

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

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Second Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
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

Thursday, April 6, 2023

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

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

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Bill 235—The Employment Standards Code  
Amendment Act**

**Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere):** I move, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson), that Bill 235, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Micklefield:** Madam Speaker, none of us here are untouched by grief of a lost one—of the passing of a loss—of the passing of a loved one. This bill expands what is required from three bereavement days to five. It also acknowledges the loss of miscarriage and still-birth in its considerations.

Thank you.

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

Committee reports? Tabling of reports?

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes' notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 27(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

**Paul Jerrard**

**Hon. Obby Khan (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the life and legacy of Paul Jerrard, the first Black assistant coach in the National Hockey League, a hometown hero, a true trailblazer and a sport of hockey—in the sport of hockey.

Born on April 20th, 1965, here in Winnipeg, Mr. Jerrard's passion for hockey began at local arenas in East Kildonan and Transcona. He would go on to be drafted by the New York Rangers in 1983, then

traded to the Minnesota [*phonetic*] North Stars before continuing his hockey career with various teams in the American league and International Hockey League.

As an athlete, Mr. Jerrard was known for his defensive 'prowness', where—but where he really thrived was on the bench as an assistant coach. For over 25 years, he coached some of hockey's great stars with teams from the university level through to the National Hockey League. In these roles, Mr. Jerrard was an accomplished and respected leader who inspired the best in his athletes.

Madam Speaker, what stands out in Mr. Jerrard's hockey career is not that—his talent as an athlete or as a coach, but his exceptional character. He was known to be a compassionate individual who dedicated his life to helping others realize their potential. He gave of his time freely and was an active member of the NHL's BIPOC Coaches Program where he worked alongside Black, Indigenous coaches and players of colour to mentor and motivate the next generation of hockey players.

Representation in sport is pivotal to inspiring young athletes to pursue their athletic goals. Forty years ago, there were a few players of colour in the National Hockey League, let alone in the NHL—in the sport of hockey, sorry, let alone in NHL. Today, in arenas across Canada, youth of all backgrounds lace up their skates to play our nation's game. Role models like Mr. Jerrard have helped to open the doors for hockey to become a reflective sport in our multicultural mosaic.

While there is so much more work to be done, it is clear that much progress has been made, not just in hockey, but across our entire sporting world. In Manitoba, sports organizations from the grassroots through to high-performance levels continue to prioritize programs and initiatives that support diversity, equality and inclusion in sports. We can be proud of Manitoba leaders like Mr. Jerrard who have paved the way for these advances.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Jerrard sadly passed away in February after a courageous battle with cancer. He has left behind not only a legacy, but a permanent impression on the hockey world and our province and across North America. His memory will be an inspiration for years to come.

Also, Madam Speaker, as we speak of memories and inspiration, we cannot forget that today is the anniversary of the Humboldt Broncos bus crash, where 16 people lost their lives.

The parents of Humboldt Broncos defenceman Logan Boulet offered to donate his organs so that six lives could continue on. They did so because Logan told his parents he was registering as an organ donor and that he was inspired by his coach and mentor, Ric.

The leadership and mentorship of coaches like Ric and Paul Jerrard live on forever in the lives of athletes.

Madam Speaker, I ask that all members join me in commemorating and celebrating Mr. Paul Jerrard's exceptional life and career, as well as the legacy of Ric and Logan Boulet.

I would ask now that we stand and recognize Paul's wife, Cheryl Jerrard, in the gallery; Paul's daughter Catherine Jerrard-Rosen; Paul's mother, Merline Jerrard. And there's a list of 10 other family members here.

Madam Speaker, I ask for leave that all the guests' names here on behalf of Paul Jerrard's family be included in Hansard.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to include all of the names of the guests in Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Leave has been granted.

*Family: Cheryl Jerrard, wife; Catherine Jerrard-Rosen, daughter; Merline Jerrard, mother; Paulette Jerrard-Gilbert, Michelle Piwniuk, sisters; Chad Gillert, Aidan Piwniuk, nephews; Justine Gillert, Jillian Piwniuk, nieces; Ainsley Nelson*

*Best friends: Chris Black; Grant Clark, wife Susanne and son Brayden; Glen and Lorie Hearn, Ted Ryplanski*

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** Today we recognize the important contributions made by Paul Jerrard, one of the first Black coaches in the NHL.

Jerrard was born right here in Winnipeg and had a passion for the game of hockey from a very young age. He was admired for his skills and his skillful approach towards connecting with players. He played for teams like the New York Rangers, Minnesota North Stars and Hershey Bears.

Jerrard was full of life in everything that he did. It was evident from a young age that he loved playing

hockey and loved interacting with both players and coaches. Between his jobs in the NHL as a professional defenceman, Jerrard was an assistant coach in the American Hockey League in Iowa, Texas, Utah and Hershey.

And after spending most of his career as a defenceman, Jerrard went into coaching when he hung up his skates. P.J., as he was often recalled, approached every day with unmatched enthusiasm and put his teammates and the program of hockey first. Jerrard had such a positive attitude towards hockey and the work that he did that it was said that he never worked in a day in his life, and he surrounded himself with players that were in such a lively environment.

Jerrard's commitment to the sport was one of a kind. He was an active member in the NHL's Coaches' Association BIPOC Coaches Program. He was an exemplary leader, whose generosity in sharing his knowledge to work with other coaches in the mentoring BIPOC Coaches Program.

Beyond being just a coach, Jerrard was a beacon of hope in the community, bringing light to locker rooms and touching the lives in no small way. He was an incredible role model and a pace setter for the BIPOC community in our city of Winnipeg and around North America at large.

His passing has left a great vacuum in sports and in our hearts. And in his words that he said himself, quote: I just want to make sure that I'm a good coach and a good role model and a good citizen. And, if by doing that, I can be a positive role model for those kids, that's a great by-product.

Mr. Jerrard will be missed, but we will continue to draw inspiration from the phenomenal trail he blazed while he was with us.

Thank you.

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

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

Leave has been granted.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I stand to recognize the incredible contribution made by Paul Jerrard, a former NHL player and coach, a proud Winnipegger and a trailblazer as the first Black coach in the NHL.

Paul Jerrard passed away on February 15th, 2023 at age 57 after fighting a long-term battle with cancer.

A little bit about his story: He was drafted by the New York Rangers in the 1983 NHL draft after playing with Althol Murray College of Notre Dame in Saskatchewan, and collegiate hockey at Lake Superior State University.

After spending one season with the Colorado Avalanche, Jerrard spent two seasons with the Dallas Stars and, most recently, two seasons with the Calgary Flames between 2016 and 2018.

Paul Jerrard was known for being a great listener who was compassionate and 'authoritative'. He was trusted immensely by players and colleagues.

\* (13:40)

Between his NHL jobs, he assisted on hockey teams and he himself played as a defenceman in the minors from 1983 to 1987, and he played in five NHL games with Minnesota North Stars during 1988 and '89.

Madam Speaker, he was also an active member of the NHL Coaches' Association BIPOC Coaches Program, where he was known as an incredible coach, but more than this, he was known as a great human. He would coach, mentor, share advice and wisdom, and he often spoke about wanting kids to see and be part of more people of colour playing, officiating and coaching.

Madam Speaker, we as Manitobans are proud of outstanding hockey talent, but we need to also recognize that Paul Jerrard was an exceptionally hard-working and humble man and should be recognized for being a family man, a role model and for contributing to better minority representation in hockey.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to share our condolences with his loved ones who have joined us here today and thank the minister for bringing forward the statement.

Thank you.

**Mr. Khan:** Madam Speaker, I ask for leave for a moment of silence for Paul Jerrard, his family and the Humboldt Broncos.

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to have a moment of silence? [*Agreed*]

Leave has been granted. Please stand.

*A moment of silence was observed.*

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Cornerstone Alliance Church

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I rise in the House today to acknowledge the amazing team behind Cornerstone Alliance Church's food drive and wardrobe events.

Cornerstone is a church in the Southdale constituency. They run a food bank every second Wednesday and a free clothing event called the wardrobe every six weeks.

To run the food bank, Cornerstone works with Harvest Manitoba. Harvest drops off a truckload of food, and the team works quickly to organize the food into orders. They serve around 80 community members each time. They make sure those who need help accessing quality food receive it.

Not only that, Cornerstone makes sure those who need clothing items get them too. The team takes in donations of clean, gently used clothing and shoes and then arranges them by category and size on racks for browsing during the wardrobe events.

Sitting in the visitor gallery today are Josh Gaudreau, Claude Verrier, Elaine Doerksen, Alex Mercredi, Laban Eskaros, Judy Holukoff, Marilyn Cote and Pastor Joel Black.

These individuals, along with other staff and volunteers not present today, run the food bank and wardrobe events. They work tirelessly to respond to community needs. They are integral to the community presence of Cornerstone, and they add so much life to our community. Just recently, I heard that they even have started dropping off baked goods every month to our local fire hall.

Thank you for all of your work.

Madam Speaker, I am providing a list of the names of the individuals in attendance today to be included in Hansard. I ask all the members in the Chamber to join me in thanking these hard-working individuals for their selfless service.

Thank you.

*Pastor Joel Black, Marilyn Cote, Elaine Doerksen, Laban Eskaros, Josh Gaudreau, Judy Holukoff, Alex Mercredi, Claude Verrier*

### Florence Halcrow

**Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak):** Today I am honoured to recognize a remarkable and resilient community member who has grown so close, she is like a family member of my own.

My guest today has shown great effort to paying back the strength and care that the community offered her in times of need. Her commitment to protecting vulnerable communities, community wellness and turning even the most difficult struggles into successes has shown the value of second chances.

Florence Halcrow has overcome adversity and put community-focused wellness and advocacy at the centre of her life and career after living through hardship, making mistakes and having experienced incarceration. The support that Florence found from the community through adversity, however, was instrumental in making her 'trajectotory' into one of growth, restoration and healing.

Thanks to the help of community members and organizations focused on giving second chances and support to those who never received them, Florence was able to commit her journey of healing herself, her relations with family and uses her experiences to help others.

In April 2021, the Ask Auntie program was born as a part of the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation. As an Indigenous-focused and Indigenous-led program, the group provides general support, unconditional care and wisdom.

During the pandemic, Ask Auntie built partnerships with other community organizations to provide direct support, accommodation and connect vulnerable people with resources to change their situation.

As the Ask Auntie program co-ordinator, Florence has able to give back to the community that supported her and used her lived experiences to connect with other struggling community members and pass on positive change to others who did not have the right opportunities.

The positive impact that Florence and the rest of the Ask Auntie team have been able to make on the community is incredible. I would like for my colleagues to join me in welcoming Florence Halcrow for joining us today in the gallery, and thanking her for the work she has done to create a more caring community.

Ekosi.

### Chris Dunn

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, it's a sad day for Chris Dunn, a sad day for health care in Manitoba and a sad day for the present government.

I've written four letters to the minister about the precarious situation of Chris Dunn from Dauphin, who has an eye condition, diabetic retinopathy, which needs treatment every three months or he may go blind.

Sadly, he's been able—been unable to receive treatment since September 2022, as he can't travel to

Winnipeg for treatment, being the primary caregiver for his sick mother.

The minister promised treatment would be available in Dauphin starting in fall 2022. Delays and prevarication by the minister and her government occurred. As of the end of March of this year, visits had not even started.

On April 3rd, with great fanfare, the minister went to the airport for a photo op with the eye specialist on his way to Dauphin to provide the eye treatment, but this was arranged last minute, and Chris Dunn wasn't informed and was unable to get an appointment with the eye specialist.

To make matters worse, instead of all patients from multiple doctors being seen each visit, only the visiting doctor's patients are being seen, and the first doctor was not his doctor.

Mr. Dunn's eye doctor is not scheduled to go to Dauphin 'til October 2023. Mr. Dunn could be blind by then. Mr. Dunn now has to find out which doctor is scheduled to come out at the start of May, and then ask his eye doctor to refer him to that particular specialist. But his doctor's office has no access to the schedule.

The project is failing Mr. Dunn, and undoubtedly others in similar desperate circumstances. It's not the right care in the right place at the right time. Next time, perhaps the minister should check that the program is actually going to work for those who need it before arranging a photo op.

Thank you.

### Small Business

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** Madam Speaker, small businesses in Manitoba have been hit hard by the pandemic. Through lockdowns and related struggles, Manitoba has 21 fewer small businesses than before the pandemic.

This means that many small businesses were not able to survive the years of little support from the provincial government when compounded with prolonged and recurring public mismanagement of the pandemic.

Right now, small businesses face record levels of debt, meaning that they are less able to grow, hire fewer employees and are struggling more. This is a threat to the viability of small businesses in Manitoba, and desperately needs to be addressed.

\* (13:50)

The PC government has not adequately supported our small entrepreneurs during the ongoing pandemic or responded to repeated calls of small business owners and advocates. What programs have been offered by the Province have fallen flat, which was made clear by the low uptake from businesses.

Another unacceptable statistic which we have seen come out of the pandemic is that Manitoba has the second highest increase in all of Canada for shelter costs. This increase, 7.3 per cent, is even higher than the rate of inflation and has meant that Manitobans are finding it harder to survive while supports are being removed from beneath our families.

Skyrocketing inflation, groceries and shelter has meant that Manitobans have less money to spend in the economy, and small businesses will continue to struggle. Manitoba also has the second highest rate of low-income persistence out of all provinces, meaning if you were born into poverty, it's not likely that you'll ever grow out of poverty in your lifetime.

This is why the government should be focusing on making life more affordable for Manitobans and breaking the systemic barriers which we know exist, and without a solution being actively sought, Manitoba will keep its rigid income disparity. We also have among the lowest average weekly earnings, meaning Manitobans are compensated less when compared to other provinces.

This is a persistent failing of our Province and absolutely devastating look at our support for small businesses. This is what Manitobans are facing under the PC government.

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Leave.

**Madam Speaker:** There is a request for leave for the member to complete his statement.

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Madam Speaker:** Leave has been denied.

### **Paul Jerrard**

**Hon. Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** Madam Speaker, today I rise in this Chamber to play tribute to my brother-in-law and my great friend, Paul Jerrard.

To the hockey world, he was a both a player and coach. To our family, he was Uncle Paul. To even many kids in Virten, where Paul had developed and

ran his—Jerrard sport hockey school for five years, he was also known as Uncle Paul. Our two kids remember fond memories of their summer vacations spent with Paul and his amazing wife, Cheryl, and their two daughters: Catherine, Meghan.

With Paul's hockey—long hockey career, they lived in many different cities across North America including Lowell, Massachusetts; Michigan; Denver; Des Moines; Dallas; Calgary; Omaha; and, my personal favourite, Hershey, Pennsylvania. Our family has amazing memories of those locations, Madam Speaker.

My son, Aidan, and his uncle, Paul, had a special relationship. My sister-in-law, Cheryl, always said that Aidan was like a son to Paul, since he had two daughters. Aidan has many memories of cross-country drives with his uncle, as the two of them went to Bob Hartley hockey school every year in York, Pennsylvania, where Paul instructed and Aidan attended.

Paul truly believed in networking and making long—lifelong connections as a priority in his life.

I wanted to share with you one example Paul had, a difference that he made for many players as he coached and mentored. At his funeral, I had an opportunity to talk to Eric Perrin, who played for the Tampa Bay Lightning, when they won the Stanley Cup in 2004. Eric explained that, it wasn't—if it wasn't for Paul's mentoring and his encouragement, he would not have been playing in the NHL and, of course, he would not have been on a Stanley Cup winning team. The family had heard and read so many similar stories from several college players, coaches, as well as current and former NHL players of the impact that they had—that Paul had on them.

In the—there is a—like, one of my favourite Christmas movies is the wonderful life. There was an inscription on a book that Clarence the angel gives to the main character, George Bailey, that reads: Remember, a man is at no—is—there's—remember, no man is a failure who has friends. Then, George Bailey's brother raises his glass and toasts: George Bailey, the richest man in town.

Madam Speaker, for all the friends Paul had made in the hockey world, combined with the friends that he made in communities wherever he lived, Paul was the richest man in town and he was the richest man in hockey, measured by all the lives he touched and the friends he made along the way in his short time on this earth.

Rest in peace, my friend. Until we meet again.

### Introduction of Guests

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

In the loge to my right, we have the former MLA for Sturgeon Creek, Gerry McAlpine, joining us today.

And seated in the public gallery, from Acadia Junior High, we have 25 grade 9 students under the direction of Wendy McClellan. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard).

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

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Humboldt Broncos Hockey Team Anniversary of Fatal Bus Accident

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** I want to take a moment to acknowledge the anniversary of the tragedy that befell the Humboldt Broncos. April 6, 2018, is the day that changed our country forever. It is an absolute sorrow-filled memory, I think, for the families and survivors and, of course, all the friends and those affected.

So many of us are hockey families. All of us have participated in the national pastime in one way or the other, and I think that's why it was so easy for all of us as Canadians to empathize and to ask those questions of, you know, what if, as it pertains to this tragedy.

So even though half a decade has passed, these memories are still fresh. And I just want to take this opportunity on behalf of my colleagues to extend our deepest condolences to the survivors and to their families, and to let the Humboldt Broncos know, you will always be remembered.

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Our hearts go out to the entire Humboldt community—hockey community. And, of course, the families and friends impacted by the sudden, tragic death of those 16 individuals.

Today marks the fifth anniversary of this tragedy and we remember and honour the 16 lives that were lost and, of course, the 13 surviving teammates and, of course, the families whose lives were changed forever—forever.

Madam Speaker, Canadians will remain Humboldt strong, which is why today we are wearing these green and yellow pins today.

I also just want to take this opportunity to extend our deepest condolences to the family of Paul Jerrard, the Jerrard and Piwniuk families, who are here with us today, and, of course, to my dear friend and colleague, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (Mr. Piwniuk), for their loss of someone who is an icon and a legend in our—in hockey as well.

**Madam Speaker:** And, with a Speaker's latitude, I will not consider that the first question.

So, I will now recognize the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on his first question.

### Health-Care System Reform Government Position

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Thank you kindly, Madam Speaker, for your discretion.

Manitobans know that Brian Pallister caused a lot of damage to health care in this great province. Brian Pallister closed emergency rooms at Concordia, Victoria, at Seven Oaks.

Brian Pallister cut CancerCare funding by millions of dollars, and he closed CancerCare community clinics in Manitoba. He also cut outpatient physiotherapy.

Now, in spite of this being common knowledge to everybody in the province, the Premier this week says that Brian Pallister made some improvements to health care in Manitoba.

Will the Premier tell the House why she thinks Brian Pallister improved health care in Manitoba?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** I think it's important for Manitobans to know and remember what took place under the previous NDP government under Greg Selinger—who, of course, was the mentor of the current Leader of the Opposition.

Now, what happened back on—in those days in 2015 and '16? According to the CIHI report at the time, Manitoba's ER waits were the longest in the country.

And also, Madam Speaker, in a CIHI report, wait times—under wait times for priority procedures in Canada, again, in 2015, Manitoba was the worst province west of the Maritimes for cataract surgeries.

But, Madam Speaker, we know that Manitobans do not want to go back to those dark days of the previous NDP government. We are making record investments in our health-care system. We recognize there's more work to do, and we're committed to getting the job done.

\* (14:00)



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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, health care is worse in Manitoba today than it has ever been. Patients are waiting longer than ever before. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Kinew:** The emergency rooms have hallway medicine to the likes of which have never been seen in Manitoba.

And the reason why is because Brian Pallister cut health care. He cut health care when he first got into office. He cut health care while the member for Tuxedo was the Health minister.

And now, today, we see that the Premier continues to implement Brian Pallister's plan for health care. In fact, in spite of all the evidence and the collective experience of Manitobans, she insists that Brian Pallister improved health care in this province.

Will she simply explain to the people of Manitoba why she thinks Brian Pallister improved Manitoba's health care?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Once again, fact versus fiction, Madam Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition continues along the path of putting false information on the record in this Chamber. He knows full well, and all the members opposite know full well, that we are investing more than \$2 billion more than the NDP ever did in health care alone in the province of Manitoba.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to remind Manitobans that under Greg Selinger, when he was premier of the province—again, the Leader of the Opposition's mentor—of course, at that time the CIHI report also, when talking about wait-time priority procedures in Canada, Manitoba was the third worst province for hip replacements.

It also went on to have—say that Manitoba has—had the highest ambulance fees in the country, Madam Speaker. That's why we took action and we cut those ambulance fees in half, so that Manitobans would have the access to health care.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Problem is, no one can get an ambulance to show up in rural Manitoba anymore under this government. Manitobans are waiting in emergency rooms longer than ever before. And those paramedics who

are working on the front lines have had their wages frozen for half a decade by this Premier, and by Brian Pallister.

Everyone in Manitoba knows that health care got worse under Brian Pallister, and under this Premier; that's a fact. The only fiction is that the PCs are somehow going to change, just because it's an election year.

So we know that she said Brian Pallister improved health care—in this very Chamber, this very week—in the Estimates committee.

We're simply asking her today, and I'll repeat the question one more time: Can the Premier explain why she thinks Brian Pallister improved health care in our province?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, once again, Madam Speaker, the litany of false accusations by the Leader of the Opposition never seems to cease, you know, on that side of the House. But we will continue to put the facts on the record.

Now, the facts are we understand and we recognize that there's a health human resource challenge, not just here in Manitoba, but right across the country. And we know that that has transpired as a result of the pandemic, and there's been some challenges. And we're taking action on that.

But back in the dark days of the NDP government, doctors were leaving for other jurisdictions in droves, Madam Speaker. In fact, between 2000 and 2016, under the NDP government, 2,000—more than 2,200 doctors left this province for other jurisdictions.

Manitobans do not want to go back to the dark days of that NDP government.

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

#### **Education Property Tax Credit Corporate Rebates**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** It's a simple question, Madam Speaker: Should the Manitoba government send million-dollar cheques to billionaires who don't even live in Manitoba, yes or no?

On this side of the House, we think that sending cheques to billionaires who don't live here or contribute to our province is not the right approach, particularly as schools go underfunded. These billionaires did not ask for these cheques, and we should not send them millions of dollars at a time when kids are

struggling to be able to access the education that they need.

Does the Premier agree, or does the Premier plan to keep sending cheques out of province to billionaires, just like Brian Pallister?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition was all over the map in that question. But I certainly appreciate any question about affordability.

We know that we—as a result of the NDP-Liberal coalition, that carbon taxes have been increasing in the province of Manitoba. We have called on the NDP-Liberal coalition to stop that to make sure that life is more affordable for Manitobans, while the NDP and Liberals here in Manitoba continue to support that. That doesn't make life more affordable for Manitobans, Madam Speaker.

We're—will continue to make life more affordable for Manitobans.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** I just want to quickly remind the Premier that, in this Chamber, she twice voted for a PC carbon tax. So this is another Stefanson government flip-flop. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Kinew:** But the question at hand is about billionaires outside of Manitoba getting million-dollar cheques from this government.

We know that that big—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Kinew:** —Bay Street real estate firm, \$20-billion market cap, Cadillac Fairview, they got a \$1-million cheque from this government. Charles Koch got a cheque for \$80,000 from this government; he's the 21st richest person in the entire world, and, no, he does not live in Manitoba. The Canadian cheese giant Saputo is worth nearly \$5 billion, they got a cheque for tens of thousands of dollars from this Premier.

This is as school divisions like the Interlake School Division are forced to cut teaching positions.

Will the Premier explain to Manitobans why she underfunds schools with one hand and then hands out—

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

Just a reminder to members that we have a lot of guests in the gallery today, so I think they would like to be able to hear the questions and answers, as would I.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** The Leader of the Opposition and all members opposite know that in the budget that we recently tabled in this Chamber had a 6.1 per cent increase to education funding: record increases of funding for education.

And I think it's time to remind Manitobans what the NDP did when we presented that—those record increases, I think the largest increase in 25 years—

**An Honourable Member:** Forty.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** —or even more than that—40 years, Madam Speaker—in the province of Manitoba. And each and every one of the NDP voted against that.

More money for education, more affordability for Manitobans, that's what we stand for in Manitoba.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** You know, Madam Speaker, Brian Pallister decided it was a good idea to send million-dollar cheques to billionaires, and this Premier decided it was a good idea to continue the practice.

Now, this Premier then turned around and brought in a budget that is forcing the Interlake School Division, along with many others, to cut teaching positions. At the same time, they refused to fund a nutrition program in schools. In fact, the member from Radisson says that funding school nutrition programs is a bad idea.

This same government turns around and gives a million-dollar cheque to a big real estate firm headquartered on Bay Street. They send tens of thousands of dollars—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Kinew:** —to some of the richest people in the world, none of whom live in Manitoba or contribute substantively to our society.

So the question that the Premier should ask is the question that every voter in Manitoba will be confronted with this year: Do you want to send more money to billionaires outside of the province or do you want to feed hungry kids right here at home?

\* (14:10)

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition continues to put blatantly false information on the record in this. So let's say what the facts are.

We have invested, as a government, \$2.5 million in the children's nutrition council of Manitoba. That is more money for nutrition for children, not less, as the NDP has accused, Madam Speaker.

But beyond that, Madam Speaker, beyond that, by increasing the basic personal amount in Manitoba, by giving more affordability and tax relief to those Manitobans, we are taking more than 47 Manitobans off of the tax roll in Manitoba.

That helps people with low-income Manitobans. That's what we stand for. They have nothing. They don't stand for anything.

### Introduction of Guests

**Madam Speaker:** Although these students left the gallery, I would like to put on record that we had seated in the public gallery, from Acadia Junior High, another 25 grade 9 students under the direction of Wendy McClellan. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Fort Richmond (Mrs. Guillemard).

### Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited People Request for Action Plan to Address Violence Against

**MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** Linda Mary Beardy was a 33-year-old Indigenous woman and a mother to four beautiful children. She was loved by her family and her community of Lake St. Martin.

Two days ago, her body was found at the Brady landfill. Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited folks face savage and epidemic levels of violence here in Manitoba. Much more must be done to protect Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited.

Can the Premier explain what actions she's taking to protect Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited?

**Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations):** I—our Premier has already expressed condolences to the family and friends of—community of Ms. Beardy, and I also extend that on behalf of all of us.

To listen to the member from St. Johns insinuate that is—nothing has been done, I look back over the past seven years working with the people in this side of the government and the progress that has been made, and I certainly want to speak to all ministers of Justice, ministers of mental health and wellness,

minister of Families, minister of Health. We have come a long way.

Is there a ways to go? Absolutely, there is, but this government is working hard for all those families.

### National Inquiry Into MMIWG Implementation of the Calls for Justice

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

**MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns):** I don't know what the minister means when she says we've come a long way when two days ago an Indigenous woman, a mother, was found in Brady landfill; when three months ago, the police announced a serial killer of four Indigenous women, of whom have not been returned to their families.

We haven't come a long way, Madam Speaker. And this morning, the Premier was asked on CBC to name just one of the national inquiry's calls to justice that she implemented. She couldn't name one single thing that this government has done. That's shameful.

Can the Premier explain why she's failed to act to implement any of the national inquiry's calls to justice?

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** Compelled to rise in the House and correct the record. The member is absolutely wrong in her assertion.

This is an absolutely tragic situation that remains under investigation, and I would suggest that by—before putting more information on the record that the member allow for that investigation to continue on.

What I said on the radio this morning is that we have acted to ensure that we put together a group of—including the police, RCMP, Winnipeg police—a working group on missing people to ensure that we prevent more people, so 'they' what that organization does is they look for those who are in most need of help ahead of time to prevent them from getting into those situations, Madam Speaker.

That is taking action, Madam Speaker. That is what we were doing. This member is absolutely wrong and should apologize.

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

**MLA Fontaine:** That was a shameful answer from the woman who runs the province, here, in respect of the murder of Indigenous women and girls in this province. Two questions—three questions now, they

haven't put one action that they've put to implement any of the calls to justice from the national inquiry.

Linda Beardy was only 33 years old. That's younger than most people in this Chamber. And this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and none of these ministers can get up and talk about what they're going to do to immediately implement the national inquiry's calls to justice. That's shameful, and if anybody should—

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

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women):** It is absolutely shameful that that member is politicizing this death. And our government sends condolences to the family and the loved ones for this tragic loss.

Some of the things that our government has done recently under this Premier's leadership is: \$1.5-million investment to Velma's House, which is a 24-7 safe space for women; we have established a matriarchal governing group to ensure the implementation of all those calls for justice under the MMIWG inquiry are—and that will be led by Sandra Delorande and the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata folks to ensure the implementation.

We passed Clare's Law, which answers the calls of two particular calls for justice under the report, as well as last week we announced a \$1.3-million sexual assault emergency response which answers the calls to five—

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

#### **Management of MPI Autopac Rates**

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** Madam Speaker, this Stefanson government's bad decisions are making life more expensive once again. This time, it's your MPI rates which have increased because of mismanage by—management by the PCs, and it's only going to get worse.

MPI's IT upgrade, known as Project Nova, is now years behind schedule and \$200 million overbudget and counting. And it's all because of PC interference. This is just the beginning. PCs are now spending millions on outside consultants rather than being accountable to Manitobans.

Will the Premier just tell Manitobans how much more their Autopac rates will go up this year because of their mismanagement?

**Hon. Jeff Wharton (Acting Minister responsible for the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation):** Again, fiction coming from the member opposite today. I'll put some facts on the record, Madam Speaker.

We know—

**An Honourable Member:** The mic.

**Mr. Wharton:** —that the former government had—my mic is on. The former government has had 17 years, Madam Speaker, to deal with the IT issue at MPI. What did the members opposite do for 17 years? Nothing.

We are taking the initiative to ensure that we bring MPI into the 21st century. Not like the days of the dark days of the NDP.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** To bring the minister up to speed on this issue, here's what's going on at MPI: an \$82-million project has ballooned to nearly \$300 million because of PC mismanagement. They're taking money that should've gone to Manitoba drivers, and Manitobans are already paying higher rates because of this PC chaos.

Instead of taking accountability, the government is now trying to buy time with a nine-month review, a review that just so happens to be complete after election day. It's clear the PCs desperately want to buy time and to shift blame.

Will the Premier stop ducking and just tell her—tell us her plan to raise Autopac rates again this year?

\* (14:20)

**Mr. Wharton:** Our government will definitely not put ratepayers at risk like the NDP did, Madam Speaker.

With Manitoba Hydro, Madam Speaker, I will remind the members what they did: \$4 billion overbudget. That is absolutely shameful. Went around the PUB that now they claim to be champions on. We know that going back to the dark days of M-B-NDP government—can't even say it, don't want to say it—we don't want to go there. Manitobans don't want to go there. We will not go there.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** Madam Speaker, Manitobans want answers on Project Nova, and they're just not getting them from this PC government.

Instead, once again, they're using a multi-million-dollar consultant to hide. But here's the thing. It's the PCs' hand-picked board that manages the Crown and reports directly to the minister. And according to his CEO, who speaks to the minister biweekly, the PC board

is, quote, extremely supportive of what's going on at MPI.

The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) can't claim to be in the dark on this one. Her minister has been in lockstep with the CEO and the board this entire time, so someone's obviously not telling the truth, Madam Speaker. It's time to come clean.

Will the Premier raise Autopac rates on Manitobans this year again?

**Mr. Wharton:** I certainly welcome a question on truth because I know there's none on the other side of the House, Madam Speaker.

Let's talk about a little bit of truth. We know that the NDP cannot be trusted with Crown corporations. They have a history of not being trusted. *[interjection]*

And as the member—as the Leader of the Opposition barks out at me, let me remind him what he did with FleetNet. They actually went on Amazon—eBay to try to look for parts for the—for their 911 service. They were found standing in Walmart talking to the greeter, saying, I want rollbacks so I can buy to support FleetNet in Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

That's just wrong. We'll get it right. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

### **Senior in Long-Term Care Constituent Case Concern**

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** Madam Speaker, Christina Bowman is a 91-year-old great-grandmother who was living happily in her own house in Selkirk until she had a fall on March 10th. Since then, she's been transported away from her home community to Eriksdale.

And her family is, quite frankly, devastated. They want to be by her side, but it's a two-hour drive for all of her kids, and they've got to take time off work to visit her. And with the recent bad weather, unfortunately, that's just not possible for much of her family. Her daughter Barb says, and I quote, we can't keep doing this.

Will this Premier admit that her continued support of Brian Pallister's cuts to health care means Manitobans like Christina Bowman—sorry, Christina Brown *[phonetic]* rather, are being separated from their families?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** My sincere sympathies to Christina Brown *[phonetic]* on her fall and her injury. In the later years, I know that

falls can lead to a lot of trauma in the body, so my sympathies.

Now, these decisions are being made by health system leaders, Madam Speaker. They're not being made by politicians here at the Legislative Building. They're being made to ensure that individuals are receiving care in the right place at the right time and the level of care that they need, and to create, as well, opportunities for those who are waiting for care to get that care.

We will continue to work on ensuring, like we did, that individuals are reimbursed for their expenses—

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

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, that's no comfort for Christina or her family.

Christina was happy in her own home, but now far away from her family, her mental health is declining and doctors say that she's starting to show signs of depression.

Barb says her mother asks her every single time she visits her, can I come home now? But the doctors say that she'll need to be there for many months. We know this Premier thinks that there were some improvements with Brian Pallister's health-care cuts. That's a pretty tepid endorsement of her own record.

What has improved about health-care delivery for Christina and her family?

**Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care):** I would indicate that this government is certainly working diligently to satisfy the needs of seniors who wish to stay in their homes for as long as possible.

And, Madam Speaker, this government announced a \$12.6-million investment in self- and family-managed care which goes to assist those individuals who wish to stay at home and be cared for, for as long as possible, at home.

So this government is working diligently to satisfy that need, Madam Speaker.

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Madam Speaker, that minister is talking about announcements this government has made, and it seems to think that this PC government

believes that their work stops once they've held a press conference.

Christina Bowman's family has asked the MLA for Selkirk to do something. His office forwarded it to the minister and her office said they'd respond in maybe 10 business days. Yet another long wait, as her mother's health declines.

Her daughter Barb says that her mother has lived in Selkirk almost her entire life—almost 91 years, Madam Speaker.

Why can't Christina Bowman get the health care that she needs alongside her family support right in her own community?

**Mr. Johnston:** This government, as I mentioned, is working diligently to fulfill the needs of seniors. The budget of my department increased by 72 per cent, Madam Speaker, to ensure that we're able to fulfill the needs.

We've announced the seniors strategy which has had a number of initiatives come forward to assist seniors and ensure that they're able to get things like hearing aid supports and other initiatives such as that.

This government is supporting seniors; that side of the House never did.

#### **Manitoba's Public Service Staffing and Bargaining Contract**

**Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples):** Years of cuts under Pallister-Stefanson government have significantly damaged the capacity of the hard-working people in our public service to meet the growing demand of our population.

Vital Stats is just one area where we have highlighted where the PC government fails families with the long waiting for basic and necessary documentation, celebrating the birth of child or marriage. Our FIPPA request shows that.

When will this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) stop the cuts and stop the vacancy management that is starving our public service?

**Hon. James Teitsma (Minister responsible for the Manitoba public service):** Appreciate that the member did voice appreciation for the diligent work of people in our civil service. I can join him in that acknowledgement.

I do very much appreciate the work that's being done at Vital Statistics. It continues to receive my attention and we continue to make improvements to

the way that services are delivered there and to the staffing levels there.

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

**Mr. Sandhu:** Madam Speaker, the Pallister-Stefanson government has cut the number of public servants in the government by 11.3 per cent.

That means fewer staff to help the public by processing applications in Vital Stats. That means fewer conservation officers protecting our environment and wildlife. That means more privatization work to external consultants because they don't have internal capacity to get the job done.

When will this minister stop the disrespect toward those public servants who serve the people of our province?

**Mr. Teitsma:** We on this side of the House have nothing but respect for the civil service and the amazing work that they do.

I just want to highlight one of the things that the folks at Vital Statistics recently accomplished, and that was putting forward Call to Action No. 71 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

That work had remained undone for several years, but now that has been accomplished. Manitoba is one of the first provinces to do so, to ensure that residential school survivors and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have access—unfettered access—to the records that are available in Vital Statistics to be able to do the research.

\* (14:30)

I'm proud of that work and I think it's very important. I hope the member agrees.

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

**Mr. Sandhu:** Madam Speaker, the government has attacked public sector workers since the moment they were elected seven years ago. This last public service froze wages, forced union members to fight each other and blame bargaining of their contract. Many are still waiting.

Health support staff are still waiting for their retro pay being negotiated and that this government promised. Allied health still don't have a contract yet. That's over five years, Madam Speaker.

When will this PC government stop the attack on our public servants?

**Mr. Teitsma:** Madam Speaker, when we talk about respecting civil servants, we talk about respecting most of the people who work in this building. And I know for years, under the NDP, women especially in this building were not treated well.

As a former member for Dauphin, Stan Struthers was sexually harassing staffers. Nothing was done—nothing was done.

Madam Speaker, the members opposite were aware. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Teitsma:** Some of them were on staff or elected at that time. They did nothing. They said nothing. They offered no support for—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

### **The Link Youth and Family Supports Centre Scope of Deloitte Inquiry**

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** We asked written questions about the inquiry into The Link, formerly Macdonald Youth Services, and we're concerned about the answers.

The minister said that they first learned of problems about The Link in December 2022. We learned in January, had to ask twice before an investigation was launched and was promised for March, and it's now April with no report.

But the investigation by Deloitte will not investigate individual claims of employee harm, which means it's been crafted to ignore all the most serious allegations, including preferential hiring, dangerously short-staffed programs and mistreatment of Indigenous staff and youth.

How is the Deloitte investigation supposed to provide viable recommendations when it ignores all the most serious allegations?

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families):** And we, on this side of the House, are committed to high standards of care and service for Manitoba's children and youth, and certainly the services that are provided by The Link are something that our government is very committed to and ensuring that those are the best quality services available for the children and the youth who depend on those services on a regular basis.

When these allegations were brought to our attention, we did hire a third party evaluator to conduct an evaluation, and that work is—there was an interim

report that has been provided. I would respectfully ask the time to review that interim report and that work is ongoing at The Link.

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

### **Request for Auditor General Audit**

**Mr. Lamont:** The Link also serves Community Living disABILITY Services, and foster parents have told us the changes to respite pay have been a nightmare.

Each child gets at least \$9,300 in respite a year, but The Link portions it out monthly on a use-it-or-lose-it basis, which means that foster children with disabilities who can't get respite because of a worker shortage can't carry the respite forward, so they may be missing out on \$10,000 or more a year. And The Link won't tell them how much they've got left, and the money is being denied to children with disabilities.

Emails and warnings to management are ignored, and a foster parent contacted has said, when we question policy changes they threaten to take children from us.

Will the minister ask the Auditor General to perform an audit of The Link today?

**Ms. Squires:** Of course, our government takes allegations very seriously. That is why we've hired a third-party evaluator. That is why we're doing an evaluation and that is why we are going to continue to ask these questions to ensure that the best quality service is available.

The member opposite mentioned respite, and we agree, on this side of the House, that it is a vital service for families to be able to access. And, in last year's budget, we put forward significant dollars so that we could have new respite homes opened up in the city of Winnipeg and Brandon for families with children with disabilities.

And, Madam Speaker, it is really unfortunate that that member voted against respite for children in this province of Manitoba. He has no credibility on this issue.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for River Heights, on a final supplementary.

### **Visitation Units for Personal-Care Homes Donation to Organizations Addressing Homelessness**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, in June of 2020, the government announced it would build 19 visitation units for family members to visit

their loved ones in personal-care homes during the pandemic. These visitation units were made from shipping containers. Many of the final 105 pods, at a cost of \$24 million, were only sparingly used, so the program was less successful than hoped.

Recently, the government has announced it's getting rid of these units. With far too many people in Manitoba who are experiencing homelessness, will the minister considering donating the units to organizations which help those experiencing homelessness, and what would be the conditions put on the organization accepting them?

**Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services):** I know that the member doesn't seem to think these shelters performed their purpose, but I can assure you, from speaking with individuals that had the opportunity to visit in these shelters, they were very, very grateful for them.

Now, the member suggests that the government should consider donating and repurposing some of these shelters for homeless—to house homeless individuals, and I wholeheartedly agree. Our priority, as expressed in the expression of interest, was not to sell them, but to donate them, and to donate them to organizations that are going to use them for a good community purpose.

And, certainly, I can imagine that housing homeless individuals would be a good community purpose and I hope that the respondents to the expression of interest that have been put in includes those kinds of responses.

Thank you.

### **Provincial Park Reservation System Implementation Update**

**Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River):** Manitobans love our provincial parks because we have some of the greatest in the country. The minister responsible for provincial parks had previously discussed changes to the park's reservation system.

We understand the NDP refused to update this system for the many, many dark years that they were in government.

So, can the minister elaborate on how the new system has enhanced user experience for Manitobans seeking to enjoy our beautiful natural spaces?

**Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development):** I'd like to thank my friend from Swan River for that great question.

I'm pleased to report that the new provincial park reservation system has been a tremendous success, enhancing park accessibility and user experience for all Manitobans. Since its implementation, we have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from park users who have found the system to be user-friendly, efficient and reliable.

Our government recognized the need for an improved reservation system and took the necessary steps to ensure the process was smooth and enjoyable for everyone. The success of the new park system not only demonstrates our commitment to investing in our parks, but also highlights our dedication to providing residents with easy access to the natural beauty of our province.

Furthermore, we have implemented—

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

Due to some time lost during question period with extended applause, et cetera, I'm going to allow one question from the next opposition member.

### **Municipal Planning Legislation Request to Repeal Bill 37**

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** Municipalities know this PC government does not like to work collaboratively. We saw this when they passed Bill 37, which was bad legislation that took away community autonomy and created red tape.

Bill 37 is costing municipalities millions of dollars in staff time, and it's clear the PCs were not listening to municipalities then, and they aren't listening now.

Municipalities are still hoping this government will do the right thing and repeal Bill 37. Will the minister do so today? *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Andrew Smith (Minister of Municipal Relations):** It's always a welcome opportunity to speak about the great things our government's doing for municipalities here in Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

We're the government that created predictable funding models for the municipalities. Predictable funding, Madam Speaker: \$47-million increase in operating; that does not include a 23-and-a-half-million-dollar cost—or, 23-and-a-half-million-dollar infrastructure spending from



our province to the municipalities. That's an increase, not a decrease.

When the members opposite were in government, what did they do? They forced amalgamations. And when they—opposition to it, they called them howling coyotes.

On this side of the House, Madam Speaker, we work with municipalities.

We just had a great debate with our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson)—

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

The time for oral questions has expired.

## PETITIONS

### Health-Care Coverage

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

\* (14:40)

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) Private health insurance is not a substitute for public health insurance. Private insurance plans available to most migrant workers and international students are paid for by the worker or student. They do not provide coverage for all of the potential health needs covered by public health coverage. Individuals are required to pay up front for health expenses without a guarantee that they will be covered and wait weeks for reimbursement.

(3) 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.

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

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

(6) 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.

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

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to immediately provide comprehensive and free public-health-care coverage to all residents of Manitoba, regardless of immigration status, including refugee claimants, migrant workers, international students, dependant 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 public 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 they can access public health care without jeopardizing their ability to remain in Canada.

Madam Speaker, this petition is signed by Evan Krosney, David Gould, Carson Fijal 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.

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

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

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.

Number—oh. 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.

Madam Speaker, this petition has been signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Ekosi.

### Right to Repair

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Manitoba consumers believe that products should last longer, be repaired when broken, and that planned obsolescence has environmental consequences and threatens 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. Number three.

(4) Right to repair enables consumers access to the resources 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, replacement parts, 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, the right to repair ensures manufacturers replace electronic products at no cost or refund the amount paid by the consumer to purchase the electronic product, where they refuse or are unable to provide manuals or replacement parts.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

### Lead Water Pipes

**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:

Many renters and tenants living in Winnipeg are unaware of the potentially high levels of lead in their drinking water due to lead water pipes.

Drinking water with lead levels higher than 5 micrograms per litre is above Canada's national standard for drinking water quality, and may be damaging to health, especially for children and expectant mothers.

According to medical research, renters and tenants unaware of the potentially high lead levels in their drinking water because of old, lead pipes are at risk of experiencing greater levels of mental illness.

High levels of lead in drinking water due to lead pipes disproportionately affects Indigenous and lower income communities. A 2019 Intrinsic study used data on lead exposure to predict that many children living in Point Douglas will have high and worrisome lead levels in their blood.

Lack of knowledge of lead levels in water may result in the continuation of ongoing lead-poisoning-related health issues for thousands of renters and tenants living in Winnipeg and elsewhere in Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately act by requiring landlords to inform renters and tenants if their rental units have lead water pipes.

To urge the provincial government to provide an adequate number of water filters on an annual basis for tenants where there are rental units with lead pipes.

To urge the provincial government to immediately act by requiring the City of Winnipeg to replace all lead water pipes in Winnipeg by 2027, as the City of Regina is now doing.

Signed by Ben Kramer, Hilary Druxman, James Favel and many, many other Manitobans.

**Madam Speaker:** Grievances?

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

*(Continued)*

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

\* (14:50)

**Hon. Derek Johnson (Acting Government House Leader):** There we go. My neighbour's mic come on here, mine's on now.

Can we please resolve to Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

**(Concurrent Sections)**

### ROOM 254

### HEALTH

\* (15:00)

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

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** I'd like to provide the minister an opportunity. Yesterday she mentioned—well, she took under advisement, rather, I believe six different matters of—under advisement. And I'm just wanting to clarify if the minister has those documents available, as she stated they would be today.

I don't know that it was all six that would be available today, but I do believe there are several she stated would be provided today, so I wanted to start with the opportunity for the minister to provide that, if available.

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health):** I appreciate the opportunity for us to start with the items that were taken under advisement yesterday. Unfortunately, we haven't received the official record of yesterday's discussion or the items that were taken under advisement; we haven't received that from Leg. Assembly. So, I have quite a bit of materials in front of me but I'm unable to validate it against the specific questions that were asked of the member—that the member asked yesterday.

So, my apologies for the delay, and I would like to have an opportunity to validate all the data and information I have before me against the official record and items of advisement that will come forward from Leg. Assembly, hopefully today. I request that opportunity.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** I can understand and appreciate that, and I certainly appreciate that the minister has the information but wants to make sure that she's providing the correct, I guess, responses, to what the questions were.

So, I would just like to clarify, then, if the minister and her staff were able to get confirmation from—get confirmation of what those questions are and were, rather. Is the minister able to commit to providing that, those answers, those responses, via the undertakings the next time we're in committee?

**Ms. Gordon:** I commit to making available to the member the answers to all the items that were taken under advisement the moment we receive confirmation of what those items are from Leg. Assembly.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister and her staff for agreeing to do so. That's very, very helpful and it

allows me to proceed with confidence, knowing that we'll get that information soon as it's available, so thank you.

The minister has previously mentioned that her government has developed a health human resources plan. We've heard these announcements many times.

The minister has outlined what their plan is several times, be it in the Chamber, even in committee but previously, certainly in the media, et cetera.

\* (15:10)

And I think it's interesting, because the approach, when the minister talks about the health human resources plan, seems to be that the government is trying to convey that somehow this plan will make up for years of cuts to health care, will make up for freezing the wages of health-care workers, firing nurses, delays in bargaining and cuts to training seats, for example, for nursing students.

And so, I'm going to ask some questions around this health human resource plan that's been announced many times, specifically around the \$200 million that was announced last fiscal year.

So I'm wondering if the minister can verify how much, if any, of those funds of the \$200 million attached to the health human resource plan was spent in 2022-2023, or is the \$200 million only going to be available of April 1st of 2023?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the member for the question, because the health human resource action plan is a priority for our government in terms of retaining, training and recruiting health professionals into the health system here in our province.

I'm pleased to share that the \$200 million was available in fiscal year '22-23. And committed to date, in terms of use of those funds, is \$132.6 million.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response.

Can the minister verify if that \$200 million is an annualized amount or will it be clawed back as a one-time pre-election spending budget consideration?

I know the minister just said that \$132.6 million was allocated in the 2022-2023 fiscal year. So, if she could clarify if that \$200 million is an annualized amount or will it be clawed back as a one-time pre-election spending budgetary line?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the member for the question. So, the incentives for health professionals would be over

a two-year span, and the items that would be annualized—or the funds that would be annualized—are the funds that are going towards continuing system changes.

So, for example, our government has increased the number of seats in family medicine, international medical graduates, physician assistants in a number of areas. We have created the new emergency-care service called VECTRS. Well, that wouldn't—that would be a continuing program, so those costs would be annualized and the one-time cost for the incentives over two years would not be.

**MLA Asagwara:** Can the minister provide some clarity as to why the costs around incentives are only times two years?

Given that we know the nursing shortage and shortage of health-care human resource is so dire, and we also know that in order for many of these folks to be successfully trained and integrated into our health-care system takes well over two years, I'm curious if there's a specific reason why incentives are only allocated for two years, or does the minister have a strategy beyond that that is maybe above and beyond what is allocated right now?

I'm just wondering if the minister thinks that two years for these incentives is long enough in order to ensure that we're going to have the capacity, the ability to successfully retain and recruit folks into our health-care system.

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the member for the supplementary question. So, the incentives that are currently in place, for example, for nurses, the nine nurse incentives that are—we've committed \$123 million towards, those were negotiated with the Manitoba Nurses Union under a collective agreement that has a life span of the same duration as their current collective agreement.

\* (15:20)

So, that collective agreement will be in place for two additional years. So, the incentives that were agreed to and the MOU that was signed with Manitoba Nurses Union is for the life of the collective agreement.

Now, that doesn't mean that they will go away because the needs are projected to continue to be there, and so those incentives would be part of the collective agreement bargaining and negotiations when the collective agreement expires. This is the understanding of all the parties that signed the MOU, including the Manitoba Nurses Union.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response.

Can the minister provide some clarity around, out of the—I suppose generally speaking it would be the \$200 million, but my understanding, based on the minister's response, is that it's for the year 2022-23, it's actually \$132.6 million that's been allocated to different initiatives.

Can the minister clarify, out of that \$132.6 million for 2022-23, how much of those funds were allocated to doctors, how much to nurses, how much for allied health-care professionals and how much for sector support?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the member for the opportunity to elaborate on the health human resource action plan and our government's commitment to adding 2,000 new health professionals. It is one of our priority areas and I'm very pleased with the work thus far, and the discussions we've been able to have with the various stakeholder groups.

The body that supports doctors, nurses, allied health—there's a lot of negotiation still occurring around the table on a number of different incentives. Those dollars will be finalized once MOUs are fully signed. And all the parties in these negotiations have asked for the talks on the discussions to remain confidential around the table, to respect their membership and the need to negotiate in good faith, and we are going to honour that.

But I do want to say that we are very committed to a comprehensive plan that has three pillars: retain, train and recruit. And under—for example, just to give the member a flavour or a sense of some of what is being discussed at these negotiations is, under the retain pillar, you know, we've talked with the nurses about—the Manitoba Nurses Union about a weekend premium, an additional hourly premium for weekend hours worked.

The wellness incentive, additional supports for mental health counselling. These were some of the feedback I received when I met one-on-one with front-line nurses. They said, Minister, we need additional counselling and psychological, emotional support, and we answered the call.

Reimbursing licensing fees. Activating a joint nursing council; I look forward to making the names of those individuals available very soon.

A provincial float pool. So, creation of a provincial float pool, which was agreed to under the 2021

Manitoba Nurses Union collective agreement; moving forward on that.

Institutional safety officers. We're working with my colleague in Manitoba Justice to ensure that the safety and health of individuals coming into our health facilities, as well as those who work in health facilities, are safe and can provide the care that is needed in an environment of health and safety.

Practice stabilization supports for physicians. VECTRS, we have already stood up and have announced. The primary-care hours, the incentives to expand hours so patients can access primary care in off hours, evenings and weekends. Community health clinic incentives.

Physician collaboration tool expansion to improve patient care by allowing better rapid consultation with specialists and streamlining consultations.

Psychotherapy virtual care. So, we were asked to expand virtual care to group psychotherapy visits.

Reducing physician administration. So, establishing a joint task force to reduce administrative burden for physicians, and we have announced that.

A remote-location incentive. Mental health supports. Emergency department incentives. So, we're looking at those under the train pillar.

The undergraduate nurse employee program expansion. The rave reviews that we have heard about our government's decision to make it possible for third- and fourth-year nurses to enter the health-care system. And I heard it first-hand from Darlene Jackson and the Manitoba Nurses Union when I met with them to talk about the needs of front-line nurses. She herself talked about the success of the UNE program.

So, we are looking at extending that program for nurses who want to return from retirement, internationally educated nurses. We're going to look at psychiatry, psychology and—positions. We—under the recruit pillar, the nurse referral program was something I heard right at the front line; the nurses said, Minister, can you establish and incentivize us to refer people to nursing in the health system, and we made that happen.

Tuition rebates are under discussion and a whole—

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

**MLA Asagwara:** So, the minister did provide the number that has been allocated—that was allocated

from the \$200 million in 2022 and '23. She said it was \$132.6 million.

My question was pretty straightforward, and I'm not even asking for a breakdown or—you know, I think the minister knows how much I love charts—organizational charts. I'm not asking for an organizational chart of where those dollars are allocated in great detail, but I am asking for the minister to provide clarity around how much of those funds were allocated for doctors, how much for nurses, how much for allied health and how much for the support sector.

And so, if the minister, at a high level, is able to provide a breakdown of where those funds are being allocated, that would be very, very useful information. Her response, although it was lengthy, didn't address anything that I asked whatsoever.

\* (15:30)

And, again, this is pretty important information. It speaks to what this government's priorities are and where those resources have been allocated. And, beyond that, you know, we can dig into whether or not those funds have been spent or projects are currently off the ground.

So, if the minister is able to provide some clarity in terms of how much of those funds have been allocated to those areas, that would be great.

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm pleased to respond that of the \$132.6 million, 93 per cent of those funds have been allocated to the nurses under the nursing incentives.

We continue—we are still at the table negotiating with the physicians and allied health and no final amounts are available, but I can say that for nurses, because their MOU's already signed, it's 93 per cent of the 132.6.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**MLA Asagwara:** Can the minister provide a bit more detail about the nursing initiatives?

So, I know that the minister said 90—she just said 93, I believe, 93 per cent of the 132—that's the \$123 million figure that we're looking at—has been 'allogated'—allocated, rather—to nurses specific to retention initiatives.

Can the minister provide a breakdown of how much of the incentives or, rather, how much of those funds are paying for which specific initiatives?

So, the minister has already talked about some of the specific incentives out of the nine that have been

identified, so can the minister provide a clear breakdown of how much of the incentives—how much funding, rather—is allocated to each of the articulated incentives?

Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the member for the question and I would like to take the response—or the question under advisement, please, and return with a response.

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank the minister for taking that under advisement.

Can the minister clarify if she'll be able to provide that information in today's committee or at a later date?

**Ms. Gordon:** We will provide it at another sitting of this Estimates section.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** Can the minister clarify—and thank you for clarity around when that will be provided, to the minister.

Out of all the \$123 million allocated for these incentives, can the minister clarify if there are still funds currently in reserve, or have all of those funds for the 'intentes' been spent or already determined, sort of, where they're going out to?

\* (15:40)

I'm just curious to know whether or not, you know, there are many of those funds. I know that I can't get clarity around where they are, necessarily, allocated specifically, but just wanting to know if there are funds there that are still sitting in reserve.

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm seeking clarification of the member's question. So, the member has said, are there funds in reserve? Can I get some clarification of what that—funds in reserve—means? And is this question specific to nurses? So, if the member could clarify those two items, please.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** That's a good question. So, this is specific to nurses, and when I say funds in reserve, what I mean by that is we know that some of those funds would have already been spent. We know that those incentives have been rolled out.

And, again, I know the minister can't tell me as of yet how much of the \$123 million has been allocated to which incentive, which area of incentive. But I'm wondering if the minister can tell us, I guess, overall—

so, globally, in terms of this money—how much of that money has been spent, has gone out.

Are there funds that are still remaining because they haven't been, you know, rolled out for specific incentives yet?

**Ms. Gordon:** So, under the—for the nurses—\$123 million was committed to the Manitoba Nurses Union for nurse incentives in the MOU that was signed last year. And the funds are to be available over three fiscal years.

The funds are budgeted over the '22-23, '23-24 and '24-25 fiscal years. In year 1, '22-23, it's \$28.6 million. In year 2, it's twenty—in year 2, which is the fiscal year '23-'24, it's \$62.9 million. And in the third and final year, it's \$31.9 million.

So, again, that was all agreed in the MOU endorsed and signed by the Manitoba Nurses Union.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

**MLA Asagwara:** On Tuesday, during Estimates in the main Chamber, the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) said dollars were set aside last year for completing collective bargaining with a number of public sector employee groups which, presumably, would be allied health.

Can the minister confirm if that is what the Premier was referencing, that last year, dollars were set aside for completing collective bargaining with public sector employees, namely allied health?

So, I'm just looking for confirmation from the minister that, last year, that is in fact the case that funds were set aside for allied health-care professionals. And can the minister clarify which budget line those funds would be found in for this year's budget?

And I thank the minister for her previous answer to my question.

**Ms. Gordon:** So, those discussions were occurring in a different Estimates section and I would appreciate if the member could review the official record and confirm exactly the context for that discussion and exactly what it was that the Premier said.

And please re-ask the question having that information available, so that we can know for sure what was being discussed. It's hard for me to speculate on what was being discussed at that time.

So, I would appreciate a question being asked from the official record obtained from that Estimates

sitting so that we can provide an accurate response to the member's question.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

\* (15:50)

**MLA Asagwara:** So, I'll re-ask my question while I get that. I'm going to ask the question again because this is information that the minister and her department should have readily available in terms of the budget line.

Is there a budget line for funds set aside for allied health-care professionals' collective bargaining agreement? So my question is, was there, in last year's budget, money set aside that was meant to go toward allied health-care professionals under the conditions that collective bargaining agreement was achieved?

And my follow-up to that is, is there money set aside in the budget where we can see that there are funds set aside for allied health?

**Ms. Gordon:** So, with—in response to the question about funds being budgeted in our department for collective bargaining with any sector, that is not the case. Those collective agreements and any bargaining of new collective agreements or agreements that have expired that need to be renewed for any sector, those funds are budgeted centrally in the Ministry of Finance, Department of Finance, and so that would fall under the Estimates for that section, and the monies are not held in our department.

**MLA Asagwara:** So, just to clarify, the minister is saying that in last year's budget and in this budget, there has never been a budget line for allied health-care professionals. There's not been a budget line allocated for that demographic, with the understanding that currently in Manitoba, we have a very real health-care crisis happening, health-care human resource crisis happening. We depend on allied health-care professionals to, you know—they're integral to the delivery of health care across our province.

And so I just want to be clear that the minister is saying, in last year's budget and in this year's budget, there has not been a budget line of funds, dollars, set aside specifically for allied health-care professionals, with the hope being that they would have achieved the collective bargaining agreements and that those dollars are ready to go, there for those folks, for initiatives.

**Ms. Gordon:** Happy to clarify and put my response on the record.

I am not saying that, no. What I am saying is that if those funds would be budgeted centrally under the Ministry and Department of Finance, and those totals and those numbers can be obtained from that Estimates sitting—the Department of Finance or the Ministry of Health. So I would direct the member to that department's Estimates for a complete response.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for her response. I'm going to move on now to doctors and then the support sector.

Can the minister explain why her government hasn't restored the funding cuts that they made to the physician recruitment and retention fund?

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm pleased to respond. Manitoba is proceeding with changes to the way physicians are recruited based on Manitoba's success stories, and one of them is the successes we've had with our Swan River experience that are not based on five-to-eight-year-old return-of-service commitments.

And we've also received a request from the health system at the University of Manitoba to re-profile these funds as recruitment grants rather than grants payable during residency.

So, as you know, we're also in negotiations and discussions with the physicians for renewal of their collective agreement. It's 450 pages, hundreds of proposals, new initiatives, such as initiatives to address our physician shortage and how to go about doing that.

You know, one of the areas that came to light immediately was—and this came out of the rural health summit that was held in Portage, and I was pleased to be there to listen and to walk around to each table and hear some of the ideas that were coming forward from the physicians. And one of those ideas was to increase the seats as a way of recruiting and bringing in more physicians, and we acted on that immediately.

And one of the areas that the physician who presented the findings from the day's discussion was international medical graduates, and we moved to increase the IMG seats as well as a number of other seats. We also have the physicians saying we need to reduce administrative burdens, so we moved forward with the joint task force. So we are listening rather than having this top-down approach to—this is the way it's got to be, and you know, telling the system what we think is right.

We are listening to what the system says is right and we are flexing and making changes as we hear from the system. So, again, we've heard from the health system, University of Manitoba; they want the funds re-profiled. We're looking at proceeding with changes to the way physicians are recruited. Lots of discussions—just a recent discussion yesterday with U of M and the dean there. And we're going to continue at the negotiation table to hear from the union representing physicians. We're going to continue to work with Doctors Manitoba, the task force that has been set up to ensure that what we are funding is in line with our needs. We can no longer use antiquated approaches to address current-day problems.

And so our government is flexible in terms of funding, flexible in terms of initiatives, enough to listen to what the system needs are, and to ensure we are funding the right initiatives based on what we are hearing the needs are and where the monies need to be placed.

**MLA Asagwara:** So, I certainly appreciate what the minister just said that old approaches aren't necessarily the best approaches, in order to address new needs and growing needs.

My concern with the minister's statement is that there doesn't seem to be or appear to be some sort of new approach that she and her government is taking that's actually addressing the growing physician shortage we have in Manitoba.

We need well over 400 physicians in Manitoba, and that shortage is growing. In very short order, we're going to lose about a third of our physician demographic here in Manitoba. We're actively losing doctors to other jurisdictions who are providing better work-life balance, better compensation packages, more stable residencies. We saw during the pandemic that there were challenges in internal medicine here with—for residents. And that has very real impacts. There are programs that were under review under this government.

And so I have a lot of concern with the minister's articulation of what this government's approach is when, in fact, the evidence in front of us in terms of what is happening in Manitoba shows us that this government's approach isn't helping the physician shortage; it's actually making it worse.

And, you know, when I look at this cut to the physician recruitment and retention fund, which is nearly over 20 per cent—I think it's nearly 20 per cent,



rather, this fund has been cut by the Conservative government since 2017. Year over year, when you add that cut up, we're looking at about \$30 million not invested directly in retaining and recruiting physicians in Manitoba.

That is incredibly concerning, again, given not only the shortage that we have, but the very real shortage that we're facing in very short order with a number of physicians who are going to retire. And we know that many physicians are saying they're going to retire due to burnout, not adequate work-life balance, et cetera.

And so I want to press the—this subject a bit more with the minister because, again, her stated approach doesn't line up, actually, with what our province needs in terms of addressing the physician shortage.

\* (16:10)

So, does the minister think it's okay that her government cut the physician retention recruitment fund year over year since 2017 to the tune of nearly a 20 per cent cut, around \$30 million not invested directly in retaining and recruiting physicians?

*Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Ms. Gordon:** What I do want to say is that just as time doesn't stand still and is not static, the needs of the various health sectors also changes, and we, as a government, are open to listening and to acting on the needs of the various sectors.

So, as I shared earlier, I was out in Portage la Prairie for the rural health summit on physician shortage and a very comprehensive report was submitted to me. Five physicians that were in the room for an entire day—rural physicians from the various regional health authorities, the various SDOs, community health, acute care—they—we've always said, as a government, that the best ideas come from the front line. And they submitted a report of what physicians feel are the approaches to addressing the physician shortages.

They said: Increase the physician training seats; we need 40 additional undergraduate physician seats, 10 international medical graduate seats, 30 two-year, post-grad medical seats for internationally educated students.

The physicians said: Extend primary care patient hours for family and pediatric clinics; offer a financial incentive for doctors' offices to extend hours so patients can access primary care more regularly.

The physicians said: Offer physician mental health supports through the peer support program.

The physicians said: We need a new emergency-care service called VECTRS to virtually support patient transfers.

And we continue to partner with Doctors Manitoba to reduce physician administration by establishing a joint task force to reduce administrative burden for physicians and reduce red tape. This is what the physicians told us. This was needed in order to address the physician shortages.

And they're at the table having more discussions through their negotiation of their collective agreement on other initiatives, other steps that can be taken.

But I do want to share with the member that the day that I posted on social media the announcement of the members of the joint task force to reduce administrative burdens on physicians, Doctors Manitoba re-tweeted and liked the post, and I'd like to share what they said: It's going to take a broad set of actions to reverse the doctor shortage in Manitoba, and we are pleased to see Manitoba government and Audrey Gordon—MB move forward with this one: A task force to reduce the significant administrative burdens on physicians that rob them of time with patients.

We are listening to physicians. We are responding to their needs. That is what a government that leads with empathy, with listening and understanding does. We act on what we have heard. Doctors Manitoba agrees that we are acting, and we will continue to have respectful negotiations and discussions with them on how we can address the physician shortage here in our province.

And we know, we've said it many times, it's not unique just to Manitoba, but we care about our province and want to see things get better in our health system. So, we need to listen. That is what we're doing. We're working collaboratively. We are addressing the needs as they are presented to us by physicians.

Thank you, Mr. Acting Chairperson.

**The Acting Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Thank you. And just before we go onto the next—just a reminder to the minister and to everybody, even if you're quoting an article, even if you're talking about yourself, you must refer to the person's title or position instead of the name. So, appreciate that there.

And we'll call the member from Union Station.

**MLA Asagwara:** I just want to get clarity: Does the minister think, does the minister believe, that her and her government's decision to cut the physician retention and recruitment fund by nearly 20 per cent since 2017 is the right approach?

The minister, you know, has talked around providing a direct answer to that question, but I think it's a very, very important question deserving of a clear response from the person who is most responsible for health care in Manitoba.

Does the minister think that cutting the physician retention and recruitment fund to the tune of, you know, year over year, around \$30 million, is the right approach for health care in Manitoba?

I think it's a pretty yes-or-no question. I'm hoping the minister can provide some clarity on this right now.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

**Ms. Gordon:** You know, I have been in the system for a long time. And one of the things that I really pride myself on is—as Health Minister and as part of this government—is that we are listening. We are a listening government, I'm a listening minister.

And I feel that I have to ask the member this question: Is the member suggesting that, as a government and as a Health Minister, I should ignore the request that has been received from the health system and the University of Manitoba to re-profile these funds as recruitment grants rather than grants payable during residency?

Is the member suggesting that I should ignore the suggestions that have come forward in the rural health summit that was held in Portage la Prairie with physicians who came forward with recommendations of what needed to be done to address the physician shortage in our province? Is the member saying that I should ignore those, and our government should ignore them?

\* (16:20)

And is the member saying that, although Doctors Manitoba and the president of Doctors Manitoba stood with myself and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) on the day we announced the health human resource action plan, and included information about the recommendations that had come forward from physicians; and Doctors Manitoba stepped to the podium to support our move towards recognizing their recommendations of what needed to be done.

Is the member suggesting today that we—I should ignore those, as the Minister of Health, and our government should ignore all of the recommendations that have come forward from government—from the physicians—and focus on what the member is referring to today—just forget all of that, and just focus on what the member is referring to today? And if that is the case, I would like to know, what is the rationale for that, and what's the basis for wanting to ignore physicians as well as Doctors Manitoba?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**MLA Asagwara:** Well, after attempting several times to clarify the minister's position on her government's and her decision to cut millions of dollars from the physician retention recruitment fund, I'm going to have to ascertain that the minister thinks that was the right decision.

The minister is doing an interesting job making an attempt to avoid answering what is a very, very straightforward question, which is concerning. But I think that we can surmise that the minister is perfectly okay with her decision to cut the physician retention and recruitment fund, which is disappointing. Because those dollars could really be making a difference in ensuring that Manitobans have access to the doctors they need in their province.

I am going to move on to home care and health-care aides, the support sector. I've raised this a couple of times today and haven't gotten a ton of clarity in terms of dollars that are being allocated there under this government. But I'd like to specifically ask about uncertified health-care aides and get an understanding as to what the plans are—if any—that the minister has regarding uncertified health-care aides.

You know, this government, this minister, they've had seven years to address the shortage of staffing in home care and recognize that we've got to treat health-care aides with more care, consideration and respect. I know that many health-care aides unfortunately, under this government, had their wages frozen. Have really had a tough time in this aspect of our health-care system.

And so now we're seeing, you know, uncertified health-care aides being hired in these areas, and I'm wondering if this minister plans on paying for these folks to become certified health-care aides versus, you know, the training that's available for folks to be uncertified.

Does the minister have a plan to pay for or support uncertified health-care aides with accessing training

to become certified, and if so, what are the timelines for that?

**Ms. Gordon:** I will have to refer the member to the Estimates section for Seniors and Long-Term Care for that information. That is in their budget line, and so I will refer the member there.

But I do have a reply to an item that I previously said I was going to take under advisement, if the member would like me to provide that information. It was the question about the nurse incentives and what percentage of the \$123 million had been allocated to each incentive.

Would the member like that information now?

**MLA Asagwara:** Yes, please. Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** For the weekend super premium, 53.4 per cent; for the wellness bonus, 17.8 per cent; for the full-time incentive, 17.3 per cent; for the health professional licensing fees for '23 and '24, 3.8 per cent; for the refer-a-nurse, 4.9 per cent; for the returning nurse recruitment, 0.5 per cent; for the retired nurse recruitment, 1.7 per cent; for the remoteness location incentive, 0.1 per cent; and for the provincial float pool, 0.5 per cent.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

**MLA Asagwara:** So, when I asked about the uncertified health-care aides, I—in my remarks, I talked about—or, I think I actually asked whether or not the minister has a strategy around that. It was communicated that it was meant to be sort of a stopgap initiative, a short-term way to address the crisis in the health-care human resource that we were seeing in our health-care system.

And, you know, many Manitobans stepped up and rose to that occasion and took advantage of an opportunity to become part of our health-care system on the front lines. And we certainly thank those Manitobans for doing so. They made a tremendous difference during a time where many health-care workers and Manitoba families needed that additional support in health care.

That being said, it was never communicated to be a long-term strategy for addressing the shortages in our health-care human resource. And I've heard from many people across the health-care system who have questions about what the actual long-term strategy is regarding uncertified health-care aides.

I'm wondering if the minister can clarify if she has a plan—and I know she's referred me to the Seniors

department in terms of the budget line for this but, as the Minister for Health, I'm sure she has an understanding as to what the plan is, if any, regarding uncertified health-care aides in our health-care system. And I would imagine that she meets—I would hope she meets regularly with the minister for Seniors.

And so, can the minister provide any clarity as to whether or not there is, in fact, a strategy to address the use of uncertified health-care aides in our health-care system? They are being utilized in many different areas. And, if so, what is that plan?

\* (16:30)

**Ms. Gordon:** We certainly have a plan to support uncertified health-care aides to enhance their skills and become certified.

I recall in July of last year joining my colleague, the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care (Mr. Johnston) to announce our plan for—to help uncertified health-care aides working in the public system.

And we talked about offering tuition support to enhance their skills as part of an ongoing effort to expand staffing in personal-care homes and in other health-care facilities. We shared that, over the coming year, eligible uncertified health-care aides working throughout the province would be able to apply for tuition support, beginning with an initial intake of approximately 120 students. The courses would be offered part-time over 24 weeks through a mix of virtual and in-person learning.

Uncertified health-care aides were first hired, as you know, in 2020 following a one-week training course to support residents living in personal-care homes. But then, of course, we want to support them to become certified.

And so our government committed \$3.4 million towards the initiative, in addition to a \$16-million commitment that was announced to expand staffing and training in PCHs overall.

And so, just to take us back a couple of years, in fall 2020, a seven-day micro-credential course was developed with Red River College Polytechnic to provide basic training to individuals to work as uncertified health-care aides, and at that time, it was in order to assist PCHs with their staffing challenges. So, initially, it was focused on COVID supports. But then, once the Stevenson report was released, it was refocused to support the recommendations in the Stevenson report.

So, since November 2020, a total of 59 micro-credentialing cohorts have been held with additional cohorts planned. I know that in September of '22, an MOU was entered into with the department of economic development and jobs and Shared Health to train up to 850 uncertified health-care aides to become fully certified health-care aides. Again, eligible employees received tuition to complete their training.

I was recently informed that as of March 24th of 2023, 158 uncertified health-care aides have registered for the bridging program across the province. And we also recently made some changes to the criteria for the bridging program, to modify it. Previously, it was up to 1,200 hours, and what we heard from the individuals taking the course was that we needed to modify that.

So, also, in January of '23, we launched a focused recruitment health-care-aide initiative and introduced the training as well to uncertified health-care aides, with a goal of hiring 200 by the end of June. So, as of March for—30th, for that initiative, 35 certified health-care aides are now available; 22 uncertified health-care aides are being trained. And the current uncertified health-care aide class is full, and there's another one filled and waiting.

So, we are moving forward with our commitment from 2022 and can see that the results are bearing fruit. And there is a plan, there is money invested by our government and we are moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

**MLA Asagwara:** So, it sounds as though the minister's plan when it comes to uncertified health-care aides is for this to be a long-term health-care human resource strategy. And I'm hoping the minister can be very clear about if that is, in fact, the case. Because what she's stating sounds very much as though she's investing in uncertified health-care aides being a core component to the health-care human resource crisis that we're facing in Manitoba moving forward.

The minister seems to be outlining the use—the training and the use and the implementation of uncertified health-care aides as a long-term plan under her government in our health-care system. Can the minister confirm if that is, in fact, the case? And if it is the case, can the minister confirm where she sees uncertified health-care aides being utilized in our health-care system beyond where they're already being employed?

\* (16:40)

**Ms. Gordon:** Pleased to clarify the points that the member has put on the record. We've had hundreds of uncertified health-care aides who stepped up to help our health system due—during a unprecedented pandemic. Those individuals are in the system. They're working in the system. They're needed for our clinical preventative services plan. They're needed for the Stevenson recommendations.

We are focused on helping those individuals, who helped us, to become certified. That is why we have made the investment into their training; it is to help those individuals to transition to being fully certified as our other health-care aides are. We certainly wouldn't want to abandon individuals who have shown an interest in remaining in the health system and becoming certified, who helped us during a very, very difficult time.

So our goal is not to keep these individuals uncertified; it's to offer them the opportunity through investments and supports and the micro-credentialing courses and tuition payments and working with Red River polytechnic to get them fully certified. That is our goal. And to find them—ensure that they have placements in our health system.

Thank you.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for her response. I think it's pretty clear that, just based on what the minister is saying and based on what the minister's answer prior to that was, that she and her government do plan to continue to train uncertified health-care aides as a part of their health-care human resource strategy long-term.

I take her point that she said there are hundreds of folks who signed up and who became uncertified health-care aides who they're going to be supporting to get their full certification. But I also hear very plainly the minister stating that continuing to train—to recruit and train uncertified health-care aides is a part of the PC plan moving forward, as a long-term plan in our health-care system.

So, now that that's clear and on the record and folks can understand that, that that's the government's plan for our health-care system, I'm going to move on to the Grace Hospital.

This is a really important hospital in our health-care system here in Winnipeg, and certainly beyond Winnipeg, and the minister is very well aware of the challenges that hospital has been facing now for many months, several years, under this government; pre-dates the pandemic, reaching Manitoba's borders.

And very recently, we were all made aware of concerns brought forward by physicians who had been advocating for increased supports by way of staffing and other resources in order to provide care for patients in a timely and adequate manner.

Now, I think it's very concerning, as do many other folks, that these doctors were so afraid for patient safety in after-care hours that they—and they felt forced, like they had no other alternative but to go public, and go to the media, in order to ensure that the government would provide the funding that they need.

I continue to hear some pretty concerning reports from doctors at the Grace as to what's going on there and how concerns that they brought forward aren't being heard by this government.

And so, I am wondering, given everything that we know that we've heard from physicians and nurses and allied health-care professionals alike from Grace Hospital, does the minister have an update she can provide regarding the staffing shortages at the Grace?

And I would ask for clarity in various areas, so the staffing shortages around physicians, physician assistant positions, nurses, allied health-care professionals and support staff.

**Ms. Gordon:** I do want to start by placing on the record my sincere thanks and appreciation to all the staff and leadership and administration at Grace Hospital. They are our health-care heroes and they have been working during some very, very difficult times. And we know that the staffing shortages are felt across our system. And so I want to thank them sincerely for all their efforts to provide Manitobans with the health-care services that they need.

Over the last year, I am told that the WRHA has worked closely with Grace Hospital leadership to stabilize staff and support the operations of the hospital. This includes supporting Grace at times on-site with their patient flow initiatives and capacity management protocols.

In terms of nursing, Grace Hospital is actively recruiting nurses to fill vacancies at the site. The nursing staff is being supported with new incentives, mentorship programs and the undergraduate nurse employee program, which allows senior nursing students to gain valuable clinical experience in a paid role while completing their studies.

I am told—and this—and was able to hear from Mike Nader, who's the CEO of WRHA responsible for Grace, that one of the undergraduate nurse employees

was actually awarded for outstanding performance at the Grace Hospital, and I'm told that over 60 positions have been filled at the Grace with undergraduate nurse employees.

Leadership at the Grace also worked closely with emergency department staff to stabilize operations at the ED.

In terms of orthopedic surgery, hospital leadership has worked with the orthopedic medical leads to better match capacity and demand. A reduction in elective cases have—has avoided same-day cancellations of surgery while, at the same time, ensuring there is surgical capacity to respond to ortho trauma and acute surgeries. This initiative has been well received to date, and assessment is ongoing.

The WRHA has had a utilization resource on site to review lengths of stay and long-stay patients in the ortho surgical units to identify barriers and improve patient flow. The site is also renewing patient flow initiatives this quarter.

In terms of physician coverage, they have—the WRHA has been working with physicians and site leadership on solutions to ensure safe patient care.

Two weeks ago, the WRHA approved additional physician resources for the site, and Grace Hospital has been notified that they can hire additional physician assistants and a hospital medical officer for the overnight shift on the acute medicine ward.

I also want to share that 46 new physicians have been hired in and are practising in Manitoba since we announced the health human resource action plan. This includes 30 family physicians, a cardiac surgeon, a neurologist and a neurosurgeon, amongst many others. I'm proud to say that many of these new physicians are internationally trained doctors.

Our government has invested \$77.1 million into the Grace Hospital. This includes: capital upgrades, \$63.1 million; safety and security measures, \$4.9 million; and medical equipment and upgrades, \$9.1 million.

You know, again, just want to reiterate that I met with the ER nurses at Grace in December, and many of the incentives that have come forward under our health human resource action plan came from these conversations.

And I've already shared \$123 million was the total for the MOU that was signed by the Manitoba Nurses Union, and these ideas are coming directly from the shop floor at the Grace Hospital. We will

continue to support Grace Hospital. We will not belittle, demean or put—

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

Okay, the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard). [*interjection*] Oh, can you—sorry. The honourable member for Union Station.

\* (16:50)

**MLA Asagwara:** I'm going to cede the rest of my time to the member for River Heights.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Now, my—I've got three questions and, just in the interest of time, that I will ask together.

One is a follow-up from yesterday: the number of dialysis units in the province and what the total cost is.

Second, in the list of capital projects, I note that there's nothing there for the Health Sciences Centre, and I hear repeatedly that there's some need for some upgrades at the Health Sciences Centre.

And thirdly, in the capital investments, there's continued capital investment for the upgrading and development of information and communications technology, and I'm wondering about what is involved and how many dollars are involved in that upgrade.

**Ms. Gordon:** I will start by answering the question about the number of dialysis units. In '22-23, Winnipeg has a total of 11 units: the Health Sciences Centre has four; St. Boniface Hospital has two; Seven Oaks General Hospital has five. In rural Manitoba, there are 17 units, including Brandon.

The number of dialysis units in '23-24 is anticipated to be the following: rural Manitoba will have 18 units, with the addition of Bethesda Regional Health Centre. Norway House has a new facility; it's slated to open in January '24, but this is not an expansion or an additional unit—but I do want you to know that. Winnipeg will continue to have 11 units: four at Health Sciences Centre, two at St. Boniface Hospital and five at Seven Oaks General Hospital.

The member also asked about the operating capital costs. So, we will have to continue to take that under advisement because Shared Health has indicated that the various service delivery organizations, as well as some of our Indigenous stakeholders and Indigenous Services Canada, has that information, as they are the operators and are responsible for the budgets. So, we will need to reach out to them. So I will take that under advisement for—to come back to with that information.

With regard to Bethesda, because I did mention Bethesda would be coming on—is slated to open in January of '24, this is under the clinical preventative services plan. There will be construction of six new dialysis bays; so, at the Bethesda there will be six new dialysis bays constructed. The estimated construction completion date is August 2023, and occupancy is slated to be September 2023. So, that is coming onsite that will also change our dialysis units and numbers in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Let me ask the other two again.

The Health Sciences Centre, are there any capital renovations? And, (2) the dollar amount for the continued capital investment for the upgrading and development of information, communications technology.

**Ms. Gordon:** I will—would like to direct the member to page 74 of our Estimates document. And on that page it says, Manitoba Health, health facility investments; and it lists the facility, the service delivery organization and the activity. There he will find the listing of projects for Health Sciences Centre.

The first is adult emergency department, emergency psychiatry and addictions area. The second, for Health Sciences Centre, is the adult inpatient unit refresh. And the third is Health Sciences Centre surgical centre of excellence.

With regard to IT investments and other capital investments, on the same page the activities are listed, and the scope and location. These are mostly province-wide, but they will have benefits for Health Sciences Centre as well.

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

## ROOM 255

### EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

\* (15:00)

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

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona):** Just as wrapping up Estimates, Mr. Chair, I just want to thank the employees of the department. I know that they do their very best under trying circumstances and I appreciate your time here these past number of days. It is indeed a very important piece of what we do here in the province.

I want to commend you for your dedication to the kids, families and communities of our province. I don't say that lightly. I know how important it is and I know what you bring every day to this job.

We, on this side of the House—or, this side of the table—understand that fully and appreciate what you do.

I do want to say, too, that I would like to close Estimates, Mr. Chair, and move on to the resolutions.

**Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I'd like to thank the member for Transcona (Mr. Altomare), the Education and Early Childhood Learning critic, for his words.

And I, as well, have commended and have absolutely enjoyed and will continue to enjoy working quite closely with all of our leaders within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning, and I look forward to not only many more months of that, but many more years to come.

And I want to commend all of—the whole team for all their hard work on a day-to-day basis, for everything that you do for not only myself and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning, but as well for all of our education partners across this great province of ours. And your service to Manitobans definitely does not go unnoticed.

So, thank you, everybody, and thank you to the MLA for Transcona for his words. And we'll proceed to wrapping this up.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you very much. And, yes, we will move on to resolutions.

So, resolution 16.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$42,549,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Student Achievement and Inclusion, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,453,000 for Education and Early Childhood

Learning, System Performance and Accountability, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,759,967,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, support for schools, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024. *[interjection]*

Just a—that—it's for Support to Schools. Just a bit of a correction there.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$17,088,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$445,645,000 for Education—*[interjection]* Okay, I'll just repeat that again right from the beginning.

Resolution 16.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$445,645,000—*[interjection]*

What am I saying? Okay, I'm going to give you the number: —a sum not exceeding \$445,644,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Early Learning and Child Care, for fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Shall the resolution pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Pass.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The resolution is accordingly passed.

Resolution 16.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$105,329,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Costs Related to Capital Assets of Other Reporting Entities, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$260,385,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 16.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 16.1.

At this point, we request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item.

Okay. The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Altomare:** Mr. Chair, I seek your guidance.

Is this the appropriate time to move an amendment to 16.1(a)?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Altomare:** I move that line 16.1(a) be amended so that the minister of Education, Early Childhood Learning's salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Mr. Chair, can I provide rationale?

**Mr. Chairperson:** It has been moved by the honourable member for Transcona that line item 16.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning's (Mr. Ewasko) salary be reduced to \$21,000.

The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on this motion?

**Mr. Altomare:** I don't say this lightly. I didn't bring that resolution—or, sorry, the motion lightly.

The latest numbers that we've had access to in the FRAME show that, in 2016, that provincial contribution to public education was \$2,019,000,000. The latest numbers in FRAME in twenty-two, twenty show that it was \$2,040,000,000—\$21-million difference, Mr. Chair.

We do know that inflation—that a dollar in 2016, Mr. Chair, is now worth \$1.25. That would have resulted in a substantial increase that needed to be provided.

I believe—and I'm sure that everyone around this table believes—that a show of good faith by the minister would be to incur a decrease in order to show an appreciation for what school divisions have had to endure since 2016.

Like I said earlier, Mr. Chair, I don't bring this lightly. Because these are the facts. The numbers show what the numbers show. And it's my hope that through this respectful motion that we can have agreement around this table, around my amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Any further questions?

Seeing none, is the committee ready for the question?

Shall the motion pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I hear a no.

**Voice Vote**

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Aye.

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

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

**Mr. Altomare:** On division, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** On division.

The motion is defeated on division.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Chairperson:** All right then, we'll move on to the final resolution, 16.1.

Resolution 16.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,531,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning. The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Finance.

And shall we briefly recess to allow the ministers and critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next department? *[Agreed]*

The 'canibee'—the committee will now recess.

*The committee recessed at 3:09 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 3:10 p.m.*

**FINANCE**

\* (15:10)

**Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance.



Questions for this department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James):** It's good to be back with the minister and to have this opportunity to ask some questions related to Estimates.

I do want to, before we get into it, just welcome the new deputy into his role, Mr. Komlodi. Welcome here. Looking forward to the exchange today.

And I do also want to just take this opportunity to recognize today as the anniversary of the tragedy that happened with the Humboldt Broncos hockey team. I hadn't had a chance to get up earlier in the day, but I did want to take an opportunity right here to send out recognition to the community and just let them know that our hearts go out to them on this anniversary of that tragic event.

I would like to just dive right in here and continue on from our last conversation in the Chamber, here, with the minister. And I'm going to start out by asking a bit about advertising. And we know that it's mentioned in the supplement there on pages 24, 30 and 46.

And I would like to just start by asking the minister if he can outline what the budget for advertising for \$10-a-day child care is?

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance):** I thank the critic for his comments, especially in respect of Humboldt. And this being the five-year anniversary, I think that was an event that impacted Canadians coast to coast to coast. Just a tragic set of circumstances, for sure.

So, I think it's a good time for us to reflect on—we go into the Easter weekend, as well, time for all of us to reflect on the good things we have and yet acknowledge that that impacted so many families, and continues to impact so many families. So, thanks for acknowledging that today.

As our staff is seeking to provide the information that the member requested, I just want to make some introductions. We do have some new staff around the table today from the last time we met and, as you mentioned, we have a new deputy minister in Finance. We welcome Silvester Komlodi back to Finance and from his brief stint over in Health, as well. So, we look forward to Sil providing some sound advice over in Finance in his new role as deputy minister.

Today, with us we also have Christian Gratton from Finance; Jeff McCulloch, who is director of tax policy is with us; Rob Marrese, executive director of

Crown services secretariat is here, as well. And at the table, Andrea Saj, Provincial Comptroller and Matthew Wiebe, ADM for analysis and strategic management.

So, a few new faces to the department, and we're—also had a retirement at the ADM level and so—and a move at ADM level to another department, as well. So, we're in the process of filling a couple of ADM roles, as well, as we go forward. So, appreciate the great people that we do have working in Finance.

And we certainly appreciate previous deputy minister and wish Mr. Groen all the best in his retirement, and I'm sure, this being his first week off, he's enjoying his time away from the office. So we certainly wish Richard all the best in his future endeavours.

And I thank all those other—the other ADMs who have decided to move on and take on different challenges. So, we appreciate that. And—should speak to the—will be able to respond to the minister—or, the member on his next question.

**Mr. Sala:** Yes, I certainly thank the minister for everything he shared and for welcoming the new team here.

I'll just re-ask the same question, which is: Can the minister outline what the budget for advertising \$10-a-day child care is?

I could also add to that, maybe the team is ready as well with this, to know how much was budgeted and how much has been spent.

**Mr. Cullen:** We're working on the total budget amount for the 10-day child—\$10-a-day child care.

From January 1st of this year to present, we spent \$135,000 on the promotion of the 10 day—\$10-a-day daycare and we'll seek to get the total budgeted number for that advertising in this year's budget.

**Mr. Sala:** Thank you very much for that.

Relating to advertising, can the minister outline what the budget for advertising in the 2023-24 budget is, and again, how much was budgeted and how much has been spent?

\* (15:20)

**Mr. Cullen:** So, we're seeking to get the global number for this year's budget in terms of how much we're going to be budgeting from—for educating

Manitobans about our Budget '23. So, we're endeavouring to get that number from Communications and Engagement division.

I will tell the member that, to date—from January 1st of this year—we spent \$210,000 on education and promotion around Budget '23.

**Mr. Sala:** I thank the minister for that, and I appreciate his willingness to find that total budgeted and to follow up with that.

I'd also like to ask what rules have been prepared for government advertising during a fixed-date election, and will those rules be made public?

**Mr. Cullen:** In response to the member's question, the rules are laid out in The Election Financing Act. So, obviously, we'll be cognizant of whatever rules are in that piece of legislation. And, certainly, government will be adhering to those rules.

So, I don't—I won't pretend to know exactly what those rules off the top, but the intent would be to make sure government—across government—is informed of what those rules are. And I know, in the past, we've taken direction across government in terms of making sure that each department knows what those rules are and, certainly, sticks to the rules under that particular piece of legislation.

**Mr. Sala:** I want to talk a bit about a contingency portion of the—the contingency portion of the projected deficit.

We talked a bit about the contingency funds in our last sitting together, and I do want to just ask a little bit more about that.

The contingency is currently sitting at \$200 million, as I understand it. And I'd like to know if the minister can confirm whether that money is, in fact, unallocated.

**Mr. Cullen:** So, in terms of the previous question around the timeline of election activities, staff has provided me a chart here in respect of the elections finances act.

So, looking at the October 3rd fixed date, I know there is some restricted communications period 60 days in advance of that. That would be a August the 4th date. And then the election period itself would be, in this case, September 5th to October 3rd.

So, those are the sort of timelines that we're looking at, with—in respect of an October 3rd election this year. So that's information in respect of The Elections Act.

In terms of the contingency we've set aside on the revenue—the \$200 million revenue, we did have that figure in our budget for the '22-23 year as well. We've added contingency because of the unknown. And you're never sure whether you're going to achieve the level of income. There's lots of different circumstances that could provide variability when it comes to revenue. Some—a lot of that is outside of our control and obviously, economic conditions play a—have a bearing in that as well.

So, we have left the \$200 million in there as a contingency on the revenue side, same as we did for Budget '22-23.

**Mr. Sala:** I thank the minister for that.

I'd like to just move on to another area of questioning here and ask the minister: Why does Budget '23-24 actually spend less on fiscal policy?

On page 37, it shows that there's nearly \$160,000 less being spent this year.

\* (15:30)

**Mr. Cullen:** With respect of the question regarding the fiscal policy and corporate services, which is housed in the department itself, there's four FTEs we'll be moving over to the Manitoba Financial Services Agency, which is set up as an S.O.A.—a special operating agency—now.

Yes, so they—that agency will deal with pensions agencies and those types of things. So, previously, the same work was being done within the department. Felt it was more accurate to have those FTEs reflected in that S.O.A.

So, no change in number of staff, just a transfer of those FTEs to the S.O.A.

**Mr. Sala:** I'd like to ask, does the Department of Finance track how much money is spent on outside consultants centrally, and if not—

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable minister.

**Mr. Cullen:** Sorry, can I get the member to repeat that question, please?

**Mr. Sala:** The question was: Does the Department of Finance track how much money is spent on outside consultants centrally?

**Mr. Cullen:** Sure. As far the—thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the outside contracting, we do, obviously, keep track of that. We do hire outside consulting when necessary—when deemed necessary.

We proactively disclose any contract worth \$10,000 or more on the website through—OpenMB is the website there. So, OpenMB—any contracts over \$10,000.

Going back to previous questions raised by the member in terms of budget allocation; so, for the child care—the \$10 child care daycare, I'd indicated we'd spend \$135,000 on that. The total budget in this year's budget is \$500,000 for that initiative, and my campaign for the actual budget itself, I'd said we'd—had spent \$210,000 to date. The total budget for that is \$290,000.

Hopefully, that will answer the member's questions on that front.

**Mr. Sala:** Yes, I thank the minister for that information.

Just going back to the question about spend on outside consultants, related to the department itself—the Department of Finance—how much does it spend on consultants—or, how much did it spend on consultants last fiscal? And is that included on—in the corporate services line on page 37?

**Mr. Cullen:** So, in terms of the 37 FTEs within that appropriation of fiscal policy and corporate services, we have 37 FTEs. The dollar figure for those 37 FTEs is just over \$3.2 million. So that will be reflective of staff within the department.

That particular branch also has a operating budget of \$276,000. So if they were going to do any contracting out, that would come out of that \$276,000 operating account, if you will.

So, in terms of the contracts or anything that we do contract out, again, anything over \$10,000 is shown on the OpenMB website. So I guess what we would do, in terms of accumulated from '22-23 year, we would just go back and add up whatever those columns are that have been reported publicly. And then we would come up with that figure.

\* (15:40)

So, further to that, if I may, when the summary financial statements do come out, there's a couple lines that the member may look for: supplies and services, which could fall in the area of services that have been contracted out, that's reported. And I think in other operating, too, that could fall into that particular category.

So, later in the year, when you look for the financial statements to roll out for this year, member could have a look at those line items in the book.

**Mr. Sala:** We know, of course, federal transfers are, well, more essential than ever.

We do know that we've had a big bump this year, and I guess, the question that I'm hoping the minister can offer us some information on here is whether or not the department receives projections of federal transfers out into the future. And, if so, what are they?

**Mr. Cullen:** So, in terms of transfers from the federal government, obviously, there was a number of categories that we look at there.

If the member goes to page 12 and reviews the summary of revenue there, you will see equalization, this year, budgeted for \$3.5 billion. The equalization, you know, based on a formula—all of these are based on formulas subject to change from time to time and subject to how the economy of the country does, what the population of Manitoba does. So, we have seen some growth in equalization—or, budgeting this year, on that front.

The Canada health-care transfer of \$1.8 billion, this year, we budgeted. Again, I think you'll be aware of the conversations that have been going on with the premiers and the federal government and that. I think this year, as a result of those discussions, we booked in an additional \$207 million coming from the federal government on the health-care-transfer side of things.

Not sure, you know, exactly what that will look like in years to come, but we—again, there's going to be a formula for that, so we expect, certainly, that won't go down in future years.

The social transfer, \$591 million booked in this year. Again, and—there's a formula for that.

And then, of course, the other item is more general, and that's shared costs and other transfers. So, that \$1.3 billion speaks to various agreements we have with the federal government, as well. And those agreements pertain to various departments across government, you know, whether it be education, daycare, child care, economic development, as well, post-secondary—I think there's some arrangements in there on the federal government.

So, those are the—sort of, the four areas of—that we would look to in terms of payments from the federal government.

**Mr. Sala:** I may have missed it but, of course, one portion of the federal transfer is the equalization payments that were being provided from the federal government.

And I am wondering if the Department of Finance has a projection for what we would assume we will receive for our—in terms of equalization payments for the following fiscal year.

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Cullen:** In terms of equalization, the budget documents do talk about that, page 116–117, excuse me.

And maybe just for—sake—in terms of the record, the annual growth and equalization program is determined by a three-year moving average of growth in Canada's nominal GDP, while fiscal capacity calculations are based on a three-year weighted moving average of revenues with a two-year data lag.

So, it's a—it is a moving target. We usually get some indication from the federal government just in advance of the budget what that's going to be. I will say, at a recent meeting of finance ministers, we did have a discussion about, you know, the formula. And there's ongoing review of what that formula looks like and what it'll look like into the future, as well.

But, again, part of that formula is based on economic activity across the country and changes in population in respect of each province, as well. So, a lot of factors come into play.

So, the bottom line is, we don't always know what that figure is going to be until closer to budget time.

**Mr. Sala:** So, just to repeat the question and just so we can get clarity on this: the department has, at this point, no projections for estimated equalization payments to be received next fiscal?

**Mr. Cullen:** So, in the budget documents, on page 103, we do provide a—sort of a future looking, call it more like a fiscal outlook. So, the department will do—provincial department will do a lot of the legwork on that. Obviously, we're pulling a lot of different factors into that, the equalization payment being one of them. And we're certainly at the mercy of the formula and some of the population growth and economic activity around the country, as well.

So, the forecast—although, general terms, it doesn't necessarily outline specifically what we're looking for for equalization, obviously equalization figures will be factored into our total revenue going forward. So—again, based on the formula and economic activity around the country.

So, again, the budget talks about our fiscal outlook that is informed by the economic outlook and review interim forecast, '22-23 fiscal year, which

obviously is going to be finalized in Public Accounts, you know, as we go forward. And then we're—but the nature of a budget, we are speculating somewhat on what these line items will look like.

But we have tried to provide a forecast of revenue and expenses going forward on page 103 right up to the year '26-27 budget year.

**Mr. Sala:** I thank the minister for the response.

So, we are in a period of unprecedented, sort of, fiscal challenges. I think we're—we've got a lot of economic uncertainty right now, more than ever—or at least more than in recent memory. I know there's a lot of talk about a recession across—not only in Canada, but in other countries, as well. It is, I think, safe to assume that a recessionary period in Canada, there would be a likely potential reduction in those equalization payments.

There's also the risk, in this kind of environment, of other provinces requiring—needing to be a recipient of those equalization payments. For example, we know Ontario, years ago, ended up becoming a recipient of equalization, and that did shift the way that those dollars were, of course, split amongst provinces.

So, the question I'm hoping the minister can provide some clarity on is: What kind of circumstances or situations could possibly lead to a reduction in the size of those equalization payments for Manitoba?

**Mr. Cullen:** You know, clearly, when we set out to do budget work, we have to be cognizant of what not only our economy is doing, but other economies around the country, as well.

And I know that the budget documents reference GDP. I think, you know, this past year, we were looking at a 3.6 per cent growth, which was third in the country. If you take out Saskatchewan, Alberta and the oil side of it, the—that type of revenue, we had the highest GDP in the country. So we're pretty happy with that.

And, again, when we do our forecasts, we have—I think there's nine different agencies that provide input and advice to provinces and to Manitoba. We take an average of those nine agencies and put our predictions together for our budget. We expect, this year, real growth of 0.7 per cent is what we'd budgeted for our budget.

And I know that the member did reference a potential recession or a downturn in the economy.

Anything we've heard from those nine agencies or the Bank of Canada as well, Manitoba is rather unique compared to a number of other jurisdictions. We do have probably the most diversified economy in the country.

So that protects us well from recession and recessionary activities. So we are not like Ontario—which, obviously relies on the auto industry there, or think Alberta with the oil industry. We were the—just that much more diversified. So, we don't see the fluctuations in GDP like other provinces do, because of our diversification here in Manitoba.

\* (16:00)

So, although there is some talk recently about, you know, potential for a recession in some areas of the country, they haven't really pointed to Manitoba to have an impact—a negative impact in terms of—at least, in terms of a recession. Clearly, we have to be mindful of, you know, there's interest rates and a lot of other things that come into play in terms of our economic activity.

And, I mean, right now, what's really holding our economy back is the labour supply. And if we can attract more Manitobans to Manitoba, or keep Manitobans in Manitoba and keep them gainfully employed, that will be reflective on increase in GDP. And clearly that's positive for us, because more Manitobans working creates greater opportunities for wealth for government. And, quite frankly, that's how we pay for the social services, such as health care and education and those other social services that Manitobans so desire.

So, clearly, we are mindful of that potential. Again, optimistic that Manitoba's going to be in a good place. And the, you know, the formula—the equalization formula—is based on a number of different elements. And those all come into play. So we're—certainly, I don't think we're too concerned about any downturn in equalization payments to Manitoba.

Again, that's our perspective on it, and—but obviously being mindful of what's happening around the country as well.

**Mr. Sala:** Appreciate the response. And the question was really focused on what the minister and what the department would perceive as being key risks that would potentially lead to a significant downturn in the level of the equalization payments.

So, I'll just ask again, if the minister would provide that: What does the department perceive to be key risks to those current equalization payments, and the rate at which we're receiving them? Again, I mentioned one possibility, another province requiring some support and becoming a recipient of those payments could significantly alter the way that those funds are distributed. What are the risks, from the department's perspective and from the minister's perspective, to our current equalization-payment rates?

**Mr. Cullen:** I guess, in terms of equalization, clearly, we have to be mindful of, you know, economic activity around the rest of the country as well.

You know, we all share in that—we all share in the economic opportunities that exist, and some provinces share more in the equalization side of things. So we have to be mindful of the economy across the country.

So, you know, when you talk about risk, yes, clearly, you know, there's risk if we do get into a, you know, a wide recession. But, again, you know, Canada's economy is pretty diversified as well, and that's some of the positive nature of actually having an equalization program, such as being—such as designed.

I think the other part that we should be aware of is the very nature of the formula within the equalization program. Again, I made reference to the three-year moving average of growth in Canada's GDP. So, you know, if we do have a downturn, say in Ontario, that's not immediately impacting Manitoba's equalization because it's a moving target, so it's more of an average in there so that, you know, those impacts aren't felt right away.

So the equalization formula itself does actually provide a buffer to provinces that are receiving equalization. So that is built inherently into the formula, which certainly helps provinces such as Manitoba. The fiscal capacity calculations are based on a three-year—it's a weighted moving average of revenues—and I said before, too, there's a two-year lag in data.

So that, in itself, should give us a heads-up. You know, if we're seeing a strong downturn in the economy, that lag will not impact equalization for some time to come.

So that gives provinces such as Manitoba time to adapt to that because we will have some time to see that trend. So, if things are trending across the country in a negative fashion, then we'll have some time to see how the formula responds to that and then allows us some time, as a province, to respond to that downtime,

or that downturn and—because there is a lag in the formula.

So, inherently built into the formulas gives us an opportunity to be—we will see those downturns coming, and then we can adjust if we have to make those adjustments.

**Mr. Sala:** I thank the minister for the information. And just, of course, to put a finer point on it, the concern is that we've seen this government make a number of decisions as it relates to tax changes that provide particularly large benefit to, in some cases, out-of-province corporations or those who are in, you would call, the sort of ultra-wealthy category of Manitobans. And there's some serious concerns about the wisdom of those decisions in light of our broader fiscal uncertainty.

I want to talk a bit about the education property tax rebate, and we know, building on what I was just sharing there, that that rebate does, unfortunately, provide wildly disproportionate benefits to the very wealthiest people in the province. And, of course, we do know there that is also providing benefits, as our leader was sharing earlier in question period, to out-of-province folks who, certainly, are not in need of financial benefits, like the Koch Brothers or others.

And, more to the point here in this question, we know that it's also the cheque approach, which has been proposed or, which has—sorry, which is being utilized—is a rather inefficient way to send money to people.

Last year, when the province mailed out checks, we know that 4.1 per cent weren't cashed as of June 9th, 2022, and—hoping the minister can update the—update us on how many checks remain uncashed.

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Cullen:** Certainly, in terms of the school property tax rebate, it was clearly a policy decision our government took a number of years ago to assist homeowners on their property tax bill in respect of the education component.

And I would say, rightly or wrongly, we have been funding a—certainly, a portion of education through the property tax system. Very few provinces continue to do it that way. Our feeling, and I think most Manitobans would feel that's probably not an equitable way to fund education.

Obviously, we're trying to find a more equitable way to fund education through general revenue as opposed to the property tax. And I think it's—over the

years, it's really shifted how much certain individuals were paying because of property valuations. And, in particular on farmland, where we have an increase in property assessments, we were finding farmers were paying a higher portion and amount into the education. So we're trying to find a way to balance how we fund education more appropriately.

So we've taken the initiative. I can—I guess, 2021 was the first time we rebated. I think that was at the 25 per cent level for residential homeowners, 10 per cent in the business community. That amounted to \$246 million for rebates to Manitobans.

In 2022, we increased the rebate to 37 and a half per cent for Manitobans, and that amounted to \$315 million. And, in 2023, we've gone to the 50 per cent level for residential homeowners, keeping the business component at 10 per cent.

So, Manitobans will realize a net savings there of \$450 million this year. So, it is a substantial realignment, we think—an appropriate realignment, in terms of how we fund education.

And I think Manitobans should be well aware that, because we are providing relief to homeowners through this rebate, we are also continuing to fund education, and we're continuing to fund education, actually, at record levels.

I know the minister responsible for K-to-12 education made the announcement of a 6.1 per cent increase of funding to K to 12 this year; over \$100 million more money going into the K-to-12 education this year than last year. And we have been making ongoing, increasing payments to school divisions. And, in fact, since we came to office, we have had a 23 per cent increase in funding to K-to-12 education.

So, Manitobans should be well aware that, even though we're providing tax relief to them through the property tax rebate, we are also making sure that we are funding the K-to-12 education as well, with year-over-year, annual increases to education.

So, clearly, it was a—is a policy decision that our government undertook to provide some rebate and some assistance to property owners, and we think it's a more equitable way to help fund education.

Certainly, we—also providing affordability cheques recently through the carbon tax rebate. I think we had about 700,000 cheques rolled out in the mail over the last couple of months.

And I will say this: through BITSA, we—in case people do not receive their cheques in the mail, we also have the opportunity for them to get their relief when they file their income tax for 2023. So we're making sure that Manitobans have every opportunity to get that particular rebate.

**Mr. Sala:** I'll ask the question again, because although I missed some of the answer, my understanding is it wasn't clarified.

Can the minister update this House on how many cheques still remain uncashed?

**Mr. Cullen:** In fact, I—staff have been working diligently to get us the information that the member asked for.

So there was 438,000 cheques sent out; just over 17,000 were uncashed. Staff tell me that's 3.9 per cent.

**Mr. Sala:** Appreciate that information.

And, I guess, just to add to that—I'm going to go to another question—but if it would be possible to obtain the total value of those cheques—that 3.9 per cent that weren't cashed, that would be of—that would be appreciated.

Can the minister share how much it cost to send out the physical cheques during the last fiscal?

\* (16:20)

**Mr. Cullen:** So, in terms of the—this—again, this is the 2022 property tax rebate cheques that were mailed out; \$350 million total that was sent out. Records say there was \$9.3 million not cashed. Again, that's about the same figure—it's about 3.9 per cent on the monetary side versus the volume of cheques that were not cashed, as well.

To the member's other question in respect of what is the dollar figure for that, I don't have exactly the figures for the property tax cheques that were mailed out. But I do know the Carbon Tax Relief Fund cheques that were mailed out this spring, the total cost to government was \$1.15. So, that's all-in costs; that is the cost of physically producing the cheques, the envelopes and the mailing cost. So, that's a dollar point one five—\$1.15—all-in cost per cheque.

So, on that, I think there was 470,000 cheques sent out under the—[interjection]—430? [interjection] Yes. So, there was 430,000 cheques sent out for the education property tax rebate. We just sent 700,000 cheques out this spring to Manitobans that qualified for the carbon tax rebate fund.

And, again, you just do the math: 700,000 cheques times \$1.15 is somewhere in that \$1-million range for this year. So I would assume that it was probably very worthwhile, that the same parameters would apply to the education property cheques, probably somewhere in that \$1.15 range, as well.

I should add, too, I had the same conversation with the department that the member's raising: Is this the most effective, efficient way to—[interjection]

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Cullen:** —to—money—get Manitoba's money back to them.

And clearly, I think what we did in our budget was, we think the most effective way to get Manitobans—Manitobans money is to allow them to keep the money in the first place.

And that's exactly why we have created historic tax breaks for Manitobans. So, now we've—expecting we can allow Manitobans, beginning in July, to keep some of their hard-earned money up—a lot of them for up—close to \$75 per month on their paycheques in July. We think that is the most efficient way to allow Manitobans to keep their money.

In the meantime, to support some of these activities like the carbon tax rebate, we did look at other avenues and the challenges that the department has had in the past, trying to go to some kind of an electronic, automated banking system where we could just send money to accounts. We were finding that Manitobans were changing their bank information on a regular basis, so we ended up not being as efficient in terms of getting those—getting that money transferred to Manitobans. So, I know it seems easy, that there might be other avenues but, again, probably not as efficient in terms of trying to get money to Manitobans.

So, we looked at it, at different options. We made sure when we sent out the Carbon Tax Relief Fund that we provided time for Manitobans to make sure that they—we had their correct mailing address. And then, once we did that, we started the system rolling and started sending out the cheques as soon as we could after the announcement. So, again, excited about Manitobans getting close to \$200 million on that carbon tax rebate over the last several weeks.

**Mr. Sala:** Appreciate the response, and in there, the minister was—referenced that, you know, his—the new tax commitments that they've made and that he feels

that there's—they're taking an efficient approach to getting dollars to Manitobans.

I just, in relation to the question here, which is their approach as it relates to the education and property tax rebates, why not just offer that to Manitobans on the front end and not have them be out of pocket and require them to wait until a cheque arrives?

What's the thinking behind that and what can the minister share in terms of why his government is choosing to take this route instead of just allowing Manitobans who are, for the most part, facing significant affordability challenges, why not just let them keep those dollars in their pocket on the front end?

**Mr. Cullen:** Yes, certainly, we've made the conscious decision to try to provide relief to Manitoba homeowners through this rebate system.

The other thing we're doing—I mean, we did signal a number of years ago that we wanted to take the funding of education right off of the property tax altogether and come up with a more equitable way for Manitobans to pay for education. Obviously, that's a lofty goal. We recognize that's a lofty goal. It's a substantial budget item for us. That's why we've taken the incremental approach to dealing with that, and those are decisions that we make around the budget process each year.

\* (16:30)

So, the percentage of rebates that we are providing to Manitobans is made on an annual basis around the budget table, obviously ratified by Cabinet. And, as I did say, we have been increasing that. We started at 25 per cent for property owners, residential owners and on the ag farmland side, and 10 per cent on the commercial side. And we've kept the commercial rate the same at 10 per cent over the last three years. We have increased, last year, the rebate on property owners—personal property owners—and farmland to 37.5 per cent. And then, we continued again, making a bold move, I would say, to increase the residential and farmland rebate to 50 per cent. Again, now it's a \$450-million assistance to property owners.

And, as I say, we're changing these figures during the budget process, and I think the member should be aware of the property and the education property tax notices are sent through the local municipalities.

So, to make changes to that current system would take some time, would obviously take some—a considerable investment as well. And, again, as these percentages fluctuate on an annual basis, we just deemed

it the appropriate way to move forward on providing assistance to Manitoba homeowners and agricultural producers.

Not saying that we couldn't change that into the future. I think our goal has always been to eliminate the education property tax from homeowners altogether, but as I say, that is a big task and something that can't be done overnight.

But we're always mindful of trying to find effective ways to make sure that Manitobans keep more of their hard-earned tax money as well. So we're certainly not opposed to looking at options, as well, but it does get complicated when you—dealing with over 100 municipalities, as well.

**Mr. Sala:** Yes, I'd just like to apologize for needing to leave suddenly like that, and do appreciate the answer and look forward to reviewing it later in Hansard.

I'd like to move on to discuss FIPPA and some of the results that were discussed in the supplement. On page 28, it says that the department's target for FIPPA response is completed on time is 100 per cent based on legislative requirements for on-time responses. Yet, the baseline for Manitoba Finance was only 35 per cent.

I'm hoping the minister can explain why the department was missing its legislative requirement to complete FIPPA responses on time.

**Mr. Cullen:** I thank the member for raising that. I see—I wasn't aware of that, but Finance is certainly behind the rest of government, so I appreciate him raising that question.

I think there is some explanation in the document, as well, that does reflect that we do have a backlog that we have to address.

So, the department has allocated additional positions to the access-to-information function in order to improve response-time compliance and reduce the number of overdue requests.

As of January 20th of this year, the number of backlogged requests for information dropped by 87 per cent. The department has reprioritized resources to eliminate the backlog and increase compliance under The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

We're also in the process of implementing a new, centralized intake process and software solution for information requests under FIPPA. This will increase



the efficiency of processing requests and improve the consistency of handling of requests and the clients' experience.

So, we will be working with digital technology solutions, and the vendor will build a software solution and the department will work collaboratively with a cross-departmental team to increase use of the 'acceff' software across all government departments. So we are going to be making investments in technology that I think will help provide a solution to some of these outstanding issues.

\* (16:40)

I will say the FIPPA component through Finance is being handled by Communications and Engagement division. And, in fact, that division—we've just approved additional—three FTEs for that particular division.

So, I am optimistic, with some new staff being allocated to that particular branch and some new FTEs added to that branch, that the issue the member raised will be resolved.

Again, the 38 per cent figure is in respect of the '21-22 year. Our target, again, still remains 100 per cent, and that's why we are making investments in both resources—personnel resources—and we're 'alco' making investments in operational funding for that particular branch as well.

Certainly, making information available to Manitobans is a priority for our government, and certainly the 38 per cent figure from '21-22 will be improved, I'm sure, in the '22-23 documents when you see those later in the year.

So, again, making investments in funding and investments in personnel to try to address that particular situation.

**Mr. Sala:** I do appreciate the response.

I think it is important, on the record, just to respond to the idea that this is a priority for government; the 35 per cent result is dismal, by any measure. And, of course, that's having a real impact on Manitobans' ability to access information as they're supposed to be able to do.

We know that—and, I guess, just before I move on, I'm hearing the minister share that there are IT investments to be made, that we will be hiring new individuals to support improving those numbers.

But, I guess, just to understand more clearly there, were there—is the minister stating that that number is a function of understaffing in that area? *[interjection]*

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

**Mr. Cullen:** So, yes, I want to make sure that I highlight for the member opposite, and for the record, again, this was a—the results in '21-22 fiscal year, in terms of Finance. I expect the numbers will be significantly improved in this year's documents once you see the '22-23 documents.

I would suggest that we had probably—staff were checking on the number of submissions we had as well, and I think that can go a long way, I would think, to explaining the situation we had. So, looking forward to seeing what those numbers are, if there was, in fact, an increase in submissions under FIPPA.

I could also say that—I think if we reflect back in '21-22, we were still suffering from the hangover of COVID, if you will. And we had a lot of staff were doing different things, and multitasking and trying to provide information to Manitobans in respect of COVID. So, a lot of things happened over that course of that couple of years and I think, you know, we're still working our way through COVID recovery.

And, to the member's point, you know, it certainly could have been a staffing issue. Again, we've taken steps to deal with that. We've moved people into that branch—branch and we—think we've actually dedicated people within that branch to dealing with FIPPA as well. And then, just recently, I know we've allocated—I think just in the last few weeks—three additional FTEs to this branch. So, hopefully, that will help in this regard.

So, certainly, there's a lot of things going on there. I think we'll see significant improvements. Again, investments in the technology I think will help all across government to deal with what I think is probably going to be an increase in the amount of FIPPAs that we're seeing across government.

I will say, on the other side, we're trying to be proactive in providing information to Manitobans and we're going to do that across government as well. And we're taking those initiatives; certainly, departments have been encouraged to be more proactive in putting information on websites and out to Manitobans, so that Manitobans can find this information easily and not create sort of that administrative burden, if you will, having people to work through the system to find answers for their inquiries.

So, I would say, you know, a lot of things working on this front. We're always open to advice on how we can improve this, but I think with the investment in information technology and a software solution, I really think that will help address, you know, some of the backlog and also help with, I think is going to be, an increase in the number of FIPPA requests as well.

**Mr. Sala:** Appreciate the response. It is good to hear that there are some proposed improvements that will help to support improving those numbers and that would be good, of course, for Manitobans to ensure they can get the access they deserve to information when it's requested and will improve transparency.

And that has been an issue for several years. I guess to that point, this issue has been ongoing for some time now, where FIPPA responses have not been met on time. And, I guess, I'd love to hear the minister share just more broadly why this issue hasn't been responded to before. We're in year seven here of his government; this issue has been ongoing and has persisted for some time.

We know that his government brought forward legislation that gives them even more time to respond to FIPPA's and extend things to, I think from what some would perceive to—some would perceive as being far too long a time frame for responses. But they've made those changes to create more leeway. So, I don't know if that was considered a strategy for improving response times.

But, just broadly speaking, can the minister share why they're deciding to take action now in year seven? Why wasn't action taken years ago when this issue started to become a concern?

\* (16:50)

**Mr. Cullen:** In respect of the question regarding FIPPA's, staff was able to pull up some information for us in respect of sort of the year-over-year increases in FIPPA requests, as well as the FIPPA's that were responded to, as well, year over year. So—and, again, these figures are across government, across all government departments and agencies.

And I would say, back in 2016, we had just over 1,700 requests; 1,300 were completed.

Two thousand seventeen, a rise of almost 2,200 requests in '17; over 1,900 were responded to.

You look at 2018, again, an increase up to—over 2,300 requests; almost 2,000 of those were completed.

We move into 2019, again, another increase in requests at 2,500; 2,100 were responded to.

And then, as we got into the COVID period, 2020, again, an increase in FIPPA's of 2,600; close to 2,200 of those were responded to.

And then, a pretty substantial increase in 2021: almost 3,000 requests for information across government and agencies, and 2,500 of those were responded to in 2021.

And just to give the member a bit of a view into where we are so far this year, so the—oh, sorry, this was the first quarter of '22. Right, 740. So, if we extrapolate that, that's going to be somewhere close to 3,000 requests for information in 2022, if we extrapolate the first quarter of the year in '22.

So, clearly, the numbers have been increasing as we go. The number of completions and responses have also been increasing as well.

I'm not here to make excuses for previous actions of government. I think, clearly, more work has to be done, and we've identified that. So, we are moving people within the branch to deal with FIPPA requests.

Again, I think we should make sure we understand a lot of people in communications and engagement were involved on the pandemic front, and may have got involved in that on a more regular basis.

And you know, FIPPA maybe have got reduced, but I do know the number of requests completed certainly increased during that time, as well.

So, I don't want to use the pandemic as an excuse but, certainly, it's something we have to be mindful of. The department has moved people into the area where they are responding to FIPPA's within that branch, and we have committed additional staff to that branch, and we also committed to the IT for that particular undertaking, as well.

So, again, optimistic as we go forward. We will have a more effective tool to respond to Manitobans with their inquiries, and I think that's the important thing as we move forward.

**Mr. Sala:** I thank the minister for that.

I do want to ask a question in a different area here of interest. Yesterday, in the exchange between the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and our leader, the MLA for Fort Rouge, there was a discussion around collective bargaining settlements and collective bargaining agreements.

A quote from the Premier here, it says: The fact of the matter is, is that when we were anticipating that, you know, potential collective bargaining agreements are completed, we budget for them.

And so, the question for the Finance Minister is, which Finance budget line would contain that information where government has budgeted for these agreements?

**Mr. Cullen:** I just wanted to—want to clarify to—in respect of FIPPA. Certainly, you know, when we were talking primarily about the Department of Finance and where our FIPPA is held in the Communications and Engagement branch. And, again, we were trying to design an IT program to be used across government, but each department within government is responsible for their own FIPPA as well.

So, just wanted to clarify that we, in Finance, don't respond to FIPPAs all across government. Each department will have their own FIPPA co-ordinator and be responsible for it. But, clearly, we're driving the IT function for FIPPA as we go forward and recognizing that we've got some work to do within our department to get better results than what we've seen in the past.

So, as far as salaries, so what we do from a budget perspective is within each department we will have a line item for salaries in each department. That item is reflective of known contracts. So, if we know what is—if the contract's been resolved and we know what the firm numbers are, then we will book those numbers in the budget for each respective department.

If a contract is outstanding within a department, we've allowed that under our Enabling Appropriation in Contingencies. And, in fact, you will find an item on page 157 that talks about our Internal Service Adjustments, Contingencies and Limited-Term Funding.

So, one item there, you will find a line item of Contingencies and Unanticipated Events and Other Expenditures. I know we had a discussion about that last time we met, so this is exactly a line item that you will see for any of those contracts that haven't been resolved.

So we try to book the unknowns in this area under Contingencies. That's why we have an Internal Service Adjustments area of our budget. So the knowns we book; the unknowns we book in ISA.

**Mr. Sala:** Just in relation to that, has the MAHCP settlement—or, the perspective settlement and negotiation, has that been included anywhere in that budget line?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

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

## CHAMBER

### EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Executive Council. At this time, we invite ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber, and we ask the members to please introduce their staff in attendance if they so choose.

As previously stated, in accordance with sub-rule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner.

I'll give a moment for those staff members to take their seats.

**Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier):** I'll just introduce my staff who are here with us again today. We have Kathryn Gerrard, who's the Clerk of the Executive Council; Brad Salyn, who's chief of staff, as well as Braeden Jones, who's director of communications and—[interjection]—and stakeholder relations. I will get his title right but—one of these days.

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** I present to you Mark Rosner, bon vivant.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Okay, the floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Kinew:** I'd like to ask the Premier if she can tell the committee who is responsible for the hiring of the current CEO at Manitoba Public Insurance?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I believe it's the board of MPI that's responsible for that.

**Mr. Kinew:** So, the PC administration appoints the board at MPI. I just want to put that on the record.

Was there a competitive search conducted for the current CEO of Manitoba Public Insurance?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Yes, I believe there was.

**Mr. Kinew:** And did the hiring of the current CEO of Manitoba Public Insurance receive scrutiny or approval at Cabinet?

\* (15:10)

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Yes, I think I'll, you know, answer this question, but I do believe that some of these questions would be best put to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen), who's responsible for Manitoba Public Insurance.

But, of course, it is the board that is responsible for doing all the due diligence. At times, they hire a search firm to do this. I don't know all the details of that, with respect to this specific case. Again, that can be found through MPI Estimates—or, sorry, the Minister of Justice's Estimates. And, then, of course, the board makes a recommendation, and it's ratified through an order-in-council.

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes. So, what due diligence did the government conduct on the CEO of MPI prior to ratifying the PC-appointed board's recommendations with an order-in-council?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, again, I think those questions are better put to the minister on—in terms of the details.

But, again, I'll just reiterate that the due diligence on the search, that all takes place at the board level of MPI. And the board then makes a recommendation, which is then ratified by way of an OIC.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Kinew:** Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) call the chair of the board at MPI and the MPI CEO to a standing committee of Crown Corporations this month?

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Kinew:** Will the Premier call the leaders of MPI to a Standing Committee on Crown Corporations within the next month?

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I believe that MPI was just before the Crown corporation committee in December of just last year. Yes, MPI was before that.

And, you know, but certainly, when it comes to accountability, we have no problem making sure that—I think the typical process is when the Crown corporation is called before the committee that the CEO is there to answer questions, I believe, along with the chair. That's typically the process that takes place.

I know the minister, again, who's also our House Leader, will have more details about Crown corporations and when they will be meeting next.

I will say that when it comes to accountability, I know the minister has already taken initiatives to do a review of what has transpired at Manitoba Public Insurance. He ordered that external—that an external organization conduct that review. That review was called for earlier this week, I believe, on April 3rd. And certainly we want to make sure we get to the bottom of what has transpired there and I think Manitobans want to know as well.

And so those are the steps that we have taken.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, I'd like to wrap up.

\* (15:20)

**Mr. Chairperson:** Okay. Seeing no further questions, we will turn now to the resolution for this department, and we will now consider—*[interjection]*—isn't that right after I say this?

We will turn now to the resolution for this department and we will now consider item 2.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 2.1. At this point, we request that all ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item, which they have done.

The floor is open for questions.

**Mr. Kinew:** I just want to move a motion here, and we're going to go on a little trip down memory lane, dig up one of the golden oldies.

Rather than making the Premier's salary \$1, I figured we'd take it back down to the level at which it would have been before Brian Pallister raised all his Cabinet ministers' salaries by 20 per cent in 2016—*[interjection]* Oh, okay. No, I'll just leave those words on the record.

I move, seconded—no, not seconded by anybody—I move that line item 2.1(a) be amended so that the Premier's salary be reduced to \$50,400.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order, please. Order, please.

It has been moved by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) that line item 2.1(a) be amended so that the Premier's salary be reduced to \$50,400.

The motion is in order.

Is there debate on the motion?

**An Honourable Member:** No.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Shall the motion pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I hear a no.

#### Voice Vote

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Aye.

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

**Some Honourable Members:** Nay.

**Mr. Chairperson:** In my opinion, the Nays have it. The motion is accordingly defeated.

**Mr. Kinew:** On division.

**Mr. Chairperson:** On division. It is defeated on division.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Chairperson:** Resolution 2.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,820,000 for Executive Council, General Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

#### **Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates of the Executive Council.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Economic Development, Investment and Trade.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and critics the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next department? *[Agreed]*

We are recessed.

*The House recessed at 3:24 p.m.*

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*The House resumed at 3:30 p.m.*

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INVESTMENT AND TRADE

\* (15:30)

**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 Economic Development, Investment and Trade.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade):** I do.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade.

**Mr. Wharton:** It certainly is a pleasure to be here today to talk about all the exciting work and things that are happening in Economic Development and Investment and Trade, and as a matter of fact, I have a lot of it right here in front of me that I'm going to put on the record today, Mr. Chair, and I'm going to start right now.

I am proud to stand before you today to discuss Budget 2023 and the historic investments it makes to help improve the lives of all Manitobans. Our budget acts on the priorities of Manitobans who deserve safe, strong and healthy communities and an inclusive economy that provides new opportunities, continued growth and good jobs. To support these priorities, this budget makes significant investments that will grow our economy, strengthen our workforce and make Manitoba the top destination to work, live and invest. This includes important investments that will attract new investment, accelerate economic development, grow our mining sector, increase our competitiveness, strengthen our workforce and advance economic reconciliation.

Manitoba is home to Canada's largest inland port and foreign trade zone, putting us in a unique position to compete and succeed globally. That, combined with our many Manitoba advantages, is why we are working hard to identify new trade and investment opportunities. To support this work, we created a new investment and trade division that collaborates with businesses, stakeholders and private sector to leverage Manitoba's competitive advantages to attract trade and investment opportunities. And to strengthen Manitoba's global reputation as a leading investment destination, we unveiled our new Invest Manitoba brand that sends a clear message to the world's business community:

Manitoba is open for business. That's right, ladies and gentlemen, Manitoba is open for business.

To make the most of these new opportunities and support our business communities, we are making strategic investments to accelerate economic growth across Manitoba. Our stakeholders and partners made it clear that access to the capital—is to—pardon me, access to capital is critical to the growth. So we are investing another \$50 million in Manitoba first fund, the venture capital fund that we launched last year to support businesses' development at all stages.

On that note, Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to report that our initial \$50-million investment generated over \$100 million in private sector interest and signalled our clear commitment to supporting the growth and expansion of Manitoba businesses and the good jobs they—and the great jobs they create.

Adding to this, we are making a \$15-million investment in the relaunched Communities Economic Development Fund's business loan program, to boost strategic—[interjection]—bless you—to boost strategic economic development in northern Manitoba.

Because our province's talented entrepreneurial community is so important to innovation and growth, we are renewing and expanding our funding agreement with Futurpreneur so that Manitoba's youth can transform their innovative ideas into businesses that provide new products and services for local, national and global audiences.

Mr. Chair, last year, we made it our mission to make Manitoba a world-class mining destination, and we are already seeing those results. We are experiencing the highest level exploration expenditures in the history of our province: major private sector investments in Manitoba by world-class companies like Vale, HudBay, Alamos Gold, combined with emerging opportunities in lithium and silica sand mining that are seeing global demand and are clear—and are a clear signal of the promising future in this sector right here in Manitoba, a future that will create good jobs, economic growth and new opportunities for Indigenous peoples, furthering our commitment to economic reconciliation.

With the recent integration of the resource development division into our department, we will lead the sustainable economic development of mineral, oil and gas and aggregate extraction and production right here in Manitoba.

To drive private sector investment, Mr. Chair, and growth, we are accelerating permitting processes to get mines up and running more quickly, reaffirming our commitment of \$10 million over three years in Manitoba's Mineral Development Fund, and adding 18—that's correct—18 new, full-time employees, who will provide dedicated support to this industry.

Our resource development must be safe, efficient and environmentally sustainable. This is why we are using geoscience data to make informed decisions that maximize economic potential, why mitigating—while mitigating environmental risks.

Across all sectors, Budget 2023 commits to providing grant funding to encourage decarbonization and to fund innovative projects that protect Manitoba's environment.

Furthermore, Mr. Chair, our government is committed to working with all First Nation communities across Manitoba to ensure that they are the main benefactor of the economic opportunity that mining and resource development will bring into their area.

Budget 2023 also improves our tax competitiveness by increasing the payroll tax threshold for the fourth consecutive year. Mr. Chair, this will benefit approximately 900 employers, exempting 150 employees from tax entirely and incentivize employers to hire more workers on increase—and with increased wages.

Our department is also enhancing the Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit by expanding eligible expenditures to help attract investment, create jobs and support growth in our growing media sector, which is home to both local start-ups and global companies.

Our department continues to review and improve our business development programs and services to make them more accessible and responsive to the needs of our business community. This includes recent improvements to Innovation Growth Program and oil and gas reporting requirements.

We are also working closely with our economic development partners to develop a new data-sharing framework that will help us take quick action on emerging economic development opportunities.

Our stakeholders have told us that workforce skill and supply shortages are the largest barrier to economic growth—and we know that is very apparent right across the world—and Budget '23 is focused on building a strong and talented workforce. And with Manitoba projected to have more than 114,000 job

openings over the next five years, Mr. Chair, many requiring some post-secondary education and training, we need to take immediate action.

This starts by enhancing and expanding the Sector Council Program through an increase of \$4.1 million annually for a historic investment, Mr. Chair, that's right: \$40.4 million over the next four years to help sector deliver workforce training for new and existing employers right here in Manitoba.

This major investment will increase the capacity of our sector council organizations, incentivize cross-sectoral collaboration and create a dedicated film industry sector council to support workforce development in this very fast and continuing growing industry.

Our workforce will also be strengthened by the record number of newcomers making Manitoba their home, but many are not working in fields of education and expertise best aligned to their talents and ambitions. Mr. Chair, to address this, Budget 2023 commits \$3.6 million in 2023 for a new internationally educated professional program that will reduce financial barriers and help newcomers fill in-demand jobs in regulated professions that match their education and professional experience, including those in our health-care sector.

Talent and attraction recruitment is essential, Mr. Chair, to a modern, skilled workforce, so we are partnered with Economic Development Winnipeg to create a work-in-Manitoba job portal that connects local employers with local, national and international job seekers to address immediate labour market needs.

I was pleased to see that the federal government extended the top-up funding for the labour market transfer agreement. However, we are calling on them to immediately begin negotiations to strengthen the agreements by providing sufficient predictable and reliable funding over the long term. This will increase our ability to fully address workforce development needs at a time when stakeholders have said labour shortages is our top priority and their greatest barrier to growth.

\* (15:40)

In April, I become the chair, actually the co-chair, of the forum for labour market ministers while we are at the critical juncture with the transfer agreements. Mr. Chair, I will use this opportunity, along with my provincial and territorial colleagues, to advocate for sustainable funding from the federal government to ensure we can continue to deliver quality and a range

of workforce supports for Manitobans and what Manitobans deserve.

Budget 2023 reflects our commitment to economic reconciliation and the full participation of Indigenous peoples in the economy. So, that—

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

Order, please.

We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** We won't have any opening comments; just go straight to questions. I got questions. Less speeches, more questions.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the minister for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate of the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 10.1(a), contained in resolution 10.1.

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.

**Mr. Wharton:** It's great to welcome a couple of our wonderful staff. Unfortunately, they all can't join us, but I'm flanked by Melissa Ballantyne and Michelle Wallace. And also in front of me, my chief of staff, Erik Selch, is joining us here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** In accordance with subrule 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. Wasyliv:** I'm wondering if the minister can advise what is the current vacancy rate in the department and how many full-time equivalent positions are, right now, being unfilled.

**Mr. Wharton:** I thank the member for the question, and, as the member knows, at the end of January, there was a shuffle, and within that shuffle there was—did you want him to move over so we could address each

other? *[interjection]* No, seriously. *[interjection]* Yes, good.

There was also an addition—additional department added to Economic Development, Investment and Trade, which was the mining sector.

So, currently, I can give you numbers as of February. There's still some shuffling going on as far as staff recruiting and whatnot. But 133 basically equivalent FTEs and a vacancy rate of 28. And there is a hiring—right now, we're looking at hiring—in the hiring process of roughly 46. So, that would be the numbers to date.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Now, the minister referenced mining being new to this portfolio.

When Brian Pallister was premier, Manitoba had 40 geologists under our employment. There's recent media reports saying that's down to seven.

I'm wondering if the minister can confirm how many geologists we currently have. Is there a plan to hire more and how more? And are we going to return to 40 prior to all the cuts?

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Wharton:** And I—certainly, I'd like to thank the member for his patience, as well. As he knows, or maybe doesn't know, I'm a farmer, entrepreneur myself and a business owner, and I know that it's very crucial that you put facts on the record. And I know the member would appreciate knowing exactly what—or, getting an answer to the question that he's looking for. So, providing that, it may take a little bit more time, but we do have it now.

We're currently sitting with 12 FTEs as geologists and we have four vacancies which we're going to be pursuing. And we're also hiring 18 additional FTEs incremental to the current staff allotment to the mining support team to support, essentially, expediting permits in a fashion to ensure that the economic activity moves quickly and mining firms and prospectors and developers have the opportunity to get into the ground quicker to also build our economy in Manitoba.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm glad to see that this government is investing again in mining. My concern is is that the minister has just indicated that there's now been a permanent cut of 10 geologists in Manitoba from the time they took over government in 2016.

I'm wondering if he can explain the rationale of why we are going to have less geologists in Manitoba now than when this government took office in 2016,

and how cutting back on geologists is helpful in expanding the mining industry in Manitoba, and whether the minister just sees a conflict in the stated commitment of this government in mining but the lack of actual resources in hiring geologists to make that actually happen.

**Mr. Wharton:** And maybe give the member a little bit of a history lesson. For 17 years, the NDP didn't even know what mining was, and they certainly walked away from an industry. And I know the member from Flin Flon would probably agree with me.

But certainly, he knows there's been—there was no investment in the mining sector under the current NDP. As a matter of fact, his leader that—he's currently sitting in the Leader of the Opposition's chair right now and he could probably feel the vibes from the leader about the late manifesto that he signed saying that minerals, particularly critical minerals like zinc, copper and lithium should just simply stay in the ground. We don't need it, according to the member from Fort Rouge and the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew).

So, I don't know exactly, and I can't comment for what happened during the—or during the NDP government's time with respect to how many geologists were hired, but I can tell you it was unfortunate they weren't able to do their job because the NDP walked away from mining.

We are committed to mining. The member knows that. The member from Flin Flon knows that. And, certainly, we will continue to develop that mining sector in collaboration with all the stakeholders right across the province, including northern Manitoba, by the way, which is going to be booming under our government, and we're looking forward to that boom.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, it's—I think the government is doing a great job of keeping it in the ground when we have eight geologists down from 40 when they took office.

So, if we currently only have eight geologists, and this government's committed to hiring 22 more geologists, how much time is it going to take to hire those 22 more geologists? And are having—are we having to look across Canada and internationally to actually find them and recruit them to come here to Manitoba?

**Mr. Wharton:** Again, I'll simply try to provide some facts for the member. Again, he's quite focused on the number of geologists that are required to grow the mining sector and—while I'm more focused on the mining sector—growing the mining sector.



Government should be there to help and enable the sector to grow and ensure that, once the partners are working together, to simply just back off, let them go. Businesses know; they know how to grow.

And, case in point, I'll just put a few of the mining sectors on—or, mining companies on the record for the member. And I know the member from Flin Flon would love this information.

Vale announced a \$150-million investment to extend current mining activities in the Thompson area by 10 years; great news for northern Manitoba.

Snow Lake Lithium announced that they would raise over 20—they raised over \$27 million in their initial public offering to support lithium exploration in Snow Lake.

Alamos Gold continues to pursue their project near Lynn Lake. The consultation process has been concluded, and the company is expected to conduct additional exploration and complete updated feasibility studies this year.

PADCOM—first time in Manitoba—has completed Manitoba's first potash development near Harrowby in the municipality of Russell-Binscarth. We know that PADCOM partnered with Gambler First Nation—again, a sign that our government recognizes economic reconciliation is so important to First Nations, not only in northern Manitoba, but right across the province.

Great news. Companies know what they're doing. First Nations know what they're doing. Government should just simply be there to support them and get out of the way when they want to start building the economy right here in Manitoba.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, when the government talks about supporting industry, well, how they do it is having government geologists.

So I'm wondering if the minister—who didn't answer my question—can tell this committee the drop-dead date, what will be the targeted date when all 22 geologists will be hired and under the employ of Manitoba and we will have a zero vacancy rate for geologists? How many years from now is that date?

**Mr. Wharton:** Again, I know the member feels that he's not getting an answer. But he has been getting an answer of all the success that's happening in the mining sector and also our government's commitment to ensuring that there's enough horsepower there and resources in the FTE and full-time equivalents, of

course, in the sector and right across government, actually.

\* (16:00)

So, I think the argument that the member is trying to make is he thinks the benchmark is X, and he's suggesting that we think the benchmark is Y. Well, I think the proof is in the pudding. And if the member wants to play back—over the weekend, when he's having some turkey dinner with, maybe with the family—he can play back some of the great news that we've put on the record about how the industry is growing based on the current benchmark.

Now, the member also knows that staffing issues are a challenge right throughout—not only Manitoba, but throughout Canada and the world, quite frankly. And—but I know the member from Flin Flon would probably find a job easy, for sure, because of all the great work we're doing in the North, when he decides to retire from politics. But you know, certainly, we know and we recognize there are staff shortages right across the world.

And we are actively recruiting new hires for not only the mining sector, but particularly in EDIT, where we know that we have some great folks and great horsepower to ensure that the economy continues to grow under their watch. And again, the addition of 19 full-time FTEs and an investment of \$5 million is going to help make that happen in Budget 2023.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I think the minister's non-answer is concerning to Manitobans, because clearly, they don't have a plan, and they don't know when they're going to fill these 22 vacancies, if at all. But I will move on, because our time is short today.

Now, the minister had indicated that there's a general 28 per cent vacancy rate in the department; 133 FTE positions. Again, a shocking number. I'm wondering if he can outline what sectors or departments within his ministry have the highest vacancy and maybe an explanation as to why.

*Mr. Shannon Martin, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Mr. Wharton:** Good to see you. Welcome to the Chair, the member from McPhillips.

And, thank you, again, for that question. And, as I alluded to earlier, our government is working hard, as many other sectors—whether it be public or private sector—at recruiting and hiring full-time staff.

It's interesting; I met with Restaurant Association today, Shaun Jeffrey. And boy, oh boy, that sector, like every sector, the trucking sector, you name it, they're all going through challenges with finding staff to work, period.

And I know one of the challenges was—when I was at the—I went to meet the federal Canadian bank rep, his name escapes me now, but he did a little bit of a program at The MET and it was interesting to hear—and I never—and the member would like this, actually. It was interesting to hear—and I will get his name because I know you'd want to look him up—that the—Manitoba is performing better than any other jurisdiction in Canada. His words, not mine, which is fantastic. And I actually will endeavour to get that information to the member if he's interested.

But also, he really highlighted the labour market in Manitoba. He said—and he recognizes, as we do, the labour market in Manitoba is challenged. And we said, why? And he said, well, I'll tell you why. Because almost 25 per cent of your labour force are baby boomers and they retired over the last 18 months. And he said that created a massive vacuum in the labour pool right here in Manitoba, particularly in the city of Winnipeg.

And we found that to be very helpful information for our government, and I know the member would probably appreciate it, too. I know he owns his own business and, certainly, I'm sure he's signed a payroll cheque before and knows how difficult it is, you know, to retain and to continue to have good quality staff to work for him, maybe even to work on your social media accounts or something. Oh, well, maybe that's something that the member needs to look at.

But I can tell you that we're working hard. We hired 19 new FTEs, we're continuing to hire in the resource development sector, which we know under the NDP's watch was essentially broken down to nothing. Forty geologists and—the member says were working there and those folks, I hope they're hearing us today. And if they are, I welcome you to please reach out to our department because we want you back, we respect you and we know that you can help grow the economy, particularly in the mining sector.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Yes, I'm wondering if the minister can tell the committee what question he was answering just now.

**Mr. Wharton:** Sure, and I'll even answer it again. The department—the area in our department that is currently

one of the highest vacancy rates, and that's resource development. That's why I put on the record that we're actively hiring and continuing to hire. We hired 19, we're going to keep going down that process.

But—maybe the member didn't hear me before—but also finding labour is a challenge, and our government recognizes that, but we're having some success.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Thank you, minister.

I have a question about the supplement of Estimates. I'm looking at last year's 2022-2023 and in the sort of infographic it talks about a summary 'expenditure' of the department in 2021-2022 of \$193 million and core staffing of 369.4 FTE positions.

Then, I'm looking at this year's supplemental and the 2022-2023 summary of expenditures dropped by \$10 million. It's \$183 million and the core staffing now is at 472.40 positions. There seems to be a discrepancy there, you've got \$8 million less money and 100 more positions.

So I'm wondering if you can reconcile those numbers because they, quite frankly, don't make any sense. How do you get 100 more positions but you've cut funding by \$8 million?

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Wharton:** Again, I appreciate the question from the member, and the simple answer is simply that through the government restructuring in late January, early February, there was obviously a massive restructure, particularly within our department, and certainly, that—the numbers are not—it's not apples to apples; it's actually apples to oranges in this case, because you can't really put—compare one to the other when your department is—has a totally different—we'll call it a facelift, for lack of a better term.

And with new initiatives, initiatives that have moved on, FTEs that have moved to other departments, cash flows have changed, needs have changed, requirements have changed; it is, as you can see and as you mentioned, the member across the way, 472 FTEs. Earlier, if I play back the Hansard, at one time, you were concerned about not having enough FTEs. Well, we've actually gone up by 100, and now, you're concerned that there's too many.

So we continue to ensure that we have a full complement within our department, and certainly am looking forward to sitting on this side of the Chamber next year and having this discussion on an apples-to-apples comparison instead of apples to oranges.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can advise when is the mining strategy going to be released.

**Mr. Wharton:** Early summer.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Earlier, the government had promised that it would be late spring. I'm wondering if minister could explain why it's now being delayed.

**Mr. Wharton:** June is—June 21st, I believe, is the first day of summer. The last day of spring would be June 20th, so somewhere between there and there.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can advise who's been consulted in the creation of that strategy.

**Mr. Wharton:** Again, the release of the mining strategy, as we've talked about, will be coming early summer, late spring. So, certainly, we've been consulting with stakeholders and we're looking forward to continuing that process. And I can assure the member that all stakeholders that we've spoken to are excited about the steps we're taking to continue to grow this mining sector and we'll certainly look forward to presenting that strategy in early summer.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Have First Nations or Indigenous organizations been consulted in relation to the mining strategy, and if so, who?

**Mr. Wharton:** Well, again, I mentioned in my opening comments about economic reconciliation, Mr. Chair, and it's a top priority for our government and certainly when we say stakeholders we include First Nations and Indigenous people.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I wonder if he minister could advise what First Nations and Indigenous organizations have been consulted.

**Mr. Wharton:** Again, with the mining strategy being introduced some time this spring-summer, we'll definitely be able to ensure that our stakeholders continue to advise us on what they want to see in that strategy. I haven't even seen a draft at this point, so it would be too soon to start naming stakeholders.

Look, stakeholders are being consulted and they will continue to be consulted. And they are in the process of drafting, along with Indigenous, First Nations and stakeholders across Manitoba, but outside of Manitoba, too, because we know when we were at PDAC in Toronto, the largest mining conference in the world, we were consulting with—as a matter of fact, we had meetings with Indigenous groups, First Nations; we had meetings with mining firms,

prospectors, developers—you name it. We've been consulting with absolutely everybody.

To put individual names on the record, I—certainly I don't have that at my disclosure, but I can tell you that Manitobans, First Nations, Indigenous and industry have been fully consulted and are leading the charge on the mining strategy.

\* (16:20)

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Well, will the minister undertake to this committee to provide a full list of who's been consulted as of this date to this committee when you obviously have that information?

**Mr. Wharton:** As soon as the strategy's released, the member will get a copy.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I—this—really straightforward question, so it's concerning the minister is—either doesn't know or is refusing to answer, so he's certainly giving Manitobans the impression he hasn't consulted with the Indigenous community. Otherwise, he wouldn't be so cagey and flippant.

So, I will ask the minister again whether he will undertake to provide a full listing of everyone consulted for this mining strategy as of the date of this hearing.

**Mr. Wharton:** When the strategy is completed and it's delivered, it'll be public and the member will have a good opportunity to review it and comment further at that point.

Certainly, we haven't seen a draft and we continue to develop it, so I think the member should move on at this point.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Would the minister advise whether he has consulted any environmental organizations in relation to the mining strategy, and if so, who?

**Mr. Wharton:** Many stakeholders have been consulted.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I think the minister might have some trouble hearing me.

The question was whether he had consulted any environmental organizations in relation to the mining strategy, and if so, who? And if he hasn't, simply state on the record that that's the case, that he has not consulted with any environmental organizations.

**Mr. Wharton:** You know, I'm feeling a little insulted by the member saying I didn't hear him because I did turn 60 this year and I know that I have an appointment with my audiologist very soon because my hearing is poor.

But, certainly, I understand the question and I feel I've answered it to the best of my knowledge. But when I get those hearing aids in the coming weeks or so, we can have this discussion again, probably when the review and the strategy is delivered to Manitobans.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering why the minister is refusing to answer whether he has consulted with environmental groups in relation to a mining strategy for the province.

**Mr. Wharton:** As I mentioned many times, we've consulted with many stakeholders from all areas that would be involved in the mining strategy, Mr. Chair, whether it be environmentalists, whether it be First Nations, Indigenous, also business—the mining firms. All those folks are continuing to be at the table as we continue to move forward with the mining strategy to be released sometime in early summer, late spring.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can advise whether there will be a value-added strategy as part of the mining strategy. And what I mean by that, is there a plan to process minerals here in Manitoba, or are we simply just going to take them out of the ground and ship them elsewhere?

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

**Mr. Wharton:** And I welcome the member back to the Chair.

Thank you for that question. And again, the review is being done. The full scope is going to be looked at in the review, and the mining strategy again, with—and within consultation, of course, with the stakeholders that we've mentioned many times on the record.

And if—one thing for sure—and the member would probably know this, too—one thing that the pandemic taught us and really opened up—and there were many areas, of course—but this particular area—the supply chain area, we know how it affected everyday—our everyday lives, not only in Manitoba but across the world.

Whether it was simply getting certain fruits and vegetables and food, you know; whether you're looking at buying or leasing a new vehicle, you know, putting a new truck on your fleet; a number of areas that were suffering with supply-chain shortages, and certainly, that put a lot of stress on the economy, particularly in Canada; and Manitoba, too, was, of course, part of that. But what it did show us is we need to focus on ensuring that we are, and our manufacturing for—let me step back a bit.

I want to talk—and praise—our manufacturers here in Manitoba. We lead the country in manufacturing. It's just incredible, the amount of talent we have here in Manitoba, whether it be in the—in any sector when it comes to manufacturing—but particularly in the pharmaceutical sector.

One thing that just blew me away when I was at—*[interjection]*—yes, thank you, from my colleague; you're right. When we were at the BAM dinner and—awards dinner, about a month ago, something that the member would like to hear, too; maybe he knows.

But it's amazing how big our pharmaceutical sector is here in Manitoba. We'd—I didn't even know this—but we are the largest exporter of medicaments here in Manitoba, to—particularly down in the US, in the Tennessee area. And it's amazing. I didn't even realize how big it was, and it's—certainly, we have the opportunity here, with the talent we have, whether it be in the science field or just simply the entrepreneur field, to actually build out the supply chain and ensure that we're putting value added into the mix.

So, I would assume going forward, and I've heard from our stakeholders that, yes, value added definitely needs to be looked at, and we're looking forward to seeing the results of that study come early summer, late spring.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** I'm wondering if the minister can advise how many exploration permits have been issued in 2021, 2022 and currently in 2023?

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Wharton:** Fiscal '21-22 there were 31; fiscal '22-23, currently, there are 101 active dispositions.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Just wondering if the minister can advise how many active mines they are in Manitoba and how many are Canadian owned.

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Wharton:** I appreciate the patience from the member opposite, as well, as we endeavour to get some further information.

Currently, we have three active mines, and one is Canadian owned. And further to that, I just wanted to put on the record, and the member may not know this, but very important work our government is doing in ensuring that we continue to invest in this sector.

And one way we're doing that, again, is Manitoba Mineral Development Fund. And, again, that's committed to developing more sustainable mining sector that benefits northern and Indigenous peoples,

advancing shared goals, promotes economic reconciliation and creates long-term growth and prosperity.

So, to that point, Manitoba has also committed \$10 million over three years as part of the Manitoba Mineral Development Fund to support northern economic growth through private-sector investment, community partnership, skill development and job creation. And, again, we just did some recent enhancements to the MMDF fund to focus on streamlining applications, as I mentioned in my comments earlier, with the addition of the 19 FTEs and expanding grant funding to increase responsible mineral exploration, strengthening our mining supply chain and develop additional partnerships with Indigenous communities and organizations.

So, our government has taken action, there's no doubt. And since its inception, actually, of the MMDF, the fund approved over \$8.1 million toward 53 projects involving 31 community industry partnerships. That is expected to leverage over \$55.3 million to create more than 200 jobs. Boy, I wish the member from Flin Flon was here.

That's a takeaway, and I know the member from Fort Rouge—or, Fort Garry will probably pass this information on to him because I know how interested he is in the mining sector, particularly jobs. Two hundred more jobs; \$55.3 million. We're continuing to grow this sector; we're committed to doing it.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Given that there's only one Canadian company that actually owns a Manitoba mine, I'm wondering if the minister has any concerns or has any policy preference to favour Canadian-owned mines.

And does human rights considerations ever factor into us issuing licences, perhaps to authoritarian undemocratic regimes with human rights abuses and horrible records? Does the government think along those lines at all, or they're prepared to issue licences to whatever company comes and is willing to mine in Manitoba?

**Mr. Wharton:** Certainly appreciate the question again from my colleague, and—I'm concerned about the last comments, though, that the member made with respect to just licensing or getting anybody to come into Manitoba to mine. That's just simply reckless, and it's certainly not anything that our government would do. I can't speak for the NDP, but I know our government wouldn't go down that path. That's why we have some of the stringent—most stringent licensing environmental process right here in Manitoba.

And, certainly, we recognize in working with industry that we needed to focus in on ensuring that we're protecting the environment, but also ensuring that we're expediting the permit process in a balanced way as we work with stakeholders and, particularly, First Nations and Indigenous folks on economic reconciliation. So lots at play there, for sure.

It's not government that should be sitting, picking winners and losers, when it comes to who wants to set down roots here in Manitoba.

Certainly, we have—as we mentioned earlier on in some of the discussions—we have a lot of interest in the mining sector. We have many prospectors and developers working now in the North. The member knows the path towards actually getting a mine to a point where it can open. It can take five, ten years before the site is properly assessed by all parties and ensuring that it's environmentally safe in relation to ensuring that we're protecting it, but also working with First Nations on economic reconciliation, which is new, which we introduced, and we ensure that that process continues.

So, to the member's question, again, I think I've answered it, but we certainly won't take a reckless approach when it comes to growing this particular sector or any sector in Manitoba. Licensing, stringent environmental process and good, solid, transparent reconciliation discussions, conversations, and that's the way we're going to continue to do business, and that's why, the member will probably admit, that that's why the sector's growing. Because we take it seriously.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, I'm wondering if the minister can advise if a Manitoba mining company gets any kind of preferential treatment from the province of Manitoba, or it's treated just as any other mining company, including, you know, international conglomerates and giants that come here?

\* (16:50)

**Mr. Wharton:** As I mentioned earlier to the member, and certainly is in Hansard, it's not for us to pick winners and losers. Look, this is a free and open market. Anybody that wants to set down roots in Manitoba should be welcome here. I hope that the member and the NDP are not suggesting that that's a process that we should move away from.

We want to grow business here. And that's why the sign coming into Winnipeg, whether you're flying in or driving in, says we're open for business. And we are open for business.

That's why we've made investments in partnership with the Winnipeg Airports Authority to ensure that we open up more direct flights to let the world know that you come to Winnipeg, you come to Manitoba, you can open up a business here, whether it's in the filming industry or the mining industry.

So, we're proud of that record, we're going to continue to do that and industry will do what it does. However, it needs to ensure that it's running through a stringent environmental and licensing process, and we'll make sure that happens.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** So, just to clarify the minister's comments, a Manitoba company would get no assistance or special treatment at all to establish a mine in Manitoba and they would have to compete with whatever massive conglomerate wants to come in here, and this government would stand by and let that happen.

**Mr. Wharton:** Well, it's kind of question and answer, so I'm going to throw it back to the member and ask him a question.

What is he referring to as far as special treatment to a Manitoba company?

**Mr. Wasyliw:** This is the Minister of Economic Development, so I'm wondering, as the Minister of Economic Development, what policies does he have in place to develop Manitoba's small mines?

**Mr. Wharton:** Manitoba Mineral Development Fund, \$10 million over the next three years. It doesn't pick or choose which company can apply.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** Now, it's been widely reported in the media that there are Russian oligarchs who own Manitoba companies and have financial assets in Manitoba. Some of these individuals are extremely close with the Putin regime and are actually on a federal sanctions list.

I'm wondering, what steps has this minister and his department and this government done to seize those assets and liquidate them in order to support the federal government sanctions list?

**Mr. Wharton:** Certainly, we continue to work on many fronts with the federal government, and anything respecting national security, we would definitely

be working with the feds on something like the member had mentioned.

But, again, we need to continue to focus on Manitoba. We're talking about a mining sector that was ignored for almost two decades by the former NDP government and, certainly, we're continuing to clean up that mess and making some significant inroads to restoring the open-for-business sign in Manitoba, and we'll continue to go down that road.

But anything with respect to national security concerns, I know—and certainly, I'm extremely proud of our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) leading the confederation of premiers—at COF, pardon me.

And certainly, the Premier and her great work in leading that group of premiers from territories and provinces across this great country would also be concerned, too. So, being a federal matter, the Province would have eyes on it and work in collaboration with our federal partners.

And, for the record, I just wanted to—I mentioned to the member that I was going to get the name of the Bank of Canada BDC rep that we went and spent the morning at during his presentation. His name is Pierre Cl  roux—C-l-e-r-o-u-x—and he's actually the research and chief economist for Canada.

I suggest that the member, under his new portfolio, go and check out, and certainly I'd help him to find that information if he needs it. But the research and chief economist presentation is online. He can pull it up, and he can reference some of those numbers and percentages that we talked about early on.

Just astonishing to see how great Manitoba is doing in all sectors when it comes to the lowest unemployment rate in the country, leading in economic growth. And, particularly in the mining sector, where Manitoba was in the top five years ago, where we are—ended up in, I believe it was double digits. We fell right off the charts.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Time 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 10 a.m. on Tuesday.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Thursday, April 6, 2023**

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