support for public schools are further broken down: \$62.9 million increase in operating support, which includes an additional \$20 million which address cost pressures; \$5 million extra for special needs along with increases to other existing grants.

Now, I know the member talks about supporting students with special needs, and I know that the member knows that during my time in the education system before I became an MLA—again, I didn't serve as long as the member did—but for my 17 years, I worked in student services for quite some time, and

I feel that making sure that we're supporting students with special needs is very important.

And I know that our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) feels it's very important to support students with special needs. So, on top of that—those operating supports to school divisions, we've also, since the Premier has been the Premier, has increased funding to students with special needs by an additional \$17 million.

So, this year, in the 2023-2024 budget, which I'm hoping the member is going to support, is seeing a \$5-million increase. Also, we're seeing, within that large increase—6.1 per cent increase—\$100 million. We're also looking at a \$8-million increase in capital support; \$23.9-million increase in the Property Tax Offset Grant.

And in addition to all of that, just to show how much our department and myself—the member mentions, listening to our education partners, they had asked the last couple of years to make sure that the \$106 million that we included last year was annualized, and that was \$77 million for wage and other cost pressures, \$7 million last year for students with special needs—that's on top of the operating—and, of course, \$22 million for strengthening student support and learning.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll—I'm sure we've got more good news to share and—after the next question.

Mr. Altomare: It's been clear these last number of years that education funding has not matched the rate of inflation.

I talked earlier in my opening statement that since it's not—since the inflation rate has been higher than what the funding increases have been, has resulted in a cumulative effect where school divisions right now are having to make choices between providing school busing for kindergarten kids or not. And that's in Hanover School Division.

All this funding that the minister talks about, if it were truly having a positive impact, you wouldn't have, Mr. Chair, school divisions lining up during their budget presentations to their communities saying that they don't have enough provincial government support just to maintain the status quo.

Last night, in having a dialogue with the local school division that I represent, they were really concerned around how the challenges that they've communicated to the minister and his department are

not being met by the financial support from this government.

I said earlier, Mr. Chair, in my opening statement that this was truly a unique opportunity to have some positive impact for school divisions that are struggling to provide programming that they know their children need. Especially as they are coming back from the pandemic.

Why was this a unique opportunity, Mr. Chair? It was a unique opportunity because this government had record revenues from three sources that could have been dedicated to this sacred trust that we know as public education: record revenue from Manitoba Hydro, record revenue from federal transfers and record revenue from income tax.

* (16:20)

And we know of the challenges that are being faced, and I can just remind the minister of what's happening in a school division like Lakeshore, where they're having to worry about whether or not they can get busing or enough—or a—purchase a bus so that they can keep the bus ride under an hour for kids that need to be at school.

Instead, this government makes the decision to send even more dollars to mall developers as opposed to supporting school divisions that need the financial support today. Again, these are choices that were made by this government.

I mentioned earlier—in my other statement, Mr. Chair—that there are many school divisions now in this province that can't meet that 4 per cent threshold to have in—as a surplus because many have had to dig into it just to maintain the status quo, because the government hasn't lived up to the opportunity, I would say—to take the opportunity now, as kids were returning to school after the pandemic, to ensure that their needs were being met.

So, when the minister says that they're funding these needs, clearly school divisions aren't receiving the same message. So, there seems to be a gap in understanding, here.

So, I want to ask the minister, Mr. Chair, can he tell us why he's not responding or listening to these school-division concerns that have come forward to his office and his department.

Mr. Ewasko: As the member knows, and what I continue to hear a little bit in his line of—not quite questioning, but sort of just carrying on and chatting a

little bit, and there is some really good points in there and I'm definitely going to address some of them.

But also, what I'm hearing a little bit, too, is that, you know, for a year, year and a half, the member opposite really wanted a—you know, some more autonomy for school divisions, and now it's seeming like, the last few weeks, through his line of questioning it's sounding as if he's wanting more and more of the power to go into the Minister of Education's department to then tell school divisions what they should or should not do.

But I have to disagree with the member from Transcona, that they have local autonomy. That's why they have elected school boards.

And so, when we give astronomical, historical, unprecedented funding to the K-to-12 education system of \$100 million—or a 6.1 per cent increase, Mr. Chair—I don't know. I don't know where this member is—where his line of questioning is coming from.

He talks about how myself—he's being pretty pointed—but, myself and the department is not listening to the needs of school divisions. He brought up River East Transcona, and it sounds as if from him, he had met with them last night—I guess getting ready for today, maybe for a coffee or whatever else—but I have to disagree with the member.

I think that school boards are elected and they run to represent their local communities, and then they make decisions with the money to see what is their priorities for the school divisions within their own communities. And they work with—I'm assuming they work with—I know they work with their administrators and their teaching staff.

And I'm sure that the member from Transcona has been—shared the fact that I actually had a meeting with the chair and the 'superintendent' and the board of River East Transcona not that long ago. Actually, it—in November. And they were talking about funding, and they were talking about getting ready for their budgets and all that type of thing. And I know that they also met with the department officials January 19th, 2023 to talk about the funding pressures.

And so, I'm happy to report to the member from Transcona—and I've said this multiple times—it's in Hansard—that the \$100 million of astronomical funding to the K-to-12 system, 6.1 per cent increase—and I'll get to a couple of the pieces. The member's talked about inflation and that. I mean, we're talking,

since 2015-16, when the former government actually decided to come forward with a budget, not just a financial report or statement that they did, leading up to the 2016 election, we've seen a 25.9 per cent funding increase from then 'til today—25.9 per cent. River East Transcona receiving this year, for '23-24, a 9.8 per cent increase, or \$11 million.

I would like the member from Transcona, if he so would see fit to put on the record, did the school division not ask for this coming school year \$10 million? And they are receiving \$11 million. He can fact-check that with whoever he was talking about, if he feels that he should put those names on the record who he was talking with.

So, in regards to River East Transcona, again, 9.8 per cent, \$11 million. The school division has seen an increase, since 2021, of 25.9. And from 2015-16, I just have to correct the record so—just so that the member doesn't go back into Hansard and say, well, you said 25.9. So, the rate of inflation was actually 25.5 from 2015-2016.

So, when we start talking about inflation, and we've got 6.1 increase for next year, the people who talk about the rates of inflation, and specifically for Manitoba, the forecast for 2023 is somewhere around the 3 per cent for 2023. And for 2024, they're looking at 2.2. And for the '23-24 school year, we're looking at a 6.1 per cent increase.

Now, there's many factors that we do take into account when we're talking about funding. And, as the member knows, and he's asked today and he will continue to ask, why does the PC government not do what we never did when we were in government. And the nice thing is, I can report to the member that we're doing it. We're doing the funding model review. We're asking Manitobans about how do we—what are some of the priorities that Manitobans want to see at the K-to-12 commission? Over 30,000 Manitobans, Mr. Chair.

* (16:30)

So, we talk about—you know, I'm not going to be sarcastic. I'm not going to sit here and be sarcastic and tell the member, you know, has he not heard that there was this worldwide pandemic? There's been some major, major challenges, not only here in Manitoba, but across Canada and throughout the world, due to the pandemic. We've seen increased fuel costs, which then equates to transportation costs, supply and demand of those parts that the member mentioned earlier.

And, again, this is something that the member could stand up to his leader and stop getting on the side of the Prime Minister. And they continue to champion and want an increased carbon tax, which we know is one of those taxes that definitely affects transportation and fuel costs. And Manitoba is a large province when it comes to education or commuting or anything along those lines.

So when the member from Transcona—I'm going to more so say that his leader—stands up and is hand in hand with the Prime Minister to make sure that the carbon tax continues to inflate and increase, these are cost pressures. And we, the Progressive Conservative government, are making sure that we're challenging those and we're trying to make life more affordable. And that's why I'm hoping that the member from Transcona will see fit to support the '23-24 budget.

And, again, just to reiterate for the member, that for 2023 we're looking at roughly somewhere between a 3, 3.5 per cent inflationary rate; in 2024, a 2.2.

Mr. Altomare: I just want to refer back to what I was talking about earlier about the cumulative effects of inflation.

The minister has mentioned, then, that there was \$100 million put in, but that clearly isn't meeting the needs of school divisions right now after seven years of persistent underfunding. I will tell you that through just basic analysis, the increase needed to be closer to \$225 million just to get back to 2016 purchasing power. That's what school divisions throughout the province would've needed to receive.

I'm glad the minister acknowledged the really significant cost pressures of rural school divisions, especially around transporting kids to school. Yes, fuel costs have increased, absolutely.

The other interesting piece here is that diesel fuel, which fuels most—well, almost all of the buses, hasn't decreased the same amount as regular gasoline has, so those cost pressures still exist, absolutely.

I said earlier, Mr. Chair, that we had a unique opportunity in this province this year with record revenue and with teachers around that PC caucus table to forcefully advocate for an increase in funding the public schools that would have an impact and at least get it to 2016 dollars. The analysis is there. The department knows what those dollars are. They chose not to do it when given the unique opportunity that they had to truly invest in our youth, not just our youth, our families and communities.

These are important responsibilities, and data right now is showing that a vast majority of our school divisions are receiving less operating funding right now than they have in previous years, going back to 2013.

These are the cost pressures, the very real ones, that are being faced. And we needed to have a proactive government that was ready to come up with the solutions. School divisions already have this data. They know what they need. They've been communicating that regularly. Many members of the House have been invited to budget meetings—not just here in the city, but outside of the city—because they want their MLAs to know that they need real, tangible support, Mr. Chair.

I'm not saying anything that nobody around this committee room hasn't heard before, regarding that demand from local communities. We've heard that loud and clear. And as mentioned earlier, school divisions now are dipping into surpluses just to keep the lights on and the buses rolling for this upcoming year. And we're not even talking about, yet, what could be happening with wage increase and settlements that'll have to come down the pipe, that will really put a lot of pressure on school divisions, especially smaller ones.

When meeting with a number of school divisions, that is one of their concerns that they bring up: How are they going to meet those wage settlement demands that are going to come through? So these are some of the real pressures that are being faced, Mr. Chair. Again, we needed a government to step up to the challenge, right now, that's being faced here, with providing services to our kids, our families and our communities. I say that on a regular basis because these are important investments.

So my question for the minister right now is, does he think that school divisions should be forced to borrow money just to avoid making cuts?

* (16:40)

Mr. Ewasko: So when we start talking about funding—and I know that I've shared this on more than one occasion with the member—that, you know, we're talking about \$100 million in this year alone, which is an increase of 6.1 per cent in funding to public schools. Within that, also, different things that end up happening throughout the year, as well.

And so, within the form of grants and those types of things, we also have \$117 million that's built into the budget that helps with those additional cost

pressures that, again, unlike the previous government, we set up conversations with our education partners and those—that \$117 million is not allocated, of course, for next year, as well. And those—and that's sort of held for those in-year challenges.

And so, in addition to that, over the last three years, to support schools, we've also put in safe schools funding to the tune of \$275 million.

Last year alone—and I know that the member from Transcona didn't necessarily jump up and down and give myself or the department some credit but we also put in \$77 million to support wage and other cost pressures to school divisions. And then, again, last year was \$7 million for students with special needs and \$22 million for the strengthening students support, which we talked about already.

And with all of that, all of last year's support was \$106 million. Of last year, it was one-time funding and we had those consultations and conversations with our school divisions. And they were asking if we could annualize that—the \$106 million right into the budget.

And so, we did. That was \$106 million put into the budget on top of the \$100 million of the 6.1 per cent increase for '23-24. Significant investments in education.

Again, for this coming year, that \$100 million, a \$62.9-million increase in operating support, which includes an additional \$20 million add—which addresses cost pressures; \$5 million for special needs. That's this year. Eight million to increase in capital support; \$23.9 million increase in the property tax offset track.

But the member doesn't want to talk about those figures. He's pulling numbers out of I don't even know where. He says it—the numbers he's pulling out is from his conversations with his school board. Okay, well, I've given him the opportunity to share a little bit of that.

I had mentioned that we had met with his school board, River East Transcona. And, again, they were forecasting cost pressures of around \$10 million. We gave them 11, making sure that we are listening.

And we know that the member from Transcona, especially his leader, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), strongly advocates for the old status quo. So, what would they have done?

I've heard for the last few years, school divisions and our education partners want to see fairness and

equity, fairness and equity, fairness and equity. I agree. They want to see fairness and equity. So that's why myself, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the department have been working hard to try to bring that fairness and equity to the table.

I know that the member from Transcona and his leader, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), would have taken that \$100 million—first of all, they would have never given \$100 million to education. They never did. They never have. They never would. I don't care what they say. They would have taken that \$100 million and they would have put it into the old funding model.

Why? Because they would have caved to those particular pressures that are out there, which then would have seen even more of a disparity of unfair, inequitable funding for our kids in Manitoba.

And, again, I'm not necessarily painting the member from Transcona with the same brush; I am talking historical NDP mindset.

* (16:50)

I'm glad to see once in a while that the member from Transcona gets in his vehicle and gets outside of the Perimeter, but I think that our school divisions within Winnipeg and our school divisions that are in the city of Brandon, city of Portage, other cities in this great province of ours, but also rural and northern Manitoba, deserve fairness and equity. That's why that funding model review, we took it upon ourselves to listen to the K-to-12 commission.

I don't know if I've mentioned this today yet, but the last commission—Royal Commission on Education in the province of Manitoba hadn't been done since 1959. That was before I was born, which is absolutely unheard of. I can't even believe that that's what happened.

So that's why we took it upon ourselves to make sure that we're listening to Manitobans. So we did the K-to-12 commission, and I have to thank many of my colleagues that I have the pleasure of working with to embark on that. We did many parent engagements and came forward with the K-to-12 action plan, came forward with Mamāhtawisiwin, making sure that we are embarking on making sure that students are succeeding in numeracy and literacy and in Indigenous education and inclusion.

The member also knows that when it comes to numeracy and literacy, he doesn't ever want to talk about this, usually. I'm waiting for some questions in question

period on this. He talked about so many questions that he's asked in the House on so many different topics. Since beginning of March, 118 questions total; seven education questions.

You know why he's not asking so many questions? It's because we're doing such a good job on Education. The department's working hard, got a rock-star team around me and the Premier is trusting the work that we are doing. And that's why, this year, in Budget 2023, you've seen \$100 million go to the K-to-12 system. That's a 6.1 per cent increase.

Again, if all of this was easy, the NDP would've done it, but they didn't. The NDP inherited, when they came into power in the early 2000s—and I'm educating some of the members across the way because I don't think they're being told the full story in their caucus—Manitoba was sitting third in numeracy, literacy. Shortly thereafter they added science. By 2014, Manitoba was 10th and further behind 9th.

We're making sure that we're building a system—repairing a system that is going to see student success no matter where they live in this province. And with that comes that \$100 million of investment in Budget 2023, and I encourage every member in the NDP caucus to support it unanimously.

Mr. Altomare: Like I said earlier, I was looking forward to a really robust conversation about a very important topic, public education—one that we, like I said earlier, take very seriously, simply because of the stewardship notion of this really important service that provincial governments in Canada provide to their citizens.

I'm going to say—and I'm going to quote the finance chair of the River East Transcona School Division, Mr. Chair, right now. I'll do that. He says that provincial funding over the last number of years has been substantially shorter than what we needed in comparison to inflation.

Now, I've asked questions about that earlier. He goes on to say, as well, of the number of new students we are receiving, and the funding pressure—and the pressure of new enrolment: Since September of 2022, enrolment has increased in that school division—River East Transcona—by close to 900 students, many of which are war-affected Ukrainian refugees. We've talked about this.

We know that they're there, Mr. Chair. We know that they require significantly more services to—in order to provide for their needs. Absolutely, schools divisions are going to do the very best to get that done.

What they're—what they want is they want a partner in the provincial government to do that.

Now, I know the minister talks about trust, fairness and equity, but no one trusts this government to be fair or equitable when it comes to redistributing wealth in this province. We see that with the property tax rebate that's going out, disproportionately favouring those in corporations that really don't need that, sending money out of the province that could go and stay right here to deal with the needs that we're facing right now, Mr. Chair.

Again, as I said earlier, these are challenges that required a government to step up and provide the support that's been necessary. We hear that from school divisions all the time. And what they feel is that they're not being heard.

Especially when we see with this budget that this—that the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), the Minister of Education says is an important budget. Yes, but it transfers such a significant amount of wealth to those that don't need it that one is left to wonder where their priorities are. That's the piece that is really frustrating.

We have, evidently, in this time that we've been sitting here, we have different definitions of fairness and equity. Fairness demands that when challenges are placed in front of you, that you tackle them in a manner that people will understand as being equitable. And right now, I don't know if that's the case in this province when it comes to funding of public education.

We have clearly established, Deputy Chair, that since 2016, funding has not kept pace with inflation. Even this latest announcement is below inflation. That's a challenge that has to be met.

And, like I said earlier, I know that there are people in the department that are willing to meet this challenge, except the PC caucus right now, Mr. Chair, isn't willing to partner with its department and its school divisions that it has to work with to provide the necessary funding to deal with these challenges. It's clear. It's been established.

Many members have sat around the same budget consultation meetings that I've sat around. They've heard it from school divisions. There are choices that have been made here that are detrimental to kids, families and communities. They have chosen to redistribute wealth in an inequitable fashion.

What's the cost of that, Mr. Chair? The cost is school divisions don't have the funding they need to

provide the services that their kids, communities and families require. This is a real challenge; one that's not being met.

I don't doubt, Mr. Chair, the willingness of the department to meet the needs and to meet what's being asked of them by school divisions. I don't. However, caucus members have the opportunity to forcefully advocate for public education. Clearly, with what funding has been, it's fallen on deaf ears.

And it hasn't been—this challenge has not—and is not being met. And these are situations right now that we're getting to—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

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

CHAMBER

FINANCE

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Finance.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): Good afternoon. Manitoba Finance is committed to an economic recovery strategy that protects the health and safety of Manitobans while also creating a more competitive environment to support job growth and provide hope and opportunity for the next generation.

Our government's focus continues to be on providing significant financial relief to those who need it the most, healing Manitoba's health-care system, improving public safety, helping build stronger communities and steering our economy into a new era of growth and opportunity.

As a central agency, Manitoba Finance has responsibility for fiscal and economic matters, including my role as Chair of Treasury Board.

Appropriations within the department includes Administration and Finance, Crown Services, Fiscal Policy and Corporate Services, Communications and Engagement, Treasury, compliance and law enforcement, Treasury Board Secretariat, Policy and Planning Secretariat and Intergovernmental Affairs. Finance also includes the Manitoba Financial Services Agency, a special operating agency.

Budget 2023 records a \$2.2 billion—or 11.2 per cent—increase in revenue relative to Budget 2022. The government of Manitoba is reinvesting revenue increases to provide historical help to Manitobans and strengthen the programs and services they rely on.

Our government has been outperforming budget projections, lowering the deficit to \$704 million in 2021-22, and to our projected deficit of \$378 million in the third quarter of '22-23. Budget '23 projects a deficit of \$363 million and puts Manitoba on track to balance the budget by '28-29.

Budget '23 introduces the largest tax reduction in Manitoba history, as well as continuing to support businesses with further reductions to the payroll tax, benefiting small business. Increasing the basic personal amount to \$15,000 in 2023, \$311 million in savings to Manitoba taxpayers in 2023.

The budget also removes an additional 70—pardon me—47,400 taxpayers from the tax rolls in 2023. This moves Manitoba from among the lowest basic personal amounts to among the highest, compared to other provinces.

Increasing the personal income tax bracket thresholds to \$47,000 and \$100,000 for the 2024 tax year will result in an estimated total tax savings of \$160 million for the 2024 tax year.

With these changes, taxpayers will save up to \$1,399 next year, and a person with \$30,000 in taxable income will see their income taxes reduced by 23 per cent.

We're continuing to phase out school taxes by increasing the rebate for residential and farm properties, from 37.5 per cent to 50 per cent in 2023, and we will be continuing to increase the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax Levy rate thresholds in 2024 for the fourth consecutive year.

These changes to the payroll tax will benefit approximately 900 employers, including exempting 150 employers entirely. These tax measures were informed by the new tax competitiveness working group, whose mandate is to modernize Manitoba's tax system, making it more affordable and more competitive with other jurisdictions.

We have also heard from many stakeholders and Manitobans who identified increasing the basic personal amount and adjusting personal income tax brackets as priorities, followed by reducing Manitoba payroll tax to ensure employers are not discouraged

from hiring more Manitobans and increasing their wages and salaries.

* (15:10)

Changes built on the affordability measures we introduced in 2022-23: the Family Affordability Package and the Carbon Tax Relief Fund payments returned nearly \$290 million to Manitobans. When these taxation changes are combined with our affordability measures, Manitobans will benefit from more than \$1.8 billion in savings between 2022 and 2024.

To ensure Manitoba remains competitive on the global scale, it needs to have a good borrowing strategy in place. We do that by raising the majority of funds in the domestic market and look for opportunities to issue in international markets at rates that are competitive to domestic levels.

As of February 17th, 2023, the Manitoba government has raised \$3.9 billion in '22-23. This includes six months of prefunding for '23-24. Borrowing requirements for '23-24 are forecast to be \$4.7 billion, which includes \$2.1 billion of prefunding for next fiscal year.

Want to acknowledge the importance of these first steps. We recognize more is required to advance Manitoba's tax competitiveness, including moving towards eliminating the Health and Post-Secondary Education Tax Levy, or the payroll tax. The tax competitiveness working group will continue to meet and provide advice on future steps, including personal and business taxation, to grow the economy and make Manitoba a competitive place to live, work and invest.

Budget 2023 provides historic help for Manitobans and fully reflects the roots of our government. We have increased investments in every government department, including generational investments in health, education, families, municipalities and infrastructure. We are helping make Manitobans' lives more affordable, our streets safer, our communities stronger and healing our health-care system.

Support for Budget 2023 is needed to help deliver the programs and tax reductions that Manitobans deserve. Every member here has a duty to help make the lives of Manitobans better. Supporting Budget 2023 will do that by making significant program enhancements, historic investments and 'meanicle'—meaningful tax reductions.

From additional child-care funding to investments in disability services, arts, culture, parks and the

environment, Budget 2023 delivers, creating boundless opportunities that we know lie ahead for Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I want to just start by welcoming the minister to his first and last Estimates process as the Finance Minister. It's—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Sala: —also my first Estimates process, of course, as Finance critic and I do welcome the opportunity to question the minister about fiscal policy of his government and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson).

For too long, we have not seen a responsible or balanced approach to Manitoba's economy. Cuts to important services like health care have been at—have been the direction under Brian Pallister and now, of course, under our current Premier.

At the same time, there's been a failure to balance Manitoba's needs with investments in people, business and initiatives that will build Manitoba for the future. Unfortunately, this has meant Manitoba has not grown as it ought to these past seven years.

But I am eager to ask questions of the minister and to ensure I play my role in holding this government to account in regards to fiscal and other matters and I do look forward to today's Estimates process.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for department in the Committee of Supply. And accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 7.1(a) contained in resolution 7.1.

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

The honourable minister, would you like to introduce your staff?

Mr. Cullen: So, joining me at the table are Deputy Minister Richard Groen; and I guess we'll introduce you as the former ADM of central Finance for the department—Ryan Klos, who's going to be moving on to Natural Resources and Northern Development very soon, so we congratulate him on that move.

And Matt Wiebe is our ADM for analysis and strategic management over at Treasury Board Secretariat.

Mr. Chairperson: In accordance with sub-rule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Sala: I'm grateful for this opportunity to ask questions of the minister and, you know, I want to start out by talking about affordability.

The minister did, in his opening remarks, talk a lot about affordability and what his government is seeking to do to try to improve it. And last evening, I had the pleasure of hosting a renters' town hall in St. James. And in that town hall I had a lot of folks from our community express their concern with the changes to the—first of all, the education property tax renters tax credit, and the lowering of that credit from \$700 to \$525.

And, of course, we know that the minister and this government did change the name of that to now the renters tax credit, but it remains at \$525.

So, I want to start us out today, again focused on something that's so important to Manitobans, which is the affordability challenges that they're facing. And on this question, I just would like to start out by asking the minister how he squares increasing taxes on renters by \$175, given the affordability crisis that so many families are facing in our province.

* (15:20)

Mr. Cullen: I'm happy to entertain a discussion on affordability this afternoon. I know the member's picking up on one area, and certainly happy to respond on that front.

We have locked in the \$525, as the member has identified. We also made some additional changes to broaden assistance for Manitobans that would be, I would deem, the more needy.

So, we have broadened the criteria, made more people eligible for assistance—Rent Assist, primarily—and made people in social housing—allow them to be available for that Rent Assist credit as well. So, certainly, a focus on Manitobans, I would say, the most needy Manitobans.

I will also say, and the member maybe forgets, that we have actually frozen rent increases for the last two years, so, both in 2022 and 2023.

And I also should remind members opposite that we are taking many other steps when it comes to affordability measures for Manitobans. In fact, between '22-23—and I'm looking at the '24 year, which will be part of this budget—we are providing \$1.8 billion of tax relief and affordability measures to Manitobans.

So, this will be significant and, certainly, those measures will benefit many low-income Manitobans the most.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate that response, but unfortunately, it didn't respond to the substance of the question, which was really about renters generally, writ large in Manitoba.

You know, last night, in hearing from a lot of folks in our community, they were confused as to why they were selected as the group that would see a tax increase, ultimately, on so many people. And people that are on fixed incomes, seniors, people with disabilities—those are the people that were in the room last night with us, and again, just general confusion as to why they, of all groups, generally those who are lower income, were selected to have taxes increased on them in that way.

So, I do want to, I just—I want to have the minister answer clearly, because he's—you know, he's listed some promises that his government has made.

There's so much that this government has done to make life more unaffordable in this province over the last many years. You know, from legislating hydro-rate increases for the first time in our province's history, to raising tuition by 25 per cent on Manitoban students, life has gotten more expensive across the board.

But for this group in particular, I really think that he should answer to that, why they've lost \$350 over the last two years, and why they chose this group of Manitobans to raise taxes on.

So, could he just provide some clarity over why he and his government have chosen to raise taxes on some Manitobans who are really in the greatest need of financial support right now?

Mr. Cullen: I think the member should put this in context. This is not a tax increase per se. I mean, this is not related to income tax. This is simply a tax credit.

And I think the member should also recognize the changes we're making on the homeowners' side as well. So, right, we've locked this in at \$525, similar to homeowners; and, certainly, homeowners are receiving a—rebates, as well. So, again, this is a tax credit.

* (15:30)

What we've also done is we've, again, broadened some of the eligibility for other assistance like Rent Assist. So those types of programs are geared to the low-income individuals in Manitoba.

So, the rebate—renters rebate—is certainly not tied to income. Everyone is eligible for it. In fact, more people are eligible for other assistance than ever before.

So you tie that in conjunction with some of the other affordability measures that we're taking, the \$290 million that we've sent this past year to Manitobans, and also in conjunction with income tax breaks as well, certainly making life easier for Manitobans.

And I'm sure as the days go on in committee here, we'll hear more about some of the other things outside of government and direct assistance for Manitobans that we have done in some of the Crown corporations.

And I know the member did raise Manitoba Hydro and, certainly, the steps that we have taken on policy will save Manitoba Hydro ratepayers \$190 million this year alone, so, substantial savings to Manitobans directly. And that, certainly, will have an impact to those that rent, as well, here in Manitoba.

So, significant policy decisions, which result in significant cost savings for Manitobans.

Mr. Sala: That's cold comfort for renters in Manitoba. Appreciate that the minister outlined some of the other announcements that his government has made and the other promises, but, you know, benefits for homeowners, right now, which may be needed at this point in time, is a step in a good direction. But what we're seeing, again, right now, in terms of the challenges renters are facing, are pretty extreme.

And I think one thing that really needs to be said right now is that, while the minister has stated that his government has frozen rent increases for a couple of years is highly misleading. And the reason is, is because the minister would know that thousands and thousands of Manitobans every year see large increases to their rent through above-guideline rent increases, which have been happening at an alarming rate in this province and under the leadership of this

government. Thousands of units are seeing increases north of 10 per cent per year. That continues to make life much harder and much more expensive for Manitobans.

And so, that tax increase, the minister said—or that, you know, ultimately, this doesn't amount to a tax increase. Well, again, at the end of the day, renters lost \$175 worth of tax credits. That is a tax increase on renters; there's no other way to characterize it. And that is coming at a very difficult time for a lot of people, and I do hope that the minister will consider the impacts of that on some of our lowest income people in the province.

And so, building on this question about these renters tax credits, I would like to ask the minister: Can he tell the committee how much is estimated to be provided to Manitobans in the renters tax credit for the last tax year?

Mr. Cullen: So, in response the member's question, if he turns to page 17 of the supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure for the enabling appropriations tax credits and public debt, he will see the myriad of tax credits that our government allows Manitobans.

And in there, we—in '22-23, we budgeted \$90 million of support for the renters tax credit. We've also set aside, in this year's budget, the same \$90 million. So we'll have a clearer understanding of what renters will be eligible as they will be filing their '22 income tax and tax returns in the coming months. So that's what we've set aside there.

Again, we've frozen rent allowances for two years. And, I guess, any questions relative to the residential tenancies board, that falls under the Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services (Mr. Teitsma). So I'm sure the minister would be more than happy to address anything on that front relative to the Residential Tenancies Branch.

We do know there is the opportunity for landlords to submit—if they're making renovations to property, they can submit to the Residential Tenancies Branch for any—an increase in rent if they're making, you know, adjustments—improvements to the property. Again, that falls under the authority of the Residential Tenancies Branch.

Mr. Sala: Appreciate the response from the minister and I do appreciate clarity that the questions about above-guideline increases do fall under another minister.

I just wanted to ensure I—we got that on the record, that while this government does suggest publicly that they've frozen rents, the reality is very different for Manitobans because AGIs continue to skyrocket and are out of control.

The minister just mentioned that, in terms of the estimated amount that's to be allocated for the renters tax credit, I think the number he said was \$90 million. I note that the estimate for the renters tax credit is the same this fiscal year as last.

And so, I'm hoping he can help us to understand better why the number is the same given we would assume there's been a growth in the rental market in Manitoba over the last year.

* (15:40)

Mr. Cullen: I guess that's why we have a budget process and, you know, the front of the document says it is Estimates of Expenditure, so that is certainly this year's—there's Estimates.

This particular credit, obviously, is subject to a lag because Manitobans are now just filing their tax returns for this—the past calendar year. So we'll get a better understanding of how many Manitobans do qualify for this particular tax credit.

So, I will say, you know, there is some allowances in our budget, as well. We certainly will not be turning down anyone on this particular tax credit. If the—it turns out that more than \$90 million, and Manitobans are eligible for more than \$90 million of that tax credit, we will certainly make sure that we find that money for them. Again, we've expanded criteria for some of the other credits, Rent Assist and whatnot as well, so, hopefully, that will help Manitobans.

To the member's point about more units coming on the market, I think that's a positive sign from my perspective. That shows confidence in the economy, confidence in where we're headed as a province, and to see that type of investment in Manitoba is quite reassuring. Officials have told me that they expect 7,000 more units to be constructed this year. Obviously, many of those will be on the rental side and some of those will be on the homeowner's side as well.

So, certainly, a positive sign seeing that level of activity on the construction site. And even with construction costs going up, it's encouraging to see that there's still that confidence in the marketplace and people are still investing here in Manitoba.

So, I look at that as a very positive sign for Manitoba and I think it speaks to our economy. Like, our economy here in Manitoba, we expect, for 2022, will grow in about 3.6 per cent, third best in the country.

If you take away the resource provinces, such as Saskatchewan and Alberta, our economy actually grew the—by the most across the country. And I think that really speaks to our diverse economy here in Manitoba.

I know, just in the last week, some economists have been talking about the potential for a recession in some parts of the country. We hadn't actually heard that in the previous couple of months, but some people are flagging that we might be into that particular situation and, again, in some parts of the country.

But, again—and economists are quite bold on Manitoba—that we will continue to grow the economy in investments such as in the renter's side or the homeowner's side, is very positive. We've booked in this year for a 0.7 per cent increase in the economy here in Manitoba and we're quite optimistic we'll achieve that.

Mr. Sala: Did the minister include projections for an increase to rent for the next calendar year as part of his budget projections?

Mr. Cullen: I think the question from the member opposite was, have we reflected the potential rent—monthly rent increases into our budget.

You know, I don't really think monthly rent increases, if there are any, will have an impact on our budget. I mean, what we're budgeting in this tax credit is the \$525 for eligible Manitobans that qualify for that particular credit. So fluctuations in rent don't really have a bearing on the tax credit. Again, we've expanded the Rent Assist program as well, which is outside of this particular tax credit.

So, I guess, bottom line, it doesn't really have a bearing on our budget.

Again, we've frozen the rent for the last two years outside of—certainly, landlords can apply to the Residential Tenancies Branch for an increase above zero if they've made, you know, significant modifications to the property.

So, bottom line is, no; the changes in rent really don't have a bearing on our budget.

Mr. Sala: I'd like to—the minister, if he can, to provide what their estimate is for the total number of

individuals who will receive the renters tax credit in this fiscal.

* (15:50)

Mr. Cullen: I'm informed that—*[interjection]*—I've been informed that this year, we're estimating 170,000 Manitobans will be eligible for the tax credit.

So, again, we've expanded that, including those in social housing are eligible for the tax credit, those on Rent Assist eligible for the tax credit. So, again, a focus on some of those individuals with lower income.

Mr. Josh Guenter, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Sala: I'd like to move on to ask questions of the minister regarding the deficit.

And, of course, you know, we have heard this government make announcements recently about commitments and some changes to tax policy and, of course, a lot of big promises in their budget. But we also know that the government will be running a deficit this year, according to their projections, of, I think, \$378 million.

That \$378-million deficit is happening at a time when Manitoba is in receipt of significant federal equalization payments, significant increase in hydro revenues and, of course, a significant increase to in-house revenue coming mostly from inflationary factors.

And so, you know, running a deficit right now, there are certainly a lot of folks, I think, out there in Manitoba that are wondering how it's possible that this government is running a deficit, given the huge amount of money that's coming into the province federally from—especially from the federal government.

So I would like to dig into these questions about the deficit and I'd like to start by asking about one aspect of this government's budget and, specifically, the planning contingency.

So, can the minister tell the committee about the planning contingency associated with the deficit for the '23-24 fiscal year, and how did the department arrive at this number and why did it include it?

Mr. Cullen: Certainly appreciate the line of questioning relative to the deficit. Maybe I'll just premise the comments around the budget as a whole.

And, clearly, governments have to make decisions, have to make choices on the best information they have. And, certainly, our government has

been making decisions based on what we've heard from Manitobans.

And to our previous conversation around affordability, we certainly recognize that affordability is top of mind to Manitobans. We have put some things—affordability measures—in place to the tune of close to \$300 million this past year.

We want to make this more permanent going forward and that's why we've made changes to the taxation—income taxation amount. And, yes, we're—we are getting additional revenue to Manitoba, and we have more Manitobans working than ever before.

So in terms of the point around contingencies and internal service adjustments, I think we have to be mindful of where we've been the last couple of years. And I'm speaking of the pandemic and the issues around the pandemic.

So a lot of issues came to the front where we had to make adjustments to the budget, and last year, we had set aside contingencies of over \$630 million. This year, \$520 million. We're optimistic the worst of COVID is behind us, but there certainly is other events that could lead to uncertainty and we try to leave room in our budget to deal with uncertainties. And, certainly, the budget speaks to that.

And the contingencies, internal service adjustment provides for unanticipated events and contingencies that could not be reasonably anticipated when the budget was prepared or initiated during the fiscal year. Unanticipated events include developments during the year that could not be reasonably anticipated when the budget was prepared. Contingent events include developments that could be anticipated but not with enough certainty to make a reasonable estimate of budget costs, or where final costs are dependent on a pending decision by government.

This provides additional funding for items budgeted in other service headings for the estimated costs of various workforce and government transformation initiatives, limited-term initiatives, internal service adjustments and other costs which may result from changes in program delivery or design. In addition, any costs related to salary or employee benefit adjustments in government departments not provided through department appropriations would be provided through this appropriation.

And when we put our budget together, obviously, there's a lot of assumptions—go into preparing that budget. And—both on the income side and the expense side.

So, clearly, we're looking at how the economy does. The economy is—can vary. Again, optimistic that our diverse economy will continue to grow, which generates revenue for Manitobans.

And, this year, we've got more Manitobans working than ever before. Again, optimistic that will continue, and as more Manitobans are working, the more revenue is generated by our government.

* (16:00)

So, we're mindful of uncertainty. You know, clearly, we're in a time of higher inflation. That's something that has a bearing on budgets here in Manitoba, as well.

And, certainly, I've referenced that we're going through contract negotiations with a number of unions. All of this will have to be reconciled throughout the course of the year as those contracts are resolved.

So there's a lot of things that will develop over the course of the next 12 months, and this provides us some—a contingency to adjust as the year goes along.

Mr. Sala: Just a—and I apologize, because I didn't hear it, and I'll just ask the minister just for the number.

What was the total number that was offered in terms of the size of the planning contingency?

Mr. Cullen: So if the member goes to the Estimates of Expenditure for this year, page 157, it has the contingencies we booked. In the current fiscal year, \$634 million; this year, we're booking just south of \$521 million. So, certainly, a lot less than last year.

Hopefully, we're in certainly more certain times than we have been as a result of getting a little further away from the pandemic.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate that answer from the minister.

Could he provide—I'm not going to request, you know, line by line or detailed answer here about how that's broken down—but could he provide—and he did in his previous answer identify some of the key elements that go into that contingency.

But I am hoping that he can provide a sense of what the biggest items within that \$521-million number would be. What are those top-line items that are taking up the majority of that contingency?

Could he please spell that out for us here?

Mr. Cullen: So, just to clarify the item around contingencies. You know, in an ideal world we'd like to put everything in a department and put a line in

there, so it's nice and neat and tidy and everybody knew exactly what money was allocated to whatever that service was.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

The reality is, there's unknowns; unknowns that we don't know what will potentially come up.

So, maybe what I'll do is I'll kind of walk through sort of the list of knowns that potentially could put pressure on individual departments or put pressure on departments across government, not just individual departments. So, as things come up, government has an ability to respond, and that's why you see this number in budgets, quite frankly.

And I talked a little bit about some of them earlier on, but you know, clearly, we've got salary negotiations going on across government that will impact a number of departments. So, again, we can't really assign a line item or a dollar figure to those. We've allowed this to make those adjustments into the future, this year.

Another program that has—*[interjection]* That was just going to be an update on union negotiations.

And so, one program that came across government was the Ukrainian refugee program, which we've, you know, invested in supporting that program, you know, tens of millions of dollars that we can't really assign to one department because it's really a cross-government program.

So, those types of programs we've allocated in here. And, again, we don't know what kind of response we're going to get. We had a surge in refugees just over the last couple of months, so we've allowed some contingency money in this particular fund.

* (16:10)

I did mention COVID as well. I mean, that's sort of a pandemic health response; we just don't know what the future holds. So that's something that we have to try to book in. And I will say, quite frankly, you know, sometimes we do have to guess a little. There's speculation, but we try to find, you know, a best guess for some of these unknowns, if you will.

And the reality is we still have the—this global economic challenges in front of us, and we don't really know what that is going to mean to government in terms of our supply chain as well and what will drive costs up. And, you know, in terms of inflation, we're seeing that every day when, you know, we're looking at—not just on the capital costs side, but on the

operating costs side, too, that the cost of doing business and cost of supplying services to Manitobans is fluctuating. So, those types of things, we have to book somewhere.

We've also got the, you know, environmental issues that we're dealing with as well, and those things fluctuate from year to year. And you talk about environmental liability. I mean, we've got legal liability, too, that again, fluctuates from year to year.

So there's a whole bunch of factors in there that we try to earmark some money to book into contingencies so the government can respond to those. So, hopefully, that gives you a bit of a perspective on what we're trying to accomplish in this particular line item.

Mr. Sala: Appreciate the response from the minister. And, you know, we didn't really get clarity over which of those items is taking up the lion's share of that contingency fund, or that—those contingency numbers—\$521 million. But that was helpful in giving a sense of where some of the—maybe the bigger costs may be hidden, or where we may see additional costs going forward.

You know, reflecting on what the minister just shared reminds me of the degree of uncertainty that we currently face in Manitoba right now and the current fiscal environment that we're in.

We know that, of course, globally, there's a lot of fiscal uncertainty; we don't know what's going to continue to happen with interest or cost of capital. Again, there's all these sorts of time limited or potentially time limited revenues that are coming from the federal government.

So, I would like to ask, just generally, whether or not the minister does have concerns about, you know, the approach that's being taken by this government.

And, specifically, I would like to ask, you know: relating to those federal transfers, at approximately 33 per cent the share of federal transfers of Manitoba budget is the highest it's been for decades. And, I guess, I'd like to know if the minister believes that's sustainable.

Mr. Cullen: So, in terms of, you know, where we're at in the economy and relative uncertainty there relative to inflation as well, I think Manitoba's in a pretty good place with our diverse economy. You know, we've had discussions with the Bank of Canada to understand where they think we will be headed in terms of interest rates and inflation. Obviously, there's

other economic organizations that provide forecasts to us and we're mindful of those forecasts.

I think the Bank of Canada's quite optimistic that we will see a lower inflation rate here this summer, somewhere down closer to 3 per cent and, hopefully, early in the new year more in the 2 per cent range. Optimistic that that will not result in any increase in interest rates as well. So that's something that we're mindful of.

Again, we're pretty confident in Manitoba's economy, and when we look at our potential growth in our economy, again, it's not just our people here at the Bureau of Statistics. We also survey other organizations that are providing economic forecasts. I think there's probably in the range of eight or nine of them that actually we look at, and then we will take an average based on their assessments of where Manitoba's headed.

So, our 3.6 per cent growth last year, optimistic we're going to be in that 0.7 growth this year, so that, I think, keeps us in pretty good stead.

* (16:20)

As a result of having more Manitobans working than ever before, we are seeing an increase in our own source revenue through income tax and through the business tax, as well. So that, certainly, is positive.

That's why you hear the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) talk about the importance of economic development. And we have to finish the sentence, and what does economic development mean? Well, it means more Manitobans working. And the more Manitobans working and the more revenue it generates for Manitobans and the more money we have to provide services such as health care, education and social services that Manitobans want.

So in terms of the actual federal support to Manitoba, he can find that on page 115 of the budget, and it talks about equalization payments going forward and the—what we've seen historically and what we're budgeting this year. Again, that is a formula that has been—I will use the term agreed to—and we're certainly subject to that formula.

Also, we have a Canada Social Transfer. Again, that formula is set. And also the—when it comes to the Canada Health Transfer formula, which, clearly, there's been a lot of discussion about that over the last several months.

We do recognize that we're going to get a one-time transfer under the health—the new health

agreement going forward, but the federal government's also signalled a—at least a modest increase in health transfers to the provinces going forward. This year, I think we've booked a total of \$207 million extra for those health transfers as a result of that—those conversations.

So these formulas are based on a population increase. We're, again, optimistic Manitoba's population will continue to grow. And, in fact, if you go to page 92, again, the economic forecasters are telling us that Manitoba should grow by 1 per cent this year in 2023 and another 1 per cent in 2024.

So, growth in the economy and growth in our population is critical for us to make sure that we are going to be receiving transfers from the federal government. That's why it is so critical that we be competitive with other jurisdictions. We want to make sure we keep Manitobans here and they don't leave for other pastures, if you will. So that's why things like the basic personal amount is so critical for the future of Manitoba.

Mr. Sala: Appreciate the response from the minister.

So I—you know, I do want to just go a little further with this question. We know recently—or after the government brought forward with their budget, RBC expressed concern about fiscal management from this government and their—expressed, specifically, concern about this reliance on federal equalization payments and these significant revenues that are coming from the federal government. And, you know, we saw a number of years ago where Ontario required access to equalization supports.

Potential there for something like that to happen again in the future is real, and I'm guess—what I'd like to hear the minister share here a bit about is, does he not have concerns about a similar situation happening in the future? And does he have concern about the financial risk that may pose to our province?

Mr. Cullen: Again, if the member turned to page 115, 116, 117, that's the area of the budget that talks about federal transfers into the—into Manitoba.

* (16:30)

First of all, let me talk a little bit about the Canadian health transfer and that new agreement—health agreement—that we've entered into. Certainly, on a portion of that agreement, the federal government has identified a 5 per cent escalator in that regard, so that is certainly positive; more than we had in the past. So we're happy with a step in the right direction.

We'd always like to have more support for the health here in Manitoba, but a step in the right direction.

In terms of the Canada Social Transfer, the CST, there's a 3 per cent escalator in that particular formula, so that will increase going forward. And the other program is the equalization payments to provinces of which Manitoba is one.

So, it is a complicated formula, for sure. It is somewhat based on the national economy and how much wealth is generated by economic activity across the country. And the better the country does nationally, the more money is available for those provinces that are part of the receiving end of equalization payments.

So we're carefully watching—and will be watching—March 28th, when the federal budget comes forward. You know, the federal budget will have projections not just this year, but projections into the future as well, and I'm sure there will be repercussions for provinces as a result of that. We will be monitoring that for sure.

We don't expect equalization payments to go down; I think worst case would be flatlined. But again, it depends on our growth here as a province as well, in terms of population growth. So that's why, you know, we've been focusing on economic development; that's so critical for us. We want to continue to grow Manitoba and grow the population in Manitoba and attract Manitobans. And if we continue to grow the economy here and have more Manitobans working, that's beneficial for us in terms of transfers.

So, to the member's point about Ontario having suffered an economic downturn a little while ago, clearly, that triggered some support from the federal government. I would say that the federal government is in a position—and has been in the past—to make sure that doesn't have a negative impact to other provinces. And they have been able, in the past, to take steps to make sure that they mitigate any of that potential downturn in terms of equalization payments to respective provinces.

So we, again, we're optimistic with our very diversified economy here in Manitoba. Expecting the economy to grow next year to 0.7 per cent, and we believe the—and our federal partners will be here to support us on those fronts. And, again, just optimistic we will continue to grow our population. That's why it's so important that when we look at policies and we look at tax measures, that we are competitive with other jurisdictions. And addressing the basic personal

amounts and the income tax thresholds are so critical for us to maintain our population, grow our population, and keep Manitobans here.

You know, that's what we've heard from individual Manitobans; that's what we've heard from the business community, as well. And we're certainly looking for labour, and they want to keep the labour we do have, and hopefully, quite frankly, attract more labour. In fact, I did hear a great anecdote just this afternoon about someone looking to come to Manitoba.

Mr. Sala: You know, I do appreciate the response from the minister. And I do—you know, looking at what RBC provided here, and their concern about the decisions that we're seeing from this government, I think there is reason to be concerned about some of the top-level decisions we're seeing from this government.

We look at the—some of the tax changes that are being proposed and the wildly disproportionate benefits that those are providing to folks at the very top and the questions about making that kind of a spend and those commitments, giving those dollars over to those ultra-wealthy folks at this time and sending cheques out of province, and at the same time, being reliant—at historically high levels—on these federal equalization payments, which could change.

I mean, I do appreciate that the minister has shared that they have some confidence that things will remain the same, but again, if we have another province enter into a, you know, some kind of a—join in and start becoming a recipient of those equalization payments, like Ontario had in the past, there's a significant risk of that revenue flatlining or not increasing, and that is, at this point in time, I think a serious concern. And so, I know that that's a concern that Manitobans share is that—the overall fiscal responsibility that we're seeing from this government.

So, I would like to ask, just regarding some of the communications that this government has had with bond-rating agencies. I'd like to know if the minister has received any concerns from bond-rating agencies regarding the fact that Manitoba didn't eliminate its deficit for the next fiscal year.

Mr. Cullen: You know, I just—I hope the member will take a few minutes to reflect on the pages I outlined there, 115 to 117, in terms of the transfers here to Manitoba. It also gives a pretty good historical reflection on the last four years and then, obviously,

the forecast year as well where, you know, the equalization and the transfers have been increasing.

* (16:40)

Obviously, we'll be mindful of whatever the Liberal-NDP coalition budget looks like on March 28th. Hopefully, there's no changes in programming to Manitoba as a result of that coalition, so we'll be looking forward to the projections and the forecasts from that particular budget.

It's normal protocol to meet with the rating agencies shortly after the release of the budget. Hopefully, the budget will be passed by the time that we meet with those agencies so they will have an appreciation of where we're at and we can provide them some stability so they can have an accurate reflection of where we're at as a government here in Manitoba.

So the meetings will—currently being arranged for this summer, so once the House rises June 1st, that'll provide us the opportunity to have discussions with them. That'll provide them the next little while to do the analysis on our budget, where we're going and what direction we've taken as a government.

And I will flag for the member opposite, and, you know, in previous discussions we've had with them, they raise Manitoba Hydro as an issue, and they've indicated that Manitoba Hydro is our government's single biggest contingent liability.

That's why we have taken measures to try to correct the financial situation that Manitoba Hydro finds itself in in terms of its high debt-to-equity ratio. And I think they will view this optimistically that the measures we're taking will provide a stability at Manitoba Hydro and, as well, provide stability for ratepayers at Manitoba Hydro.

You know, this year alone is \$100 million that we will allow Manitoba Hydro to keep, not—*[interjection]*—180? \$180 million—thanks for the correction—that Manitoba Hydro will keep instead of transferring to the government of Manitoba.

So, just to remind the members opposite that we reduced the water rental rates and the debt guarantee fees that the government charges Manitoba Hydro in half to provide that, so, substantial assistance for Manitoba Hydro to allow it to get its feet on the ground.

We certainly recognized the debt to equity was going in the wrong direction and, certainly, that concerns the bond-rating agencies. So I think they will

be happy the—to the fact that we are going to be assisting Manitoba Hydro to the tune of \$4 billion over the next 20 years, which we think will stabilize Manitoba Hydro and, at the same time, provide rate shock guarantees to Manitoba Hydro ratepayers.

So, I will say we're very interested in having a very strong Manitoba Hydro as a Crown corporation, owned by Manitobans, and we're also—want to have a very strong Public Utilities Board to provide oversight to Manitoba Hydro as well.

That's why we've actually increased the budget in—for the Public Utilities Board in this particular budget to make sure that the Public Utilities Board has the tools and resources that they need to do their job as a strong regulator to represent the best interests of Manitobans.

Mr. Sala: I do want to continue to talk broadly about questions tied to the deficit. But I do have to respond, I think, to what the minister just put on the record, to correct the record.

Because we've heard this minister talk about, you know, his government's desire to strengthen the Public Utilities Board. And I could hear—I don't know if there were folks listening outside the Chamber, but it certainly would inspire laughter, I think, from the majority of Manitobans, given that what his government did with bill 36 fundamentally erased the Public Utilities Board role in rate setting in Manitoba.

So, any suggestion that somehow his government has strengthened the Public Utilities Board is like Orwellian in nature; I guess, that's the best way I could describe it. Because they've done nothing but undercut it and, ultimately, have decided to set hydro rates at the Cabinet table instead of having hydro rates be set by the Public Utilities Board.

And I know that's a huge concern to so many people. We saw—I think it was 50 separate individuals who came to committee to—members of the public who took the time to come and express their concerns about the changes that this government was making and about their undercutting of the Public Utilities Board and the important role that they play.

And then, certainly, I think it is also important just to put on the record and to correct the record that, you know, this government's legislation, bill 36, not only worked to undermine the Public Utilities Board but it also set financial targets for Manitoba Hydro that were so high that the CEO of Hydro came out the day after the bill was passed and said, we can't meet these targets.

So—and then, I think it was within a day that the government had announced that they were going to be using some of the water rental fees and debt-guarantee fees to help bring down some of those costs.

We'll never know, but I have some suspicion that the reason that the government made that announcement was because Hydro was clear that they weren't actually able to raise rates fast enough to meet the targets in the bill. Because the bill did have a 5 per cent rate cap per year. The CEO of Hydro said, we can't even meet these rate increases that the government is seeking here. They're going to be too fast and the bill doesn't allow us to meet them. So they had to find a workaround.

So this presentation of these changes with the water rental fee and the debt-guarantee fee as being a sign of government generosity is duplicitous at best. And I think that's something that really needs to be called out here. This government ultimately worked to raise hydro rates as quickly as possible, and Manitobans didn't like it.

So I do want to just get back to questions relating to the deficit, and specifically, one question regarding the fiscal transparency and taxpayer protection act.

I'd like to ask the minister: How much progress has been made with respect to the requirements of the fiscal transparency and taxpayer protection act in terms of reducing the deficit, given that last year's estimated deficit and the new deficit estimate are relatively close?

Mr. Chairperson: Just in response to that member's remarks, certainly, the minister under question at the moment is responsible for Hydro. However, the questions regarding a bill presently before the House are best addressed to the sponsoring minister at—in the standing committee for considering that particular bill.

So, just a point of clarity, and I'm sure the minister can address the questions, but there will be an opportunity to address that particular bill. And that's perhaps when we should get into the nuts and bolts of it in more detail.

Thank you.

* (16:50)

Mr. Cullen: I'd ask the member if he would like to have a look at page 103 of the budget. That, again, goes back to 20—as far as '21-22 and that also takes us forward into '26-27, and it outlines revenue, expenses and surplus or deficit.

So it probably doesn't go back as far as I would like, but I think I can at least, verbally, today take the member back in history to where we were previously, and I think this is something that Manitobans should know.

When we came into budget, there was a substantial deficit that we were left by the term—previous government the previous year. So, in '16-17, we set out to balance the budget. The first year we had a \$789-million deficit, followed by '17-18 of a \$694-million deficit; '18-19, a \$149-million deficit; and then '19-20, actually, a \$5-million surplus.

And then, as everyone knows, along came the pandemic. So, in '20 and '21, we had a \$2.1-billion deficit. And again, we had a target that we didn't want to get back to deficit, so gradually and incrementally, we're heading that direction; '21-22, we were still feeling the impact and the effects of COVID. We had a \$704-million deficit; and '22-23, we anticipate a \$378-million deficit for this year-end.

I will say the impact of the pandemic was in the range of \$3 billion—so, a substantial cost to government—but it's what Manitobans needed. They needed support for that and we were certainly standing by them on that front.

Again, our goal is to return to deficit by '28-29. That is what The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Act or the balanced-budget legislation that the member raises requires government to do. It requires government to take responsible steps to achieve balance.

We think our approach is an incremental approach to doing that. We have to balance the needs of Manitobans when it comes to health care, education and social services. That's why you see record investments and historic investments on those fronts.

And, as well, we've got ourselves into a—I want to say a positive financial situation, where we're able to provide tax relief—and I would say historic tax relief—to Manitobans. So, we're excited about providing that to Manitobans in this budget.

And we're providing Manitobans an incremental approach—we think a responsible approach—to get back to a budget which is going to be balanced in the near future, according to the legislation in front of us.

Mr. Sala: Thank the minister for that response.

I'd like to just flip over now to talking a bit about reporting; I know we're going to be wrapping up right

away, but hopefully, we can get one more in here before the day wraps.

The Auditor General expressed concerns regarding a significant number of errors in last year's Public Accounts, to the point that concern was expressed about the ability to ensure the timely publication of this year's Public Accounts.

Does the minister agree with the auditor's concerns, and will the minister commit to publishing the Public Accounts by the end of September of this year?

Mr. Cullen: It is a legislative requirement that we table the report by September 30th, and I will report to the member, and members opposite, that we have done that each and every year. I would say Finance officials will work with the Auditor General, making sure that we have an audit plan in place.

And I want to say last year, we did get an unqualified—which is a positive—statement from the

auditor, so, obviously, very positive outcome on that front.

I will say, we have to be cognizant as well when it comes to the summary budget; we also have over 100 government reporting entities that we have to get information from, and put that in the budget document as well.

So it's not just core government. We have to be mindful of those over 100 government reporting entities that feed into the summary budget.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

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