

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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, May 11, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

I have a statement for the House.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: I have a statement for the House on the occasion of Manitoba Day, but before I begin, I would like to introduce some very special guests we have in the Speaker's Gallery.

We have with us today the Honourable Tony Akoak, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut; Andrew Carrier, the Manitoba Métis Federation, Minister of Métis Community Liaison Department, Residential and Day Schools; and David Beaudin, the Manitoba Métis Federation, Minister of Agriculture.

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

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: Tomorrow, May 12th, 2023, marks 153rd anniversary of the day the Manitoba Act received royal assent in the Canadian Parliament. This act created the Province of Manitoba and, accordingly, May 12th has been designated as Manitoba Day.

In honour of this historic occasion, as we have done for the past several years, our Sergeant-at-Arms carried our original Manitoba mace in today's Speaker's parade.

Carved from the wheel hub of a Red River cart in 1870, this mace made its first formal appearance on March 15th, 1871, at the First Session of the 1st Manitoba Legislature, held in the home of A.G. Bannatyne in the Red River Settlement. The Bannatyne home was destroyed by fire in December 1873 but, thankfully, the mace survived.

After 13 years of service, our original mace was retired in 1884 when our current mace debuted. The original mace has a permanent home on display outside of the Speaker's office, coming out of retirement annually for this celebration and other special events. This important historical artifact sits

on the table today as a tribute to the rich history of our province.

In addition to the original mace, the star blanket cushion and the beautiful beaded mace runner, gifted to us by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in 2010, are also on display today to honour Manitoba's Indigenous heritage as we celebrate Manitoba Day.

As well, this year we have been gifted two new significant artifacts to enhance and enjoy our heritage display.

First, we have a Métis sash, gifted to us by the Manitoba federation. President David Chartrand presented this sash to me this week, and I am pleased that Minister Carrier and Minister Beaudin are able to join us on his behalf in the gallery today.

Second, we have a soapstone carving of a polar bear, a gift to this Assembly from our northern neighbours, the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. George Hickey Jr., the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut, personally delivered the carving to us earlier this week, and I am very grateful that Speaker Akoak is also with us today in the gallery as well.

All of these artifacts serve as a reminder that this Assembly Chamber and Legislative Building reside on the traditional lands of Indigenous people, as we recognize each day in our land acknowledgement.

I am honoured and humbled that we are able to include these treasured artifacts in our annual celebration of Manitoba Day, and I trust that this tradition will continue past my tenure as your Speaker.

With this rich history in mind, I would encourage all honourable members to reflect on the solemn responsibility we all share to serve our constituents in this Assembly with honour and respect, and recall that whatever heated debates occur in this place are all part of a very long legacy of service to the people of this province.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Orders of the day. Regular-routine proceedings. Pardon me.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 214—The Ecological Reserves Amendment Act (Ecological Corridors)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Tyndall Park, that Bill 214, The Ecological Reserves Amendment Act (Ecological Corridors); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les réserves écologiques (corridors écologiques), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, this bill provides the legislative framework for the formal designation of ecological corridors, sometimes called wildlife corridors, in Manitoba.

For example, ecological corridors along a river, like the Little Saskatchewan River or the Red River, could now, under this legislation, be designated an ecological corridor formally, and potentially be available for public support from the federal government.

It is very different from the model for a provincial park or federal park. Because there are so many landowners involved, it involves a partnership in stewardship moving forward.

Thank you.

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

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Justice Third Report

Mr. Len Isleifson (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the third report on the Standing Committee of Justice.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Justice—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Justice presents the following as its Third Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on May 10, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 7) – The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur**

la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis

- **Bill (No. 16) – The Domestic Violence and Stalking Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la violence familiale et le harcèlement criminel**
- **Bill (No. 27) – The Intimate Image Protection Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection des images intimes**

Committee Membership

- *MLA ASAGWARA*
- *Hon. Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *Mr. ISLEIFSON*
- *Mr. LAGASSÉ*
- *Ms. LATHLIN*
- *Hon. Mr. TEITSMA*

Your Committee elected Mr. ISLEIFSON as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mr. LAGASSÉ as the Vice-Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- *Ms. LAMOUREUX*
- *Mr. WIEBE*

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following three presentations on Bill (No. 7) – The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis:

Sean Jackson, Private Citizen
Brandon Guenther, Pedal Pub Winnipeg
Kevin Selch, Little Brown Jug Brewing Company

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 7) – The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 16) – The Domestic Violence and Stalking Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la violence familiale et le harcèlement criminel**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 27)** – *The Intimate Image Protection Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection des images intimes*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Isleifson: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member from Dawson Trail, that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Fifth Report

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

Clerk: Your Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development—

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on May 10, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 10)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (Social Responsibility Fee Repealed) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis (abrogation de la taxe de responsabilité sociale)*

Committee Membership

- Hon. Mr. CULLEN
- Mr. MICHALESKI
- Ms. NAYLOR
- Mr. SALA
- Hon. Mr. SMITH (Lagimodière)
- Mr. SMOOK

Your Committee elected Mr. SMOOK as the Chairperson.

Your Committee elected Mr. MICHALESKI as the Vice-Chairperson.

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Mr. LAMONT

Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following 14 presentations on **Bill (No. 10)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (Social Responsibility Fee Repealed) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis (abrogation de la taxe de responsabilité sociale):**

Todd Friesen, Private Citizen

Shannon Sala, The Essential Cannabis Company Ltd.

Sean Stewart, AAAAA Supercraft Cannabis

Tyler Miller, The Vault Cannabis Ltd.

Ryan Peterson, Midnight Show

Kerri Michell, Farmer Jane Cannabis Co.

Sharon Clark, Private Citizen

Annick Beauchesne, Babette's Cannabis Dispensary

Melanie Bekevich, Private Citizen

Ariel Gliner, The Joint Cannabis Shop

Katie Torgerson, Star Buds Cannabis Co.

R.J. Kusmack, Fiddlers Green Cannabis Co.

Kim Ruud, High Tide Inc.

Steven Stairs, Cannabis Business Association of Manitoba

Written Submissions

*Your Committee received the following two written submissions on **Bill (No. 10)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (Social Responsibility Fee Repealed) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis (abrogation de la taxe de responsabilité sociale):**

Christopher Britton, Black Tie Cannabis

Sandy Nemeth, Manitoba School Boards Association

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 10)** – *The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act (Social Responsibility Fee Repealed) / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la réglementation des alcools, des jeux et du cannabis (abrogation de la taxe de responsabilité sociale)*

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

Mr. Smook: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Manitoba Day

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.

Hon. Obby Khan (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): Madam Speaker, thank you for your beautiful opening remarks today celebrating and recognizing Manitoba Day. Today, I rise—well, actually for tomorrow—May 12th, 2023, as Manitoba Day. This marks the 153rd anniversary of Manitoba—of the Manitoba Act receiving royal assent in Ottawa.

On a day like today, it is important to pause and acknowledge the heritage, history and traditions of all peoples in our province when it was founded, and all those who live here today.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 1 territory and the homeland of the Red River Métis.

This year, I am honoured that we are able to include two new artifacts on the Clerk's table to celebrate Manitoba Day: the Métis sash, gifted by President Chartrand of the Manitoba Métis Federation, and a soapstone carving of a polar bear, gifted by the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. Thank you for these beautiful artifacts.

Today's Manitoba—today, Manitoba is rich with diversity, inclusivity and a multicultural heritage that enriches our lives every day. We have the opportunity to explore objects, records and stories of our very own archives, libraries and museums. Our province represents a variety of cultural traditions, languages, art, food and so much more.

Whether you were born here or, like me, were given the opportunity to experience the warmth of friendly Manitoba, our province is the sum of its parts. Diversity is our strength and we are stronger together. Together, we have grown from a postage stamp to this land we are so proud of.

* (13:40)

I encourage each and every Manitoban to take this opportunity to explore our wonderful province and its rich history.

Diversity is strength. Unity is beautiful. Heritage is knowledge. And together we are friendly Manitoba.

Thank you, Madam Speaker—Manitoba Day.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Madam Speaker, 153 years ago on May 12th, the Manitoba Act received royal assent after months of negotiation with the father of the province, Louis Riel. Riel and his provisional government had a vision for a Manitoba in which all peoples were treated equally and in which Indigenous communities played a central role in our cultural, social and political landscape.

Today, we reaffirm our commitment to Riel's vision for the province. We celebrate how far we've come, but we also recognize how far we have to go. When we see Manitobans come together to help others in their time of need, we can hope that Louis Riel would be proud. But we know we have more to do to ensure that all Manitobans are treated equally in this province, regardless of race or socio-economic background, and more to empower Indigenous peoples. Only then Riel's vision for our province be fully realized.

Celebrating Manitoba Day also highlights the unique features and attractions of the province. From the natural beauty of Riding Mountain National Park to the rich history of The Forks National Historic Site, Manitoba has much to offer visitors and residents alike. The province's diverse population, including its Indigenous communities, also contributes to its vibrant cultural scene.

Manitoba Day is a significant day for the province of Manitoba and its Indigenous communities, providing an opportunity to acknowledge the history and contributions of Indigenous peoples, while also celebrating the unique features and attractions of the province. As we look towards the future, let us continue to work towards reconciliation and building a brighter future for all Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Ms. Lamoureux: I rise today to recognize our province's entry into Confederation.

Back in 1870, it was Louis Riel and his provisional government who began the effort of founding Manitoba and having it become a part of Canada.

The Riel government wrote a bill of rights, as we all know, and this bill recognized language rights, religious freedoms, representation in Ottawa and the interests of the Red River Métis population.

The bill of rights became the Manitoba Act and was passed by Parliament on May 12, 1870. And then, in June, the land was transferred from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Government of Canada, and, on July 15th, Manitoba was officially established as part of Confederation.

Madam Speaker, Indigenous people were the first people here in Manitoba. And while today we recognize Manitoba Day, we also need to recognize that Indigenous reconciliation is an ongoing process. Part of this process is having September 30th be considered the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. It is one tangible move we can make now, and we are calling on this provincial government to do so.

Since Manitoba became a part of Confederation, our province has become home for many people around the world. We are so fortunate to live in a cultural mosaic filled with people of different backgrounds and skills.

In wrapping up, I wanted to share a couple neat facts about Manitoba.

Did you know that The Forks is actually the longest skating trail in the world, stretching 8.45 kilometres, and the coldest temperature ever recorded in Manitoba was on December 24th in 1879, at -47.8°C, Madam Speaker?

And with those few words and those fun facts, I want to thank the member—the minister for bringing forward today's statement, and you, Madam Speaker, for allowing the opportunity to speak to it.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: In celebration of Manitoba Day, and you all have a little flag on your desk provided by the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mr. Khan), how about a wave to all Manitobans? And happy Manitoba Day.

Further ministerial statements?

Wildfire Prevention Week

Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development): Madam Speaker, as we observe wildfire prevention, mitigation and preparedness planning week, I want to remind all Manitobans of the importance of being vigilant in preventing and responding to wildfires. This is especially critical as we approach camping and fishing season, which brings more Manitobans outdoors.

Wildfires are not exclusive to Manitoba and we will always be ready to help where needed. That's why I am pleased to announce our government has sent two Canadair CL-415 tankers and a bird dog aircraft, along with five pilots, two air attack officers and two engineers, to assist in fighting wildfires in Alberta. Our firefighters have now arrived in Lac La Biche and are ready to help our prairie neighbour.

I want to extend my gratitude to these brave men and women for their service and dedication to protecting communities.

A small fire can quickly become a large fire, so I encourage all Manitobans to take the necessary precautions to prevent wildfires, including being mindful of campfires, disposing of cigarettes properly and following all fire restrictions and bans. We must all do our part to protect our province.

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: And I would indicate that the required 90 minutes' notice prior to routine proceedings had been provided in accordance with rule 27(2).

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, as spring arrives in Manitoba, it brings warmer temperatures; with that, the risk of wildfire. Unfortunately, human activity can increase the risk of wildfire, making them more dangerous.

Wildfires are becoming increasingly unpredictable as climate change worsens. Research shows that climate change will increase the frequency and severity of droughts in the prairies, which will increase the likelihood of wildfires.

We can act now to prevent worsening wire fires. Most summers, Manitobans have to be evacuated from northern communities due to wildfires. Unfortunately, this government is refusing to take meaningful action on climate change. At the same time, they've actively reduced our ability to fight fires by privatizing our fire suppression program and our water bombers. We also see a reduction in the number of available initial attack

firefighters, which puts more northern communities at risk of out-of-control fires.

We know, right now, there are devastating fires burning in Alberta. We appreciate that Manitoba has sent resources to Alberta to help fight these fires, and I want to thank all the firefighters who are willingly putting themselves in dangerous conditions to protect all our communities.

It's important that we send firefighters to assist in other jurisdictions—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow the member to complete his statement?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Leave has been denied.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, today our attention must be focused on ensuring that Manitoba is well prepared for wildfires in our province.

With the government's poor preparation with regards to human resources in health care, it's opportune to emphasize the need for training an adequate number of people to fight forest fires in Manitoba. There can be a major surge in the need for personnel if there's a series of wildfires, and we need to make sure that we have the people ready.

There's also a need to act quickly when the forest fire has any chance of spreading toward a community. From visiting Wasagamack a couple of years ago, quick action to prevent or suppress a fire could have prevented the evacuation of the community.

We need to be ready to act quickly.

I want to thank all those who are active in such preparation, as well as those who are active in fighting the fires when they occur.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Transcona Biz—Festival of Banners

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Today, I want to tell you about an inspiring program happening out in Transcona that really sparks the creativity and imagination of students from kindergarten to grade 12 across our community.

Each year, the Transcona BIZ invites all Transcona students, whether they attend public school or an independent school, or are homeschooled, to submit ideas—designs ideas—as part of the Festival of Banners.

Each year there's a theme, and this year's theme is Dinosaurs Roam Transcona. Students are encouraged to use their creativity and ideas to combine the theme, along with trans-local Transcona icons.

My six-year-old son Mark submitted his idea that includes a giant Tyrannosaurus rex taking a huge bite out of the Transcona museum.

* (13:50)

Last year over 1,200 students submitted design ideas for the 65 banner locations, and this year is on track to be just as popular. Entries have to be in by 3 p.m. on Monday, May 15th, at the BIZ office on Bond Street, so there's still time to enter. They'll then be scanned and posted online. The voting happens between May 23rd and June 6th. Once the winners are selected, they're given a 90-inch-by-30-inch-wide banner to paint both sides of with—and along with all the supplies they need to do that.

Now, the banners are usually erected in the middle of July and are kept on display for an entire year. After the year is over, the banners are taken down and returned to the students who created them in the first place, giving them a lasting memento. My own daughter was one of the artists selected 12 years ago when she was just in grade 5, and she still has her banner hanging up in her room today.

If you visit Transcona, you'll find these amazing banners on display up and down all the major streets in the BIZ. I encourage you to come on down, check them out also while visiting the Transcona Hi Neighbour Festival, happening the weekend of June 3rd. And be sure to return in the fall when this year's 65 winning entries will be up on display. Grab breakfast or lunch at the L'Arche Tova Café to make your Transcona experience complete.

Thompson Seniors Community Resource Council

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): I'm pleased to recognize the Thompson Seniors Community Resource Council for their outstanding work in providing essential programs and services to the senior citizens of Thompson.

The council is a non-profit organization dedicated to identifying the needs of elders in the community and responding to those needs, and improving the quality of life for seniors in the area. And their commitment to this mission is truly admirable.

The seniors community resource council provides a safe and welcoming space for seniors to gather and participate in a variety of activities. These activities include exercise classes, art workshops, technology education and social events, all of which promote physical and mental well-being among the seniors community.

The council also offers transportation services for seniors who are unable to get around on their own, ensuring that they're able to attend medical appointments and other important engagements. This summer they're even offering cycling programs for seniors and elders with disabilities where groups of two can book private cycle tours.

Another important program provided by the council is the food hamper service program. This service delivers food hampers to low-income seniors who face mobility challenges, helping them ensure that they receive the nutrition they need to maintain good health. This program is especially important for seniors who are living alone and otherwise may not have access to regular meals.

This council also provides a range of resources, information and advocacy for seniors and their families, including information about health, grief support, legal issues and financial planning. This information is crucial for seniors who may be facing difficult decisions about their future, and guidance can be a great help navigating these challenges.

Overall, the Thompson Seniors Community Resource Council is doing fantastic work in supporting—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow the member to complete his statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Redhead: Thank you. I'll be brief.

The council is doing fantastic work in supporting senior citizens in Thompson. Their commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for seniors, as well as their dedication to promoting health and well-being, is truly inspiring.

I commend the council for their efforts and wish them continued success in the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Grace Hospital Day

Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate): I rise today to recognize Grace day, May 12th, 2023, dedicated to honouring the ongoing support of the Grace Hospital, the Grace foundation, the health-care professionals, staff and our community's Grace foundation supporters.

The Grace Hospital has a reach—a rich history deeply rooted in our community. Incorporated in 1904 as the Salvation Army Grace General Hospital, it has been a beacon of hope and healing for over a century. From its humble beginnings as a rescue home for women and children on Ross Avenue to its present-day modern facility at 300 Booth Dr., the Grace Hospital has continuously evolved to meet the health-care needs of Kirkfield Park, Winnipeg and Manitobans throughout our province.

Throughout the years, the Grace Hospital has been a pillar of strength and compassion, providing exceptional health-care services to Manitobans. The hospital's commitments to excellence has earned the trust and gratitude of our community.

The Grace foundation has played a vital role in supporting the hospital's mission. Since established in 1990, the foundation has tirelessly raised millions of dollars to enhance patient care, improve facilities and provide leading research medical equipment. Their unwavering dedication has helped shape the Grace Hospital into the remarkable institution it is today.

On Grace day, we come together to express our deep appreciation for the extraordinary contributions of Grace Hospital staff, medical professionals and the Grace Hospital Foundation.

I also want to thank our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) for the \$30-million investment to allow for a significant expansion of the intensive-care unit and for the \$77 million that has been provided since taking government for multiple upgrades.

I ask my colleagues in the House to join me in showing appreciation to Jon Einarson, executive director of the Grace Hospital Foundation; Jeff Coleman, chair of the Grace Hospital Foundation; Bruce Lillie, chair of the Grace Hospital Day.

Thank you all, and thank you, Madam Speaker.

Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Recently, the PC government announced that the Manitoba remote learning centre will be shuttered next month. I've had the opportunity to speak with a number of families about this, and I'm grateful to all of them for sharing their stories.

What I heard from many of them is that the remote learning centre is hugely beneficial and sometimes the only option for students with significant health and learning needs.

While the Manitoba remote learning centre began as a temporary measure in response to the pandemic, it has become very different from the remote learning experienced by many families during COVID. During these past number of years, staff have developed a comprehensive programming focusing on community, student efficacy and autonomy. The program has been able to successfully address a wide variety of issues that prevented students from attending and succeeding in a regular school setting.

Many students using the Manitoba remote learning centre have been prevented from attending in-person school due to complex health and learning needs. By eliminating triggers such as bright lights, loud noises, the Manitoba remote learning centre was able to provide a space where students could focus on their learning and also provide needed flexibility. Some students had even joined classes from the hospital, Madam Speaker.

Another interesting piece I heard from communicating from parents is that the Manitoba remote learning centre made financial sense. Traditional school settings require a lot of resources to provide the support, and what Manitoba remote learning centre did is that they were able to receive this support without extra cost.

It is lamentable, Madam Speaker, that the government does not seem to have considered the positive impact this program had on these students with unique learning needs when they decided to shut down the remote learning centre.

The cancellation of the Manitoba remote learning centre has left many families feeling frustrated because an education support that worked for their kids is being removed. I encourage the government to listen to these families and reconsider their decision.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Health-Care Forum in Tyndall Park

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): On April 30th, I participated in a health-care panel in Tyndall Park with a nurse of 30 years, a STARS paramedic and our local Member of Parliament.

It was a productive meeting, and I was encouraged by the feedback shared by so many who are working or were working in our health-care system and many who have had experiences within our health-care system over the last few years. Everyone had a lot of insight and experiences to share.

The main takeaways from the forum included how our health-care system desperately needs a lot more attention, how we need to do better at recognizing health-care credentials while also retaining our current health-care workers and how many seniors cannot afford their prescribed medications, and there is a concern that a two-tier health system may be happening.

Madam Speaker, Seven Oaks hospital is a community hospital, and with how rapidly the community is growing, it does not make sense to have what was supposed to be a major hospital so underutilized.

Because of the concerns and ideas around Seven Oaks hospital that were raised at the forum, I made a posting on social media last week calling on those who work at Seven Oaks to reach out. I've since spoken with quite a few people who work in various roles at the hospital, and they all have very valuable ideas that they would like to share with this government.

So I'm calling on this government to revisit Seven Oaks hospital, reconsider some of the changes that have been made over the last few years, and turn it into a health-care facility that it is capable of being so that the residents of Tyndall Park, as well as The Maples and Burrows and Kildonan, all have a health-care facility close to home.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (14:00)

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: I have some guests that I would like to introduce to you, and before they leave the gallery, in the public gallery, we have, from Dauphin Regional Comprehensive Secondary School, 42 grade 9 students under the direction of Steff Matskiw. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski).

We welcome you all to the Manitoba Legislature.

And I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery, where we have with us today Mr. Greg Quinn, British consul general, and Mr. Dwight MacAulay, British honorary consul in Winnipeg.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Education System New Funding Model

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): In November of 2021, in one of her first acts, the Premier announced that she was going to create a new education funding model for Manitoba schools. It was supposed to be released this past February.

However, last fall, the Premier reversed course and said that she was going to delay the release of this funding model until after this year's election. And now we know why. We have seen the model. We have it in our hands. And it's not good for schools in Manitoba.

The PC Premier is hiding this funding model because she doesn't want to see Manitobans have—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —access to the cuts that they are planning to make in our K-to-12 system.

I'll table it so that we can pierce the shroud—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —of secrecy.

Millions of dollars cut for schools in Pembina Trails, in—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —St. James-Assiniboia, Louis Riel, Seven Oaks school divisions and more.

Why is the Premier hiding her plan to cut school funding in our province?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Madam Speaker, we're very proud of this budget that was just tabled in the Manitoba Legislature that offered a \$100 million increase to the Education budget. That is more money for education. In fact, every single school division right across the province of Manitoba received an increase.

Those are the facts, Madam Speaker. And the Leader of the Opposition and every member opposite voted against that.

So, while they claim to care about our kids' education, they claim to want to spend more money on education, Madam Speaker, they had an opportunity to support a budget that had significant, record increases to education in the province of Manitoba, and they voted against it.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the Stefanson government will say anything to try and get re-elected. But now, through these documents, we see what will happen if they get another—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —term in office.

Under this new education funding model that the PCs have developed, kids and educators in the Louis Riel School Division will see their funding cut by \$10 million. Pembina Trails is going to be cut by four and a half million dollars. The Interlake School Division, they'll be cut by \$3 million. This is the Premier's plan to cut funding for schools in Manitoba. It says that this is the funding model, not for distribution. We think Manitobans deserve to see it before they vote this year.

Will the Premier tell the House why she's hiding this from Manitobans? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, Manitobans remember a desperate NDP government at a time right on the eve of an election where they said that they wouldn't raise taxes.

They went door to door, to every single Manitoban, Madam Speaker. They told them they weren't going to raise the PST. And what did they do as soon as they got elected? They raised the PST.

Those are the desperate tactics of the NDP. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, Madam Speaker, the Premier can attack all she wants, but what's missing from her answer is very telling.

She does not deny that this is the plan that the PCs will implement if they get another term. She doesn't deny that they're planning to cut school funding in Manitoba.

In addition to the divisions that I was listing earlier, St. James-Assiniboia is going to face a \$9-million cut for their annual school funding. The Lord Selkirk School Division will have their funding cut by \$8 million. These cuts to school funding are wrong.

If the Premier won't tell the House why she is hiding this cut from Manitobans, perhaps the members who represent these constituencies will stand up and let Manitobans—whether they've seen these cuts either.

Mrs. Stefanson: What we have stated, Madam Speaker, is that we will be out consulting Manitobans when it comes to the funding model moving forward. No decision has been made on that funding model. So the Leader of the Opposition can table all of the irrelevant documents he wants, but those are not the facts.

The facts are, Madam Speaker, when it comes to education, we had \$100-million increase to the budget. Every single school division got a significant increase to their budgets. That's more money for education. That's more money for our students. We care about education.

If the Leader of the Opposition and the members opposite cared so much about the education system in our province, why did they vote against these historic investments in our education system?

Madam Speaker: And I would just remind members, before everybody gets all wound up, we do have students in the gallery. So, they're here to learn.

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

Mr. Kinew: I think the PC plan to cut school funding is very relevant to students and to families and to people right across the province.

When you pay attention to the Premier's answer, you will see that she is acknowledging that these are the real documents created by this government. I will table them for everyone in the—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —province of Manitoba to see.

There are 16,000 kids in the Louis Riel School Division. It's very relevant that this PC government is planning to cut their funding by millions of dollars—\$15 million, when we look at Pembina Trails—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —and Louis Riel school divisions combined. The biggest school division by population, Winnipeg School Division, will see their funding cut by another \$2.5 million. These are very serious cuts that this provincial government under the PCs is entertaining.

Will the Premier explain to the people of Manitoba why she wanted to hide these documents before they had a chance to vote this year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I just stated to this House, to the Leader of the Opposition, that no decisions have been made whatsoever when it comes to a funding model. We are continuing to consult Manitobans. We want to make sure that we get it right.

We, on this side of the House, listen to Manitobans—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —and act accordingly, Madam Speaker.

We want to ensure that school divisions—every school division—gets an increase, Madam Speaker. That's why we put that in this budget this year: significant and historic investments in our education system.

And what did members opposite do? They voted against it. They have no credibility, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Premier for acknowledging that these are the documents that her government created for a new education funding model in Manitoba.

They provided direction to people who created this document, and based on their direction—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —school divisions like Louis Riel, like Seven Oaks, like Lord Selkirk, like Pembina Trails—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew:—like St. James-Assiniboia are looking at having their funding cut by millions and millions of dollars. That's if the PCs get re-elected. Now, of course, the PCs wanted to hide this until after Manitobans had a chance to vote this year.

Will this Premier explain to the people of Manitoba why she didn't want to share her plan before you had a chance to vote?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. I'm going to call the members to order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition can say whatever he wants and table whatever documents he wants. That's his right.

* (14:10)

But the facts are this: We just tabled in this House, and we debated on a budget, Madam Speaker, that had record and historic increases to our education system right across this great province of ours. Each and every single school division got significant increases.

In fact—and I think the Leader of the Opposition, other members, have mentioned—the Louis Riel School Division, an 8.4 per cent increase; over \$8-million increase to that school division alone in madam—in Manitoba, Madam Speaker. Those are significant investments for better education for our kids.

We care about our kids. We want to ensure that they get the investments they need in education. Madam Speaker, if the leader in the—of the opposition and the members opposite cared so much, why did they vote against significant and historic increases to our education system.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, one thing's clear: we've established that this is the plan that the PCs developed behind closed doors to cut millions of dollars in funding every year from schools in Manitoba.

The other thing that this establishes is the motivation for the other major issue we've been dealing with here this week. Many Manitobans have been wondering, why are they cutting school funding? Well, it's because they continue to give cheques—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew:—to billionaires, with money that is taken from revenue that should be funding our schools.

When you look at the Louis Riel School Division, Pembina Trails, Lord Selkirk, St. James-Assiniboia, Seven Oaks and so on down the list, and they're facing cuts under this new education funding model of millions of dollars per year, and then you look and see that this PC government is giving Loblaws a cheque for more than \$300,000; it shows just completely how out of touch this PC government is with the priorities of Manitobans.

We already know why the Premier did not want—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition, again, cared so much about education funding, then he would've voted in favour of our budget that had more than \$100 million more to education in the province of Manitoba. He chose to vote against that.

But the member opposite mentioned Louis Riel School Division. They got an 8.4 per cent increase; more than \$8 million, Madam Speaker. He also mentioned Pembina Trails School Division, who got a 13.2 per cent increase in—or, over \$10 million. He also mentioned Seven Oaks School Division: a 3.8 per cent increase, or a \$3.3-million increase. St. James-Assiniboia: a \$3.7-million increase, or an 8.1 per cent increase.

Those are the facts. We are making record and historic investments in our education system in the province of Manitoba.

Pembina Trails School Division Government Funding Plan

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): They know they've been underfunding—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare:—public education since 2016. It's been 0.5, 0.5, 0.5—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare:—and then all of a sudden, Madam Speaker, they show up in the year of an election and they announce some funding pieces, right? They know that that has been their record: underfunding since 2016.

And now we know why. They've come up with this model, and yet they won't share it with the people that needed the very dollars that they say they're providing. And under this new model, the PCs would cut funding to Pembina Trails by four and a half million, Madam Speaker.

And they've already had to cut their full-day kindergarten program.

So my question is simple: will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) tell the House why she's planning to cut four and a half million from Pembina Trails?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Members opposite are clearly very adept at fear mongering and putting unfactual words on the record.

That's unfortunate, because Manitobans deserve the truth. And Manitobans—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —remember, under the NDP government for 17 years, how horrible the school systems felt for their own children—mine included.

We had children who lost their library spaces. We had children who lost their art spaces. We had children who lost their gym spaces because they had to learn in the hallways under this group over here—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —who mismanaged education, underfunded and never listened to the needs of the children or the teachers in the system.

Madam Speaker: Honourable member for Transcona, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Altomare: They know they've been underfunding education since 2016. They can't even defend their record.

They come here and they try to put these words on the record, showing that they completely misunderstand the needs of Manitoba students. They know that they planned to cut. It says it right there in that document, and it's been tabled. I'll table another page of that document—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: —that shows the same thing, just in case they need to see it again.

And so who pays the price? Teachers, EAs, librarians, students, extracurricular programs that are very important. This 4-and-a-half-million-dollar cut to Pembina Trails is going to hurt, and they know it.

Will the Premier finally do the right thing and stop cutting public education?

Mrs. Guillemard: Only members opposite of the NDP party would call a 23 per cent increase since

2016 a cut. And maybe, Madam Speaker, this highlights the problems under their previous government for 17 years where they introduced a new math program that saw our students go from middle-of-the-pack performance to dead last in math and science.

Madam Speaker, I hope the member opposite, while he was in the administration in the school system, also recognized how detrimental that was to our students.

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

Mr. Altomare: You know, we don't even know what the actual numbers are in the latest FRAME documents. The latest FRAME documents are from 2021. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: We don't even know what they actually invested in education, so we can't even—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: —see where it's going to go next. But we do have a document that's created by them, by their funding formula, and right now it's being released. And it's about time, Madam Speaker, because cuts like this are eliminating necessary programs in our schools. That is shameful and unnecessary.

Will the Premier finally do the right thing and commit to stop cutting public education today after emerging from the pandemic?

An Honourable Member: Hitting a nerve on that side.

Madam Speaker: Where the nerve is being hit is mine, with all this heckling that is going on, and I'm going to remind everybody again that I would like everybody to be more respectful to each other, to be more civil to each other and let's get to hear the questions and the answers.

Mrs. Guillemard: Again, the member opposite really highlights that none of the members opposite agree with due process or consultation with stakeholders. That's unfortunate, and I hope that the education system and those who work within it are paying close attention that the members opposite have stated time and time again they will interfere in multiple processes where they should not.

We respect the process. We respect the feedback we get from the people who are working front lines, and we will continue to listen to them. And, Madam

Speaker, we have invested record numbers into the education system in this budget alone.

And I will say that the members opposite are trying to distract from these record investments because they voted against them.

Seven Oaks School Division Government Funding Plan

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Well, Madam Speaker, all of the PC members support and celebrate cutting our schools, and that's what the PCs' new funding model for education does. And top of that, they're trying to hide it from Manitobans right before a provincial election.

* (14:20)

This new model cuts nearly \$11 million from the Seven Oaks School Division. I will table the document. That means cutting teachers from classrooms and after-school programs.

Why is the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) cutting nearly a million dollars from the students in Seven Oaks School Division?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): I know the member opposite has access to all of the details that we have submitted within the budget. She has spent time debating that budget and asking questions. We've just been through Estimates, and we'll continue today, where we go through all the details.

So, I'm going to share on the record for the member opposite's benefit: that Beautiful Plains School Division, they received a 12.4 per cent increase; Border Land School Division received a 4.2 per cent increase; Brandon School Division received a 10.2 per cent increase; the DSFM school division received a 3.8 per cent increase; Evergreen School Division received a 6.4 per cent increase—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for St. Johns, on a supplementary question.

MLA Fontaine: Seven Oaks has already had to make cuts to supports for schools, like laying off teaching staff, eliminating programs like Learn to Swim, closing after-school and summer programs, and eliminating the school bus transportation for grades 7 to 12 students.

But that's not enough for members opposite; they want to cut even more. Now they want to cut Seven Oaks' funding by \$11 million.

Why is the Premier cutting nearly \$11 million from Seven Oaks School Division, when they've already been forced to cut so much?

Mrs. Guillemard: I will continue with the list: Seven Oaks School Division received a 3.8 per cent increase in funding in this budget alone.

I will point out, as well, the member is going down a slippery slope when she wants to step on the autonomy of school divisions in terms of the program, and they decide—I hope—[interjection]—I would hope—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Advanced Education, to complete her answer.

Mrs. Guillemard: I would hope that all school divisions are paying close attention to the words that members opposite are saying. They know exactly what's coming down the line.

And, Madam Speaker, I will say that that—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —3.8 per cent represents \$3.329-million increase to the Seven Oaks School Division this year.

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

MLA Fontaine: The minister seems to have forgotten Bill 64, which, thank God for us on this side of the House that we killed that very outrageous bill.

Seven Oaks School Division is already struggling under seven years of cuts by each and every one of those members, and now the PCs want to cut funding to the Seven Oaks School Division by nearly \$11 million. That is beyond shameful, and Manitoba children will suffer because of them.

These cuts will hurt kids and educators in our Seven Oaks School Division.

Will the Premier stop her plan to cut \$11 million from the Seven Oaks School Division today?

Mrs. Guillemard: While members opposite talk about the what-ifs, we already know what they would do because we've seen for 17 years how they dismantled the education—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: –system through underfunding, through interference. And they will continue to do so if they ever reach government again.

Madam Speaker, Louis Riel School Division received 8.4 per cent increase into—in this year's budget; that's over \$8 million more this year. Mystery Lakes school division received a 3.3 per cent increase; Park West School Division received a 10.4 per cent increase; Pembina Trails received 13.2 per cent—that's over \$10 million increase to their funding this year.

Louis Riel School Division Government Funding Plan

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, while the PC government continues to choose to hand cheques over to billionaires instead of funding kids in classrooms here in Manitoba, they propose a new funding model which would take even more money out of classrooms.

The Louis Riel School Division's funding model will cut over \$10 million with this new PC funding model. That's \$10 million that would go to hire more teachers, EAs or staff to support kids in the classroom that need help to succeed.

That is simply unacceptable, Madam Speaker.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) tell the House today why she plans to cut \$10 million from the 16,000 students in Louis Riel School Division?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Clearly, math is not a strong suit of members opposite, nor is listening and understanding what they're hearing.

I'm—I will continue with a list of the investments we've made in this year's budget so that the member can have some clarity on that, but I do want to reflect on that members opposite have continually been concerned about rebates. They don't understand how a government can actually give tax rebates while increasing the education funding, and that should worry every single—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: –Manitoban in this province, because they don't have the ability to function in that realm of understanding economic growth, and how you can invest in these services.

I'm happy to continue to educate members opposite in my next question.

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

Mr. Moses: After seven years, Manitobans are still looking for this government's strong suit, and they haven't found it.

All they've seen is cuts to education, and schools are struggling, students are struggling. Educators have made it clear that funding is not keeping up with the rate of inflation or the rate of enrolment growth, and now they want to cut an extra \$10 million from Louis Riel School Division.

On this of the House, we believe in schools. We believe in teachers; that they need more supports, not less.

Will the Premier stand up today, commit to stop cutting funding for schools, and will she commit to invest in education in Manitoba?

Mrs. Guillemard: Once again, I'm just going to reiterate: only members opposite would call a 23 per cent increase since 2016 a cut.

And I know that Manitobans are smarter than what the NDP wants to believe they are. It's an insult to Manitobans that they want to continue to put this on the record.

Madam Speaker, Pine Creek School Division received a 5.9 per cent increase. And that reflects over \$400,000 increase, not a decrease.

Madam Speaker, I can understand why members opposite are frustrated. Not only have we announced 20 new school builds, which they couldn't get any built under their government, but we are also increasing funding while reducing taxes.

They may not understand—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, we know this government has tried to hide their cuts to education. That's why I'll table the documents right now that show that \$10 million is being proposed to be cut from the Louis Riel School Division under this PC government's new funding model.

We know their agenda is to cut from schools. And they've tried to hide it, and they've tried to put it—push it back to past the next election. It's unprecedented, Madam Speaker. Another \$10-million cut from the students of Louis Riel School Division? Unacceptable.

* (14:30)

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) stand up today and change course? Will she abandon her plan and actually invest in schools in Manitoba?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Well, if everybody wants to hear the answer, let's have some quiet in the room and let's hear the answer from the honourable Government House Leader.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Well, we remember for many years when students, at this time of the year, they would walk through schools, and you know what they'd hear that sound? Drip, drip, drip. Because there was buckets all over the floors of the schools, Madam Speaker, because the roofs were leaking all over Manitoba, because that former government refused to put money into schools, into teachers, into education, so schools were falling apart. The kids were walking around with their umbrellas.

It was this government that brought in record funding for capital, for operation. Astronomical funding, and there's more to come, Madam Speaker.

St. James-Assiniboia School Division Government Funding Plan

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): This PC government is hiding their plans to cut millions from local school divisions. As we've heard today, we obtained the secret PC plan for the new education funding model, and it cuts nearly \$9 million from the St. James-Assiniboia School Division.

This new funding model is nothing more than another way for the PC government to take money out of our schools so they can turn it around and give it to out-of-province billionaires.

Our schools need support now more than ever.

Will the Premier commit today to stopping her plan to cut millions in funding for kids in St. James?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: I'm going to call members to order. If you want me to start identifying who you are, I will. Your constituents won't be very appreciative.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): Everybody on this side of the House wants to get up and answer this question, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let the record show the members are throwing hypothetical stuff on the table. The reality is a 6.1 per cent increase to funding for education in Manitoba; NDP, Liberals voted against it.

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

Mr. Sala: I will table the document that shows nearly \$9 million in proposed cuts to kids in St. James-Assiniboia School Division. That money should be going into our classrooms to make sure our kids have the resources that they need to succeed.

This PC government has made it clear that their plan for education is more and more cuts. They tried to hide it from Manitobans until after the election, and we think that's wrong.

Will the Premier stop standing up for billionaires and stop cutting education for kids in St. James today?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

I am going to recognize the honourable Minister for Seniors and Long-Term Care, but I would ask him to put his response through the Chair.

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I would indicate to the member that, as a former trustee in the St. James-Assiniboia School Division, I would have actually died for an 8.1 per cent increase to ensure that the students of St. James-Assiniboia are continuing to receive the best education they can.

Under the NDP government, Madam Speaker, when I was there, we had to close schools because of a lack of funding.

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

Mr. Sala: I would indicate to the member from Assiniboia that he should read his government's own plan to cut funding to kids in his community.

This PC government has been cutting funding to our schools for seven years. Schools are reaching a breaking point and are having to make impossible decisions about cutting programs and services that our kids rely on. Another \$9 million in cuts to kids and educators in St. James-Assiniboia will mean fewer resources in classrooms, and they've already had to cut the IB program in St. James-Assiniboia.

Manitoban students deserve so much better.

Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) do the right thing and commit to stopping her cuts for kids in west Winnipeg today?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: —the leader for St. James—sorry, the member for St. James clearly has not been listening to the answers he's been given—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: I'm going to call everybody to order.

There's a lot of heckling going back and forth, a lot of comments being made. I'm going to actually ask the front benches on both sides to rein it in because we do have to hear what the answers are. And I'm going to ask everybody, and no point in wagging fingers because it's happening from all sides.

So, I am going to ask for everybody's co-operation. If you want to get named, just keep it up, but I think we've had enough today of the disrespect that is being shown on this floor.

So I'm going to ask for everybody's co-operation, please. Let's listen to the answers and let's listen to the questions. *[interjection]*

Order.

Mrs. Guillemard: Madam Speaker, 6.1 per cent increase, over \$100 million invested in increases to education. That is an increase, not a cut.

Housing Affordability in Manitoba Cabinet Minister Housing Allowance

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): There's a housing crisis in Manitoba, so many people are having to turn to government support with the hope they can actually find a place to live. Younger generations are in despair, wondering whether they'll ever be able to afford to buy a house at all. And with rising interest rates, nearly one third of mortgage holders across Canada could be at risk of default.

With so many people struggling to pay for their own shelter and many being homeless, we can't help but question why certain MLAs in Manitoba have more lavish perks than MPs in Ottawa do.

Could the Premier explain why Manitoba taxpayers who can barely afford their own rent or their own mortgage are subsidizing the purchase of second or third homes for Cabinet ministers and MLAs?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): So, it's very rare that I have a point of agreement with the member for St. Boniface, but when it comes to the need for providing housing in the province of Manitoba, that is a rare point of agreement.

That is the reason why this government has invested significantly in housing in the province of Manitoba: 745 new units of housing since we formed office. And that is why we're committing to also working with housing—non-profit housing providers who are coming off of agreement to ensure that as we're growing the affordable housing stock that we are also maintaining those units that are currently under agreement.

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

Mr. Lamont: Madam Speaker, we're talking about Cabinet ministers already making six figures, some living barely an hour's drive from the city.

I table monthly expense reports from the government's website that show that both NDP and PC MLAs and ministers used their allowance to buy second homes: NDP Minister Steve Ashton from Thompson, NDP Minister Peter Bjornson from Gimli, NDP Minister Stan Struthers from Dauphin, NDP Minister Drew Caldwell from Brandon, the MLA for Borderland, the MLA for Brandon West, the MLA for Interlake, the MLA for Riding Mountain, the MLA for Turtle Mountain, the MLA for Red River North.

Manitoba Liberals think this is unacceptable that we are subsidizing the purchase of second homes.

Does the Premier agree, and will she do anything about it?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, the member opposite will know that the allowances for all members are set by an independent officer. It's been that way for years. It's been agreed to by all members of the House. It ensures that there are independent rules and independent analyses done of how members can spend their money.

In fact, I remember looking at the member opposite's expenses one year, and for whatever reason, I think he bought five MacBooks. I have no idea why he would need five MacBooks in one year, but maybe he wants to explain it to us.

* (14:40)

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

Trucking Industry Staffing Needs

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, trucking is one of the most important industries in our province, yet the government once again has been caught short in not supporting the manpower needs of the industry.

When we met with the Manitoba Trucking Association recently, I was told their need of 4,000 more truckers today, and that the growth of the industry is being severely hampered by the lack of trained drivers.

Why, in seven years, has the government failed to properly address this important issue? And don't blame the COVID pandemic, because it would've been an ideal time to train more truckers.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade): Certainly, we'll focus on that. I met with Aaron Dolyniuk from MTA. We're working on that; we'll continue to make that progress.

Madam Speaker: According to my clock, time for oral questions has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

An Honourable Member: Absolutely not.

Some Honourable Members: Two seconds.

Madam Speaker: Oh, okay.

Order, order.

The honourable member for Brandon West thinks there was two seconds left on the clock. He may be right. I wouldn't make that big of a deal out of that. If that was the case, and I take the member's word at it. Sometimes with all the confusion and heckling, it is hard at the very end to keep track of things, so I will recognize the honourable member for Brandon West.

Direct Flights from Winnipeg to Atlanta New WestJet Route Announcement

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Last fall, our government was proud to stand with stakeholders and announce direct flights between Winnipeg and Los Angeles, which has already started paying dividends for Manitobans in the Manitoba industry.

We all know Manitoba punches well above our class in the global market, and the Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade announced further opportunities earlier today. I have—

I since taken advantage of those opportunities, Madam Speaker.

Can the minister elaborate on how we're helping build the Manitoba industry and where I'm going for a family wedding?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Economic Development, Investment and Trade): I'd like to thank the member from Brandon West for that great question.

And, Madam Speaker, I was honoured today—this morning, actually—to join our Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and many industry stakeholders to announce that, starting this September, WestJet will be offering direct flights between Winnipeg and Atlanta. The new flights will give Manitoba businesses faster access to markets they already are doing business in—with, and open up many more future opportunities.

Under our Premier's leadership, Madam Speaker, we have been able to grow this partnership, and our government is investing and providing \$5 million to Winnipeg Airports Authority for this expansion.

Madam Speaker, with five direct flights a week and 12 months of the year, 200—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

PETITIONS

Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

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

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

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

(2) Thousands of Punjabi newcomers are coming to Manitoba as students and as immigrants, looking to call this province home. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: People of Punjabi origin contribute a great deal to the social, economic development of Canada and Manitoba in fields such as education, science, health, business and politics.

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

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

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

We therefore petition the Manitoba–Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

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

Diagnostic Testing Accessibility

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

The background of this petition as follows:

(1) Until recently, diagnostic medical tests, including for blood and fluid samples, were available and accessible in most medical clinics.

(2) Dynacare blood test labs have consolidated their blood and fluid testing services by closing 25 of its labs.

(3) The provincial government has cut diagnostic testing at many clinic sites, and residents now have to travel to different locations to get their testing done, even for a simple blood test or a urine sample.

(4) Further, travel challenges for vulnerable and elderly residents of northeast Winnipeg may result in fewer tests being done or delays in testing, with the attendant effects of increased health-care costs and poorer individual patient outcomes.

(5) COVID-19 emergency rules resulted in long outdoor lineups, putting vulnerable residents at further risk in extreme weather, be it hot or cold. Moreover, these long lineups have resulted in longer wait times for services and poorer service in general.

(6) Manitoba residents value the convenience and efficiency of the health-care system when they are able to give their samples at the time of the doctor visit.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to immediately demand Dynacare maintain all of the phlebotomy, blood sample, sites existing prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency, and allow all Manitobans to get their blood and urine tests done when visiting their doctor, thereby facilitating local access to blood testing services.

And this petition's signed by many, many Manitobans.

Brandon University Funding

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, these are the reasons for this petition:

(1) Since taking office, the provincial government has cut operating funding to post-secondary institutions such as Brandon University, while simultaneously increasing tuition and student fees.

(2) Brandon University is the only university in rural Manitoba and serves as an important hub for Westman.

(3) Brandon University is the largest university outside Winnipeg with over 2,200 full-time students and just under 1,000 part-time students.

(4) Despite the important role Brandon University plays in Manitoba, the provincial government is continuing to cut the university's funding in Budget 2023-24, as funding yet again fails to keep pace with inflation.

(5) Inadequate funding hurts students and the quality of education they receive, as it may force Brandon University to raise tuition, cut programs and services, or both.

(6) Funding cuts also negatively impact Brandon University's faculty, who are at risk of having their courses cut or being let go altogether.

(7) The provincial government has refused to expand—explain why Brandon University's 2023-24 operating funding increase falls below inflation, and why it is lower than other universities in Manitoba.

* (14:50)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to adequately fund Brandon University so that the institution can avoid making cuts and continue to serve students, faculty, Westman and the province of Manitoba as a whole.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you.

Drug Overdose Reporting

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Across the province, many Manitobans continue to struggle with addictions, and the pandemic has led to even more deaths and worsened the ongoing public health crisis of opioid overdoses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to enact Bill 217, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act (Overdose Death Reporting), to require the Province to publish the number of drug overdose deaths, as well

as the type of drug, on a government website in a timely fashion.

And this has been signed by Brenda Cook, Charles Equan [*phonetic*], Ms. Sutherland and many others.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Pursuant to rule 34(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor). The title of the resolution is Condemning the Provincial Government for Failing to Uphold the Right to Housing for All Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for Wolseley. The title of the resolution is Condemning the Provincial Government for Failing to Uphold the Right to Housing for All Manitobans.

* * *

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

CONSUMER PROTECTION AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Consumer Protection and Government Services. Questions for this department will continue in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Nice to be back again.

And yesterday, when we left off, I was just wondering, what are the numbers and the types of people bidding for their birth certificate, marriage certificate? What are those numbers?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): I thank the member.

And I recall, I think when I first took on this role, chatting with the member and, you know, when we were congratulating each other on our respective roles as the new minister and the new critic for Consumer Protection and Government Services, we had a chat back then. And at that time, I think the member was likely aware, because he's talking to, you know, talking to the same citizens that I'm talking to, that the wait times were significant.

I think, at the end of the January, by my records here, it was about a five-month backlog for birth certificates—for the registration of a birth certificate, and then a couple more days or weeks for the processing of the actual certificate, depending if rush service was chosen.

So it was at the beginning of this year as I took on the role—about five months. We've been working very hard on that backlog, as the member knows, and we've been adding staff. So the latest information I have, which is less than a week old, is showing that we're just around the two- to two-and-a-half-month mark. So we've managed to cut the backlog more than in half in just the last—I guess that's four months.

Mr. Sandhu: And, actually, I was looking at the numbers that the minister can provide us the numbers. How many people—what is the backlog with the numbers? Hundreds? Thousands?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes. And I think I was mentioning yesterday that I hesitate to spell it out in those terms because the nature of the work is that there's just an incredible volume that has to go through the Vital Statistics office on an annual basis. I believe the number was 125,000 events are typically going through the system. And so that's a few thousand—a couple thousand every week.

So even if, you know, we had the wait times down to, say, three weeks, you would still have a backlog with 6,000 in it. So I don't have a specific backlog number to share with the member, but I'm just—I'm

very optimistic that we've made north of a 50 per cent improvement.

I've made it clear to my staff that that's appreciated, but also not our final target. We're committed to completely eliminating that backlog and getting our service times, you know, better than our targeted amounts.

Mr. Sandhu: Actually, this is so disappointing. Like, the minister have the numbers, like a month, but he doesn't have the numbers.

Can he maybe undertake to providing us these numbers by—in a week or so? You know, because when we have the—we know there's a wait-list is two and a half months to three months, but the numbers should be there, too, right?

Mr. Teitsma: Mr. Chair, I'll start by just correcting the member. It's currently under two and a half months; it's closer to two months backlog. So, as I said, a significant improvement, less than half the size that it was just a few short months ago.

I appreciate the member's desire to get a number on that backlog, so I do agree that I can—I'll take that—my department will take that as an undertaking and we'll endeavour to provide those numbers. And if—and some context around it, too, to help, you know, ensure that there's realistic expectations on the part of the member and on the part of the public as they see those numbers.

So, yes, I appreciate the inquiry and yes, I will take it as an undertaking.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you to the minister and the staff for providing those numbers later on.

When people don't get their event certificate on time, what is the effect on Manitobans? Or can the minister maybe just—if they don't get their birth certificate on time or they don't get their death certificate on time or they don't get their marriage certificate on time, what is the effect on Manitobans?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member and I think—I hope the member can appreciate a couple things.

One is that those impacts aren't necessarily something that's in my departmental purview, and, as such, he has probably as much insight as I would, or any other MLA would, as to how this is impacting our constituents.

But the member and I have both chatted about some of the impacts, so I think we're both reasonably familiar. You know, an example would be a delay in

the registration of birth can result in a delay in the payment of child tax benefits.

Usually those payments are made retroactively, and so it does catch up. But that payment can really be impactful to families, and that's, you know, one of the reasons that I've really prioritized the birth registration backlog as something that needs to be addressed thoroughly.

Other impacts, the member would know, right—we've spoken with individuals who are under a time constraint to get a passport. And in those cases I think the member would agree, and I believe I mentioned yesterday, the department does make every effort that when a member comes to an MLA's office to say, look, this is my circumstance, and they're vetted there, and the MLA agrees that they have a reasonable request to get their certificate faster than most other Manitobans, that when those escalations are sent into my office, they are dealt with, you know, quite promptly and effectively.

And I think that that reality does help to mitigate and minimize the impacts of these delays. But I don't want to pretend that they're not impactful, the member knows that I know that they are, and the member knows that they are, and the constituents that we have to deal with regularly know.

And I know the other MLAs in my caucus and his caucus and among the Liberals also have helped, you know, have had contact with people in these situations where their delays are impacting them. And, you know, some we've been able to assist, but with others it is sometimes just a matter of patience to ensure that, you know, say, the birth is registered so the child tax benefits flow. Yes, we ask for patience on that.

* (15:10)

But, as I indicated, you know, we've managed to cut our backlog on birth registrations by nearly—actually by more than two and a half months, in the three and a half months since I've been in the role as minister. I'm optimistic we'll be able to continue to reduce that backlog at a significant pace over the coming few months and have a much better situation by the time we get into the summer and fall.

Mr. Sandhu: Last season, my colleague, the MLA for Keewatinook, pushed for a change regarding name registration to allow for traditional Indigenous characters and names to be registered. Unfortunately, the PC government didn't support my colleague's bill, but later amended the Vital Stats act to make this change.

Does the minister have any stats on the number of names that have been registered using the newly allowed characters and the names?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, thank you for that question.

Mr. Chair, I think the member will agree that it was important to do that work that was brought forward by my predecessor under Bill 3. And I think the number of that bill should indicate the relative priority that it was to our government, that it was very important to 'bensure' that it got addressed early in the session. And I'm recalling that it did receive unanimous support from all parties, and I was very happy about that, that we could move forward in that way.

Before I get into the number, I just—I want to spell out, I think, for the member—just to ensure he's aware—that, while Manitoba and some other provinces are doing well in this regard and ensuring that these special characters for Indigenous names and even some other cultures—Scandinavian comes to mind, that they—these—characters can be used, there's still a gap. And that gap is that, at a federal level, federal documents don't support some of these special characters.

So, for example, you can't get a passport with these characters on it, and that's formed a barrier. So some families that might have wanted to include these characters in their child's name, when they find out that they can't get a passport with that in it—and that might create issues for travel for that child for, you know, some time, potentially—some of them decide not to proceed at this time.

And so I think the numbers are perhaps lower than we might think that they could be or would be, and I think they are lower than they would be if the federal government had been catching up.

So the latest number I have is kind of stale, it's as of February the 1st. And, as of February the 1st, there were 11 such instances that had been registered in—at Vital Statistics.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister too.

And we will be moving to RTB now, and want to know, what is—the current vacancy rate is at RTB?

Mr. Teitsma: I'll note with some amusement that the question is a little ambiguous, because when you talk about vacancies and the residential tenancies board, usually we're thinking about how many apartments might be available, you know, in the city or in the province. But I'm pretty confident that the member,

instead, was referring to the number of full-time equivalents and the number of staff in the division.

So there's 57 full-time equivalents in the budget. Right now, there are four vacancies, which results in a 7 per cent vacancy rate.

Mr. Sandhu: How many above-guideline increase requests did the RTB receive in 2022-23?

* (15:20)

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

Residential tenancies board actually tracks those numbers on a calendar-year basis, so I don't have the fiscal-year breakdown for him. But I can say, in the calendar year of 2022—so that's January 1st to December 31st of 2022—there were 353 above-guideline rent increases that were received by the residential tenancies board.

Mr. Sandhu: How many of them were approved?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member.

Yes, just for the purposes of clarity, it probably would be wise to talk through the process to ensure that everything's understood.

So when a—when an above-guideline rent increase is made, there's three, I would say, possible outcomes. So, one outcome is that there's no basis for the above-guideline rent increase, in which case the application was made almost in error or by an effort of the landlord that was very misguided. That's rare, but last year there was about 10 of those. And so those ones result in the application being withdrawn.

Then the other two outcomes that can occur is that the rent increase is approved exactly as provided by the landlord, so the landlord said, look, these and these and these are my expenses, and this and this and this is why I want this increase, and the residential tenancies board approves it.

And then the third thing is that the application is made for the above-guideline rent increase, and parts of that application are denied by the residential tenancies board. Well, they'll say, no, the amount of the increase that you're applying for is too high, and so they'll instead grant a lower above-guideline rent increase instead.

Mr. Sandhu: So, 353 above-guideline applications were made, 10 were withdrawn; so that leaves with 343. So all 343 were approved with, maybe, what they were asking for, or them—like, what those numbers are—so, like?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, I don't have the breakdown of how many were approved as—for the amount that they applied and how many approved for a lower rate. But I do know that that's not uncommon for there to be approvals made, but for a lower amount.

Mr. Sandhu: So, 353 applied, 10 withdrawn, 343 approved; so that's 100 per cent approved. And how many Manitobans were affected by this rent increase?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member.

I don't have the number directly related to the 343 applications that were approved or approved for a lower rate from last year.

But I do have kind of an overview of what happens. Because this is not a—above-guideline rent increases, as the member would know from question period, is not a new process. It's not even a process that was changed at all by our government.

It's a process that was set in place, I believe, by an NDP government back in the day and even administered by someone who's sitting as a current NDP MLA, the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw). The member for Fort Garry was in charge of approving a large number of these types of approvals.

So, you know, on average, over a 13-year period, there's about 346 applications made per year, and this year we're talking about 353. So that's right on average. On average, there's 10 applications withdrawn, and last year there were 10 applications withdrawn.

On average, the percentage rate approval is below the actual—sorry, the percentage rate applied for is higher than the actual percentage rate granted by roughly the same percentage, about 2 and a half or 3 per cent reduction. And on average, between 20 and 25 thousand units are impacted by above-guideline rent increases each year.

Mr. Sandhu: So if the minister's—so they were around—between 20 to 25 thousand units that were affected this year?

Mr. Teitsma: That's right.

Mr. Sandhu: So what was the highest approved increase—was this year?

* (15:30)

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

I don't have that level of detail. We have averages, and I think the member might be already familiar with those averages. But what I will point out is that, you know, rent controls in Manitoba, generally speaking,

roll forward at a calculated or prescribed rate. There's a formula for it.

And our government interrupted that formula for 2022 and 2023 by setting the rent increase guideline to zero per cent. I think that's unprecedented in the history of our province to have two zero per cent increases in a year. I think the member knows why we're doing that. And certainly, that's, I think, something that's going to contribute to or that has contributed to better results for tenants and ability for tenants to have some cost certainty as we went through the pandemic.

Mr. Sandhu: Actually, my question was, what was the highest approved increase above guideline?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, and I began with my answer saying I don't have that number.

Mr. Sandhu: Can the minister undertake to providing these numbers?

Mr. Teitsma: I appreciate—I think the member might be looking for some kind of a sensational number or something along those lines, but I would hesitate—I would recommend that, you know, from a policy-crafting perspective, it's more important to look at the averages and to see what, you know, what the holistic plan is. Because when you get to the fringe of any data set—and maybe the member has studied maths in university like I have—you know, there's always going to be an outlier of some sort.

And I can imagine, you know, I think of some apartment buildings in my community that were solely run down and poorly maintained and you could barely convince somebody to live there for 600 bucks a month. And then a new owner came along and invested tens of thousands of dollars in each unit. I'm sure a significant increase to the rent was had there.

As a percentage-wise, it's probably quite a significant number, but it's also not particularly relevant because at the end of the day, these apartments were turned into something that—like a—just a much, much better unit, a unit in which people would want to live.

So it's more important, I think, to look at the overall market, to look in terms of affordability, in terms of the Rent Assist programs that you can ask the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) about and the ways that we try to ensure that tenants are treated fairly in our province, and that landlords are also encouraged to make investments to improve the quality of properties and improve the security of the tenants and

their properties and create a—you know, better outcomes for all Manitobans.

Mr. Sandhu: The minister said it is better to look at the average, so maybe, can the minister provide the average above-guideline that was last year?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, the average approved above-guideline rate was 9.8 per cent. The averaged approved above-guideline rate over the last 13 years was 9.9 per cent, so last year's average was slightly lower than the average over the last 13 years.

An Honourable Member: Maybe you should do something about that.

Mr. Teitsma: You want to make it higher? *[interjection]* No, I said, do you want to make it higher?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for The Maples.

Mr. Sandhu: I also want to find out those AGIs, were they—increases were concentrators in certain areas or were they just the—all over the city, all over Manitoba or were, like, most of the applications—out of 353, were they in downtown, like, say, south side? Do you got those numbers?

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

Not really sure where he's going on that, but that information is generally not made public. Individual landlords have their relationships with their tenants, and they're often private buildings, and they're allowed to operate them in a way that, you know, complies with the legislation. And beyond that, it's not something that's, you know, posted on a public website. But, I mean, we're talking about averages.

And I know the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), you know, tried to get some words on the record, but he wasn't recognized by the Chair, so I'll put them on the record for him. He said, when I said that 9.8 per cent was how much it was increased by last year and that—but the average over the 13-year period that's before me or that I have records for was higher than that. He said, we should do something about that. That's why I replied with the phrase, are you suggesting that we increase them more? *[interjection]* He thought that was funny and he still seems to think that's funny.

I'll tell you—I'll—I will tell you that when the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) was on the Residential Tenancies Commission, I think it was, making decisions about above-guideline rent increases, the year before we came in government, when the

member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) was part of a very different looking NDP caucus than they had—than they have in the House today. I know the member never did get to sit in Cabinet—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: The member never did get in—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Teitsma: —Cabinet. I doubt he ever will, based on his current conduct, if not his past.

But, nonetheless, when he was in the government side of the House, back in 2015 I think his seat might have been on the opposition side, then the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) was on the Residential Tenancies Commission, and the member for Fort Garry was processing above-guideline rent increases.

So, in 2015—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

* (15:40)

Mr. Teitsma: —the above-guideline rent increases approved by the member for Fort Garry and whoever else was helping him on the Residential Tenancies Commission was a whopping 12 per cent. In the year 2015, the average above-guideline rent increase, under the previous NDP government, was 12 per cent. That is 2.2 per cent higher than it was last year under our government, even in the context of construction inflation and all sorts of other inflationary pressures that would suggest that those kinds of renovations may, in fact, be eligible for higher than the average guidelines.

In fact, the end result was a lower than the historical average guideline—above-guideline rent increase and an improvement. I know this frustrates the member for Concordia. *[interjection]*

I know that he can't—he's hoping one day that he gets to sit around a Cabinet table. He's frustrated he didn't have the opportunity to do that when he was on the government side of the—of caucus for years and years. I don't have any expectation that he'll ever get to sit there.

But I can tell you that what it takes to sit there is a level of discipline that he seems incapable of exercising.

Mr. Chairperson: Before I continue on, I'd like to remind the members that the person has the floor, if—and I'd like to stay on topic to what we're discussing today, here. We are doing quite well, and we're hoping to finish these Estimates off today, but please, let's

have some respect for each other. Whoever has the floor, has the floor.

Mr. Sandhu: We know these above-guideline rent increases, which is like 9.8 per cent, is kind of high.

So the member from Concordia was saying, like, we have to do something; we—our member, today, member from St. James brought a very good bill this morning. And the minister just spoke about the car, buying cars, instead of talking about rent increases, how we can help those Manitobans.

And so, from there, the minister wants that same thing here, and so—the minister could have, this morning, supported our bill, and—where this had probably helped lots of Manitobans. So maybe we can just move to the next question from here.

So, what was the average amount of time it took the Residential Tenancies Branch to resolve a dispute between tenant and landlord?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member for that question.

You know, there's different types of disputes, I guess, and there's a fair bit of variability between the kinds of disputes that can happen between a tenant and a landlord. And so in total, there's about 3,700 of those claims being made on an annual basis.

The wait times for a hearing would vary from a few weeks to a few months, and then once the hearing has occurred, then those decisions are typically made in a few days to maybe a maximum of two weeks.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you for that answer, Minister, and can you please break down those disputes and the wait times?

Mr. Teitsma: Sure. The highest priority disputes are emergency orders of possession, so an emergency order of possession—there's also a bill before the House that's related to that, but I'll stay focused here on Estimates.

So, emergency orders of possession are only in a matter of a few days that they're heard and dealt with. Other orders of possession are generally given priority, so those are about three weeks typically, and that's for non-payment of rent or for any other issue, really, that would result in a, you know, request for an eviction that's not of an emergent nature. So, those are usually about three weeks.

For other, you know, disputes between the tenant and a landlord where the tenant relationship is still allowed to continue and there's no eviction, those ones tend to be more in the—on the order of a few months.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you for that, Minister. And also, yesterday we were talking about P3s. I just want—I have one question going back which I referred, that I'll ask later on.

So we were just wondering, other than schools, is there any other P3 model that government is considering using in other departments?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member. I hope that he can respect the fact that I'm not in charge of building absolutely everything that our government builds. You know, I don't build the hospitals; that's for the Health department. I don't build the highways; that's for Transportation and Infrastructure. You know, I do build schools and a few other things; I—a lot of maintenance, even on this beautiful building here that is done.

So, what I would say, I guess, in response to that question, is at this time, there are no other areas that, in my purview, that I'm aware of that would be considered for P3.

Mr. Sandhu: I would like to move on to right to repair now. So, does the minister think it is important that Manitobans have the ability to repair the products they buy, including electronics, farm equipment and more?

* (15:50)

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, I appreciate the member and the member's question.

And he knows that I'm almost happy to talk about any topic at almost any time and even if he wants to catch me in the hallway, we can chat about everything from, you know, a great restaurant to eat at to what political policies on an international scale might need to be or should be.

But, in this case, you know, I—my department does not have that within its purview. We're here to talk about the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year ending 2024, March 31st. I don't think there's any reference to right to repair there.

Mr. Sandhu: We're talking about consumer protection now, so that was the question.

And maybe I can—if he doesn't know this one, maybe I can ask: Can the minister tell us what action he's taking to ensure Manitobans are able to repair the products they buy?

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, I thank the member. I think my feedback on the first question was somehow not taken to heart by the member. What I would say is that the legislation that's before the House that's put forward

by one of his members isn't what we're talking about here. The policy decisions of a government outside of the realm of what's, you know, been decided as part of the Estimates isn't really in scope here.

I'll just observe, on the right to repair, I think—and again, this is just what I'm aware of and I'm sure the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) would be happy to tell you more about it. He seems to love this sort of thing. You know, there's been some movement in the European Union towards improving right-to-repair legislation there too.

I'd just ask that member: Are there any provincial level—I mean, that's a multinational organization, the European Union. Would there be any provincial level or something that's below the size of a nation that he's aware of that has, you know, specific laws around right to repair that might help me understand what he's asking about?

Mr. Sandhu: Is the minister thinking of introducing any legislation that will protect the consumer regarding when they buy a new product, buying their new vehicle, where they can get repair done wherever they want it?

Mr. Teitsma: I'll once again remind the member that we're not talking here about potential legislative agendas or anything like that. We're talking about the way that our consumer department of works right now—Consumer Protection Office works right now.

What I will say is that the Consumer Protection Office answers roughly 15,000 inquiries annually, and that includes emails, phone calls. They also issue over 5,000 licences to direct sellers, hearing aid dealers, collectors, collection agents, et cetera. And they've also investigated hundreds—I think last year was 427—consumer complaints.

I'll also let the member know that Manitoba is one of the few provinces where the seller is liable for all warranties that they sell. That means if something does need to be shipped away to be repaired, then the seller is responsible for those costs.

And that's the way that Manitoban consumers are protected, perhaps better than in some other provinces. And there's also some even more specific requirements related to motor vehicle repairs that offer protection for consumers.

So, Manitoba does well and the department certainly is handling a high volume of inquiries and consumer complaints and serving our province well.

Mr. Sandhu: I just move—I want to move on to the Public Utilities Board. How many times did the PUB meet in 2022-23?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member for the questions about the Public Utilities Board. I don't have the specific answer to the question he's asking about how many times they've met. They're independent, and I make it my goal to keep them that way.

I'll note that our government, in this budget, has increased the amount of funding to the Public Utilities Board by \$2 million to ensure that they are able to be a world-class regulator. That's what we want them to be and that's what they're doing right now.

Now, I will say for the member's benefit because he's perhaps thinking that they're not meeting: I can assure him that they are. They, for example, have had to meet and have hearings about the Manitoba Hydro electric general rate application; also about the Manitoba Public Insurance directive and general rate application.

They have to review Efficiency Manitoba's efficiency plan. They will be expected to review and they can review, regularly, Centra Gas's general rate application.

And they also have a tremendous amount of responsibility around municipal water and waste utilities. They actually have to deal with 240 individual municipal water and waste water utilities across the province and deal with them from a rate-setting perspective.

* (16:00)

So, lots of work going on at the Public Utilities Board. Certainly, in addition to providing them with an extra \$2 million in the 2023 budget, I have met once with the chair and assured him of my commitment to his continued independence and my support for his efforts to ensure that Manitoba has a world-class public utilities regulator. And that \$2-million commitment certainly went a long way to assuring him of my commitment.

Mr. Sandhu: How does the passage of Bill 35 impact the PUB?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member for the question. I think the member would know that Bill 35 is not a Consumer Protection and Government Services bill; it's a Finance bill. Because Finance is responsible for Hydro.

I understand—I can appreciate—and I know the member for St. James (Mr. Sala) is giving me the eye

here to say, yes, but it does impact the PUB, and it does, in fact, impact the PUB. But in terms of the exact nature of that impact, I try to keep myself at arm's-length from the Public Utilities Board, and I expect that they'll do that.

I'll just read, actually, a few excerpts, if the members will permit me, from—I think this might be the last—the most recent news release. I haven't checked. But one of the more recent news releases coming out of the Public Utilities Board.

And what—this is what they have to say. They say the board—the Public Utilities Board, specifically—is an impartial tribunal and regulator at arm's-length from government. And I'm going to emphasize and read that again—at arm's-length from government—that acts in the public interest.

That's certainly their mandate. That's really what I wanted to support them in doing but the exact and particular nature of the work that they do, and the legislation that might govern them, I haven't put myself into the weeds on that. I have ultimate confidence in the head of the Public Utilities Board to be able to do his work in accordance with the legislation that applies.

But I'll also say from this news release, since I suspect it would not be the kind of a news release that might be mentioned by the members opposite in the House, is that the result of this particular decision that they made on Centra Gas is that it will decrease a typical residential customer bill, the annual bill, by 9.5 per cent; a 9.5 per cent decrease in natural gas rates, at a time when almost everything else and every other grocery item and the cost of gasoline and the carbon tax supported by your NDP-Liberal coalition in Ottawa; all those things are going up.

But here in Manitoba, we have the cost of natural gas decreasing, as approved by the independent, arm's-length tribunal and regulator, the Public Utilities Board, decreasing at a rate of 9.5 per cent.

Mr. Sandhu: I do like to ask a question on MAHCP, that they are—they got strong mandate from the members to go on a strike. Is there a bargaining mandate regarding contract negotiation with the MAHCP from the minister?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member for that question. I think he's in the wrong section of Estimates. This is Consumer Protection and Government Services, not anything to do with the Health department, not anything to do with the work of the public sector compensation committee. But he might be close, if we

get to my next department, I'd probably could provide him an answer but a different set of deputies and staff will be beside me at that time.

I do just want to revert back to the impact that Bill 35 would have on the Public Utilities Board. And I think one impact that I am aware of, that I think is very significant, is that major projects—capital projects, things like Bipole III, things like the Keeyask hydroelectric dam generating station—these projects previously were not subject to the Public Utilities Board review.

What Bill 35 does is it ensures that the Public Utilities Board, this independent tribunal, this arm's-length body that is independent from government and isn't subject to their say-so, would have something to say, would be given material and the opportunity to investigate that material and to comment on the decision making by government and the proposals being made by Manitoba Hydro to spend ratepayer and sometimes taxpayers' dollars on major capital projects like Bipole III, like Keeyask.

I hope the member recognizes that those kinds of investments significantly—or significant—like, impact the future of our province. Right now, roughly \$1 billion a year is falling out of our province's economy, being paid by Manitoba Hydro in interest costs because of the significant debt incurred as part of Bipole III and as part of Keeyask.

Mr. Shannon Martin, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Those investments were made, you know, without any scrutiny, without any independent oversight, without any input from the Public Utilities Board. That's not the way those decisions should be made, and I hope the members will agree with me that that change that came in as part of Bill 35 is going to make things better in our province, going to prevent the kind of mistakes that the NDP—the previous NDP government made.

Mr. Sandhu: I think the minister doesn't have anything good to say about the last seven years. He had to go back, way, way, way back and I don't know where minister's going, actually.

* (16:10)

I'm going to go to my next question. On the page—Estimates book, page 24 and 25, the government is thinking of reducing owned and leased buildings' footprints. Is the government considering selling off any public housing in order to, or—

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member and I thank him for his patience. I think he—first we should make sure we've got—we're on the same page in, terms of what kind of buildings we're talking about here.

So, I think the member, in his question, talked about housing or Manitoba Housing, that's not on this department's table, that's not anything I'm going to be able to speak to. The Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) is the one who's in charge of that portfolio, although we do assist with some of the major renovations and construction projects there.

But in terms of the overall portfolio and its management, that's really within the Department of Families. And so, from a housing perspective, not part of this—of my responsibility and—as—in this department and not part of my response.

The point that I think the member is talking about, say 3(b) on page 25 of the Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure talks about a reduction of owned and leased portfolio. So, my department's in charge of every office building that we own: the Legislature, you know, provincial office buildings in a variety of towns, the Legislative Building specifically, yes.

And all these buildings are in our purview as a department, and many of those buildings are owned, but there's also places where we lease. And I think the member probably can know, you know, going up and down Broadway, and in the vicinity here, you can see Manitoba government offices that are housed in buildings that aren't necessarily owned by the Manitoba government.

And so, what we are—what we're looking at here is primarily an opportunity to focus on the better utilization of the assets that we own. Sometimes that'll require a refresh or an investment in a particular asset, but overall the goal there, by investing in some of the buildings that we own, is that we can reduce the number of buildings that we lease and do a better job of using the assets that we own.

* (16:20)

And that's really what we're after with that measurement. You know, the overall footprint that government uses, we want to make sure that we're—we have enough room, but not—that we're not paying, with taxpayer money, for room that we don't need.

And that's, in fact, when we took—got into government and—you know, back in 2016, that's what we were finding, is that sometimes, you know, leases were signed for convenience without a lot of creativity.

And so you had government-owned buildings that were adequate or might have required, you know, relatively small investment to be made adequate, sitting empty while, you know, government money and taxpayer dollars, really, were being given to a private landlord just because, you know, the executive director of a particular division thought that they needed, you know, a bigger window.

And so, we don't want that. And we want to make sure that we're using our buildings prudently, that we're meeting standards for how much space an employee can have to work in and all those other, you know, aspects that go in the management of an overall portfolio.

But our goal is to use the assets that we have as well as possible.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I'd like to thank my colleague for giving me an opportunity to ask some—a couple questions here.

I am going to ask some questions related to the rural broadband expansion project. Specifically, I'm hoping that the minister can provide an update on the status of work with Xplornet.

We know this contract falls under his department. And we know that recently, a couple weeks ago, we learned that Manitoba Hydro let their employees know that work had stopped on that rural broadband expansion project. This seemed to be a due to a disagreement between Xplornet and Manitoba Hydro.

And I'm hoping that the minister can provide some clarity on the status of that disagreement and when he suspects work will recommence.

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

And I think maybe first start with setting the table here to ensure that he knows that I share his desire to get every community—in fact, every household in Manitoba—connected to high-speed broadband Internet. That's my objective as a minister; that's what I want.

And I think I want it for the very same reasons that the member wants it: because it's going to provide educational opportunities, especially for northern remote communities; it's going to provide employment opportunities; it's going to provide economic growth opportunities for our province.

Certainly, very positive outcomes are already being seen and more are being anticipated as we continue to connect communities.

I do have an update for the member about the number of communities that are connected. I think, you know, when I had a brief opportunity in the House to read into the record some of the names of those communities—I promise I won't do that today—but back then, there was—I think it was 409, but it might have been 418 communities that we had on the list. The latest list of communities that have been connected has actually increased. Now it's up to 433 communities that have been connected. There's still a couple hundred more to do, and so we want to continue that.

And I know First Nations, in particular, are our concern. That's an area where we absolutely want to see those opportunities for education, for employment and for economic growth that's going to provide tremendous opportunities for First Nations and better outcomes for them. So we have 13 First Nations communities that been already connected. There are 10 that are yet to be connected.

So that's really the overall scope of where we're at.

There's a contract in place. There's two parties at the table, Hydro and Xplornet. Certainly, I've indicated my desire that the dispute be resolved quickly, and I'm hopeful that that's what's going to happen.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate the response.

Something that is hard to compute in terms of the information that's being offered by the minister and what we know to be the state of affairs with this contract between Xplornet and Manitoba Hydro: the minister's claiming that there have been over 400 communities that have been connected and yet, over the last two years, all we've heard from communities, from small Manitoba-based ISPs, small businesses, is that, first of all, there was a giant stop-sell order in place for approximately a year after the contract was first put in place, and now we're seeing a work stoppage, and that's due to a dispute between Xplornet and Hydro, in terms of Xplornet's concerns that Manitoba Hydro Telecom and Hydro are asking too significant a cost to connect to our fibre.

So, there seems to be a disconnect here, and I just really would like to have the minister on record clarify, because he's talked about the list of connections and he's read the list of communities. But we know that the province is separated into zones.

And zone 1, which is—mostly covers southern Manitoba, which includes a lot of the towns and—that the minister read off in his list last week—is a zone that was given to Valley Fiber, that has no bearing on the work that's being done by Xplornet. And that Valley Fiber work is being done through funding from the federal government and they're—to my knowledge, and the minister can clarify if I'm wrong—they've received no funding from the province to support that expansion.

So I just—I'm hoping the minister can be clear on record when he's saying that these 400-plus connections are all happening in zones that are specifically committed to Xplornet.

Can he, on record, tell us today that he is honestly referring to connections that have been completed through that relationship with Xplornet?

* (16:30)

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, I thank the member for his inquiry. He seems to want to get into a lot of, you know, particular details.

Really, our—you know, what I'm looking at here, at this level, is to say that we have an overall agreement with Xplore, and Hydro is part of that agreement as well through the Manitoba government. And we want to—you know, we want to see that agreement completed.

Now, the information that we had reported back is that 433 communities have been connected and that that is ahead of schedule. But in terms of dictating which communities are going to be hooked up when and which are going to be nearer to end of the agreement period or which ones are going to be before—or sooner in the agreement period, that's not something that my department puts its fingers into, as much as the member might want to do that.

Mr. Sandhu: I'm giving a few minutes to member from Tyndall Park 'til 4:45.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, we have an agreement that the member for Tyndall Park will have the floor 'til 4:45, at which point I will interrupt in order to proceed with the questions.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I'd like to thank the minister and all the departmental staff who are here this afternoon and trying to answer our questions to the best of their ability as well. I'm going to try to condense my questions as much as possible, and whatever answers you can provide, I would greatly appreciate.

Earlier in the pandemic, we had what was called visitation pods installed at some of the long-term-care facilities. And I was hoping the minister could share some insight into what will happen with the visitation shelters once decommissioned; if he could provide a bit of a breakdown as to how many will be donated, sold or destroyed.

Just any insight if Manitobans have expressed interest in the pods or if the minister is accepting ideas people might have about them.

Mr. Teitsma: Yes, I thank the member, and I understand the member's time crunch. And the member knows how much I admire and respect her as a member of the opposition. She does a phenomenal job in the House and also here in this Committee of Supply. So I will endeavour to be quick in my responses.

What I would say is that we're still in evaluation stage of all the proposals that we've received. But I can say that, you know, there was proposals for donation. That's the vast majority of the proposals, about 80 per cent of all the proposals we've received was for donation. And there was enough proposals for donation to account for all of the units multiple times over. So this makes me optimistic that we'll be able to find a donation recipient for every pod. That's certainly my hope.

Now, there were a few submissions for auction, I guess, where they—it was more of a commercial use. It's possible, depending on the location and the nature of the request that one of those might be selected, but we're still in that evaluation phase. I'm happy to report that we received absolutely zero proposals to dispose of the scrap. And nobody wants that as the outcome either.

Thanks.

Ms. Lamoureux: Can this minister speak a little bit to the donations, what that might look like, how the pods are being intended to be used?

Mr. Teitsma: I thank the member.

I understand, I think, where she's going to, but really, because we have such a variety of proposals in front of us, I don't want to prejudice the evaluation process. I want that process to move forward in a good way.

What I will say is that, you know, the proposals that I've seen, there's tremendous social good that can result from the reallocation of these pods. And once the evaluation process is complete and the decisions

are made, that information will become public as to where they're going to go and who's going to use them and how are they going to use them.

Ms. Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and thank you for your response, too, Minister. I'm going to move onto another subject, but, just, if you want to take a moment of your next answer, if you could elaborate a little bit on if there's a timeline at all for what to expect with the pods.

My next question is about ICIP, the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. Can you provide a breakdown of the funding in terms of where the projects came from, who applied for the projects and the kinds of infrastructure projects approved, and those not approved?

* (16:40)

Mr. Teitsma: I'm sensitive to the time constraints here, and I don't think I can offer a particularly fulsome response to the member, but I will give what I can.

So, on the visitation pods, I expect that decision to be made as to who—which organizations will receive the pods should be made this summer. I think the hope is that before the end of the calendar year, although the pods will be allocated and moved.

What I can say on ISIP is that there's a total of \$3.3 billion in total project costs, of which 1.2 was funding that we received to support those.

There's 138 projects that have been approved, and four are still waiting review as of the last note that I have here.

But our ISIP program has been fully expended and the member can expect to see some, you know, news releases from time to time. There's probably already been quite a few of them made, as well.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 4:45, as previously agreed upon, we will now—we're finished with questions. We will now proceed to the considerations of the resolutions.

I will now call resolution 8.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$329,553,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Capital Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$55,084,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Digital and Technology Solutions, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$18,910,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Procurement and Supply Chain, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$22,393,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Public Safety Communication Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$17,059,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Consumer Protection, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

There is no resolution 8.7.

Resolution 8.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$56,200,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 8.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$62,071,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 8.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Sandhu: I move that line item 8.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services' salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

* (16:50)

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on this motion?

Is the committee 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. Chairperson: Resolution 8.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,813,000 for Consumer Protection and Government Services, Corporate Administration and Planning, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Consumer Protection and Government Services.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply are for the Department of Public Service Commission.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister responsible for the Manitoba public service): No.

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

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I—the floor is open for questions. No questions.

We will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions.

Resolution 17.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$27,933,000 for Public Service Commission, Public Service Commission, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Public Service Commission.

EMPLOYEE PENSIONS AND OTHER COSTS

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply are for the Department of Employee Pensions and Other Costs.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): No.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions.

I will now call resolution 6.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$33,652,000 for Employee Pensions and Other Costs, Employee Pensions and Other Costs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Department of Employee Pensions and Other Costs.

This also concludes our considerations of the Estimates in this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in room 254.

And we still have a couple minutes left, so I'd just like to thank everybody. Like, Estimates are over. I've been chairing Estimates for a number of years and it looks like this may be my last day chairing Estimates.

So I'd like to just—I'd like to thank everybody for taking part. There have been times over the years

when Estimates got a little bit out of control, but we're able to live through it.

I'd like to thank all the staff, because they've done a great job, especially my partner, Tim, here. He's been with me for a lot of years, and thank you very much for guiding me, Tim. I mean, and other different departments and different committees with—all the staff has been great.

So I just want to thank you guys today, and you guys. It's great to have people that you can work with.

Thank you.

Committee rise.

ROOM 255

AGRICULTURE

* (14:50)

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): I'm happy to be back, second day of questioning.

We were talking about 4-H clubs yesterday, and the minister shared that we have 97 clubs and over 1,000 members. I just want to ask the minister: How many of these clubs and how many members are in our city of Winnipeg?

Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Agriculture): Yes, thank you very much for that question.

As you know, 4-H is important to all of us, I believe, in this room, and it's a great organization. I think we spoke yesterday of how we admire what they do, and the role models they set out for our children.

I guess the member could have done the same thing as our staff here and just asked Uncle Google if there was a 4-H club in Winnipeg, and there's the U of M Future Leaders 4-H Club, so that's outstanding. And the same Google search showed that they just had a social and they had a raffle with pizza and a whole bunch of good stuff, so I'm sure they had lots of fun there.

* (15:00)

But if the member would like us to google something else, please feel free to ask us another question.

Mr. Brar: This set-up of Estimates is designed to offer us an opportunity to work together, otherwise we would be googling at home and not together here. So we're working together for Manitobans.

We're talking about the importance of 4-H clubs for Manitobans and we're talking about the opportunity that we can explore while sitting together, discussing how we can take advantage of such wonderful programs to shape up the personalities of Manitoban youth.

So why I'm asking this question is not just to see the numbers, but sit together and plan something, because I think our families, urban families, also deserve that opportunity to send their kids to these wonderful 4-H clubs.

I have talked to so many 4-H'ers, I have talked to families, I have talked to the Manitoba 4-H Council, and there is a feeling that the department should make efforts to open these opportunities for youth in the city settings.

So I am ready to work together with the minister and I want to ask the minister that if it's on minister's agenda to bring in diverse people from various ethnic backgrounds currently residing in the cities, new Canadians, so that they can explore these opportunities and get benefit and be great leaders through participation in a 4-H program in Manitoba.

So, rather than googling, I would prefer to ask the minister to work together on that and share his views, how he thinks about expanding that inside the Perimeter.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I think probably everyone here would appreciate any open opportunities for 4-H, but if the member suggests that we should control 4-H and how they run and—I would suggest that the group that is working—the leaders of the community, the leaders of the 4-H is doing a bang-up job.

And on this side of the House, we have a hundred per cent faith in the leaders making those decisions for 4-H. And I think Shannon Dupont [*phonetic*] is doing an amazing job. And I don't think Agriculture nor government should take over 4-H.

We can all agree that 4-H is an outstanding program. And on this side of the House, we welcome everyone from all cultures to participate in 4-H because we definitely feel it's a good program, and in—such that we fund 4-H for \$300,000 per year and we'll continue to do that for the foreseeable future.

There's also been an endowment set up historically. And that's a \$1-million endowment. And that's with the Brandon community foundation. And that provides \$42,000 a year in scholarships. So in 2022, it gave out four scholarships: three of them for \$10,000 and one for \$12,500.

I think it's probably—I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that Ag in the Classroom is also an outstanding program where we can get students focused on ag for a little bit of the time while they're there. They have these amazing kits that they bring in. And we help them with that.

But these kits that they bring into the classroom, it actually has all sorts of different types of seeds. So the kids there can actually see what soya bean seed or a canola seed, you know, so they know where their margarine comes from. Or if somebody's talking about biofuel or something like that. They can actually understand exactly what all of the seeds look like. And they're doing an outstanding job as well.

I won't get into the funding at this second with Ag in the Classroom as the question was focused on 4-H. But I do feel endowments are a very powerful tool to help communities that want to have a gift that keeps on giving. And with Brandon, we've done that. We set up a \$1-million foundation which funds their scholarships. So, I think that's a great idea. And the \$300,000 per year is also decided on by the leaders, of how they're going to utilize that \$300,000.

* (15:10)

So I really hope the member isn't suggesting that government is—should go in and control what they do or put strings attached to that money that 4-H gets. I'm not certain that I'd be in favour of that. If the member wants to put a written proposal together, I'd be more than happy to look at it, but I don't think taking over the great work that 4-H is doing and bring it into government is something that we should focus on.

I do agree, though, that we should focus on what we can to help 4-H do—expand, if that's where the member's going; expand what the great work that they do. And we'd do that at an arm's-length, by funding, and I think that's the direction that we should continue on the path. We're on the right path.

And there's probably—I guess I'm probably not allowed to ask how many people participated in 4-H in the room here, but I think there'd be quite a few people that raised their hand.

Anyway, I'll leave it there and for some further clarification from the member for Burrows.

Mr. Brar: My question was regarding collaborating and helping each other to work together and help Manitobans.

We trust the leadership in every department, and they're doing great but we also need to help each other and collaborate to bring in more opportunities and to achieve what we want to achieve together.

So the minister sounds like he thinks that, I've given the money, and that's it; my responsibility ends there.

My question is, again, working as a team makes things better. So I don't think that the minister is open to sit around the table and work with the departments around him to make things better.

Wherever I get a chance or opportunity to talk to these leaders, I do. And I have known over those years of working in Manitoba Agriculture and talking to such leaders in various departments, that there is a need, there is a feeling that 4-H clubs should be established within the Perimeter, in the city, and 4-H clubs should bring in more diversity and inclusion. And efforts are being made. I am making efforts. I don't know why the minister is not ready to join hands and make some efforts to make this happen. I don't see any passion.

And I also want to mention, this year, that all of us feel that there is a big urban-rural divide in our province, especially over the next generation. I'm not just talking about new Canadians; I'm talking about all kids in the next generation. They know less about the land. They know less about animals. They know less about nature. We need to bridge that gap and we need to narrow that divide. That was the purpose of my question that was not very much encouraged by this minister. But I would keep doing the right thing and I would keep talking to leaders and 4-H Manitoba.

And I have also, talking about Ag in the Classroom, I have seen those educational tools that minister just mentioned. I have touched those seeds and those seed kits and I have talked to the leaders in Ag in the Classroom, how they're sending those in the schools, and there is a path to identify various categories of seeds and crops, which is a good thing because we need our next generation to know more about land and agriculture, and because people look at somebody who is leading the Department of Agriculture to do great things for Manitobans.

So that's why I started this discussion. Anyways, I would keep doing my part and I would leave it to the minister if he wants to join hands or not. It's totally up to him. But I appreciate the details that the minister shared.

I would give another opportunity to the minister because this is where we would be ending this discussion on 4-H clubs and ag education. So, if the minister likes to jump in and say a few words about ag education, he is welcome to do so.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, we all hope that diversity is—moves forward in all of our groups, especially 4-H and the kids and getting them in and helping each other succeed. I know that's one thing that 4-H does. And Shannon Carvey of 4-H is doing an amazing job doing that.

Just so the member's aware, we have had no specific requests from 4-H Manitoba to expand into Winnipeg more, but, yes, definitely open for any discussions to expand 4-H, because I truly, truly feel it's an outstanding program.

But now, back to Ag in the Classroom, as the member mentioned. We—there is a very good website, if the member wants to look at it, but I'll just go over a few numbers that we pulled off there. So, Ag in the Classroom participated in 153 different communities around Manitoba, so that is—and it works out to one of every three schools, actually, were able to participate in Ag in the Classroom.

So that's an outstanding start, but it requires much more growth because I think it's 'adventitious'—advantageous for people to understand where their food comes from and—on all corners of it as well—not just the seeds, but how beef and pork and our chickens, our eggs, our milk, everything like that is processed and how we make it safe to ensure that we have that public trust.

Now, that's 179 schools in Winnipeg last year were visited by Ag in the Classroom. So that's a good start, but there is room for improvement there—room for growth, I should say. They've been doing outstanding improvements over the last couple of years of getting into more and more schools. So, hats off to them.

So, in 2022, there was 184,063 student experiences in—with Ag in the Classroom. So, that—again, that's student experiences for a total of 28,580 students—as the Ag—as the Education critic is looking, how can they have that many students—no, it's not 184,063 students; that's how many experiences they had, so, obviously,

visiting some of the schools multiple time. But they did have an impact on 28,580 students.

And it's not just students. It's the teachers that also get involved. So, 1,244 teachers were involved in Ag in the Classroom, and that's—that helps, as well. So, teachers are now equipped with that education that they learn on those days that Ag in the Classroom is there, and they retain that knowledge and they pass it on to the youth. And that's important, as well, so they can pull on that information for years and years to come.

So, yes, Ag in the Classroom is outstanding, 4-H is outstanding. And we've been in consultations with both Ag in the Classroom and 4-H to see how ourselves as a government can continue to help them.

I think I mentioned Clover the other day and how important of a tool that is, but I didn't elaborate on the kids that were lined up to use it. They were—the ones while I was there were predominantly farm kids. Because, as I grew up, obviously, it can be a little hazardous when you're helping deliver a calf, but sure, I was there all the time, passing the tools and calving chains and everything else that you may need for pulling a calf. But I never pulled a calf myself at a young age.

* (15:20)

So these young farm kids were lined up so they could actually feel and feel inside and see what it feels like for the calf and how it's laying in there and whether it's breeched or the head is turned back.

So it's a powerful tool for everyone, whether they're on or off the farm. You can't just make the assumption that they're practising—that they pulled a calf just because they grew up on a beef farm. They may have seen lots but may not have actually practised.

Mr. Brar: I appreciate the minister reflecting on that.

Ag education and these educational tools are really, really important, and they're successful, too. I had this experience when I saw my son at the Manitoba winter fair, just stopping at the 4-H club stall and feeling the calf inside cow, the—Clover. So he would retain that knowledge because he practically saw that—how it feels.

So, it's important. That's why I'm emphasizing that we should use such opportunities and tools to educate our next generation, because when we talk about labour shortage, in future, in Manitoba specifically, in agriculture specifically, we need to create—entrust in the next generation.

Where would the labour force come from? We have to make some efforts because we know that it's been published recently that 40 per cent of Canadian farmers will retire by 2033. And the agriculture sector will be short 24,000 general workers; it's been recently published.

And if we talk about Manitoba, by 2029, thirty–by 2029, we would need 27,000 workers in agriculture in Manitoba, and 33 per cent of the workforce will retire in Manitoba. And we would need 2,700 additional workers. Out of those, 1,800 is general workers and 900 are managers.

So we need to train the workforce. That's why I'm emphasizing it again and again. So there would be a risk of 5,300 jobs in Manitoba that might be unfilled by 2029. And this gap is three times the numbers from 2019. So that's a serious situation.

And I want to ask the minister if he can share a bit about his plan to address the labour shortage in agriculture in Manitoba.

Mr. Johnson: The department is working proactively with industry stakeholders to address the challenges of a tight labour supply. The members of the sustainable protein workforce round table under the Manitoba Protein Advantage strategy are working collaboratively to identify gaps in Manitoba's protein workforce, and initiate cross-sectional projects that increase inclusivity, traction and participation in the workforce.

The department worked closely with industry through the pandemic for a smooth–to smooth the path for temporary foreign workers, to support and stabilize the–Manitoba's agriculture and processing labour force shortages. And I think if members here recall that the member–the NDP stood in the Chamber and asked for Maple Leaf and other large processing plants to be shut down during the pandemic, even though there was no evidence of any COVID that had been contracted in that plant, because they had taken the initiatives to prevent COVID. They had all of the barriers in place and, you know, wash hands and all that good stuff.

But you–can you imagine being a temporary foreign worker and coming to work in a place like that, and then all of a sudden you're sent home because of a decision–a rash decision of government; if the NDP was in power, they would've closed down that facility. But government is working with industry and academia.

So, just an example of that, or a few of them. Roquette is working with ACC, Assiniboine Community College, and Protein Industries Canada to see training for in-demand skills to support protein and industrial development. So some of those skills, just for example to include, would be chemical engineering technologists and a food science diploma. All those are very important to our labour force and industry in Manitoba, and we're working hard to ensure that we have that.

I'm sure the member is aware that, as he mentioned in his comment, that there is a human resource across everywhere, whether it's private industry, government–and that includes farming. To try and find somebody just to–for something as simple as having a class 1 licence to haul grain off the field. It's getting more and more challenging.

My neighbour has a class 1 licence and he's retired, and he goes for that couple months in the spring and a couple months in the fall to help out on the farm because he's got a class 1 licence. And he's valued beyond belief.

But all of this starts by educating our youth and having them participate in things like Ag in the Classroom, and that's why we fund it through, I think it's been nearly half a million dollars over the last three years to fund Ag in the Classroom. And the largest investment so far has been this past year: '22-23 budget year of \$224,200 to help Ag in the Classroom get all of those messages out there.

And all it takes is, maybe, some young guy or girl–kid in the class to see that and get interested and get excited over it, and then they want to start a career in agriculture. And that's the benefits of–whether it's 4-H or Ag in the Classroom, just interacting in general with kids that would show an interest, might spur that interest. I do know there's stories of people that went to U of M, and they went to We Days, and they're from the city, and ultimately they end up choosing agriculture and getting a diploma in agriculture. So, that's outstanding, that we can attract people from the city of Winnipeg or any larger areas like that to take a unique, probably, career path from a normal–or, a regular choice of somebody in the city.

* (15:30)

So that's exciting that we have these different–whether it's Ag in the Classroom or 4-H that can move these things forward.

Mr. Brar: The minister did mention about a diploma program, which I believe is at University of Manitoba.

And I'm in touch with the university and school of agriculture, and I visit them at certain occasions, sometimes listening to the presentations from the students who are pursuing that diploma.

But the problem is serious. Again, I want to emphasize that there is not enough interest in the next generation to get into agriculture because many of them do not understand what agriculture is; it's way beyond farming.

I know that even the available positions in diploma in agriculture at University of Manitoba are not being filled every year because there's not enough interest.

I'm talking about how to create interest, how to bring in more people into agriculture, how to train the future labour force that we need, and we are losing revenue in the industry because of lack of supply of these workers that we need.

Talking about this is important, but what's even more important is taking action. And who takes action? The one who is leading. And who is leading? The Minister of Agriculture. Even without investing in any additional resources for training, we can just encourage people to join the current programs that we already have, and we are underutilizing those programs.

That's what I am emphasizing on. That's what I want to the minister to think about. That's what I want the minister to act on, because Manitoba lost \$367 million of sales due to a labour shortage in Manitoba in recent years.

And there are businesses who want to expand. They have to either delay or they have to altogether cancel their expansion plans due to labour shortage. And it's not possible to fill in that labour shortage or supply local people for those jobs. We need to think about avenues and opportunities and possibilities to bring that workforce from somewhere. Because it's expensive for us not to do anything; inaction is costing us a lot.

So, the thing is, there have been efforts in the past. In 2007, NDP government started a new program which was a baccalaureate program for internationally educated agrologists program.

And I can say this with confidence, that in Manitoba there are so many internationally educated agrologists that are available, but they're not working in agriculture. Some of them are driving cabs; some of them are working in industry, production, production lines; some

of them are exploring some jobs and avenues in insurance and real estate and whatnot.

So what I'm asking the minister is to give some attention to those human resources that we have here in this city, in this province, and give them opportunities to bridge those gaps that would help them to get into the industry.

So, the program that was started under the NDP in 2007 was a very successful program called international—the diploma for internationally educated agrologists. So it was an eight-month program, plus four months of paid internship.

And it was so successful. I personally know so many new Canadians—not anymore new because they were here—and they are working in the Department of Agriculture, in private ag industry. And they're so thankful to the NDP government because we started that—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Burrows' time has expired.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you for that.

And I just want to talk about a few other initiatives that we've been doing to encourage people to make a step into agriculture.

Hopefully, the member is taking the time to go out and visit at the Farm & Food Discovery Centre, which is south of the Perimeter, but it's part of U of M. And we provided funding for a new layer barn there to the tune of 1 and a half million dollars. And that barn is outstanding.

When kids will be able to go there on field trips, they can walk through that barn, and you can actually look through windows, through the glass, and see what the chickens are doing. They have different types of housing models there so people can see the difference between the two of them and how they produce and how they interact with one another. And it's really exciting.

So, if there's any teachers out there and you're looking at a field trip to go to, consider going to the Farm & Food Discovery Centre at the U of M, south of the Perimeter a few miles, on Highway 75.

Speaking of U of M, we've also invested in a protein chair, and that'll be a million and a half dollars that we put towards a strategic research chair at the U of M, and it will provide strategic research priorities and focus on collaboration and knowledge.

The member might also be aware we have had—made an announcement to invest \$10 million to develop the ACC, or Assiniboine Community College prairie innovation centre for sustainable agriculture. And I think we can all understand and appreciate that farmers are the backbone of the province, and we're committed to ensuring that farmers not only survive but thrive. Mark Frison was, of course, very excited to have that announcement, and he was excited to see the step forward to support the new program for the labour market development.

Mr. Brar: Yes, I visited that U of M research station many times, and I have rather taken, like, hundreds of people there in the last few years because I know that that's the facility where families can learn more about agriculture and opportunities there.

I noticed the minister did not pay attention to my ask twice: once, how can we diversify 4-H clubs, how we can expand to new Canadian families, adding diversity to our 4-H Manitoba council? He ignored that again.

Now, I'm pointing out that there was a program—or there's still a program—which focuses training or bridge the knowledge gaps for new Canadians. That's an opportunity where we can train those people who are already masters or Ph.D.s in agriculture. And Canada did not spend a single penny on their training.

And if we can invest in such programs which bridge those knowledge gaps, and it's not as expensive as training an ag graduate from scratch, why are we not focusing on that? Why is the minister not interested to bring in new Canadians, people of colour, and use their knowledge and expertise to serve the ag industry?

* (15:40)

So, my question is—before the question, I would like to share that not even a single admission happened in that program since PC government took over.

Mr. Shannon Martin, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

So, why the government is not making efforts to keep such wonderful programs which were successful, which could be successful? And why can't we expand those programs and get benefit of the people and skills that we already have in our province?

Mr. Johnson: Obviously, our government is interested in open and—having a very diverse agriculture population.

And we—in my area, we're getting a huge, huge attraction from the Philippines. They're coming and

working on farms and their spouses and kids are participating in 4-H now. It's outstanding to see how well somebody coming from a complete and other country can integrate into the community.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

I was at the Swine Seminar here not too long ago at Victoria Inn and that's another great event that everybody gets together. And there was a large percentage of the BIPOC community there that were participating, because they were all managers from the barns that came in. And it was so nice to see that diversity there in agriculture.

For internationally educated agronomists, the Manitoba institute of—sorry, of agrologists—the Manitoba Institute of Agrologists determines their education and they're in charge of licensing in Manitoba.

Obviously, our goal is to match the demographics. And just with the province of Manitoba—I'm sure the member's aware that we, you know, we have different areas that—boxes that are checked whether visible minority, women, disabled, Indigenous. All those are goals to be inclusive. And I really believe these efforts, along with many others, will increase the diversity in agriculture.

But as the member mentioned before, participating in 4-H is a huge, huge advantage. And Ag in the Classroom as well is a huge advantage to get our youth to start participating.

Mr. Brar: My question is specific to the internationally educated agrologists program at U of M.

Can the minister commit to fund that program and let the new Canadians, new agrologists in Canada take benefit of that program?

Because that was started by the NDP in 2007. It ran very successfully. People didn't have to drive cabs instead of being a farm manager or a specialist in the Department of Agriculture or relevant professional positions in the industry. So that's an opportunity. It's not a huge deal to restart that program.

But I would like the minister to commit, or think about it, and start that program because that specifically focuses new Canadians, people of colour and it would help us diversify our industry.

* (15:50)

Is the minister willing to fund that program again?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, the member will have to turn back time a little bit, maybe, because I think Advanced Education is not in Estimates anymore; I think they've wrapped up. But that's a question for Advanced Education.

Mr. Brar: I have concerns about the leadership sometimes ignoring or having ignored people of colour.

In 2018, member from Lakeside was minister of Agriculture, and I was working in the Department of Agriculture. There was a team of 11, and five positions were cut; 100 per cent of those five positions were people of colour. Could be a coincidence, I don't know. But it tells a lot about inclusion and diversity and the approach that this PC government has—have had regarding people of colour.

And I did—got an opportunity to ask this question to the then-minister of Agriculture right here behind this building—south side of this building. And the minister refused to listen to me for 37 seconds. I just requested half a minute to let me talk about the issue, and the minister rushed to the stairs of Legislature. I was hurt. And I—it's not about me, it's about people of colour and how they're being treated in this province.

How would a leader responsible for a department—would push a vegetarian, who has never touched meat in her life, to be a meat inspector? So, this is the way decisions have been made in this department. And what happened? She took premature retirement because she could not work in an abattoir.

I was not listened to. I resigned with dignity. I didn't want to be pushed to meat inspection and I did request the department and the minister that please, please don't push me because I have done my research in communications.

And, Mr. Chair, do you know why such things happen? Because the leadership puts people in a situation so that they leave. This is the way, this is the strategy, they cut these positions.

But, I have more questions about diversity and inclusion. I was working in a diverse team, all wonderful people, and we were achieving so many things together. But that was unfortunate; I wanted to share that.

But, we need to do better in—on this diversity and inclusion issue in the department in—specifically, and in general in Manitoba.

Mr. Johnson: I really hope the member will go on record and retract the statement that—that's a ridiculous allegation, that the department would make

decisions based on the colour of someone's skin. I really, really would encourage the member in his next moments here to make that apology to the department.

I have one hundred per cent confidence in the department and in the staff, management, right up to the deputy minister, who's sitting beside me here at the moment. I have full confidence in them.

Mr. Brar: Talking about diversity and inclusion further, I'm happy to see the numbers in this publication that the department has 65 per cent women employees. However, it has only 5 per cent Indigenous and just 3 per cent persons living with disabilities.

What efforts is the minister making to improve this percentage?

Mr. Johnson: I would really encourage that member to retract that allegation that the department would make a decision of employment based on the colour of their skin. Again, I have a hundred per cent confidence in this department.

Mr. Brar: I can reflect on what I said, that the positions that were cut were all people of colour. And I also said that could be a coincidence. I don't know, that's what I'm saying now.

But what I want to focus now is I want to know what efforts is the minister making to improve this percentage of Indigenous people, which is 5 per cent, and people living with disabilities, just 3 per cent, in the department. Are there any efforts being made to improve this percentage?

Mr. Johnson: I would really encourage the member to retract his statement, his allegation that the department would make decisions based on the colour of somebody's skin.

Mr. Brar: The minister is trying to divert the attention from the topic. The topic is diversity and inclusion.

My personal experience with the then-minister of Agriculture was real, and I shared that with the committee here. And that happened.

And that member is here right now. He can deny that he refused to listen to me; he did refuse to listen to me and left me alone, right here, south of this building, and I was standing there helpless. And I was at the lowest most hierarchy in the department and the member was at the highest most possible position in the department. So, this is not how we treat people.

And then I got an opportunity to be here and interact with the same minister. We worked together,

and I look forward to work together with him and the current Ag Minister. But I did share that experience. That's a real experience, and that's the fact.

Mr. Johnson: I would really encourage the member to apologize—the department is sitting right here—to apologize to them—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

I would ask members of this committee to respect the people that are on the floor and keep their comments to themselves regarding some of the debate that's going on. I'll return it back to the honourable minister.

Mr. Johnson: I would ask the member—the department is right here—right here—I would ask the member to apologize for suggesting that the department would make decisions—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order, again.

I'm going to call out the member from Concordia. *[interjection]* Order. *[interjection]* Order.

I would ask again for the member from Concordia to show respect for members of this committee and allow people that are answering and asking questions and answers to let them have the floor uninterrupted, please.

* (16:00)

Mr. Johnson: I would just really encourage the member to apologize to the department. The department's right here—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

Mr. Johnson: I would really ask the member to apologize for his comments about the department.

He suggested that the department, like five—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order.

Again, the member from Concordia remains making comments and disruptive comments from his seat while members are answering questions and asking questions. And I would ask the member from Concordia to please stop interrupting the debate that's going on.

Mr. Johnson: The member suggested that five people were let go based on the colour of their skin.

The department is right here. He has the opportunity to apologize to the department for making those allegations. I have one hundred per cent confidence in

the staff, and I know—I've learned to—I've met them and I've learned to—how they handle themselves. They're professional, and I have one hundred per cent confidence in my staff. There is no way that they would let five people go based on the colour of their skin.

They deserve an apology.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Burrows, and again, I would remind members of the committee to keep your comments to yourself and allow people that are answering questions, and asking questions, to have the floor.

Mr. Brar: I would really, really request the member not to use my wonderful colleagues that I have worked with for years as a shield.

I was talking about the leadership of the minister. He was wrong. He mistreated. He took decisions. And I never said that the people, five people who were let go, were let go based upon their skin colour.

I said they were all people of colour. It could be a coincidence. That's what I said. And I repeated it. I can repeat it 100 times. The minister did mistreat me. The minister did not listen to somebody who was a vegetarian. Minister did try to push her to meat inspection, and she retired early.

So, that's a story; that's a fact, and I shared it. Nothing wrong sharing with what people are going through. And minister is using this opportunity to maybe waste the time of the committee, rather than answering the questions.

I raised this question, and I have so many more questions on diversity and inclusion. If the minister is ready, I can ask more questions and these are important questions. Diversity and inclusion is important and we need to work together to bring in more diversity in the department and in our province in general.

Mr. Johnson: So, I hope the member would realize that it's not the minister that chooses where all the employees go. It is the manager that—and it works up the chain.

The minister doesn't have a whole org chart in front of him and point fingers at okay, this guy, this guy, this guy. This guy needs to move here; this guy needs to move there. The member is mistaken if that's how he thinks it works.

We have a great team here, a great set of managers, and they manage their employees to the one

hundred per cent best of their ability, and I have confidence in them.

Mr. Brar: I want to repeat my question to the minister that the percentage of Indigenous people and people living with disability in the department is very low.

What effort is the minister doing to improve this number?

Mr. Johnson: All things being equal, people that are Indigenous or are disabled, women, visible minority are given preference overtop of other ones.

So, we—with women in the department, we're at 66.29—at 66.2—anyway, 66.2 per cent, where the overall of government is 53.9. We are working on every effort as we hire people to increase that.

Mr. Brar: Can the minister share the breakdown of representation of all equity groups at executive and management level?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, while we're looking that up, we have a department diversity and inclusion working group, as well as accessibility and employment engagement groups, because nothing is more important than the staff that we have right here with us, including the ones in the room. And we'll just get those numbers for the member in a second here, but he can continue on.

I'll close—to close the answer there, and we'll work on getting the numbers.

Mr. Brar: Manitoba PC Ag Minister made a bold statement in 2016, that he wanted the MB cattle herd hit pre-BSE numbers, and this number he referred to as 700,000-plus. I just want a gentle follow-up on that aggressive plan of the PC government.

So, my question is: Can the minister share whether the size of the beef herd in Manitoba has increased or decreased in the last seven years? I appreciate the numbers from 2016, compared to the current number of cattle in Manitoba.

Mr. Johnson: So, the member should well know that the peak of cattle in Manitoba was \$680,000. That happened in 2006. And I hope the member realizes, in 2016, there was 470,000. So, there was a 210,000 decline due to the NDP regressive attacks on Manitoba producers.

So, I definitely won't take advice from members opposite on how to manage the herd. Our goal is to, obviously, have as many beef cattle as we possibly can in the province, and that's our goal as a whole. We also recognize that from 2016 to 2018, the herd

increased in size. They had restored hope when a PC government took over, and—with the Progressive Conservative government. And beef numbers increased.

We do recognize a drop in the herd numbers with drought. The member should be well aware—hopefully, he's well aware—that we went through the worst drought in history in Manitoba in the cattle sector, and I feel that my constituency was the one that was hardest hit, in Interlake-Gimli.

So, we recognize that producers struggled through that, and that's why we brought in a \$155 million drought-recovery program. And that helped producers, and helped them prevent from selling their herds.

Some, though, just had to. They had to downsize. And so we had a—we brought in the comprehensive 'dought'—drought program, which had an incentive to purchase your cattle back if you had to downsize your herds, so—up to \$250 per head, to encourage producers to be able to upsize again after that.

* (16:10)

I hope the member is aware of—when people have to downsize in tough times, it's not just cattle. This is genetics that those farmers have worked on for decades through selection of their favourite bull. I remember, I originally—our farm was originally purebred Hereford, and my dad brought in a Simmental bull, and he was pretty much disowned by the rest of his uncles because they were running purebred Hereford. It was almost a sin at the time.

But those genetics that he developed by cross-breeding, he was very proud of, as are all producers with the genetics that they produce. And they all feel that they have the best—you know, the best of the best. They are very proud of what they have and it hurts to reduce the size of their herd, more so than just monetary.

It's not just a monetary decision to get—to reduce the size of their herd or disperse of it. It's a very emotional decision. And during that drought, I visited a lot of producers, and they were very emotional—very emotional, where they have had that farm for—in their family for centuries, and they're the ones that had to liquidate their genetics, their herd, because they had no other option.

So, I hope the member feels for the producers that had to downsize.

Mr. Brar: The minister is actually diverting from the point.

The point is, are we losing cattle in Manitoba? That's the point.

Individual herd is something different. If you improve genetics, you can do the same with less number of animals, that's fine. But do we have more cattle in Manitoba than what we have in 2016? Like, what's the number now?

If genetics was the only factor, then why would a PC minister stand up and say it out loud that I want to go back to the numbers, which is like 700,000-plus, pre-BSE numbers. What was the plan? And what do we have now?

Did the minister share how many cattle we have now? He did say that we had 470,000 in 2016.

And I was going through a publication, which is 2022 publication by the department. It's a fact sheet. And it says in 2021, we had 372,000. The target was 700,000-plus.

And I also know that we lost 12,000 beef cows between 2021 and 2022, both Januarys. So, we are losing cattle.

What is the minister's plan to rebuild cattle herds in Manitoba?

Mr. Johnson: So, in—the member has information that's just inaccurate and I'll enlighten him here with the actual numbers.

So, in 2017, there were 480,000; 2018, 506,000; 2019, 493,000; 2020, 478,000; 2021, 475,000 and in 2022, 451,000.

So, the member is accurate. You can see how the—obviously, cattle fluctuates. This is, I would view, quite stable to—compared to the 210,000 decline under the NDP. You know, it fluctuates.

And, obviously, with the very dry conditions in 2020 and '21—let me re-say that. With the very dry conditions in 2020 and 2021, and plus winter storms and some flooding at the start of 2022, if the member remembers, there was a ice storm that sadly took the lives of quite a few calves, and then that takes away from the replacement heifers that the producers can keep back.

They also had significantly increased feed costs and reduced forage and feed inventories, and as a result some producers have had to downsize their herds. Despite these challenges, the Manitoba beef cow herd is still the third largest in Canada after Alberta and Saskatchewan.

So, yes, we're down a few thousand head from 2017. Given the circumstances and the great program that the department put together—\$155 million—shared with the federal government—in AgriRecovery and drought recovery—focused toward drought recovery—and the incentive of \$250 per head to repurchase any cattle that you had to liquidate due to those conditions, was well received.

The department spent a lot of time working on this, and it—our program didn't come out quite as quick as Alberta and Saskatchewan, but ours was so comprehensive. It was such an outstanding program.

Alberta and Saskatchewan, they just gave everybody—here's everybody, \$100 a head; here you go. There's people that didn't need that money. Here in Manitoba, if we would have done the same thing, there was people that needed a lot more than \$100 a head, and there's people that didn't need anything.

But that \$256, or what it ended up being per head—I'll get that exact number for him, so don't write that down; that was going from memory—but, that well over \$275—whatever it is—per head, really encouraged producers, when they had the opportunity, to start rebuilding their herd.

There was also help with the federal government—you have to give kudos where you can—and a problem with liquidating your herd when you're a producer is you have all these income tax liabilities now. So, if you can not have to pay tax on that with the intention of rebuilding your herd over the next year or two, depending on the program, you can actually—the federal government actually brought in—where they could defer their income tax for a year, and I think it ended up stretching out to two years, because the conditions just weren't a hundred per cent favourable to upsize their herd again.

But the combination of those really saved a lot of animals from leaving the province or, you know, allowing people to maybe keep some more replacement heifers to rebuild their herd, which was part of the incentive as well.

You could use your replacement heifers and rebuild your herd, so, you know, you keep those genetics and that there. So that's—I do have to give an outstanding kudos to the department.

And that number that we ended up sponsoring was up to \$270 per head, and we—that was a lot of great negotiating from the department with the federal government to make that happen. And I personally heard stories, again very emotional stories, from

people that they would not still have their farm if that program was not there.

Mr. Brar: I want to thank the minister for the information, and the information that the minister shared, it confirmed that under PC's watch, not even a single cow was added to Manitoba's beef herd.

And, rather, we lost. We lost so many animals; the minister said we had 470K in 2016, and we have less—thousands of cows lesser than what we had in 2016. Thanks for confirming that; not a surprise.

I do have some questions—I would sum up, actually, I would clump the questions regarding beekeeping so that we can save some time here.

First of all, I want to take this opportunity to thank our Manitoba beekeepers for all the great work they are doing to produce food. And, in addition—this is very important—in addition to that, the beekeeping industry also adds millions of dollars of indirect benefit through crop production.

* (16:20)

So, thank you so much to our beekeepers for that. And these beekeepers need better safety net programs. And they're demanding help from the Province to lobby Ottawa to redo the risk assessment and open the US border for importing bees.

Can the minister update us on this issue, please?

Mr. Johnson: Before I get onto that answer, I just want to comment on the member's last statement that he made there at the beginning of this last one. He—are we down a few thousand heads since PC took office? Yes, absolutely. We went through the largest drought in Manitoba history.

What happened under the NDP watch? Two hundred and ten thousand. It's hundreds of thousands decline under the NDP government. Are we down a couple thousand going through the largest drought in Manitoba history? Yes, we are. But hundreds and hundreds of thousands decline under the NDP, and he's going to sit there and giggle? Which, I guess, I would, if he realized his mistake, now.

This is actually quite comical. Hundreds and hundreds of thousands have declined under the NDP and yes, that's an interesting statement.

But to all of the producers out there, thank you for all of your hard work. I know it's a tough go. The margins in beef cattle are, you know, are maybe not where they were when I was growing up, when I was

a kid. And I think, on average, the margins are only 4.6 per cent in the beef industry.

So, you need those numbers up there to earn that income. And I really apologize on behalf of the NDP government that they drove down our cattle herd by 210,000 of their term and—when they were in government. So, on behalf of the NDP, I apologize that they did that. And we're going to continue working with you to bring those herds back up to the extent that we can.

Please look into the programs that you're available to use. We have lots of great programs here in Manitoba to help. We've done them historically and it's outstanding. And I just want to say thank you. You are the backbone of Manitoba. So, thank you for all the hard work you do and keep up the great work. Thank you for those great steaks that enable some of us to put them on the barbecue. They're outstanding. And thank you for keeping, not just Manitoba fed, but the world fed.

Mr. Brar: Can we put some honey on the food? That was about beekeeping and the minister ignored my question on what is the update on his efforts, if any, to help the beekeepers in Manitoba—on the help they're asking for?

Mr. Johnson: So, I really hope the member is aware that CFIA is the one who's responsible for assessing risks of where you can actually bring bees in from. I'm sure he's aware of that. I would hope so, anyway.

And we're working with industry and the federal government. We've written multiple letters to the federal government to ask them to reassess the risk. We're not asking them to dismiss the risk. We're asking them to reassess the risk and I believe that they are working on that, if they haven't concluded by now, it will be very, very soon.

And they have concerns, obviously, whether it's pests that will come in with the bees or potentially an invasive species in with the bees. So I understand why they have that risk and why they need to ensure that it's safe to bring those hives into Canada. We—the last thing we'd want to do as Manitoba, is be the epicentre of an invasive species. So the work that they do—CFIA—is very important and very responsible.

But the Manitoba Ag staff participate in the new national industry-government Working Group on Canadian Honey Bee Sustainability. And that's developing an action plan to help support the Canadian

beekeeping sector in the short and long term by providing recommendations on how to improve the sustainability and resiliency.

The current top fry-four priorities in the draft action plan are: (1) actions to support the national tech-transfer programs; (2) actions to accelerate the development of new varroa-control products; (3) actions to maintain and increase domestic bee supplies; and (4) actions to address the current and long-term challenges to import bee supplies.

Yes, I've had meetings with the Beekeepers' Association and, again, it was—I'm sure the member's aware that we have an overwinter bee program—insurance program that they can insure their hives with for overwintering damage. And it's—and MASC administers that, of course.

And in the Overwinter Bee Mortality Insurance program, it's to assist enrolled beekeepers with the financial burden of uncontrollable losses, which was the case that they went through. The program is currently insuring 25,917 colonies valued at about \$3.68 million that's insured under that program.

Mr. Brar: My next question is: How many veterinarians does Manitoba need to meet current demand?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I just want to thank all the hard work by Advanced Education and the Department of Agriculture in 'collabrating'—collaborating to fund another five seats in the college of—Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatoon. And their hard work has now ensured that we have access to those seats and we've secured them.

But more importantly, those seats are designed to be geared towards people in the large animal—or, livestock, I should say, industries. So, for example, if somebody grows up on a dairy farm or a turkey farm, they would have—they would easily have the 1,000 hours of required time that you need to be eligible for those seats. There's other criteria as well, but the member can ask Uncle Google what they are. They're readily available.

But I feel that's very important to ensure that we do have all—encourage people to go towards large animal veterinarians. I think we all know—and we have a veterinarian sitting in our midst here. I want to thank him for all of his hard work over the years as well because I know for a fact that he serviced and—large animals.

And that's so important to do. It's important to have those veterinarians there, of course, because I think by the time you realize that you need a C-section on a cow, the timelines are very, very short to get a vet out there. So it's very important that that work is done and that we can increase the seats, so we've increased the seats by 33 per cent, obviously.

So, the completion of a minimum of 1,000 hours can be either volunteered or paid experience. I think, us growing up on a farm, I don't know if you'd call it volunteer, might be more voluntold. You know, it was just part of the lifestyle, and you had to participate in that, as well. But it certainly builds character as you put in those thousand hours and many, many more.

* (16:30)

There's also a requirement of significant work towards completing a degree in animal science at the University of Manitoba or an equivalent program. And you have to also express a desire to practise in support of commercial agriculture, understanding that there's a lot more money in companion animals; there's a lot more feelings and emotions and passion there.

Producers definitely have those feelings and emotions and passion towards their animals as well, but as they need a veterinarian, it's important to have them in the community so that they can make it there in a timely manner when they're—when that time arises.

I recall even something as simple as a prolapsed uterus, where we're actually, you know, had to—a vet wasn't available back in the day even, and we had to take care of that ourselves. That was a very interesting experience to go through as a kid, to learn your animals like that on a—well, an intimate level, I suppose. Not quite as intimate as a vet would have, but it's a really good learning experience to reflect on through life.

And I'm still trying to get those numbers here, so the member might have to just express that he's happy that we've increased the seats in the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, and I think that's a really good job.

But, technically, this does fall under Advanced Education, so I'll attempt to give all the answers that I can, but as long as the member does understand that not—this isn't actually funded through Agriculture. It's just Agriculture worked hand-in-hand with Advanced Education to ensure that we could get those seats. I personally visited the college, and it's an outstanding

facility, and I'm very—feel very privileged that I had the opportunity to go and tour that building.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brar: As the minister mentioned about visiting the college, I've also talked to people from the western college, and tried to understand the situation.

I know that there are situations where Manitoba farmers have to drive 200 kilometres or more—or, in other words, I can say that the nearest vet available is 200 kilometres plus. That's a tough situation. If they need any help in calving or any emergency to their animals, how would the vet get to them?

And we did request five seats; that's fine. I know that BC doubled their seats. All the provinces are making efforts to help our producers on this supply of veterinarians, but does the minister think that these five seats is enough to address the situation we are dealing with?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, it's unacceptable to not have a veterinarian close by when you have livestock, so it's very important that we continue to endeavour to do what we can do to attract as many veterinarians.

Of course, even, you know, sponsoring the seats, we'll have, after it's fully implemented—spending \$8.4 million per year on those vet seats is very important, and I want to thank Advanced Education, where this actually falls under, I want to thank them for their hard work towards those seats.

Even if we have sponsored seats, though, sometimes when, you know, a student goes out there, they end up finding Mr. or Mrs. Right, and they don't necessarily end up coming back to Manitoba. But, I think in Manitoba, we have a great attraction here, and sometimes the Mr. or Mrs. Right comes back to Manitoba, and we get an additional veterinarian.

But I do think it's important for the member to know we also have a vet STEP program, and what that does is veterinarians that are running a clinic, they can apply to have subsidized wages for either a first-year, second-year or third-year student to come back and practice in Manitoba, but we subsidize the wages.

So, what that does is very important, is it starts putting the roots down for those people coming back to practice here. And I can't imagine the day—I guess we could ask our member from Selkirk here, but I can't imagine the day that he graduated and he's probably, like, okay, now what do I do?

So, it's very important to have that relationship with a veterinarian and maybe a clinic that you could

go and start practicing in. And then you have that confidence. And then, you know, you get out and spread your wings after a period of time.

But it's very important to have that relationship that you're building with the other people, your colleagues, and you end up learning a lot of stuff from them as well.

And we provide \$479,000 per year in operating support to the vet service districts in rural Manitoba as well. So that's—that helps them on their path to ensuring that the vet clinics stay open.

Now, staying—keeping the vet clinic open, of course, and being able to get prescription for scours or something like that on a very short notice is important because, as the member mentioned, driving 200 kilometres just to get a prescription for scours medication is unacceptable.

Mr. Brar: I thank the minister for that information.

Just wanted to know about Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. How much funding is there for Northern Healthy Foods Initiative this year?

Mr. Johnson: Once again, we'd have to fire up the time machine to go back, and he would have to ask that question to IRNR.

Mr. Brar: About animal diseases, wanted to ask why is the department's target for the number of animal disease outbreak investigations conducted in 2023-4 lower than 2021-2022?

Mr. Johnson: Member, please repeat the question? The disease outbreak investigations, I thought I heard. Can you please repeat that?

Mr. Brar: I would refer to page 22. Why is the department's target for the number of animal disease outbreak investigations to be conducted in 2023-24 is lower than 2021-2022 numbers?

* (16:40)

Mr. Johnson: Yes, this is an average number.

It obviously varies from year to year, depending on what is happening with animal disease. There's also information that comes out of vet—comes from our vet diagnostic lab. If there's a sample or something that they get that triggers investigation, then they'll do that.

So there's multiple things that can trigger an investigation; obviously, disease outbreak being one of them, as well. But it's just a variable number that fluctuates from year to year. Some years are higher, some years are lower; just depending on the year.

Wetter years, obviously, you have more disease with animals.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): The primary responsibility for climate change is with another minister, but the Minister of Agriculture is definitely the lead on helping agriculture to adapt to climate change, and to reduce greenhouse gases in agriculture.

So, let me start with a question: What percentage of the total greenhouse gases in Manitoba are produced in agriculture? And if you could list them separately for nitrous oxide, for methane and for carbon dioxide, that would be helpful.

Mr. Johnson: That's a question for Environment and Climate.

Mr. Gerrard: Well, it may be a question for the Environment and Climate, but if the Agriculture Minister doesn't know the answer, the Agriculture Minister is going to have trouble helping with the adaptation in agriculture.

Roughly speaking, the best estimates have been around 15 per cent of Manitoba's greenhouse gases are nitrous oxide from farm use, approximately 15 per cent come from methane from agriculture and somewhere between 5 and 12 per cent come from carbon dioxide, so that the total produced by agriculture of Manitoba's greenhouse gases is probably somewhere between 35 and 42 per cent—although I've not yet got an accurate overall estimate.

Maybe the minister does.

Mr. Johnson: I would have to go back in Estimates and I would have to ask the Environment and Climate Minister for that question. I maybe suggest that the member grabs a time machine at the corner 7-Eleven and go back and ask Environment and Climate.

We do have some projects, though, that—our intention is to reduce it and store carbon in the soil. We have RALP, we have better management practices, we have the 4R strategy, of course, that we signed an MOU with Fertilizer Canada, we have the water strategy.

There's lots of important strategies that we're employing to reduce our greenhouse gas footprint.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I wonder if the Minister of Agriculture has a target for the reduction of greenhouse gases in agriculture that he's hoping to achieve, and by what date.

Mr. Johnson: Well, I do know that the greenhouse gases were reduced significantly from 2006 through

2016 when the NDP have reduced the herd of our beef alone by 210,000; 210,000 the herd declined under the NDP.

Maybe that was their greenhouse action plan.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, one of the significant changes in agriculture in the last 30 years has been the fairly widespread option of tile drainage in Manitoba.

I wonder if the minister can provide information as to what proportion of farm cropland is now tile drained and what the minister's policy is with respect to tile drainage and agriculture.

Mr. Johnson: I think the member knows the licensing for drainage doesn't fall under Agriculture. Historically it did, but when the departments were moved, it's now under Environment and Climate.

And I would also like to—I will endeavour to get those answers for you from your previous question. We'll, I don't know, whatever we do. Get them to you somehow. Mail them. I trust the department's capabilities of getting you those numbers.

Mr. Gerrard: I mean, tile drainage has become a pretty important tool in agriculture and, initially, it was widespread in terms of potatoes, but it's now being used for quite a number of other crops, as well.

And I wonder what the—you know, the—since tile drainage is an important tool in managing crops and agriculture, I'm just—I would expect that the department of Agriculture would have some approach to tile drainage.

Mr. Johnson: All that permitting comes through Environment and Climate. The permits that are issued are through that department.

Mr. Gerrard: Well, I thank you. I take that to mean that the department of Agriculture doesn't have any specific policy with regard to tile drainage and whether it's beneficial or not, and whether it should be expanded or not.

Mr. Johnson: All those studies are done by Environment and Climate Department.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the things that Laura Rance has been writing around—about in the last few months is the potential for different types of agriculture—urban agriculture, and agriculture which is based on essentially producing food in test tubes.

And I wonder what the department of Agriculture has as a policy toward these new approaches to agriculture which Laura Rance is writing about.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I think we can look around the city and see lots of different approaches, from bees on

rooftops to other things. I think they're all great ideas and if we're not moving forward, we're stagnant.

So, every new idea that comes forward is—will be looked at in a very—proficiently by the great department that we have here and see if there's some way that we can help, if it's a viable effort.

Mr. Gerrard: I wonder if the minister in his department, which, I believe, has some responsibility for research in agriculture, is involved in any research projects related either to urban agriculture or to the cultivation in—call it test tubes or whatever, that would be grown as cells or muscle cultures or whatever it might be.

* (16:50)

Mr. Johnson: Yes, we fund a lot of research through our S-CAP, our Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

We don't decide what the—what specifically what they're going to delve into, but we do support a lot of research.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I wonder if the minister knows whether any of that research is related to either urban agriculture or this new type of growing agricultural products in culture dishes.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, that's one thing that we insisted when we were negotiating the new sustainable Canadian agriculture partnership is to continue in research and innovation, and it's very important.

So, I'm going to comment on the last dollar value. So, not quite a full five years because this is 'til August 31st, 2022. We did \$26,675,253 into research and innovation. So, I apologize if I don't know exactly what every single penny went to under that, but I truly support research and innovation. And it is—if we're not researching, we don't have innovation and then we're stagnant.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I thank the minister. I'm going to pass it back to the NDP critic for Agriculture.

Mr. Brar: I do not have any further questions.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, so seeing no more questions, we'll move on to resolutions.

Resolution 3.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$168,923,000 for Agriculture, Risk Management, Credit and Income Support Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$21,720,000 for Agriculture, Industry Advancement, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,919,000 for Agriculture, Agriculture Production and Resilience, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,002,000 for Agriculture, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 3.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$247,430,000 for Agriculture, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered in the Estimates of this department is item 3.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 3.1.

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

The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Brar: I move that line item 3.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Agriculture's salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Any questions?

If not, all those in favour of—[interjection] Oh, sorry. Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The last resolution, then, is 3.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$17,944,000, for Agriculture, Corporate Services and Innovation, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture and the Estimates in this section of the Committee of Supply. Therefore, committee rise.

CHAMBER**INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION
AND NORTHERN RELATIONS**

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Hello, good afternoon, welcome. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

When we finished off yesterday, we were considering a motion put forward by the honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Redhead), that line item 19.1(a) be amended—can I have a glass of water from a page, please—so that the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations' (Ms. Clarke) salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Are there any outstanding questions on that motion?

Seeing none, is the committee ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. The question before the House is the motion moved by the member for Thompson.

Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: I think the Nays have it—*[interjection]*—in my opinion.

The motion is defeated.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Okay.

Resolved 19.1: RESOLVED that there be—sorry, resolution 19.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,157,000 for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

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

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and critic the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next department? *[Agreed]*

We will do that, then. We will recess, and once the minister and critic are here, we will resume.

The committee recessed at 3:02 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:04 p.m.

LABOUR AND IMMIGRATION

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 Labour and Immigration.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I do.

Good afternoon. I'm pleased to be in Committee of Supply today to discuss the Department of Labour and Immigration. I'm excited to participate in this process and look forward to a constructive and respectful dialogue with the official opposition.

Joining me today will be: deputy minister of Labour and Immigration, Catherine Gates; Alisa Ramrattan, the assistant deputy minister of Labour; Karmel Chartrand, the assistant deputy minister of Immigration; and Melissa Ballantyne, the executive financial officer.

The Department of Labour and Immigration was created to advance economic growth by strengthening regulatory protections that meet the needs of modern workplaces, ensuring public safety and improving immigration pathways to attract international talent to study, work and live in Manitoba.

Budget 2023 makes historic investments for Manitobans. Our government is committed to providing safe and thriving workplaces and building diverse, vibrant communities that create opportunities for all Manitobans, to utilize their skills and talent to help to grow a strong economy.

We, of course, recognize the exceptional financial challenges facing all Manitobans in wake of the pandemic and in this time of global inflation. Our government is here to make life more affordable and help more Manitobans get ahead. That is why we are increasing the minimum wage to \$15.30 an hour, effective October 1st, 2023.

Using a phase-in approach, we are balancing the financial realities of Manitoba workers, and the economic challenges for small businesses. This increase positions Manitoba as one of the top minimum-wages provinces in Manitoba.

We continue to reduce barriers to economic development by focusing on regulatory reconciliation and cooperation. This is why we are accelerating the adoption of the new national model building, plumbing, fire and energy codes to align with other jurisdictions and reduce the cost of doing business in Manitoba.

When it comes to safe workplaces, partnerships are key. My department remains committed to listening to our stakeholders to ensure we are promoting safe and healthy workplaces.

To this end, the department launched a review of Manitoba's safety and health laws to ensure we have

strong current protections in place that meet the needs of modern workplaces.

Labour and Immigration will continue to collaborate with the Workers Compensation Board, SAFE Work Manitoba, and other prevention partners to reduce the number and severity of workplace-related injuries and illnesses in Manitoba.

The department works diligently to promote safe work environments and help employers and employees know their rights and responsibilities. This ongoing work creates strong, inclusive and safe workplaces for all Manitobans through programs and services that support workplace safety and health, employment standards and robust public safety.

Support for employers is critical in maintaining a healthy, vibrant economy. This is why we introduced the Employer Advisor Office, to provide free help to employers in navigating the processes, policies and decisions of the Workers Compensation Board.

The Manitoba labour market experienced a robust recovery in 2022. This was underpinned by strong economic growth and record immigration.

Our government understands that newcomers are a critical part of the makeup of this province. In 2023, we will benefit from an increased allocation for our world-renowned Provincial Nominee Program. Manitoba will receive an additional 3,175 nomination spaces here, a 50 per cent year-over-year increase.

We advocated strongly for this increase, which will enable us to further leverage immigration to grow Manitoba's economy and meet labour market needs in critical sectors across the province, including health care. Our government is hard at work, making sure that Manitoba is the destination of choice for skilled newcomers.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of leading a health-care recruitment mission to the Philippines, that resulted in Manitoba issuing letters of interest for employment for nearly 350 candidates in the health-care sector. This type of recruitment mission allows Manitoba to advance critical relationships with international governments, expand on existing labour agreements that permit and support the recruitment of skilled workers and build on strong cultural ties.

We are committed to using innovative solutions to address national issues, such as a shortage of health-care providers caused by the global pandemic. We are also taking steps to move Manitoba towards being a leading province in identifying and addressing

regulatory barriers to registration and self-regulated professions.

We are advancing legislative changes to ensure full alignment with the Canadian Free Trade Agreement. As minister, it is my duty and my honour to work collaboratively with Manitobans as we advance immigration policy.

That is why I'm proud to co-chair the Immigration Advisory Council with Dr. Lloyd Axworthy over the past year, and why we conducted extensive immigration engagements with many Manitobans across the entire province. We obtained valuable input on the entire continuum of immigration, from recruitment to retention of newcomers in Manitoba.

Moving forward, our work is clear: to evaluate and implement these recommendations. Our government welcomes new Manitobans to contribute to the growth and prosperity of our province.

* (15:10)

Collaboration is key. That is why Budget 2023 provides an increase of \$2 million in funding for the Newcomer Community Integration Support Program, for a total of \$7.1 million.

This program leverages community partnerships to increase newcomers' participation in the community and the growing economy. As we continue to stand with Ukraine, so, too, will the services and support our government offers to Ukrainian temporary residents.

Between April 2022 and January 2023 more than 16,000 individuals have registered at Manitoba's Ukrainian reception centre. This year my department will continue to support Ukrainians through priority candidate draws, and waiving their Provincial Nominee Program application fees.

As we look toward opportunities ahead, we remain committed to listening to Manitobans and working with our partners. Together, we will continue to create diverse and vibrant communities and provide safe, thriving workplaces as we reach towards a brighter, more prosperous future for all Manitobans.

I look forward to a productive and respectful discussion as we take questions from the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Thank you very much, and I appreciate the minister's opening comments. I, too, look forward to having productive question-and-answer session throughout this Estimates process on the Department of Labour and Immigration.

I certainly hope that, as opposed to some of the Estimates that I've sat in on, that the minister will undertake to answer questions with real answers, and not just read from a script, and not just try and run the clock out.

Hopefully, we can have productive question-and-answer session that will lead us somewhere, rather than just frustrate us. Certainly, there's a number of issues regarding labour; there's a number of issues in regards to immigration and what its effect is on labour, and vice versa.

So, hopefully, we can explore some of those things going forward and come up with some answers.

And I haven't been the critic for this department for a period of time, so sometimes, some of my questions may seem like something I should know. But, because I haven't been the critic, I may not be as up to speed as I should be, so I hope the minister will bear with me; and I recognize also that the Minister of Labour is relatively new to the position of Minister of Labour—now the combined Ministry of Labour and Immigration.

So, with those few comments, I'm ready to proceed.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 11.1(a), contained in resolution 11.1.

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.

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 honourable minister to introduce his staff.

Mr. Reyes: I know I did this in introduction, but because they're here, I'd like to introduce my staff again.

Joining me today are deputy minister of Labour and Immigration, Catherine Gates; Alisa Ramrattan, the assistant deputy minister of Labour; Karmel Chartrand, the assistant deputy minister of Immigration; and Melissa Ballantyne, the executive financial officer.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Lindsey: So, I think we'll cover some real general things, first off.

So, can the minister undertake to give us a list of all technical appointments in his department, including names and titles?

Mr. Reyes: I'll be happy to. List of technical officers: Karine Pelletier, the vice-chairperson of MLB; the—Colin Robinson, chairperson for Manitoba Labour; I also have my—Matthew Kwok, the executive assistant to the minister, myself; and Madhur Sharma, the special assistant to the minister.

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister undertake to give an organizational chart that lists all employees and program areas?

Mr. Reyes: In Budget 2023, Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure, the organizational structure is on page 14 for Labour and Immigration as of April 1st, 2023, with all the names that are on there. At the time, my deputy minister was Eric Charron; finance corporate services is here with me, assistant deputy minister Melissa Ballantyne, as I mentioned; Manitoba Labour Board chairperson Colin S. Robinson; the Labour assistant deputy minister, Alisa Ramrattan.

The divisions underneath the assistant deputy minister comprise of Legislative Development, Employment Standards—where we have our Worker Advisor Office and Employer Advisor Office—there's also Employment Standards, Workplace Safety and Health, Inspection and Technical Services.

Along with the Immigration division, assistant deputy minister who's with me here, Karmel Chartrand, which—divisions that fall under that is the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, Strategic Initiatives, the Fair Registrations Practices Office and the business and integration operations.

All of that can be found in the Supplement to the Estimates of Expenditure on page 14 of the document.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for that.

Can the minister tell us what the vacancy rate in his department is, broken out by division? For example, vacancy for Immigration, vacancy for Labour, administration and all those areas.

* (15:20)

Mr. Reyes: The vacancy rate for the—Labour and Immigration was 17.9 per cent as of February 28th of this year. The vacancy rate since February 28th has—we've continued to fill positions. Currently in the process of hiring five positions.

The immigration division is at 16 per cent vacancy rate as of February 28th, but now, it's 13 per cent.

And the Labour division is, as of February 28th, 16 per cent.

MLA Lindsey: So, if I heard the minister correctly, the overall vacancy rate is 17.9 per cent. Immigration, it was at 16 per cent, it's down to 13 per cent, and Labour is at 16 per cent vacancy rate? Can the minister confirm that that's—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Reyes: That is correct.

MLA Lindsey: How long has the vacancy rate been running at 17 per cent—17, 18 per cent? Is it something that's happened in the last year, the last two years, last five years?

Mr. Reyes: As of January of this year.

You know, I know I've been the Minister for Immigration for two years, but as my colleague across the floor knows that I'm still a couple months into the file, that there are constant changes with respect to vacancies. We're constantly hiring personnel. There are changes. It's still relatively a new department. It's the newest department in government.

So, that is the information that I'll provide with him today.

MLA Lindsey: So, I get that the ministry of Labour and Immigration has been a relatively new department. Specifically, in the past, it was the ministry of Labour.

So, can the member break out those numbers specifically for the Labour part of his portfolio?

Mr. Reyes: Yes, I can get those numbers.

Again, I just want to reiterate that it has evolved. I remember back in 2016 when we had formed government—there's been number of titles: Growth, Enterprise and Trade; I know it—'flaybret'—at the—at times, it fell under Finance, as well; and as well as Consumer Protection and Government Services, I believe, with the member from Brandon West.

But, in terms of updated numbers, I can get back to the critic on that.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for that. I would appreciate if he undertakes to provide those numbers. I think they're worthwhile numbers to know.

Is there a plan by the minister's department to hire enough people soon to start addressing that vacancy rate throughout his shared Department of Labour and Immigration?

Mr. Reyes: With regard to vacancies and the hiring process, we're not immune to shortages. As of February 28th, and I can now tell you that we're always hiring within both departments of Labour and Immigration.

What I can tell the member opposite, as he is—I know that he hasn't, you know, been with the Labour file in a while, but I know he has in the past, which is more relatively newer for me, and I've been in—two years on the Immigration file and I can educate him on some things, too, with regards to the Immigration Advisory Council report.

One of the recommendations on the report was to hire more personnel because of advocating for more allocations for our provincial nominee program, so that we can welcome newcomers.

So, since we have advocated for those allocations, and since we received more allocations—50 per cent more—one of the recommendations from that report was to hire more personnel within the Immigration division.

So I just want to let him know as a for-your-information that as the minister responsible, I'm very cognizant of these recommendations and I want to put them into action.

MLA Lindsey: I appreciate the minister's answer, but somewhat confused, I think, because on page 11 of his supplementary budget document, the number of full-time equivalents for 2022-23 was 263.7, and for '23-24 it shows exactly the same number.

So, is the minister saying that what's in the book is incorrect, that they're actually planning to hire some

people to fill these vacancies, and if so, why wasn't that properly reflected in the document?

* (15:30)

Mr. Reyes: The document—the supplement of the Estimates of expenditure—has those numbers.

After the document was published, we received the information from the IAC report. We received the extra number of allocations that will be going to the province with respect to the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program.

And, naturally, those numbers will change, because the recommendations in the report is to add more to fill those vacancy rates, to add more staff to ensure that we can properly process those allocations so that we can get to our targets with regards to immigration.

MLA Lindsey: So, if I'm to take what the minister just said at face value, that would lead me to think that, prior to this report coming out, even though there was 17.9 per cent vacancy rate, there was no intention of hiring anyone to fill those vacant positions.

It seems now that the minister may have some desire to hire some people. But was that not the case when this Estimates book was prepared?

Mr. Reyes: Even prior to the document being published, we're always hiring, you know, throughout the year—throughout the fiscal year. People come and go. The document shows the numbers where we're at.

But what I can tell you is the information that we received after the document was printed is that we, again, we received more information from the report from the council, which recommended more allocations for our Provincial Nominee Program, which we advocated for to the federal government. We received those allocations, an extra 50 per cent.

With more allocations means there will be more processing of applications, welcoming more newcomers to our province, and therefore, the numbers will change in a positive direction, because we'll be hiring more staff to ensure that we can process those applications in a timely manner.

MLA Lindsey: So, right now, as it stands, there's nothing in the budget to indicate that there would be an increase in staff positions, even though the minister has indicated that he's well aware that there needs to be an increase.

And he's very specifically talked about the need to increase staff in the Immigration part of his portfolio. Is there any plan to increase staff in the workplace health and safety end of—or, the Labour end of his portfolio?

Mr. Reyes: With regards to the total number of vacant inspector officer positions that are at the Labour divisions, what I can tell him, from branch to branch, the inspection and technical services, the inspectors, there are 20 positions, seven vacancies, vacancy rate is 25 per cent, and the recruitment in process is actually four.

The Workplace, Safety and Health is 47 positions. We have two and a half vacancies, 4 per cent vacancy rate. There is two in the recruitment process.

With respect to Employment Standards, there's 26 positions, nine vacancies, a 35 per cent vacancy rate, and then four in the recruitment process. So, total, *[inaudible]* positions, 18 vacancies, a 21 per cent vacancy rate and 10 in the recruitment in process.

The status of recruitment for the vacant inspector officer positions, the inspectors has approval to recruit four inspectors currently in various stages of competition process.

With respect to Workplace, Safety and Health officers, recruitment of two officers under way, and Employment Standards, we have—recruiting four officers by June.

In addition, what I can tell him as well, is that with respect to, again, the immigration file, because of the additional allocations that we have, we do have plans to bring in more staff so that we can process those applications in a timely manner, welcoming more newcomers to our province.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for that.

I have some questions that have kind of come to light to me, at least, because I still have some connections in my old role as a union safety rep and different things, so.

I understand that there has been several Workplace Health and Safety officers that have retired of late, and some of them were qualified to do certain things because they came out of industry originally and had certain qualifications. And one of them that was brought to my attention was people that can inspect swing stages; that currently what happens, I'm told, is when new safety officers are hired they ensure that they have safety certificates from a safety school type of thing. But they don't necessarily ensure that

they have the experience or industry qualifications to do some of these more technical inspections for things like swing stages.

Can the minister comment on that?

Mr. Reyes: With respect to Workplace, Safety and Health officers, they go through a three-week orientation. Every officer has an individualized training and development plan to prepare for specialization.

MLA Lindsey: Okay, so, thank you for that.

So can the minister tell us when the last time was that Workplace Safety and Health did an inspection on a swing stage?

* (15:40)

Mr. Reyes: Mr. Chair, can the critic just repeat the question?

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister tell us when the last time Workplace Safety and Health did an inspection on a swing stage?

Mr. Reyes: Workplace Safety and Health conducts targeted enforcement activities throughout the province, focusing its efforts *[inaudible]* with the highest risk of injury, illness and noncompliance. Workplace Safety and Health conducts both proactive and reactive inspections and adjusts its approach as it—to remain responsive to injury and illness, data and emerging issues.

Workplace Safety and Health—these enforcement strategies is also posted online in order to foster awareness and proactive prevention efforts.

The last time we performed an inspection on a swing station, on elevated platforms such as scaffolding, was February 2023.

MLA Lindsey: Thank the minister for that.

Could I get the minister to share his thoughts on some of the requirements to become a Workplace Safety and Health officer?

Does he believe that it should be predominantly classroom experience, or does he believe it should be predominantly workplace experience specific to certain workplaces, that the requirement for inspectors may be—for example, mines inspector, one of the qualifications I know used to be that you had to have worked in underground mines because that's mainly the type of mines we have.

But is there anything built into other Workplace Health and Safety officers, electrical inspectors,

general workplace safety inspectors, that recognizes the experience factor in combination with some of the specific schooling that you would get if you got a safety certificate, for example?

Does the hiring process recognize some experience, and does the minister think it should?

Mr. Reyes: One thing that I can say, with respect to specific provisions or topics covered by The Workplace Safety and Health Act, or regulations: The Workplace Safety and Health Act is currently under review.

The review was launched 2000—in August 2022. There were three months of public consultation. A review committee consisting of labour, employer and technical representatives has been struck to review the submissions and provide these recommendations to government.

We thank the committee for their important work and we look forward to receiving this effort. Government is committed to consulting with stakeholders and has struck a review committee consisting of labour, employers and technical representatives to provide its advice and recommendations, a part of the act review.

We also recognize the important work of the prevention advisory council, which provides advice and input to the Workers Compensation Board regarding its injury and illness prevention activities and initiatives.

Qualifications for this position. Essential ones include: education training and experience in occupational health and safety in skilled trade or profession management or regulatory enforcement field may also be considered; experience conducting inspections, investigations, audits, quality assurance or program evaluation for the purpose of meeting accepted standards and/or legislation; sound analytical and problem-solving skills with ability to identify and record relevant information, evidence, analyze facts, interpret acts, regulation and standards and determine options to resolve situations; strong interpersonal skills with the ability to interact with potentially difficult individuals in a respectful, objective manner, and work well in a team environment.

The ability to exercise sound judgment and discretion; excellent verbal communication skills; strong written communication skills with the ability to write reports and related documents in a clear and concise manner; ability to lead and manage difficult situations; knowledge of Occupational Health and

Safety fundamentals and principles, rights, duties and responsibilities; ability to work independently; strong organizational and time-management skills with the ability to prioritize work, and work under pressure to meet time-sensitive deadlines; proficient with Microsoft applications such as Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access or equivalent software applications.

So, we all desire experience working in health care, social services, ergonomics, agriculture, or metal, wood, plastics and/or vehicle manufacturing; post-secondary education in occupational health and safety, industrial hygiene, environment, health, labour, law studies or a related field.

* (15:50)

The duties would include—they'd conduct inspections and investigations into fatalities, right-to-refuse situations, discriminatory actions, serious incidents and other related workplace concerns in all industry sectors. The position completes assignments accordance—in accordance with The Workplace Safety and Health Act, the Workplace Safety and Health regulations and the operational procedures set by the branch.

The office's work involves conducting inspections and interviews, creating written reports on enforcement activities, issuing and determining compliance with improvement orders and stop-work orders and providing information to improve awareness of and compliance with safety and health legislation. The position may be called upon to give evidence at an inquest related to the incident or fatality or provide evidence before the Manitoba Labour Board.

I know that my critic can appreciate the job of these individuals. So, he's asking me for my opinion. In my opinion, I believe—because he was asking whether it's a classroom setting or on-the-job training. I—in my opinion, it'd have to be a combination of both.

Because when you're dealing with the public, you can learn it in the classroom, but it'd be good to have a 'bentor' and in on-job training, you'll get the—I guess, the real action happening with regards to an on-job training by looking at a mentor with that understudy. So I think combination of both on-job training and the classroom will produce a quality worker with regards to what I described with those duties and job description.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for that, and I thank him for sharing his personal thoughts.

Is it possible to know or find out from the most recent hires within the department for workplace health and safety inspectors—without revealing any personal information or anything of that nature—would it be possible to find out, kind of, what that combination of experience, classroom might look like?

Mr. Reyes: With regards to the hiring process, I know he's asking about percentages or the number with regards to—with respect to the process with these individuals when we hire them. Well, the hiring process is very objective. Candidates must meet the qualifications of that role. The—and that's far as I can go because of confidentiality reasons.

MLA Lindsey: I thank the minister for that.

So in 2021, Bill 18 amended The Workers Compensation Act and that was passed. One provision in that particular bill at the time was a provision that called for the creation of a schedule of occupational diseases. Now, this would provide presumptive coverage for specific diseases, meaning that diseases are presumed to be caused by work unless proven otherwise.

There are several jurisdictions that already have this schedule of occupational diseases listed. Can the minister tell us what the most current status is on a schedule of occupational diseases to be covered under Manitoba Workers Compensation, because at present, there isn't one?

Mr. Reyes: I'm going to answer my critic's question in a moment, but I just wanted to get back to—with regards to class training and on-job training, in addition to the three-week in-class training, they do also an additional nine weeks in the field.

With regards to his last question, what I can tell him is that our government wants to ensure that all workers in Manitoba are safe at the workplace, going to work and coming home safe. No worker should suffer a workplace injury, illness or death, and I commend the work of the Workers Compensation Board, having met with them in my role, the first couple months, with the chair, Michael Werier, and president and CEO, Richard Deacon.

The WCB has regulation-making powers under The Workers Compensation Act, and it's responsible for the schedule of occupational diseases, which I can tell the member is under development.

So, Mr. Chair, we've been working with WCB and other stakeholders. As I said, the regulation-

making powers under the act, the WCB act, the schedule of occupational disease regulation will be a WCB regulation. The WCB has regularly apprised the Manitoba Federation of Labour of the status of this project and has advised schedule of occupational disease will be complete by June 30th, 2023. The Workers Compensation Board has provided the Manitoba Federation of Labour and other stakeholders a draft schedule of occupational disease and welcomes its comments by May 16th, 2023.

And I want to ensure that our government continues to make it a priority and be steadfast in our ongoing commitment to continue working with our partners in labour and management to improve occupational health and safety policies, procedures and conditions in the workplace.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Lindsey: So, we know that 22 Manitobans died due to workplace injury and disease in 2022. Can the minister tell us what plans he's got in place or his department has got in place to eliminate workplace fatalities in Manitoba?

Mr. Reyes: Mr. Kevin Rebeck and I, of the Manitoba Federation of Labour, we participated in the annual Day of Mourning walk with all sides of the House, going from Union Centre to Memorial Park.

First of all, one life lost in the workplace is one life too many. I want to express my sympathies to those who lost their loved ones at the workplace or those workers who suffered an occupational injury or accident. No one should ever go through this.

* (16:00)

Our government recently launched a legislative five-year review of The Workplace Safety and Health Act, with the mandate for the 2022-23 review. It's ensuring strong protections are in place that meet the needs of modern workplaces, improving harmonization and consistency with other jurisdictions, ensuring requirements are clear and reasonable and meeting Manitoba's obligations under The Regulatory Accountability Act.

The Workplace Safety and Health Act review committee consists of employers, workers and technical experts review the public submissions. We continue to consult with our stakeholders and with all Manitobans on this important piece of legislation. The workplace is continuing to evolve and modernize, as we saw with the recent global pandemic, and that is why our government is reviewing the act.

I want to ensure that our government continues to make it a priority and be steadfast in our ongoing commitment to continue working with our partners in labour and management to improve occupational health and safety policies, procedures and conditions in the workplace. Again, I—as I mentioned, Workplace Safety and Health conducts targeted enforcement activities throughout the province, focusing its efforts on workplaces with the highest risk of injury, illness and non-compliance.

Workplace Safety and Health conducts both proactive and reactive inspections and adjusts its approach as we—as needed to remain responsive to injury and illness data and emerging issues. Workplace Safety and Health's enforcement strategy is also posted online, in order to foster awareness and proactive prevention efforts.

Workplace Safety and Health inspections average 5,400 per year, accounting for staffing variances, enforcement strategies and operational initiatives. Workplace Safety and Health conducted more than 5,870 inspections last year, exceeding its inspections target by more than 350 inspections; 56 per cent of these inspections identified contraventions resulting in more than 9,800 orders and 279 stop-work orders being issued, demonstrating that the targeted-enforcement strategy is effective at identifying workplaces with compliance issues.

In 2021-22, more than 6,400 workplace health and safety inspections were conducted, in part due to pandemic-related inspections. We are taking actions with improving and enhancing workplace health and safety legislation for the betterment of all workers and employers in Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Lindsey: So, once upon a time, there was a ongoing group, the labour management—no, not the Labour Management Review Committee—the minister's advisory committee on workplace health and safety that was made up of labour, industry and government, that reviewed things like the workplace health and safety act and regulations on a more ongoing basis, so that they could stay ahead of the curve when it came to specific issues as they came to light. Specific to mining, there was the minister's advisory committee for the review of the mine regulations.

Now, both of those advisory committees have been done away with. Does the minister see that there

could very well be a benefit to those advisory committees being revived and meeting to review acts and regulations on an ongoing basis, as opposed to every five years or after a catastrophe?

Mr. Reyes: What I can tell my critic is that our government is committed to consulting with stakeholders and has struck a review committee consisting of labour, employers and technical representatives to provide its advice and recommendations as part of the act review.

We also recognize the important work of the prevention advisory council, which provides advice and input into the Workers Compensation Board regarding its injury- and illness-prevention activities and initiatives.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Lindsey: So, there was 22 Manitobans who died from work last year.

Can the minister tell us how many of those 22 fatalities led to criminal charges?

Mr. Reyes: Again, I want to say: one life lost is one too many, and there were 22. What I can tell my critic is that no criminal charges, however—no criminal charges. However, we continue to work with Manitoba Justice and law enforcement to investigate all critical incidents, including fatalities. Some of these incidences are ongoing. There's investigations that are still ongoing with respect to some of these fatalities. And, again, my sympathies go out to those families who have lost loved ones with regard to these fatalities.

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister tell us how many inquiries have been held as a result of 22 fatalities last year?

Mr. Reyes: With respect to how many inquiries with respect to fatalities, there were no inquiries last year. However, there—investigations into each incidence are conducted by Workplace Safety and Health, and an investigation report is completed.

* (16:10)

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister undertake to tell us, over the last five years, how many workplace fatalities resulted in prosecutions under the Criminal Code; how many workplace fatalities resulted in prosecutions under the workplace health and safety act; how many fatality inquiries were carried out as a result of workplace fatalities?

This is people dying at work. How many of each one of those classifications have been done over the last five years?

Mr. Reyes: With regards to the last five years: criminal convictions, there were none; inquiries, there were none; convictions under the workplace health and safety act, there were 35; administrative penalties under The Workplace Safety and Health Act, there were 61.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Lindsey: So, of those 35 charges under the workplace health and safety act, and how many of those were specifically related to a fatality? How many of them were more proactive in that there hadn't been a fatality yet?

Mr. Reyes: With regards to the convictions under the workplace health and safety act, which were—there were 35.

And I know my critic wanted to ask with regards to how many were related to fatality. That information is public on the Workplace Safety and Health website.

MLA Lindsey: I would think if it's available on the website that the minister would have access to it and he could answer the question today.

How many of those charges—35 charges—under the workplace health and safety act were a direct result of a fatality? How many were related to non-fatal?

Mr. Reyes: We can get that information from the member if he needs it.

What I can tell him that it's very detailed, and I just want to make sure that we get him that information so that we can get him the proper information so that we can best inform Manitobans with regards to the questions he's asking.

MLA Lindsey: I would appreciate if the minister would undertake to provide that information, thank you very much.

The minister talked earlier about stop-work orders, and I don't, unfortunately, have the number written down.

How many stop-work orders were there in the last year? Is that number increasing? Decreasing? Is there a trend there?

Mr. Reyes: Well, I can give him some details with regards to stop-work orders year by year.

In 2017-18, there were 346 stop-work orders; 2018-19, there were 582 stop-work orders; in 2019-2020, there were 399 stop-work orders; from 2020-2021, there were 404 stop-work orders; on 2021-22, there were 396 stop-work orders; and in 2022-23, there were 278 stop-work orders. So, actually, it decreased by 100-plus there.

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister tell us what accounted for the decreased number of stop-work orders? Was it that workplaces had suddenly become that much safer? Was it that there was less inspections done? Was there anything that the minister can advise that accounted for that reduction in the number when they were pretty consistent throughout the previous years?

* (16:20)

Mr. Reyes: For the question with regards to what accounted for the decrease in stop-work orders, what I can tell my critic is that there was a downward trend that suggests that situations of imminent risk are reducing, which is a good thing. For example, the pandemic would be an example of one of them.

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister tell us how many of those stop work orders came about as a direct result of a fatality and how many stop-work orders were not fatality related?

Mr. Reyes: The question of how many work orders were related to fatality and how many were not fatality related: what I can tell my critic is that we don't have a number right now of stop-work orders that would be a result of fatality, but we know it is very few. Most are a result of proactive investigations.

MLA Lindsey: I could go on in this light for quite some time, but I think we'll maybe switch a little bit here in the essence of time.

Does the minister have statistics on the demographics of employees within his department? For example, what percentage are women, per cent Indigenous, other demographics, if the minister could provide that.

Mr. Reyes: With regards to the demographics of department employees, again, I just want to let him know that this is a newly established department and the—those answers will be in the next annual report.

MLA Lindsey: Can the minister undertake to provide us that information sooner than the next annual report?

Mr. Reyes: With regards, again, to having the information with regards to demographics of the department employees prior to the next annual report, what I can tell my critic is that's a matter with the Public Service Commission, but we will take my critic's request of—for that information.

MLA Lindsey: I have one very specific question about fatality inquiries that I want to ask before we get too far away from that.

So, in 2018, there was a truck driver, Bradley Jackson, who died. He was driving a tanker truck that was involved in a motor vehicle accident. He was hauling liquid asphalt, hot asphalt, at the time. Unfortunately, Mr. Jackson's accident happened while he was driving a Manitoba truck in the US.

At the time, we tried to get a proper investigation and perhaps a fatality inquiry into that because there was some thought that, regardless of the immediate cause of the accident—which we were never really informed what that was, either, because it happened in the States—that perhaps if the cab of the truck didn't have a window in the back, the hot asphalt wouldn't have been able to enter the cab, which was the ultimate cause of this young man's death.

Is there any thought as to how we could have some kind of—if it's not an inquiry, because, obviously, the time has passed—to find some way to recognize what happened in that instance, proper investigation with some recommendations going forward, potentially to the trucking industry, on the fit-for-purpose type of equipment that may prevent anyone else suffering a fatality like this?

* (16:30)

Mr. Reyes: Again, I remember the story with respect to Mr. Jackson, and the question is, how do we recognize the incidents and how do we prevent this type of situation, because an individual's suffering; in this case, a truck driver, which is very, very unfortunate—again, my sympathies to Mr. Jackson and his family.

But what I can tell my critic is that we'd have to refer back to the investigation report for the details, work with stakeholders that are involved in this industry all around because, at the end of the day, I know that my critic and I are on the same page with regards to doing what's best to provide a safe workplace with all sectors and in this case, truck drivers. But again, as I said, we'd have to refer back to that investigation report for details to ensure that we provide the right information and the right information with regards to a safer workplace.

MLA Lindsey: Would the minister be amenable to sitting down sometime in the very near future to see if together we can work on something to present to the trucking industry, perhaps, that may help this grieving mother, who would like to see something take place to honour the memory of her deceased son.

If there's some way that we can do something without going through a full fatality inquiry, that we can just make recommendations based on the knowledge that we have. Would the minister be amenable to doing that?

Mr. Reyes: I would have no problem sitting down with my critic, as I have done in the past in my previous role, sitting with other critics with regards to coming up with solutions. And the only way you're going to come up with solutions is by talking and communicating with each other. So I'm very open to that.

But, again, respectfully, with regards—situation, we'd have to refer back to that investigation report, for the details with regards to case—to individual cases. But, again, as I said, I'm open to sitting down with my critic as a result of providing solutions so that we can have a safer workplace for all Manitobans.

MLA Lindsey: I appreciate that the minister is willing to sit down, and I look forward to doing that so that, like I say, we can bring some kind of closure, perhaps, to this grieving mother and provide a safer workplace for other young truck drivers.

Just to touch a little bit on pay equity: A report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that in Manitoba, the pay gap between men and women is way too high. For every dollar a man makes a woman makes 71 cents.

Can the minister explain what his department is doing to try and close this gender pay gap? Does the minister have a plan, and would he share that plan with us?

* (16:40)

Mr. Reyes: With regards to pay equity for men and the gender pay gap, what I can tell my critic is that Manitoba was the first province to pass legislation mandating pay equity in the public sector under The Pay Equity Act.

This included the civil service, Crown corporations, hospitals, universities and school divisions. Full compliance with the act was achieved in 1994, and the legislation continues to serve as a model for the private sector.

Manitoba's Employment Standards Code prohibits discriminations in wage scales based on sex if the kind and quality of work is the same or substantially the same.

Manitoba's Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics, including sex and gender identity.

Government supports pay equity for all Manitobans and recognizes there is always more work to be done.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MLA Lindsey: So, we know from my previous question where there's a pay gap of a man–woman only makes 71 cents on the dollar for a man. We know that that gap gets even bigger for racialized and Indigenous women who only make 59 and 58 cents to the dollar, respectively.

The minister has talked about in the civil service what they've done to close that pay gap, but clearly, in the private sector, there's a huge gap.

Does the minister have any plan to update Manitoba's pay equity law or to implement any kind of strategy to close that gap?

Mr. Reyes: With regard to planning an update of Manitoba's pay-equity law, or to close the gap, that actually falls under the minister responsible for Manitoba public service, which is the minister for Consumer Protection and Government Services.

But what I can tell my critic, as the Minister of Labour and Immigration, we're going to continue to foster a diverse workforce. I'm very proud to be the minister of immigration as a person of—you know, born in Canada but of Filipino descent myself.

I've seen many people from all walks of life coming from different parts of the world, coming to Manitoba. Our immigration numbers have been increasing, and that's why we are having more and more of a diverse workforce. So that issue is important to me, as it is for the minister responsible for Manitoba's public service.

And in the role of Minister of Labour and Immigration, I'm excited to welcome more newcomers to our province. I'm excited that we receive more allocations from the federal government—50 per cent more in total allocations.

We have an Immigration Advisory Council report that was produced and released early this year. We are actioning these recommendations to ensure that we

could fulfill the labour shortage throughout our province.

I did 14 public consultations, meeting with many Manitobans from all walks of life and different parts of the province, and I know that the issue that you raised as a critic will be very, very important for these individuals when they come here. We want to welcome these Manitobans. We want them to be comfortable.

And as I always say, we can always improve and enhance our programs and services. That's why we're improving the Provincial Nominee Program that a PC government created back in 1998. It's a flagship program that many provinces have emulated. And we are improving, enhancing and modernizing that program so that we can fulfill the labour shortage and those gaps, as immigration is a priority under the leadership of this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson).

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

* (16:50)

MLA Lindsey: Well, I might disagree with the Minister of Labour that he doesn't have any responsibility for addressing pay equity gaps. I understand that there's a minister responsible for the civil service, but there's a lot of workers in the province of Manitoba that don't fall under his jurisdiction but do fall under the Minister of Labour's jurisdiction.

So, I would hope that the minister recognizes that there's huge pay disparities between men and women, and particularly between racialized and Indigenous women, that his department can undertake to find ways to address that in the private sector through regulation, education, whatever means are at his disposal.

It's interesting the minister talked about immigration, which, of course, is an important part of his portfolio, and I wish we had more time to talk about immigration. That's the trouble with sometimes these—we don't have enough time to delve into everything we want to go into.

But from July 2021 until 2022, Manitoba cities experienced the largest exodus of people to other provinces in at least two decades. Winnipeg lost 7,140 people; Brandon, 981; Thompson lost 163.

Can the minister tell us why he thinks so many people are leaving Manitoba?

Mr. Reyes: What I can tell the member is that, with the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program in 2019, there was a 75 per cent retention rate based on the data that we collected.

The Provincial Nominee Program drives immigration to our province, accounts for 90 per cent of economic immigrants. And for two thirds of all immigrants to Manitoba, it's a very, very important program—again, a program that—created under a PC government back in 1998. We bring thousands of qualified, skilled workers to Manitoba each year, and more than 170,000 nominees and their families have immigrated to Manitoba since its inception in 1998.

The Provincial Nominee Program nominated a record number of 6,275 individuals in 2021 and a record number of applications in 2022, resulting in 6,367 both years. That's the highest number of nominees since the program was established.

Manitoba also saw a notable recovery in permanent resident standings in 2022 and a new record since the start of the MPNP, 21,645 permanent residents declaring Manitoba as their intended destination.

With the new number of allocations coming to our province, 50 per cent more, that's 9,500, we'll be addressing our labour shortage through immigration. That's one variable. That's one component.

Obviously, in my former role as the Advanced Education Minister, you know, we'll be having individuals in those—coming from post-secondary institutions, fulfilling those gaps as well.

The Skills, Talent and Knowledge Strategy document outlines the information on how we are going to address those issues and it states immigration is going to be a very key component of addressing the labour issue and welcoming more Manitobans to the—to our province.

MLA Lindsey: I do have a question about statistics for the percentage of newcomers that arrive in Manitoba that stay for five years, 10 years. If the minister could undertake to provide that information, because I realize we won't have time to actually get a fulsome answer to the question today.

With that, then, I will not have any more questions, if the minister agrees to provide that.

Mr. Reyes: I appreciate the question coming from my critic with regards to statistics.

The last information that we have with respect to the retention rates, with regards to correlating

with our flagship program, the provincial 'nompinee' program, that, again, a PC Party created back in 1998, PC government. It's a 75 per cent retention rate, but that's the latest figures that we have, based on the tax information from those individuals.

But once we have more updated information on the retention rates with correlation, with regards to MPNP applicants, I'd be happy to the—provide that to my critic.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, we will now turn to the resolutions, beginning with the second resolution, as we have deferred consideration of the first resolution containing the minister's salary.

Resolution 11.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$21,628,000 for Labour and Immigration, Labour, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 11.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,411,000 for Labour and Immigration, Immigration, 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 11.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 11.1. At this point we request all ministerial and opposition staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

MLA Lindsey: I move that line item 11.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Labour and Immigration's salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Seeing none, is the committee 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. Chairperson: Resolution 11.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$785,000 for Labour and Immigration, Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Labour and Immigration.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply will be for Legislative Assembly.

I want to thank everybody for your participation in this thrilling afternoon at the Manitoba Legislature. I want to thank everyone who's tuned in online from all over the world and those who will come home from work tonight to watch these proceedings. We thank you.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

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<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>