

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

*Published under the  
authority of  
The Honourable Tom Lindsey  
Speaker*

**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Third Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
ALTOMARE, Nello, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma, Hon.	Union Station	NDP
BALCAEN, Wayne	Brandon West	PC
BEREZA, Jeff	Portage la Prairie	PC
BLASHKO, Tyler	Lagimodière	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian, Hon.	Keewatinook	NDP
BYRAM, Jodie	Agassiz	PC
CABLE, Renée, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
CHEN, Jennifer	Fort Richmond	NDP
COMPTON, Carla	Tuxedo	NDP
COOK, Kathleen	Roblin	PC
CROSS, Billie	Seine River	NDP
DELA CRUZ, Jelynn	Radisson	NDP
DEVGAN, JD	McPhillips	NDP
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
HIEBERT, Carrie	Morden-Winkler	PC
JACKSON, Grant	Spruce Woods	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake-Gimli	PC
KENNEDY, Nellie	Assiniboia	NDP
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
KING, Trevor	Lakeside	PC
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom, Hon.	Flin Flon	NDP
LOISELLE, Robert	St. Boniface	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya, Hon.	Notre Dame	NDP
MOROZ, Mike	River Heights	NDP
MOSES, Jamie, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
MOYES, Mike	Riel	NDP
NARTH, Konrad	La Vérendrye	PC
NAYLOR, Lisa, Hon.	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
OXENHAM, Logan	Kirkfield Park	NDP
PANKRATZ, David	Waverley	NDP
PERCHOTTE, Richard	Selkirk	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
SALA, Adrien, Hon.	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHMIDT, Tracy, Hon.	Rossmere	NDP
SCHOTT, Rachelle	Kildonan-River East	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SIMARD, Glen, Hon.	Brandon East	NDP
SMITH, Bernadette, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
STONE, Lauren	Midland	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	Ind.
WHARTON, Jeff	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt, Hon.	Concordia	NDP
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 17, 2024

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

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

**House Business**

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Honourable Speaker, is there leave for the following: On November 7, 2024, at the top of orders of the day, government business, the House shall consider concurrent and third reading of Bill 209, The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Expanded Training for Judges and Judicial Justices of the Peace), with the question to be put by 4 p.m. if it has not already been dealt with.

**The Speaker:** Is there leave for the following on November 7, 2024, at the top of orders of the day, government business, the House shall consider concurrence and third reading of Bill 209, The Provincial Court Amendment Act (Expanded Training for Judges and Judicial Justices of the Peace), with the question to be put by 4 p.m. if it has not already been dealt with.

Is there leave?

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

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

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** On House business, Honourable Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for Roblin on House business.

**Mrs. Cook:** I seek leave to allow the Opposition House Leader to call Bill 221, The Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act, to a committee of this House before the end of the First Session of the 43rd Legislature, no later than October 30.

**The Speaker:** Is there leave to allow the Opposition House Leader to call Bill 221, The Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer Act, to a committee of this House before the end of the First Session of the 43rd Legislature, no later than October 30?

Is there leave?

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

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

\* \* \*

**The Speaker:** Routine proceedings. Introduction of bills?

Committee reports?

**TABLING OF REPORTS**

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** In accordance with rule 78(9), I am tabling a revised sequence for the consideration of the departmental Estimates for today only.

**The Speaker:** Ministerial statements?

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

**University of Winnipeg Class of 2024**

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** Since its founding in 1967, the University of Winnipeg has fostered a diverse, multicultural and academic community committed to excellence in education.

Convocation is a momentous occasion that celebrates the journey of every graduate. As the University of Winnipeg marks its 125th convocation anniversary this week, I am thrilled to congratulate the class of 2024. I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to all faculty and staff for their countless hours spent teaching and mentoring students. Despite challenging circumstances including a pandemic, their dedication to our students equips them for the world ahead.

The University of Winnipeg's graduates come from literally all over the world. Currently, 375 students will be graduating from the university this Friday, and those graduates represent 22 different urban and rural communities, while the remaining come from 21 different countries.

It is our responsibility to ensure that these faculty and their guests, and these students and their guests, feel welcome and appreciated.

An honorary doctor of letters will be awarded to Dr. Stephen Borys, director and CEO of the Winnipeg Art Gallery. The distinguished Alumni Award will be presented to Rosa Walker, a member of Peguis First Nation and a business leader who has served Indigenous communities for over 40 years.

Kate Binesigichidaakwe McDonald will be honoured as a valedictorian for the milestone of the 125th convocation ceremony.

With approximately 9,000 undergraduate and graduate students per year, the U of W provides an exceptional education with more access to faculty, real-world learning and research opportunities that are very unique.

Please join me in welcoming and congratulating some of the graduates and the faculty and staff who have joined us here today, and I'd ask that their names be entered into the permanent record of Hansard.

Congratulations and welcome.

*Abrar Abdelmohammed, Chhavi Dhir, Jino Distasio, Danielle Dunba, Chantal Fiola, Tomiris Kaliyeva, Shauna Labman, Hailey Nicole Langford, Daniel Leonard, Kate Binesigichidaakwe McDonald, Nisha Rocamora, Anuraag Shrivastav*

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Before proceeding to the next member's statement, there's some guests in the gallery that are leaving shortly, so I'd like to introduce them before they leave.

We have seated in the public gallery from Immanuel Christian and Dufferin Christian Schools 43 grade 4 students under the direction of Maryne Vanderhoomlan [*phonetic*] and Sandra Vanderwoude. Sorry about that. The group is located in the constituency of the honourable members for Radisson (MLA Dela Cruz) and Midland (Mrs. Stone).

### Charleswood Active Living Centre and Headingley Seniors' Services

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** Honourable Speaker, with October being seniors month, it is a great pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize two fantastic organizations located in the Roblin constituency: the Charleswood Active Living Centre and Headingley Seniors' Services.

Following the dedicated efforts of many community members, the Charleswood Senior Centre was established in 2000 when it officially opened one room in Royal School. Over the last two decades, they have grown by leaps and bounds and they no longer occupy a little room in Royal School. Their name has evolved too to become the Charleswood Active Living Centre, and believe me, this is a very active group so the name suits them well.

The centre is a great place to meet new friends, pursue your interests, try new activities and stay physically active. In just a few short months, the Charleswood Active Living Centre will not only be celebrating their 25th anniversary, but will see a move into a new building which will include a fitness room, arts and crafts space, multipurpose room, kitchen facilities and a large outdoor patio.

Headingley Seniors' Services was incorporated in February of 1996, close to 29 years ago. Their mandate has evolved over the years, and their goal today is to encourage older adults to maintain independent living and improve their quality of life by providing education, recreation, health and social opportunities.

They have a plethora of learning opportunities, social events, fitness and fun as well as weekly lunch and learns. This coming Friday and Saturday, they'll host the Headingley Holiday Market which features over 25 crafters and artists. This event is not only a great chance to get a head start on your Christmas shopping, it's also their biggest fundraiser, helping to support the services and programs they provide to the older adults of Headingley.

I'd like to ask all members to join me in recognizing board members of the Charleswood Active Living Centre: Sherry Mooney, Daniel Graham, Mary McCormick, Janice Hamilton, Diana Simpson and Maxine Bryan, as well as the resource co-ordinators of the Headingley Seniors' Services, Margo Price and Kristie Todd, who join us in the gallery today.

On behalf of all the residents of Charleswood and Headingley, thank you for all that you do for seniors in the beautiful constituency of Roblin.

### McLeod Adult Learning Centre

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Minister of Environment and Climate Change):** Today, I would like to congratulate a pillar in the Rossmere community: the McLeod education centre on their 25th year anniversary.

McLeod education centre is a space that allows adults to either gain a high school diploma or take courses that are required for further education. They offer courses such as math, sciences and English, as well as digital photography, law and much more.

I want to give a warm welcome to Jenn Harris, who is here today and is the director of McLeod education centre, joins us today in the gallery. Over the 25 years they have been operating, more than 1,600 adults have earned their high school diploma through the centre's

program and thousands more have improved their credits or taken classes necessary for continuing education.

The McLeod education centre is an important staple in our community because it proves that it is never too late to upgrade your education level. The centre ensures that everyone has the opportunity to invest in themselves and their futures.

The centre is open not just to Rossmere community members but to everyone who is willing to apply and learn at the centre. What is great about the McLeod education centre is that there are no course fees for students working towards completing a high school 'diplona'—diploma, pardon me. The Adult Learning and Literacy branch of Manitoba Education is what funds the program which helps break down financial barriers that many adult learners face.

If you have graduated with a high school diploma, you can also take up to four extra credit courses at no cost. On top of this, they also have special language exams and recognition of prior learning program, helping students from all walks of life to achieve their learning goals.

\* (13:40)

The centre's key values are respect, connection, honesty and growth. Their value to create meaningful experiences and possibilities for their students amplifies the importance of the centre in the Rossmere community.

They are dedicated to creating a safe, caring environment for everyone that comes through their building. This is what we want to see in any community organization or school.

I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Jenn Harris and the McLeod education centre on their 25 years of success in encouraging folks that it is never too late to go back to school.

#### **DASCHWorks**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte):** Honourable Speaker, October is Disability Employment Awareness Month.

I wanted to share a truly inspiring experience I had last week Friday, Take Your MLA to Work Day. This day was created to 'waive' awareness about the benefits of hiring Manitobans with disabilities and to illustrate that employment and career possibilities are out there for everyone.

I had the privilege of visiting the workplace of Jeff Lamoureux, who joins us here today in the gallery. Jeff has been employed at Mercedes-Benz on McGillivray for the last two years. I was honoured to spend time

with Jeff and his co-workers, where he showcased some of his skills. The day ended with a friendly car wash competition where Jeff dominated me in washing the cars.

Jeff's journey is a testament to the incredible opportunities provided by DASCH, a remarkable organization committed to empowering individuals with disabilities, located right on the border of my riding of Fort Whyte and the member from Fort Garry.

One of their key initiatives is DASCHWorks, which is dedicated to helping graduates find meaningful employment. Currently, 11 individuals are employed. An additional 32 individuals, students, are actively engaged in the program, preparing for a future employment.

DASCH has cultivated impressive partnerships with 18 companies, including Mercedes-Benz, Allmar limited, Leila Pharmacy, Mid-Town Ford to just name a few. These partnerships not only create job opportunities but also foster a culture of inclusion and diversity in the workplace. If you have a business or an opportunity, please reach out to DASCH today.

This summer, DASCH celebrated its 50th anniversary, a remarkable milestone, with approximately 650 employees across 58 homes and multiple day-program facilities.

Jeff and a few of the incredible employees from DASCH are here today. I'd like to recognize Karen Fonseth, Nadeen Haverstock, Jordan Crouch, Dorothy Ross, Rich Kowalchuk, Kim Lavilla and Lotha Lyvenko [*phonetic*].

Honourable Speaker, I ask that all my colleagues rise today and recognize the great work of Jeff and all of those at DASCH.

#### **The Rolling Barrage**

**MLA David Pankratz (Waverley):** Today, on behalf of my colleague from Kirkfield Park, I'd like to honour The Rolling Barrage.

The Rolling Barrage is a group of courageous individuals who ride their motorcycles from coast to coast every year to raise awareness for veterans, active-duty military and front-line first responders who suffer from and are survivors of PTSD as well as other mental health injuries.

Embarking on their first ride in 2017, The Rolling Barrage aims to break down stigma surrounding PTSD while fundraising for programs and organizations that support veterans, active-duty military and first responders.

The event highlights that not all wounds are visible, creating a safe, open and welcoming space for all. This is why these folks and the work that they do are so important.

The Rolling Barrage has seen tremendous growth in the motorcycle ride's participation in recent years, with an average of 400 to 500 participants. In 2023, there were over 40 full-pull riders, which means that they successfully completed the entire coast-to-coast ride.

I had the opportunity to sit with them a few months ago back at ANAVETS 283 in Kirkfield Park, and I was struck by how organized and uplifting they are. They had such a positive impact on supporting veterans, active-duty military and first responders as well as combatting mental health stigma. And I am looking forward to their annual ride next summer in 2025.

Please join me in celebrating and thanking Mark, Leona and Mike from The Rolling Barrage, who are here in the gallery with us today, for their remarkable and fearless mental health advocacy work.

#### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** Before moving on to question period, I have some guests in the gallery I'd like to introduce.

Very first guest is none other than our Clerk Rick Yarish's daughter, Emma Carey, who is joining us with DASCH today.

And I would like to draw attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from DASCH: Karen Fonseth, Dorothy Ross, Jordan Crouch, Nadeen Haverstock, Richard Kowalchuk [*phonetic*], Dwight Woods, Jeff Lamoureux, Kim Lavalla [*phonetic*] and Olha Lyvenko [*phonetic*], who are guests of the honourable member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan).

Please join me in welcoming them all to the Chamber today.

Further, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery, where we have with us today from Headingley Seniors' Services and the Charleswood Active Living Centre: Margo Price, Kristie Todd, Sherry Mooney, Daniel Graham, Mary McCormick, Janice Hamilton, Diana Simpson, Maxine Bryan, who are guests of the honourable member for Roblin (Mrs. Cook).

On behalf of all honourable members, we welcome you here today.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Premier's Wikipedia Page Referenced in Question Period

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Honourable Speaker, yesterday during question period, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself brought up Wikipedia.

And then, just in the rebuttal to what he put on the record in Wikipedia, I started talking about the fact that the Premier himself will actually have to add onto his Wikipedia page, he's the first-ever Premier that is going to be charged—or that was charged, with intimate partner violence.

And I don't think that the record of this Premier, he should be throwing any stones at any members on this side of the House, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, yet again, I'm hearing the NDP backbench Broadway bullies are standing up and they are bullying people across way and heckling. So obviously yesterday they knew about his Wikipedia page. I didn't know about it. He brought it up.

Honourable Speaker, I'll get to my first question in a few seconds.

Thanks, Honourable Speaker.

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier):** Honourable Speaker, last year, last fall, Manitobans sent a clear message to members on that side of the House, including the Leader of the Opposition, that hateful, divisive rhetoric no—had no place in Manitoba.

And not only did they send that message by the way they voted, they have shown loudly and clearly that they stand behind a government and a Premier that puts Manitobans first—the most popular Premier in Canada, I might add.

Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House, we are focused on Manitobans, making their health care stronger, making sure that life is more affordable and their schools have the supports and resources that they need.

**The Speaker:** The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a—

### Lake St. Martin Outlet Channel Project Update

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Honourable Speaker, twice this week I asked the Premier (Mr. Kinew), after a year of cutting

projects and priorities, what would he cut next? The Premier didn't answer—not in QP, not in Estimates.

So I ask the Premier today: Can he update the House on the Lake St. Martin outlet channels project?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier):** Honourable Speaker, for the past year, our government has been focused on Manitobans, on a message of one Manitoba led by a Premier who has shown, day in and day out, that putting Manitobans first and committing to working together and bringing people together is what gets things done.

We've made advancements in health care: 873 net-new health-care workers. We've made life more affordable by cutting the gas tax. And for the first time in Manitoba's history, all kids get to go to school and know that they can focus on education and not worry about being hungry.

On this side of the House, led by our great Premier, we're making things better across this province for all Manitobans.

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

\* (13:50)

**Mr. Ewasko:** Once again, Honourable Speaker, I didn't hear an answer from this Premier on such an important, important topic.

The Lake St. Martin outlet channels project, not long ago in this very Chamber, the Premier—the now-Premier himself as opposition leader said, and I quote, it is a very important project for people across Manitoba, for many people across Manitoba, folks who live upstream, people who live in the Interlake, folks who are impacted, communities who are all along both sides of Lake Manitoba, downstream on the other side of the Fairford Dam, you have First Nations communities in the area, you have ranchers and other property owners, many of whom are raising the alarm.

Does the Premier have an update on his cut to what he called a very important project for all Manitobans today?

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, I do think that the Leader of the Opposition has done Manitobans a great service today in continuing to show them why they made the decision a year ago to elect this NDP government to this side of the House to represent them and work on their behalf.

Our government is doing what the previous government failed to do: consult with communities. While

members on that side of the House spend time disrespecting First Nations communities, refusing to engage, on this side of the House our ministers are doing an excellent job being in community, engaging in conversation and consultation and doing the work that for seven and a half years wasn't done under Brian Pallister or the failed Stefanson government.

We're focused on bringing Manitobans together and getting things done on their behalf.

**The Speaker:** The honourable deputy House leader on a new question—the honourable official House leader—the Leader of the Opposition. I'm sorry.

### Project Funding Concerns

**Mr. Ewasko:** Is it my turn? Is my camera—is my mic on? It is on. Great.

Honourable Speaker, once again, crickets from this Premier.

The Premier has been exposed yet again, doesn't seem to know what his ministers are doing on that side of the Chamber. His minister, even though it's—accordingly to the Premier, the former leader of the opposition—very important project by his own admission, now that he's Premier he gets personally involved by cutting the project.

He doesn't care about the sunk cost from two levels of government. He doesn't care about the years and years of consultation. The Premier doesn't care about Manitobans who he said needed the project when he was in opposition.

They said anything to get elected and now, they'll say anything to keep the power, but they will never, ever put Manitobans first.

Honourable Speaker, will the Premier stand in his place, apologize to Manitobans who he has misled when he personally advocated for the channel's project?

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

**MLA Asagwara:** Honourable Speaker, you know, honestly there's not a whole lot that I need to say on this. The PCs' failed record speaks for itself.

They spent seven and a half years refusing to consult, refusing to engage, and it seemed like they were only committed to damaging and destroying relationships across this province.

They damaged relationships with communities in health care, in affordability, in education; they just, wherever they went, they created damage, damage and more damage.

On this side of the House, we are focused on not only repairing those relationships, but building them up to a place where we continue to make our province better for all Manitobans. So we'll take no lessons from that Leader of the Opposition or a single member on that side of the House.

**Mr. Ewasko:** Honourable Speaker, the people of the Interlake have seen enough flooding: 2011, 2014 and many other years, reaching back all the back to the 1970s. When housing was wiped out, infrastructure was destroyed, some Manitobans lost everything and remain displaced.

The Premier (Mr. Kinew) has a bad habit of making everything political, even when we discuss very important concerns and topics. And from opposition, the Premier pretty much said he's be personally involved in getting it done, if elected.

So now that he's—that this is absolutely false and the project's been cut by this Premier and his NDP minister, I'll be clear for Manitobans: the NDP Premier is personally responsible for the lack of progress on flood mitigation in the Interlake. The NDP Premier is personally responsible for any and all future flooding, destruction and displacement.

Honourable Speaker, given that he was involved in making the cut, will he stand up and apologize to Manitobans for misleading them, not—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

**Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** This is rich—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order, please. Order, please.

I would ask members of the opposition bench to curtail their comments.

**MLA Naylor:** It's very rich coming from the members opposite who, in seven and a half years, made no progress on the channels project, as it was outlined.

In fact, they did so much damage to the possibility of that project by ignoring First Nations that were involved, by refusing to meet with them. Every Nation I've met with has told me about the closed doors and their inability to weigh in on the impact of—as of the proposed channel project in their community.

I am so proud of the work that our department and our government is doing on building those relationships and working in partnership with First Nations on flood mitigation.

### **Early Screening for Breast Cancer Act Request to Call Bill 221 to Standing Committee**

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** After months of advocacy and debate, the NDP have now twice denied leave to take Bill 221 to committee despite claiming to support lowering the breast cancer screening age.

Since they've already announced that they're following the timeline outlined in our bill, why are they so afraid to legislate their commitment and bring the bill to committee, and why are they unwilling to be fully transparent on their progress with Manitoba women?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** To be clear, we are following the progress that has been identified by experts in this province, by women across this province and those who need the care, who have been meeting with our government from very early on in our administration to move this in a better direction.

These are the very same people who have sat in my office and shared with me how devastated they were when the previous Heather Stefanson administration closed the mature women's health centre. These are the same people who have sat in my office and shared with me the damage done to the health-care system specifically around women's health by the previous PC government.

We are taking steps to not only strengthen breast health care in this province but all health care for women across Manitoba.

**The Speaker:** Order, please. *[interjection]*

The member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza) will come to order.

### **Member for Riel—Additional Caucus Duties Remuneration Concerns**

**Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain):** Honourable Speaker, apparently it is slim pickings across the way for the Premier to hand out plums to his favourite backbench MLAs.

The Premier has so little faith in his backbench MLAs, that he has been forced to place all the additional legislative responsibilities to one lone MLA, the MLA for Riel.

So on top of his \$106,000 salary, he receives \$7,500—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Nesbitt:** —as caucus chair, \$5,200 as LA to Environment and Climate Change and now another

\$5,200 as legislative assistant to Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Is the Premier (Mr. Kinew) that smitten with the MLA for Riel or that horrified—

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

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier):** Honourable Speaker, on this side of the House, we understand that all our members have capacity, have talent and have commitment to Manitobans.

I want to thank the member opposite for highlighting our great member who represents Riel and the great work that he's doing.

I'll remind that member that that is exactly what happens when folks go out and serve their communities—they actually flip seats, and they end up in an NDP government.

I want to remind that member that we saw the same thing happen not that long ago in Tuxedo, and we got a new member on this side of the House.

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

\* (14:00)

#### **Provincial Deficit Amount Accuracy Inquiry**

**Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk):** Unfortunately for the Minister of Finance, Manitobans see through him, as the Brandon Sun has written, quote: Don't swallow the spin. It's obvious that the \$1.97-billion deficit is an arbitrary figure inflated by our NDP government to make them look good and the Tories look bad. End quote.

I table for the document, Sala spins a distorted financial statement, which begs the question: Why is this minister intentionally misattributing figures for partisan purposes?

**The Speaker:** I—[interjection] Order, please.

I'd just remind members not to use member's names, but to use their ministerial title or their constituency name.

**Hon. Adrien Sala (Minister of Finance):** Look, Manitobans know they can't trust the PCs. They saw that over the last seven and a half years. And on July 28, when they presented a fiscal update to Manitobans before the last election, they provided a very distorted perspective on our financial situation.

They hid the fact that they were going to be way off in their hydro budget. They hid the fact that they

weren't going to hit their tax revenue budget. They hid the fact that they had hundreds of millions of dollars of unplanned expenditures, all in a desperate bid to try to stay elected.

That's their record. Our record is focused on transparency, accountability. We're committed to delivering on our balanced budget commitment while we ensure we deliver on better affordability, better health care and education. That's why Manitobans sent us there. They know they can't trust these guys to run a two-house paper route.

**The Speaker:** The honourable member for La Vérendrye. [interjection]

Order.

#### **Drainage of St. Malo Lake Notice to Residents**

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** Last night, the NDP started to drain the St. Malo Lake; the first time this has occurred in decades, yet they didn't start to inform the property owners and residents until this morning. I table that letter.

Some residents who were lucky enough to see the letter this morning were advised to remove their docks and boats as soon as possible, while at the same time, saying access to boating will be limited for safety reasons. When residents asked for drainage for sediment control, it was out of the question.

So why is it that the Infrastructure Minister is now blindsiding them with no notice and no consultation?

**Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** I really want to take a moment to thank my critic, because it's the first time this entire fall session that he's shown any remote interest in infrastructure here in this Chamber. So I'm really grateful for having a question.

And I want to assure the member opposite and all Manitobans that our department seeks to communicate directly with folks affected by decisions made by our department, and we will continue to do so.

#### **Employment and Income Assistance Request for Basic Benefit Program**

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Today, Make Poverty History launched their campaign for a livable basic benefit.

According to recent census data, more than 100,000 Manitobans are living below the poverty line

and almost one in five are experiencing food insecurity.

Does this government support the transformation of the EIA system in to a livable basic benefit?

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families):** I was really pleased just a mere hour and a half ago to bring greetings and meet with folks just in the Rotunda here with Make Poverty History on this really important day and that—the launch of their campaign.

I shared at that lunch hour that our government takes eradicating poverty incredibly serious. And right now, we're in the process of the development of a new poverty reduction strategy. And so our team has been working on that.

And we are, in every part of the province right now, doing consultation and engagement. And we're hearing from folks with lived experiences, with those stakeholders that are on the front lines and with those people that are truly the experts on how we can work together—

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

#### Individual Needs Allowance

**MLA Lamoureux:** The current single individual's basic needs allowance from EIA is only \$274 a month. This number must cover all of their basic needs. This includes groceries, clothing, non-prescribed medications, toiletries, laundry, transportation, phone services and so forth.

Does this government feel that \$9 a day is an adequate amount of money to cover the cost of basic needs for Manitobans?

**MLA Fontaine:** One of the first things that we did when assuming government was we instituted a universally accessible nutrition program for schools in Manitoba, so that we're ensuring that children are—have access to food and nutrition that they need, and that they can better concentrate on education.

The other thing that we did that we just announced, our Health Minister announced, is a free birth control program, which is going to be transformative in the lives of Manitobans.

The other thing that we did, that I was really proud to stand and introduce, was we doubled the prenatal benefit. All of these programs that we instituted and that we've enhanced go towards ensuring that Manitobans have—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary question.

#### Manitoba Housing Units Federal Funds for Repairs

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Make Poverty History also shares that one in 10 Manitobans are in need of housing.

Now there are approximately 2,000 Manitoba Housing units that are currently vacant, in need of repair and under-maintained.

Will this government commit to using the federal funds they received to repair these units so Manitobans will have their housing needs met by this winter?

**The Speaker:** The—[interjection]

Order.

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** We both want to get up, because we want to—both want to speak about this, because there's so much to say about housing.

Our government is doing such a great job. Unlike members opposite who cut, slash, sold off, we are not taking that approach. We are investing, we are building, we are working with front-line services.

We are actually—we've committed to 350 more social housing units. We are maintaining more than 3,000 units. We've in fact housed more than 1,200 folks in this year alone, since November—725 of those are actually in fact in our own Manitoba Housing units. The former government was boarding up those units; we are not—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

#### Health-Care Services for South Winnipeg Victoria Hospital ER and Anne Oake Recovery Centre

**MLA David Pankratz (Waverley):** The Heather Stefanson PCs systematically dismantled our province's health-care system, and this was felt all over Manitoba. One area that was deeply affected, and I know this first-hand, was south Winnipeg. Cuts to services and staff, closures, hour reductions; they all had significant negative impacts on south Winnipeg.

But our government has turned that ship around.

Can the minister please share with the Chamber our very exciting plan to bring health care back to the families of south Winnipeg?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** I thank my great colleague from Waverley for that important question.

After years of cuts by the PCs to services in south Winnipeg, our government is bringing them back. We're building the Victoria ER, increasing access to emergency services in the south. We're reopening the Mature Women's Health Centre, a key component to improving health care for women across this province. And we're working with the Bruce and Anne Oake foundation to build the Anne Oake recovery centre, which will help women and their families who are struggling with addiction.

All of these projects are located in south Winnipeg. They provide fulsome and interconnected health services. We are fixing health care in south Winnipeg, and we're fixing health care right across Manitoba.

#### **Safe Consumption Site Concerns for Swan River Invitation for Minister to Meet with Mayor**

**Mr. Wayne Balcaen (Brandon West):** The Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness has yet to answer Swan River Mayor Lance Jacobson on the open invitation. And to quote him again, quote, I would invite any politician pushing harm reduction as a solution to come and spend the day in Swan River, and maybe even the night, so that they can see it for themselves. End quote.

\* (14:10)

Does this minister intend on taking him up on this offer, or is the lived experience of municipal leaders not something that she is interested in?

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** I don't know if that member has been in contact with Mayor Jacobson in Swan Valley, but we've been working closely and collaboratively with them; we actually have a plan and we've been working on a solution.

Unlike members opposite, we don't work in divisiveness; we work collaboratively, and we are working with front-line organizations, and we're not going to take their approach where it was us and them. We are working on solutions together, and that's what Manitobans sent us here to do. And we are working for Manitobans, with Manitobans, along with municipalities, something members opposite never did.

We are taking a harm reduction approach and that includes working to support Manitobans. So—

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

#### **Relocation of Asylum Seekers Inquiry into Number Moved to Manitoba**

**Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland):** It's been a month since Manitobans learned that as many as 8,500 asylum seekers may soon be relocated to Manitoba from Ontario and Quebec. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) has failed to be transparent and provide Manitobans with details of his agreement with the Trudeau government.

Can he tell this House today how many migrants have been moved to Manitoba today?

**Hon. Malaya Marcelino (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** Honourable Speaker, the members opposite frankly don't know what they're talking about. But that's not really a surprise. Yes, asylum seekers have been coming to Manitoba, but there is no current plan regarding moving any asylum claimants here for voluntary relocation.

There is no plan to do this at this time. Talks are ongoing. There is a working group federally for other provinces, including ours, to come up with a coherent plan across Canada.

At this point, members opposite—this is just pure conjecture, at this point in what they're talking about and this is not helping the conversation about responsible immigration in this—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

#### **Edgeland Manitoba Housing Complex New Play Structure Announcement**

**MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo):** Earlier this month, Tuxedo got some great news. The Premier, Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness and I got together with Tuxedo families and especially those amazing young people who advocated for the needs in their community to announce a new play structure is going to be built.

Can the Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness please share how this fantastic project will help bring families in Tuxedo together and get kids active?

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** I want to thank my colleague for that question. I was proud to announce that our government is building a brand new play structure at the Edgeland Manitoba Housing complex. It's an exciting project that members opposite should be excited about as well, that we'll be bringing Tuxedo

families together, to play, relax and connect in their own backyard and they're heckling this.

This play structure will be an accessible space that is open to all, and it'll incorporate Indigenous elements that reflect Manitoba's rich history.

We look forward to consulting with residents to see what they're—what they envision for this project, especially with the kids who will play on it next summer. For years, Heather Stefanson and members opposite treated Manitoba Housing as an afterthought. They cut—

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

### **Surgical Capacity Expansion Contract Renewals with Providers**

**Mrs. Kathleen Cook (Roblin):** On Tuesday during Estimates, the Minister of Health once again refused to provide details about contracts with public and private providers to expand surgical capacity in Manitoba. Back in April, they promised transparency on which contracts were renewed, but no specifics have been shared to date.

The surgical and diagnostic wait-time tracker, which I'll table, reveals a significant drop in cataract surgeries at Western Surgery Centre, a key contract expansion under the DSRTF. Under the previous PC government, over 2,000 cataract surgeries were performed at Western in the first six months of 2023, but during the same period in 2024, only 945 were completed.

Will the NDP finally be transparent about the contracts they have cancelled and how their cuts to surgical capacity—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** I want to thank the folks at Western for being great partners with our government in making sure that we take an approach to health care that allows for Manitobans to get access in their own province.

The member opposite has a lot to answer for to Manitobans who were forced to leave the country to get essential basic access to health care for years. Member opposite ran under a PC banner that was committed to privatizing health care, closing emergency rooms, cutting the front lines, firing health-care workers and sending Manitobans out of the country for basic health care.

On this side of the House, we're investing in Manitoba to make health care stronger for all Manitobans.

### **Overcrowding at St. Adolphe School Request for Plan to Address**

**MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail):** Enrolment is surging in the Seine River School Division, and hallway education is rampant across Manitoba. The St. Adolphe School is bursting at the seams. I table a quote from the superintendent who warns it won't be long until we have another schools that are full as well.

Will the minister finally be transparent about the steps being taken to tackle overcrowding in Manitoba schools, or is—the reality is there is no plan?

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I thank the member opposite for the question.

Simply put, we are building schools. We do have a plan. Very proud of our capital five-year plan on schools, unlike the previous government whose plan was written on the back of a napkin. They made announcements that they were—they knew they could never complete on.

And in fact the member from Spruce Woods agrees and has admitted, and I'm going to quote from this morning's Winnipeg Free Press: Money did not need to be set aside last year because the school contract was not set.

So they get up in this House and they pretended that they had a plan. They're disingenuous. Manitobans know this. Manitobans voted for change. Manitobans voted for a government that understands education and is going to build real schools—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

### **Green Team Funding Commitment Inquiry for 2025**

**Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz):** Earlier this year—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

The member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Jackson) will come to order, because I've noticed today in particular he seems to be very voracious in his heckling. So that needs to stop.

**Ms. Byram:** Earlier this year, the minister of municipal relations was forced to realize the massive mistake that his government made in cutting Green Team

funding. Manitobans had to pack this gallery and demand to be heard by this government.

Will the minister commit to reinstating The Green Team funding fully for next year?

**Hon. Ian Bushie (Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations):** We continue to address—municipalities all across the province: \$42 million on our new Manitoba GROW program; 12 and a half million for From The Ground Up; 2 per cent for the funding model.

What's not in there, Honourable Speaker, is \$3,800 for intimacy coach that they, time and time again—why don't they go and ask for that intimacy coach to refund that money rather than asking the people of Manitoba to refund that campaign expense?

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**The Speaker:** Order.

#### **Pause of Manitoba Housing Benefit Minister's Notification to Premier**

**Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods):** Speaker, as much as I'd love to respond—*[interjection]*

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Jackson:** —to the Minister for Education's falsehoods, my question is to Minister of Addictions, Housing and Homelessness, who, on August 2, personally stopped processing requests for the Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit, threatening almost 400 Manitobans with loss of shelter.

The stop wasn't communicated to applicants and organizations until August 30, and she didn't even bother to tell her Premier (Mr. Kinew), who admitted that he found out on the radio.

My question is simple: Was the minister's unwillingness to tell her boss because she thought she could hide it from him or because she feared his reaction?

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

I would caution members that using terms such as falsehoods has been raised as an issue in this House before and caution use the—to require members quit using such terms. So I would remind members again to watch the language they're using in this Chamber.

\* (14:20)

**Hon. Bernadette Smith (Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness):** Let's talk about the Tory record or the PC record on housing.

They cut, they slashed, they stole. That's something our government isn't going to do. We committed

to investing \$116 million in housing. We are building, we are maintaining, we are actually working with non-profits, something the former PC Stefanson government never did.

They in fact were okay with people living in bus shelters. They were okay with selling off housing; over—in one transaction, over 350 units. And, in fact, made people homeless. People shared with me, they had to go live in encampments—encampments, Honourable Speaker. And they were okay with that.

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

The honourable member for Fort—*[interjection]*  
The—order.

Order, please. Everybody come to order.

#### **Need for School Construction P3 Model Inquiry**

**Mr. Obby Khan (Fort Whyte):** Honourable Speaker, three weeks ago, this government announced the use of public-private partnerships, or P3s, for a downtown health tower. One week ago, they announced the use of P3s for affordable housing. Yet today, they are rejecting P3s for much-needed schools.

Why does this NDP government and the Minister of Education welcome the private sector to health care and affordable housing, but reject it for education and much-needed schools in this province?

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** I mean, the answer's simple. We want Manitobans to own those public resources. Manitobans should benefit from public dollars. That's our legacy. What is the legacy on the other side of the aisle, Honourable Speaker? Their legacy is a legacy of cuts, chaos and apparently car rentals.

I thank the question from the member from Fort Whyte and I'm very proud of our 'scapital' school plan. We're going to build schools in the right way, in the way that benefits Manitobans for decades to come.

#### **Zebra Mussel Spread—Clear Lake Request for Downstream Water Testing**

**Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain):** Last spring, both the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MLA Schmidt) and the Minister of Natural Resources told this House they were committed to stopping the spread of zebra mussels from Clear Lake.

Since then, the situation in Clear Lake has only gotten worse. Now the Assiniboine River basin, from

Riding Mountain National Park to downtown Winnipeg is at serious risk of infestation.

I have urged both ministers to increase water testing downstream and to share the results with the public. To date, Manitobans have not seen or heard anything publicly on this issue.

Will the ministers commit today to publicly releasing the results of downstream water testing, yes or no?

**Hon. Jamie Moses (Minister of Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources):** Honourable Speaker, I'm very happy to be standing up here and answering the question on behalf of our government in regards to a very important Crown jewel in Manitoba, Clear Lake, that a lot of us take very seriously and hold dear to our hearts. I know Manitobans love visiting that space.

Now, I think we're all disappointed to learn about the discovery of zebra mussels in Clear Lake, and that's why we've been consistently advocating for the federal government—for them to manage their lake in their provincial park.

Now, we've been advocating on behalf of business owners. We as a Province have been doing our responsibility of testing downstream. Additionally, we've launched the first ever provincial strategy for aquatic invasive species and increased our budget by 45 per cent to make sure that we're doing our part to fight against all—

**The Speaker:** Member's time is expired.

#### **Post-Secondary Education Funding Commitment Inquiry**

**Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk):** Honourable Speaker, the Minister for Advanced Education promised to keep schools whole, yet today the University of Manitoba has hiked tuition 5 and a half per cent to cover their losses. I table the document today.

I've asked the minister repeatedly to ensure funding is in a place to protect the future of students and their cost to education. I've asked her to be serious in question period, but instead, she focused on the past.

The minister has failed our schools, failed our students and failed her duties to live up to her word.

Will she stand up today and apologize for her failures, or will she do the same as she did Tuesday and say it's just, quote, best to sit down?

**Hon. Renée Cable (Minister of Advanced Education and Training):** Honourable Speaker, it's a pleasure to stand up in the House today to correct the member opposite.

So I just want to take a—take everyone on a walk down memory lane here and remind them that under the Pallister and Stefanson government, 18 per cent was cut from post-secondary institutions. This included 5 per cent to University of Manitoba, 4 per cent to University of Winnipeg, 4 per cent to Brandon University, 4 per—or 7 per cent to University College of the North and all post-secondaries in Manitoba by 5 per cent.

The 'menimer' opposite wants to run from his party's record. Sorry, this is what you signed up for. You ran under their banner, you put up their signs, you defended the parental rights nonsense, and now you have to be accountable for—

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

And I would remind all members to direct their comments through the Chair.

#### **Health Care in Portage la Prairie Officials Attendance at Town Hall**

**MLA Jeff Bereza (Portage la Prairie):** Honourable Speaker, this is about accountability. The minister hoards information and silences experts. I table an email from Dr. Sikora, the head of diagnostic services, that shows only the minister's own office was impeding such meetings.

If the minister won't attend our town hall, will they release these experts to attend and answer residents' questions, or is the minister insisting on silencing the experts?

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care):** Honourable Speaker, over the past year I've had the absolute honour and privilege of serving Manitobans in the capacity of Minister of Health.

And what I've heard consistently from folks on the front lines and experts is that for seven and a half years, they had a Heather Stefanson government, Brian Pallister, Leader of the Opposition, members opposite, who turned their backs on the very folks in

this province who guide us with their expertise in health care.

On this side of the House we work with our experts as partners. We listen to the front lines and make investments to make health care better, based on what they have to say.

We are going to continue to do the work that sees more health-care workers on the front lines, more capacity in our system and more Manitobans accessing care close to home, something they didn't have for seven and a half years under that failed—

**The Speaker:** Member's time has expired.

The time for oral questions has expired.

And I just have a brief statement for the House, that I've noticed, in the last couple of days at least, that the—not just the level of heckling, but the type of heckling has become meaner and nastier. And I hope I'm wrong in this, but it seems like it's directed to a certain group more so than others. I hope that is not the case, and I would ask all members to stop and think about heckling.

I'm not opposed to heckling, but respect for each other has to be important in this place. We need to set the example for others, and hate-filled comments are not going to set that example.

So please, while you're away on constituency week this week, think about your actions, your words, and make sure that you understand that those are important for all Manitobans.

Petitions?

Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

*(Continued)*

## GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

**The Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Government House Leader):** Could you please resume debate—or resume Committee of Supply.

**The Speaker:** We will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

## COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

### ROOM 254

## TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

\* (14:50)

**The Chairperson (Rachelle Schott):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of Estimates for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Konrad Narth (La Vérendrye):** Thanks for giving me the opportunity to be back here today.

We'll kind of pick up where we had left off, so a question that I was leading into, honourable Chair, as we left, is clarifying the budget of the department. So the question that I'd like to ask next is following the statement that was made by the minister that \$500 million is budgeted, \$500 million spent.

So just to get some clarification and certainty on that, if there ends up being unspent budget dollars from this fiscal year, will the funds be added to next year's capital budget? Or how will those funds be managed within the department's budget?

**Hon. Lisa Naylor (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure):** Yes, so to the question about spending the \$500 million, we are doing everything we can with the full intention of spending the budget in this fiscal year.

**Mr. Narth:** The Manitoba Heavy Construction Association and the construction industry has called for the— for budget carry-over from our previous PC government. So just speaking to management of the budget, I know with good intention, \$500 million is going to be spent on valuable infrastructure projects throughout Manitoba, or that's the intention of this minister, but if the funds aren't spent, can Manitobans, especially the construction industry, have the comfort in knowing that that money will be spent on investment in Manitoba next year?

**MLA Naylor:** So when the opposition talks about carry-over on the budget, it's not really how budgets work.

If a government, or anybody, lapses their budget in a previous year, that isn't cash available in a drawer

somewhere to take out and spend in another year. So that is why we are trying to responsibly spend everything we budgeted this year. We do not want to lapse.

We have actually worked pretty hard this year on our own systems to ensure that, you know, sometimes these lapses are—or the projects get slowed down or take longer than expected because of weather, because of issues with the construction company, and so we've changed our systems in order to more quickly be able to bring on the next project that's in the queue in order to not lapse anything from our budget. So that is the goal. That's what we're working towards.

The member referenced Manitoba Heavy Construction, so this is a great opportunity for me to just say what a valued resource that organization is and the industry as a whole in terms of the valuable relationship that we have with Manitoba Heavy.

Certainly, we provided a spot on the blue-ribbon panel to the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association so that they could have a contributing voice to some of the provincial projects and recommendations that would be made for what this department does going forward, and are certainly seen as an important relationship and an important stakeholder in terms of getting these projects done in the province. So I really value the collaborative relationship we have.

**Mr. Narth:** This I can appreciate, the minister trying to educate me on how government departments work, I'll phrase the question in one last attempt to get the answer.

\* (15:00)

I'll give a scenario, that if \$500 million has been viewed by this NDP government as crucial to invest into our Manitoba infrastructure, and timelines on projects don't allow for that; and let's say, \$450 million was only able to be invested into our Manitoba infrastructure in this fiscal year, and next year, the Manitoba NDP government sees fit that \$500 million is again needing to be invested, will \$550 million—will the \$50 million that wasn't able to be spent this year be added to next year's budget?

I don't think Manitobans really care if the money goes into a piggy bank, into a savings account or disappear into general funds. Will that additional money be spent?

And then, furthermore, the following year, if another \$50 million or now \$100 million is a shortfall, will the budget the following year be \$600 million?

**MLA Naylor:** That's an interesting number. The last time the MTI budget was over \$600 million was under the previous NDP government because the PC government came in and slashed and burned for the next five years in a row.

To answer that question, I will just say this: We—I've answered the question on this year's budget. If the member opposite is so privileged to be the critic on this file a year from now, I welcome his questions on next year's budget, and so on, and so on, on the years after that going into infinity.

I'm happy to answer budget questions that are to the current budget year, which is what we're here for, so come back next year with that question on next year's budget.

Thanks.

**Mr. Narth:** Honourable Chair, I'd like to step back and pick up on some staffing questions that were answered yesterday, but I'd like some clarification.

So yesterday, the minister went at length about how her massive budget cuts are not cuts to staffing and I accept that she believes that, but can the minister explain how losing years and years of experienced staff all at once will impact operations?

And is this why many Manitobans are noticing scheduled projects not getting done?

**MLA Naylor:** So I believe that the member opposite has greatly misrepresented the staffing situation and what I said yesterday.

So the budget for—the budget we're discussing is—has the exact same number of FTEs as the previous year's budget. It is substantially concerning when there is a great reduction in staff; the member and I can agree on that.

So, going back to 2015-2016, this department had 1,900 staff; 1,900 substantial amount of employees, to an all-time low in '21-22 of 1,159. It's very alarming. Manitobans should be alarmed that in the first six years of the PC government, that they slashed and burned this department by hundreds and hundreds of employees. Obviously, this made a difference, along with all the other fiscal cuts in terms of maintaining the infrastructure, investing in new infrastructure across the province. This is the opposite approach that our government is taking.

So we are working hard, and I mean, those are just FTEs. They—so the—not only was it an all-time low, but there was a 30 per cent vacancy rate in those FTEs.

So we've reduced that vacancy rate to 25 per cent over the first year and we have a higher number of FTEs than was seen in the '21-22 budget.

So we think staffing's very important. We've also renewed our relationship with the engineer-in-training program with the University of Manitoba. It's a very critical relationship to bring new engineers into our program, a program that had previously been cancelled by the PC government.

Also, the concern about retirement is misplaced, I think. There are retirements every single year. While there were certain years that more staff left the department, either because they were so discouraged or because their positions were cut, right now there's just a normal amount of retirements across the system, as there is every year in the public service.

I absolutely want to wish the very best to anybody from MTI who has retired in the last year or is about to retire. I've met many of you, and the service that you deliver for our province is absolutely commendable and you deserve your retirement, so enjoy.

**Mr. Narth:** If we bring up section 15.5 and look down at hydrologic forecasting and water management, same as water engineering, the hydrological forecasting is—seen a cut.

We talked yesterday that the answer to some flood mitigation would be to put a larger emphasis on the advancements that are made in flood forecasting and water management.

So can the minister please answer how, or if, the minister, she views that cutting corners in the budget here is irresponsible, or is there an answer for the justification?

\* (15:10)

**MLA Naylor:** Okay. So regarding, I believe it was the hydrological forecasting and water management line that the member asked about—and there is no change to FTEs. So again, this is not about a staffing cut by any stretch of the imagination.

We're also doing a lot to increase capacity in the department, so the engineer-in-training program that I previously mentioned really helps us with recruiting new engineers into the program. And we also have an agreement with U of M to build our forecasting capacity, so it's—we're finding ways to increase capacity in the department and do this in a more efficient way, with no cuts to positions.

**Mr. Narth:** At this time, the member—my colleague, the member from Selkirk, has a constituency-related infrastructure question and I'd like to give him the opportunity to ask that question.

**Mr. Richard Perchotte (Selkirk):** Earlier in the spring, I met with the minister, and thank you for that very informative meeting. We talked about a number of things which have transpired for Selkirk, but one of the outstanding issues we had was the Selkirk Bridge.

I know that, at the time, we said that the information provided is that they're waiting for—they're going to commission an engineer's report and to find out, based on that report, where they go from there; whether it's going to be repair or replacement.

We have seen in Selkirk—I would make the assumption that the engineers have been down there doing core samples of the river and doing their work.

I'd just like to find out from the minister's office or the minister herself where this important project is at.

**MLA Naylor:** Thanks for giving me a chance to follow up on where that project is at.

So, the member's correct. There is work going on right now, so that is the preliminary design phase. That phase is expected to be completed by next summer or spring, by—we think probably June. That phase includes public consultations. Consultations have already begun. And so, until that preliminary design phase is completed, I can't speak to what the direction of the project will be.

For any project that's going on, I mentioned yesterday there's around 1,000 in the queue, or in the—like, online at any given time. You know, for the member, for any Manitoban who's listening, if you go to the MTI website, there's an interactive map that allows you to search by road name, bridge name, like community or municipality, to find out—any project you're interested in—exactly where it's at in terms of the planning stage or, you know, if construction has started and the anticipated timelines for that. So it's pretty accessible information.

**Mr. Perchotte:** Thank you to the minister for that answer.

I noticed that last year, there was a resurfacing of the bridge done to do some of the repairs to band-aid between now and the end, if that's an appropriate word. I noticed some of those repairs are starting to fail. We're getting a little bit of the washboard happening again in the asphalt and the potholes are coming back.

I'm just looking for a commitment from this minister and the department to make sure that that is addressed so it doesn't get as bad as it did in the previous time.

**MLA Naylor:** Like all the roads in our network across the province, there's ongoing assessment, continuous assessment and maintenance as required and as able within the budget to keep roads in a good state of repair.

**Mr. Perchotte:** I'd like to thank the minister for that answer.

So I'm just confirming that there is an actual commitment to make sure that the potholes will not get as bad as they did last time.

\* (15:20)

**MLA Naylor:** With 19,000 kilometres—over 19,000 kilometres of transportation network across the province, it's a continual monitoring system. All repairs are done on a priority basis based on, you know, the usage, the traffic volume, sometimes how bad the damage is.

As we know, this past spring, there was substantial damage as really, you know, because of how wet things were. Certainly gravel roads were in a lot worse condition than they might have been.

So those are continual, you know, judgment calls made by the department, by the staff who have the knowledge—the subject area knowledge and expertise to assess what repairs need to happen and which repairs need to be prioritized.

**Mr. Narth:** The question for the minister is: Yesterday, we had spoken about prioritizing projects and it was mentioned that the 18th Street in Brandon was bumped up because of view that the priority was higher than it was scheduled on the list. There has been commitment to have that project completed by October 30.

Would the minister please answer if that project is still slated and scheduled and on track for an October 30 completion?

**MLA Naylor:** Yes, thank you for that question.

Certainly, it was—it's absolutely our goal for this project to be completed in October. Like every construction project, there can be delays, so I think I—you know, you've asked the question. I think I would need to be updated from the contractor. We're still in October, so it's really going to be up to the contractor to indicate to us if there's, for some reason, they're not able to complete that project this fall.

But it's, you know, it's quite common in construction projects that there's a little bit of a carry-over into the next construction season, so we will cross that bridge when I get that information from—that was a transportation joke. Sorry.

We will address that when I have had the opportunity to be updated from the construction company.

**Mr. Narth:** Moving along then, I'd like to ask some specifics on managing, budgeting and getting a grasp on how much infrastructure improvement we're capable of doing in the province.

So my question to the minister would be what the average cost is per kilometre to upgrade a provincial paved road to RTAC standards. And at the same time, similarly, what is the average cost to upgrade a gravel provincial road to non-RTAC paved surface?

**MLA Naylor:** Thank the member for that question.

It wouldn't actually be responsible to apply a dollar amount because, whether we're talking gravel road, whether we're talking paved road, RTAC standards, regardless, every single road has to be assessed within its own context, so the condition of the road is a factor, the topography is a factor, the geography is a factor. Certainly, if the road is very remote, it has different expenses attached to it than if it's more urban or in a more populous part of the province.

So all of those factors have to be taken into account. Certainly with some, you know, changes to roads, there is land acquisition, there's all kinds of things that are factored into every single project that makes each project unique, and the budget for each project would therefore be unique.

**Mr. Narth:** Would it be more reasonable to ask an average for southern Manitoba, so not considering rural, remote, but this question for southern Manitoba to get an understanding if we were to take the last projects throughout last year and on an average what it had cost to upgrade a section of provincial road—PR?

**MLA Naylor:** Yes, I mean, you've identified there's differences between the northern part of the province and the southern part of the province, but there's all the other factors still apply, so the condition of the road, the topography of the area, you know, certainly who—there's so many factors involved in a particular project that we can't just assign a number that would be accurate across all projects.

**Mr. Narth:** With that being said, I appreciate it's quite a large, broad question. Seeing as this government and

this minister has identified the budget for the current fiscal year, can the minister please provide the projected capital spend for the next three years starting with the fiscal year 2024-2025?

**MLA Naylor:** No. That's not why we're here today and that's not the budget that we're looking at today.

**Mr. Narth:** Can the minister please advise the date of the last meeting of the Manitoba Strategic Corridors Advisory Council?

\* (15:30)

**MLA Naylor:** I believe the member is referring to a working group of some sort that was established under the previous government that doesn't exist under this government.

**Mr. Narth:** So then, moving on to another group, can the minister provide an update on the Northern Airports and Marine Operations, also referred to as NAMO, initiative? Specifically, which airport authorities remain under management of the Manitoba government and which have been transferred to First Nations ownership?

**MLA Naylor:** I'm very happy to get a question about NAMO because I love airports and marine operations. And when I came into this role, there were 22 northern airports and four ferries operated under NAMO, and there are still 22 airports and four ferries operating under NAMO.

**Mr. Narth:** So just to clarify, that's 22 airports under the management of the Manitoba government?

**MLA Naylor:** Yes, all 22 airports that were managed by NAMO under the previous government are still being managed by NAMO under this government.

**Mr. Narth:** Can the minister please provide an update on the department's work to establish a grid of trade commerce routes? And what work has been done under this minister's tenure to support the heaviest highway loadings possible for trucking?

**MLA Naylor:** Yes. I believe the question was about the continuous work to—for the Trade & Commerce quarters, which has been an ongoing project in the province.

So there have been numerous Trade & Commerce upgrades, both to highways and structures over the last year. So PTH 3, PTH 23, 83, as well as other major routes that are—have been completed are in—are in progress.

**Mr. Narth:** Thank you to the minister for outlining those projects.

Can the minister please provide a summary of the results of the flood-risk mapping study conducted by AECOM limited in 2024 that sought to map the extent of flooding for the 1-in-100 year events—the 1-in-200 year events along the Fisher River?

**MLA Naylor:** That study is still ongoing. We're expecting it to be completed likely early in the new year, and the report will be publicly released once it is completed.

**Mr. Narth:** Can the minister please provide an update on the MOU on economic corridors with Saskatchewan and Alberta? In particular, what is the status of the Indigenous-led NeeStaNan utility corridor running from northern Alberta to the coast of the Hudson Bay?

\* (15:40)

**MLA Naylor:** Thank you to the member for that question.

Yes, I had the opportunity to meet with the minister—well, I have met with them, the ministers of Transportation in Alberta and Saskatchewan, at—a couple of times now, but I met with them specifically around the anniversary date of the signing of the MOU so that we could reconfirm our commitment to working together on prairie economic corridors. It was a great opportunity to actually tour some really interesting highway projects in Saskatchewan, including their very successful new RCUT that they have built into one of their highways.

And so, yes, I would say that that is a good and ongoing relationship between the prairie provinces that seeks to benefit all of us, all province—all prairie provinces on economic development and it's an ongoing relationship that continues.

**Mr. Narth:** Can the minister please advise the committee today what priorities the government is advancing under the national trade corridors strategic initiative?

**MLA Naylor:** Some of the investments that we've made this past year and, well, continuing going forward, is in the national trade corridors, we have been doing surface reconstruction on Highway 75, of course, going south into the US. And a big focus for the next number of years moving forward is going to be the twinning project for Highway 1 to the Ontario border.

**Mr. Narth:** There has been previous commitments and partnerships made for twinning the No. 1 Highway from Falcon Lake into Ontario. Could the minister please update us on where that project lies and what the future forecast is on a completion?

**MLA Naylor:** Yes, our government is committed to doing the work to twinning Highway 1 to the Ontario border. This is obviously a multi-year project, but the work has already begun in terms of the relationships that need to be established with affected First Nations as—and starting to evaluate and plan for this project that will be a multi-year project.

**Mr. Narth:** My question, again, to the minister would be, what—if there's been an established goal and date for completion of the twinning of the highway. With seeing that Ontario is well under way with construction, does this minister have a planned completion time or a start time for that project?

**MLA Naylor:** I wanted to thank the member for that question, and I understand the urgency to have an end date. But I'm going to give a little bit of background. I think this is a really good opportunity for Manitobans to understand the scope of this project. It's a very exciting project that I know lots of people will be interested in and have expressed interest for a long time.

My understanding is that the Ontario side of that project, their twinning project, took 15 years to complete. My goal is for this not to take anywhere near as long. So, really, in many ways, we've been able to learn from the Ontario project, from why things took a lot longer than we would have hoped. And so that—and we're applying that learning.

So the member asked when this project will start. So I want to assure him the project has already begun. We're in the conceptual design phase. We've already started with early Indigenous consultations. You know, I think, with the Ontario project, what we've heard and come to learn is that some of the consultation work happened very late in the game, and so we've learned from that.

So that's our starting point, and we're already on track. It's quite exciting what we've been able to accomplish in terms of these early consultations and the conceptual design right now in our first year, with a, you know, this is, again, a long-term project, but I think we have the opportunity to do this in a very timely fashion.

**Mr. Narth:** We'll probably—or I'll try to keep coming back to some of the infrastructure, capital investment

questions, but I'd like to ask some questions on maintenance.

\* (15:50)

The maintenance department of highways and infrastructure is of great importance and we know that a great deal of the work is done through the maintenance departments.

So my question for the minister would be: Within the maintenance department of Manitoba Infrastructure, could you please—or could she please tell us what the current vacancy rate is within the maintenance department?

**MLA Naylor:** Thank you to the member opposite for that question. I think we probably can agree that highway maintenance is absolutely critical. It's critical to the safety of all Manitoba roads, so whether we're talking, you know, pothole repair with gravel, whether we're talking about snow removal, maintenance is essential to safety for Manitobans.

And some pretty terrible things took place under the previous government. So we already know that the previous government collapsed five regions for maintenance down to three, and essentially imposed a hiring freeze over a number of years. So there was an incredible number of vacancies in the highway maintenance.

During that time, you know, there was a research study conducted where highway maintenance workers, you know, one maintenance worker was quoted in a research study saying that they were scared for the safety of Manitobans on highways because of the kinds of cuts that had taken place.

So we're very committed to staffing up our maintenance departments. We have managed to put in an accelerated hiring process, so we reduced the vacancies in maintenance since April from 120 to only 63 and we are committed to fully staffing up our maintenance operations and we'll continue to focus on that, especially as we're heading into the winter season and all the challenges that are out there for Manitobans with snow and ice on our highways.

**Mr. Narth:** My question for the minister would be, with 63 vacancies, does the minister feel that that being fully staffed is the appropriate number, or is that still low to fulfill the requirements for maintenance across our province?

**MLA Naylor:** Thank you to member for that question. These positions have been vacant for a long time, so the fact that we have reduced almost by half the vacancy rates just since the spring shows the dedication and

commitment of our government, certainly of the department staff, in filling this really essential service that the Manitoba government provides to keep Manitobans safe on the highway.

So we are going to continue to work. The goal is to eliminate our vacancies, to fill those positions.

And, you know, we also, in addition to our own staff, we also work closely with municipalities. We have some maintenance agreements with different municipalities and First Nations as a way of managing the entire network. And we're continuing to actively work with municipalities to ensure that the needs are met across the province.

**Mr. Narth:** With taking on 120 vacancies within the department under maintenance and no additional funds allocated to the budget item, is it reasonable to expect that the full 120 will be able to be hired with the current budget?

**MLA Naylor:** The budget allocates the costs of all FTEs, whether those positions are vacant or not. This department is a priority. That must be very obvious by the fact that in only a matter of months, we have reduced the vacancies by 50 per cent. So it's going to continue to be a priority, and we are continuing to fully—work towards fully staffing it up.

**Mr. Narth:** Thank you to the minister for that response. My question then is, what has been done to fulfill those roles and fill those vacancies in this last year?

**MLA Naylor:** Well, unlike the previous government, we've hired people to do the job. That's how we've filled it.

**Mr. Narth:** I can appreciate that, but those postings were publicly available previous to the new NDP government taking office, so I was just wondering if there's something specifically that has been done other than hiring, which those positions were open under the previous government to be filled. They just—they didn't have the applicants.

\* (16:00)

**MLA Naylor:** Thank you very much for that question, to the member opposite, because we have made some substantive changes that have affected our ability to hire.

So I did talk about an accelerated hiring process, which we introduced in April, but probably the biggest impact on our ability to fill positions, honestly across the whole sector—I know we're focusing right now on maintenance—but across government is that, you know,

I'm sure the member knows very well that the previous government did not bargain in good faith with political—with public servants.

And so, when we came into government, there was—we were on the verge of the first-ever strike from public—from the public service through the MGEU. It was a very serious situation that would have devastated government and, fortunately, our government was able to bargain in good faith.

And, you know, people had been simply underpaid in these roles for a long time and now that—for many years—and you know, that was—that wasn't just MGEU, that was across the entire union sector since, you know, Pallister came in and refused all kinds of contracts to be—you know, nobody was allowed to bargain in good faith.

It was an attack on unions for many years, and so our government came in and bargained in good faith. What that has led to is increased wages for these positions, which are essential, and I'm sure, you know, the reference that the member's made probably indicates it and I know he has experience with municipal government. It's a challenge to hire positions, such as snow removal operators, who could do that same job for a municipality or for a private company for substantially higher wages, so that was a gap that had to be closed.

We were able to negotiate a special wage adjustment specifically for operators, so all of those important steps that, you know, that are in support of workers and in support of safety across the province have been the contributing factors to—some of the contributing factors to allow us to reduce the vacancy rate in the maintenance department by almost 50 per cent in a very short time.

**Mr. Narth:** Thank you to the minister for answering that. That's exactly what I was wanting—not exactly what I was wanting to hear, but exactly where I was wanting to go.

So with a very competitive labour market in Manitoba, I just want to clarify that the additional staff did not come from training new professionals to fulfill those roles of snow removal, grater operators, loader operators and all the associated tractor operators and asphalt patchers and all the rest that fulfill those roles.

What I understand from the minister's response is that we were able to—or her and her department were able to compete on the basis of favourable union agreements resulting in confidence that the employees

would have in fulfilling those roles for the Department of Infrastructure.

And potentially those people were taken from the private market and, as she had mentioned, municipalities. So these are not net-new staff to the marketplace where we're replacing private enterprise with government positions. Or has there been substantial training adding new labour to the workforce?

**MLA Naylor:** So to answer that question, we absolutely have a training program for staff. We train operators from the most entry-level positions right up to the foreman-level positions and that will continue.

What has changed is, while we're changing the culture, the wages have improved although I don't think by any stretch of the imagination that they are on par or even competitive with the private sector, but there are folks who want to be public servants and want to work for the government. They just need to be able to make enough money to live on and be reasonable for the role.

So while we can't in any way compete with private industry when it comes to these roles, we can provide a respectful workplace culture, we can provide a workplace where people want to work and where they have the opportunity to learn from the ground floor and to stay in roles for a long time and to continually train. And so a lot of our focus has also been on retention, which has been a challenge in the past.

**Mr. Narth:** I'd just like to circle back and remind the minister that she's spending less on staff than has been in previous years. She's answered in the process that workers are earning more in her department per hour, as she has stated in the last two questions. So she's spending less on staffing for the same FTEs. This doesn't really mesh.

So would the minister please be able to elaborate how the budget for staffing is less? We've cut maintenance staffing vacancy by nearly half, which we can say half; 120 to 63. And we're paying them more. How exactly does that align, unless money's taken from elsewhere within the department, like capital investment spending?

\* (16:10)

**MLA Naylor:** I do want to put on the record that the last statement from the member opposite could be confusing to the public. It's absolutely impossible to move something from the capital budget to the operational budget. That is not a thing. That is not what happens. So I

just didn't want the public to be misled with that statement.

Just straight up, we have the money in the budget for the FTEs that we have in the budget and that we have named, and the number remains the same.

**Mr. Narth:** So I'd just like to make it known to committee that we've talked about the same thing in different ways now.

But just again to clarify, and I'll quickly move on, that the minister has said that not enough had been spent previously by the previous government, and money had been returned to the budget as carry-over in the past. That budget has been cut by this government and under her leadership as minister. But yet, there's plenty of dollars.

So there's less money spent than the previous Conservative government has spent, but yet there's plenty to pay additional staff, and in the maintenance department, specifically, that's 120—potentially 120 new staff members. The money for that additional 120 members is within the budget outlined for this fiscal year.

**MLA Naylor:** Okay. So much misinformation on the record now I need to correct.

There were 120 vacancies. These are not net-new positions. We are filling vacancies that the previous government left unfilled. These are not net-new positions. The dollars are in the budget for those positions. They were just not spent under the previous government, as that department was allowed to languish and to not be appropriately staffed to do the work of high-way maintenance, which is critical for safety in our province.

As to the previous—I'm not quite sure what the member's saying, but he's clearly confusing capital budget with operational budget—two completely different streams that we need to discuss differently.

**Mr. Narth:** I'll just move on because I think that I've gotten the response that I was looking for. So thank you to the minister for clarifying that.

Within the maintenance department, the department is very dependent on bid-hourly work.

Would the minister please be able to tell the committee if bid-hourly work—maybe we'll start with: What is the dollar figure spent by her department on bid-hourly work this fiscal year?

**MLA Naylor:** Yes, thanks for that question. I was hoping we could give a number to answer that question, but we've, you know, as we've discussed over here.

\* (16:20)

It's impossible to just give a number because the bid-hourly rates would be broken out across—there's some within operation, there's some within capital, but it's also broken out across multiple programs within the budgets. So it's not, like, wound up in one precise number. It's broken out into too many different program areas.

**Mr. Narth:** Honourable Chair, my question specifically—and sorry for not clarifying that—was in maintenance. Would the minister be able to give a dollar amount for bid-hourly work within the maintenance department?

**MLA Naylor:** It was very helpful to understand that the member's just looking for a number on bid-hourly—spending on bid-hourly rates for highway maintenance, and that number was roughly \$5 million in the 2023-24 fiscal year.

**Mr. Narth:** Great, thank you, honourable Chair, and thank you to the minister for providing that.

I know that speaking definitely in my region to highways, yards and the foremans and supervisors, regional supervisors, bid hourly and contract work has been fulfilling massive voids within the maintenance department. These are local—generally very local, private contractors that have been able to fulfill the need where many times staffing shortages have not allowed.

Would the minister now, with the newfound ability to staff up these departments, would the minister feel that bid hourly and contract work positions—these are contractors that fulfill, you know, holiday snow clearing, they're called upon ditch mowing when potentially the staff or equipment isn't available in the local yards, they fulfill these roles.

Is this a partnership with the private sector that the minister feels is important and will continue, or will be diminished as staffing numbers can be ramped up?

**MLA Naylor:** I—so to the member's question, there's always going to be a role for bid-hourly contract work. There's across the entire province so many places where that's, you know, where there's—that's going to be required, and how much and how little of that is going to vary year to year based on weather, based on specific needs, events that come up in specific regions.

So that's always going to be part of how the work is delivered within the province. However, I mean, I'm getting the impression by this line of questioning that the member is more committed to work for private contractors than for good government jobs.

And if he imagines that that is, I don't know, a gotcha moment, he hasn't read my mandate letter and has sorely misjudged our government's commitment to good Manitoba jobs, good government jobs for Manitobans.

And it's literally in my mandate letter to staff up positions, to make sure that we are hiring Manitobans into these positions. And so that will continue and bid hourly contracts will continue as needed.

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Narth:** Thank you to the minister for those comments and that statement.

And just to be clear, I was asking those questions, not because of discrediting the importance of—or the need for good, well-paid government jobs to fulfill the role of maintenance of our infrastructure throughout the province, but to highlight the important role that the private sector also plays in complementing that.

And that—I would hope that the minister isn't blinded by the mandate to hire good government jobs and discrediting or, you know, discounting, I should say, the importance that the private sector does play in complementing infrastructure maintenance within the province.

So, I'd like to move on, though, which I'm sure the minister appreciates, into agreements that are made in maintenance. We're still going to stay on maintenance because I think it's probably some of the—or, is the most, in my opinion, the most important part of infrastructure in our province.

And my question would be: How many maintenance agreements does the minister's department have with cities, towns and municipalities currently?

**MLA Naylor:** Currently, we have 16 gravel-maintenance agreements with municipalities and 38 winter maintenance agreements, and we also have a number of agreements with First Nations communities regarding our winter road network.

**Mr. Narth:** So, just to clarify, the 38 includes the 16 or doesn't include the six—

**An Honourable Member:** They're separate. Oh.

**The Chairperson:** The honourable minister.

**MLA Naylor:** Those are separate agreements. It doesn't mean that a municipality might not have both, but they're separate agreements for two different types of work.

**Mr. Narth:** I'd like to thank the minister for having those numbers available and to her staff in the department.

Are there any current service agreement proposals outstanding with municipalities, First Nations or towns and cities?

**MLA Naylor:** I don't think that I would describe it as any outstanding agreements.

What I would say is that I've had dozens and dozens and dozens of meetings with municipalities and First Nations since being in this role, and every meeting, I'm interested in ways we can collaborate and work together. So, if a municipality or a First Nation has capacity, both within equipment and within the staffing, and they are interested in a maintenance agreement, either for snow removal or for gravel, then we are interested in moving that forward.

We're—I'm trying to be really collaborative with communities. Certainly, there—you know, there's an economic opportunity. There's also—it gives communities decision making. You know, there—I'm sure the member knows that, across the network, there are different, like, each road is rated in terms of priority for snow removal, for example.

But I've met with communities that have said, you know, we understand this road isn't your top priority because it's not, you know, a major trade corridor, but it's important to us and our—in our community for this reason. Well, if they have that contract, they can also decide to prioritize that road because it works for their community, so I am so open to that collaboration and it's been very, very fruitful discussions.

So, you know, I anticipate we'll have more of these agreements going forward.

**Mr. Narth:** Thank you to the minister for that response. Again, coming from municipal government, I'm glad to hear that this minister and her department are willing to work with municipalities on what makes most sense to the municipality.

Something that municipalities have brought up along these lines of service agreements, which haven't been clearly defined in the past as they have been with road maintenance agreements, has been waterways maintenance agreements—some of those that fall under the Minister of Infrastructure and her department.

Is that something that the department would entertain moving forward?

\* (16:40)

**MLA Naylor:** Yes, so further to the member's question about these agreements with municipalities regarding the water maintenance. We don't currently have any agreements like that with any municipalities, but again, our government is a listening government and I've—it's been my absolute pleasure to meet with as many municipalities as I have over the past year and hope that the ones I didn't get to meet with in year 1 will—that that will happen very quickly as we go into year 2 of our government.

But—so part of that is that we're—we would definitely be open to this if it made sense within budget. We are definitely looking at and considering how this might work and starting a process of conversation with municipalities that have expressed an interest in the past.

**Mr. Narth:** Thank you to the minister for that comment.

I've heard from many municipalities across the province, and especially in my constituency, the importance of timely maintenance of these waterways, many times along highways, and I know first-hand the decades it can take for approval. Many times, this is a high priority for the ratepayers of the municipality willing to front the funds necessary, so they'd just like to get the work done.

Just following through on the same path of maintenance and the equipment needed for the additional staff—or, not additional, but fulfilled roles of staff. We know that equipment, it expires; it's a depreciating asset. So can the minister explain why her department's own Estimates of Expenditure show \$2 million cut to general assets, which to my understanding would include the assets of equipment needed for maintenance?

With maintenance already being neglected in so many regions across the province, will more need to be done with less equipment or is there a plan on purchasing more equipment for the department?

**MLA Naylor:** So I believe the—sorry, the member opposite is talking about the General Assets line under Transportation Capital Projects and Equipment.

And so that—so the number in that line is—it's the right amount; it's what's required to meet our overall capital budget of \$540 million. So that will provide us what's required in terms of capital projects and equipment.

**Mr. Narth:** Thank you to the minister.

In the interest of time, I think we'll wrap up this portion for Estimates of Infrastructure. That gives us enough time to finish it today.

\* (16:50)

Obviously, I have many more questions, so it's not of a result of not having many more good questions to ask the minister, but would like to provide enough time for the other departments to have a chance to ask questions through the Estimates process.

**The Chairperson:** Seeing there are no further questions at the moment, we will now move to the resolutions.

Resolution 15.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,128,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,546,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Infrastructure Capital Projects, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$169,628,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Transportation Operations, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$32,889,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Engineering and Technical Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,444,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Emergency Management, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 15.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$540,000,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 15.1(a), the minister's salary contained in resolution 15.1. At this point, we respectfully request that the minister's staff leave their table for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

Seeing no questions.

Resolution 15.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,943,000 for Transportation and Infrastructure, Finance and Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

The hour being 4:55, what is the will of the committee?

**An Honourable Member:** Rise.

**The Chairperson:** Committee rise.

## ROOM 255

### EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

\* (14:50)

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

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Grant Jackson (Spruce Woods):** Great to be back today in Education and Early Childhood Learning Estimates.

Following up on some of the conversations where we left off yesterday—in question period today, the minister was asked about why they're not proceeding with the P3 model of building schools, and I believe her quote was that they were instead going to build schools the right way.

So can the minister clarify that she believes that capital projects in this province should not be built in

the P3 model and that is what is meant by building schools the right way?

**Hon. Tracy Schmidt (Acting Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning):** So building on my comments made today in question period, when we're talking about the right way to build schools, that's in a fiscally responsible way.

The PC plan that they announced—and as we discussed yesterday in committee—was not properly budgeted for or planned for. Had it gone forward, it would've been an unreasonable and an unrealistic and an unsustainable draw on the public treasury.

In the Free Press just this morning, the critic was quoted as admitting that money was not set aside for their plan. He said that we should have gone to Treasury Board with their plan—their announced, unbudgeted-for, unrealistic, unreasonable plan—but that wouldn't have been the responsible thing to do.

And that's because—well, there's a few reasons, but one of them is certainly because our government was left with a nearly \$2-billion deficit after an election year in which the outgoing government ballooned budgets in an irresponsible way. You don't have to take my word for it. The independently hired firm of M-M-P-MNP, pardon me—that was their findings. They were spending in a risky way, putting Manitobans at risk.

The opposition PCs themselves rejected the P3 model back in 2018 as a way of building schools, and that was after they claimed to have studied it. It wasn't just an opinion; they said that they studied the issue and that it would not save money, that the traditional way of building schools would save money, not the P3 model. That was their position in 2018; all of a sudden in 2023, in an election year, they flip-flopped.

We believe—the NDP government believes—that wherever possible where public funds are being spent, we should turn that into public assets. That's what we're talking about when we're talking about the right way.

The P3 model, when it comes to schools, has a very suspicious record. We can look to other jurisdictions. We can look to Nova Scotia where the P3 model was used—and subsequently researched and studied—and was proven to have cost the taxpayers in Nova Scotia unnecessary millions of dollars. The P3 model is documented to have failed in Saskatchewan; even Alberta has rejected the P3 model for school builds.

We believe that wherever possible, public schools should be owned by the people of Manitoba; the public should own and benefit from these facilities. Using this model, we have and will continue to make progress. We are currently building four new schools: two in Sage Creek for DSFM and LRSD, one in Seven Oaks, one in Steinbach for the Hanover School Division. We are making progress on the school capital plan.

The opposition's plan, I would argue, was reckless, was not fiscally responsible; it wasn't real, really. It wasn't real. We have a plan. We are going to follow it so every Manitoban in this province can and will succeed.

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Jackson:** So just to clarify the minister's comments, because there—a couple of questionable comments there, where she said, wherever possible, public funds should turn—that are funding construction should turn into public assets. She does know that how a P3 works is that the facility does turn into a public asset after a certain period of time. I hope she knows that.

But my question is, she put a lot of emphasis on that the public should own these facilities when they're public funds being used to develop them. So that's her plan for schools, but she, as a member of Cabinet, has approved P3s for affordable housing projects and the Portage Place medical development in the last three weeks alone.

So schools need to be publicly owned if they're publicly funded, but those two developments for affordable housing units and medical facilities don't?

**MLA Schmidt:** We're here to talk about school capital, so while I appreciate the question, I'm not going to comment about decisions being made on other projects.

Manitobans elected an NDP government after years of chaos under Brian Pallister's Progressive Conservatives and then Heather Stefanson's Progressive Conservatives. They failed students and families and communities year after year after year. They repeatedly cut operational funding to schools. The funding that went to schools failed to match inflation, which was a cut. And, in fact, they capped funding arbitrarily under threat of having administrative funds withheld.

The member opposite, in discussing his opinions about our government's capital plan to build schools—which we are making progress on, which we will continue to make progress on—has often referenced the

fact that they built—their government built 14 schools in seven years. And if we average that out, that's two schools a year.

And then suddenly, in 2023, that previous government announced a plan to build and fund nine schools instantly because of the model that they chose, and it was a dream. It gave false hope to families and communities; false hope that continues to rear its ugly head today with communities coming to us, talking about these schools—these imaginary schools—that were promised. This is reckless governing. That is not what serves the interests of Manitobans.

What Manitobans are going to get from our government are realistic, fiscally responsible, properly budgeted plans to improve school capital. And we're going to do that on a case-by-case basis in the best way possible. But we're going to do it realistically.

We've got a significant challenge ahead of us. The opposition likes to point out that classrooms are full, and that's true in many cases; not in all cases, but in some cases.

What they fail to remember is that it was them that eliminated the legislative requirement to limit class sizes. What they fail to acknowledge was the historic truancy that's going on in the education system for many years, certainly exacerbated by the pandemic, but there was no response.

Something they could've done, something we're very proud to have done, was introduce something like the school nutrition program. A historic investment, \$30 million towards feeding hungry kids, towards helping staff up food programs, to help buy equipment and resources needed in schools to make sure that they are meeting the students' needs. We're very proud of that program. We can't wait to see the dividends that it pays for years to come.

**Mr. Jackson:** Once again, there's a bit of revisionist history going on here.

If the minister would like to know, it was actually a commitment to build 10 new schools by—20 new schools by 2029 was the original commitment in the 2019 election campaign, and with the addition of the nine schools from the P3, it would have taken us to 23 new schools by 2029. That was the overall commitment. It was not that the commitment was to have these nine new schools spring out of a hole in the ground, as she is characterizing it on the record today, but I digress.

The minister—I have to switch gears here to child care—and the minister last week was asked how many child-care projects in the first year of this NDP government have been approved—new child-care projects have been approved in the first year in office. And she is quoted in Hansard as having said: I'm pleased to update the House that over 120 projects have been approved and will be out throughout every region of Manitoba.

Can the minister table a list of those 120 projects today?

\* (15:10)

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you, honourable Chairperson. Thank you for the question about the child-care situation here in Manitoba, which I am excited to talk about.

As a parent of school-aged children and recently the parent of preschool-aged children, I myself have had a lot of lived experience in navigating this system, which had been woefully neglected under the previous government.

So we can certainly table a list of previously announced projects. However, there are a host of projects which are approved; however, cannot yet be announced because of the terms of the agreement with Canada. That announcement should be coming in a matter of weeks, and we would be happy to share the information when it's available.

And we're very excited about the work the department has been doing, the work that our government has been doing to create more child-care spaces here in Manitoba that are sorely needed. The goal, obviously, is to meet 23,000 new child-care spaces for children six and under. We are well on our way towards that goal. There is much work yet to do, but we are rolling up our sleeves and doing that work.

But we all know in this room that there are other challenges facing the child-care sector that can't be solved by simply immediately adding a bunch of spaces. This has to be done in a targeted and measured way, and that's because of the challenges that Manitoba has experienced in the last seven and a half years under the previous government in recruiting and retrain—retaining early childhood educators.

So we would love to open all those 23,000 spaces tomorrow, but the reality is that we would not have the ECE, early childhood educator, staff to fill those positions and provide that much-needed care.

So as part of our most recent budget, Budget 2024, we increased operating grants to child-care facilities

by 5 per cent. And that's after seven years of freezes to those operating grants, which leaves facilities in a lurch.

Child-care facilities require funds to operate. Again, as I said previously, we could open up—I wish we could open up 23,000 child-care spaces tomorrow, but without the operating funds to run those facilities, the spaces are somewhat less valuable.

We know that we need staff to open more space. So that's why, on top of increasing the operating grants to child-care facilities by 5 per cent, we have also increased wages for ECEs by 2.75 per cent. And we believe that that will help recruit and retain more workers in the sector.

I know that parents in this room will agree ECEs are one of the most valuable jobs in our community. They care for our children, our youngest, most vulnerable citizens, and for too long, they've been undervalued and underpaid. So, with our 2.75 per cent increase, we're changing direction. We've also maintained the tuition reimbursement program for students in ECE's training programs, and we know that will help also.

I'm also proud of the work of the Minister of Advanced Education who has expanded post-secondary programs and established two new programs at the University College of the North and Université de Saint-Boniface.

So a lot more work to do, but we're rolling up our sleeves and we're getting it done.

**Mr. Jackson:** I'm glad to hear the minister is maintaining the tuition rebate that was in place under the previous government. That's good to know she supports that Progressive Conservative measure. It's also good to know that she supports the wage grid, which was part of this initial agreement which was signed on by Progressive Conservatives; I'm glad to know that she supports that Progressive Conservative initiative as well.

The minister's justification for why they've only announced one child-care centre, which is in the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) constituency, I might add, this year—one year in office—is because the federal government hasn't agreed to make the announcements yet. Not sure if anybody's read the federal polling lately, but I'm pretty sure the federal Liberals are looking for some good news.

So does the minister honestly expect Manitobans to believe that the reason these projects haven't been

announced is because Justin Trudeau and his team can't get around to it?

**MLA Schmidt:** I'm happy to talk about the partnership between Canada and Manitoba. And thank goodness that Manitobans had the good sense of electing a New Democratic government who's willing to work across jurisdiction, across party lines. We're here—our government is here to serve the best interests of Manitobans.

Previous government had—and frankly, continues to have—a reputation of an inability to work with any level of government, to work with stakeholders, to work with public servants. That's something that I heard a lot about on the doorstep during the election campaign, was the fact that Manitobans just want elected representatives that are there to work for them. It doesn't always have to be a game of politics.

I know why, or I can suspect why, the member opposite is bringing up the next federal election, because I know they're watching it very closely; they're frankly obsessed with it, obsessed with Pierre Poilievre. In fact, much of this first year in government—during this first year of government, while on our side of the House we've been working for Manitobans, rolling up our sleeves, the other side of the House talks constantly about their federal leader, talks constantly about federal policies, federal programs. They had a dismal reputation for being able to deal with municipalities in our province.

\* (15:20)

I was just at an event this week, hearing from a municipal leader who couldn't say enough good things about the collaborative relationship that our government has. And this was a municipality that doesn't really—had a reputation for necessarily supporting the NDP, but this municipal leader was thrilled with our style of government.

And whether it's Justin Trudeau or Pierre Poilievre or any other federal leader, our Premier has shown a willingness to work with all levels of government across party lines to do what's best for Manitobans.

And we're having a lot of great success. The member, I believe, referenced that there's been one daycare open or one space open, I'm—I apologize, I can't recollect his exact words in the question. But the truth of the matter is, is that 2,100 new child-care spaces have been opened since the NDP were elected.

As I mentioned before, while I'm not able to table the list of new capital projects at this point, over

120 capital projects have been approved and will be built throughout every region of Manitoba; 33 have been completed, 20 are in construction and 75 are in the design and planning phase. So I think that's really good work.

I welcome the collaboration with the federal government, a federal government who has shown some leadership on the child-care file. We hope that whatever government is formed after the next federal election will share those priorities.

But, again, we're happy to work with the Prime Minister, mayors, reeves right across this province, regardless of political stripe. We are a listening government and we really mean that. That is not just rhetoric. We put that into action every single day.

**Mr. Jackson:** You know, the minister has a lot of contradictions in all of her commentary so far today and yesterday, the latest of which is that, on the one hand, she's talking about spending—or rather not spending money from a bilateral agreement that was signed between our government—our previous government and the federal government and then saying on the other hand that we never worked with the federal government at all.

But the reality is this money wouldn't be in her budget to spend if Progressive Conservatives hadn't signed on to this agreement with the federal Liberals and made this happen.

And so the minister, it's unfortunate that she wants to stonewall and make excuses for why she hasn't announced any of these projects, why her government hasn't announced any of these projects. There are many centres, and I've written to the Minister of Education on behalf of many centres in my constituency and in my colleagues' constituencies and in some of their constituencies across the province, advocating on their behalf. Because I know there are countless centres who are waiting to hear from this government on their expansions.

And so I question the minister's commitment to reaching out to the federal government. And they might have a rosy relationship and they all like to have coffee together, but are they actually getting anything done? And I would argue that if they haven't announced any new child-care centres over the last year, they're not getting very much done.

And so the question to the minister is: When is her next outreach to the federal minister going to take place, and when will they schedule the announcement of these approved child-care centres?

**MLA Schmidt:** Yes, I'm very proud of our rosy relationship with the federal government, and I wish that the opposition would aspire to have those same types of rosy relationships because at the end of the day, what that rosy relationship produces is real results for Manitobans.

We could pick partisan fights all day long like the previous government did, but we'd be in the same position as them, which is outside of government—which hopefully they will stay for a long, long time.

To answer the question directly, I will very shortly have my first meeting with the federal minister, perhaps as early as tomorrow. We'll see; stay tuned.

And I'm also very excited to have just learned that the federal ministerial FPT for education is happening in PEI in November, so heaven forbidding—we all, as we mentioned yesterday, we all wish the minister, the MLA for Transcona well and that he will back—be back in this chair sooner than later, healthy and well. But should he still be on his health journey, I will be happy to represent Manitoba at that table and advance the interests of Manitobans at that table.

Rosy relationships produce real results. We've seen many examples of that across government since we were elected back in 20—back in October of 2023. An example of what that can produce is that earlier this year, our government signed a four-year infrastructure funding agreement which will provide over \$20.9 million in the first three years to further support the creation of new child-care spaces in underserved communities, including Indigenous and francophone communities across the province.

Those are real results. That's what Manitobans are looking for. Manitobans aren't interested in the political bickering; Manitobans want to elect folks that want to serve them, that want to work in the public interest. And those are our values. Those are NDP, New Democratic values is serving the public.

And we recognize, again, I'm—we are—on this side of the House, we're humble enough to admit that things are tough when it comes to child care. I've had that experience myself. My kids are now all school-aged, but during the tenure of the previous PC government, my children were preschool-aged, and it was a struggle not just for my family but families all over my community to access quality and affordable child care.

That's why Manitobans elected an NDP government. We're a government that understands everyday Manitobans, that is here to work for everyday Manitobans every single day in the public interest.

We're a government that believes in supporting families, that believes in supporting children, that believes in supporting early childhood educators.

\* (15:30)

We value early childhood educators and the amazing work that they do. I think very fondly of many of the early childhood educators that I had the privilege of engaging with, that my children have the privilege of getting to know and being educated by. And on behalf of our whole team, I think we want to thank them sincerely for their service and know that we've got their back.

**The Chairperson:** Before we continue, I just want to remind all honourable members to refrain from mentioning or referring to the absence or presence of any other honourable member.

Thank you.

**Mr. Jackson:** I thank the minister for letting us know her next conversations are imminent with the federal minister. I would hope it's top of her agenda to urge that minister to get on a plane and get over here to announce some of these child-care centres that are approved, to end the waiting game for these centres who deserve to know whether their projects are approved or not.

Secondly, you know, in respect to her comments about the Minister for Education, you know, we hope that he is well enough by then, but we also hope that regardless of which one of them ends up going to the conference in Prince Edward Island, I believe she said, we hope that the renegotiation of these child-care agreements are top of mind on that agenda, considering they are set for a five-year period from 2021 to 2026, and so negotiations of these agreements take place over many, many months.

I was involved in the negotiation of this initial agreement in a previous role in this building. I understand how long it can take, and so I sincerely hope that that is top of mind for them to start lobbying with their provincial colleagues to the federal government. And we look forward to them, whichever one of them goes, reporting back to the Legislative Assembly on the results of that conversation.

With respect to the minister's comments regarding the wage grid and recruitment and retention, can she table the numbers or put on the record the number of ECEs that we are short province-wide?

**MLA Schmidt:** We know that there is a lot of work to do in supporting the sector and supporting the workers

that work in that sector, the very valuable, important workers that work in that sector.

I think it's really important to note that this is an issue jurisdictions across Canada are facing and that Manitoba has a very long-standing commitment to the child-care sector, to growing and supporting, expanding the child-care sector here in Manitoba, and supporting, recruiting, retaining the workers that work in this sector.

There is no doubt that there is a shortage. My understanding is that the department estimates that we're currently training about 1,000 child-care workers a year, and we understand—or we estimate that to still be insufficient. And that's one of the reasons that our government is committed to working on wages and working conditions for the people that work in this sector so that we can improve recruitment and retention of folks in this sector.

I've already outlined some of the great work that our government has done already in our first year. Increasing operating grants to child-care facilities by 5 per cent after years of them being stagnant under the previous government. Increasing the wages of early child-care educators by 2.75 per cent. The tuition reimbursement, the added spaces in post-secondary.

We've also introduced—or expanded, I should say, the annual professional development days for early childhood and child-care professionals. We've doubled it, in fact, and we think that that's really important, and that's one of those working conditions on top of the operational funding that is finally increased. Improving those working conditions should help recruit and retain folks to the sector.

As an illustration of Manitoba's long-standing commitment to the child-care sector and child-care workers here in Manitoba, I'd like to remind the committee that in 2010, under a previous NDP government, Manitoba was the second province in the country to finally introduce a child-care pension plan for early childhood educators.

As someone who has been a worker, I have been a public servant in my past, and I know the value of a pension, and the effect that a pension has on recruitment and retention of a workforce. A pension is a life-line for so many folks. It's a vision for their future. It's a huge investment, and it's something that attracts folks to different sectors.

\* (15:40)

I remember growing up as a kid, and that was some advice my parents often gave me when we would talk about what the future was going to look like, what profession I might go into. As I mentioned yesterday, both of my parents are career-long public educators who continue to benefit today from their pension plan. And they would often tell me, Tracy, we don't care what you do, but make sure you have a pension.

So I'm very proud of the NDP's track record in this regard. It's important to note, and we should all be proud, that Manitoba was the second province in Canada to introduce a child-care pension plan.

Again, we know that there's a lot more work to do. We are humble enough to admit that. I wish the previous government was humble admit—humble enough to admit their mistakes, many of those mistakes which put us where we are today.

**Mr. Jackson:** Well, honourable Chairperson, what an ending to that comment. It was almost a decent answer until we got to the final sentences.

And, of course, Progressive Conservatives are very glad to have signed on to the national child-care strategy, creating 23,000 new spaces, implementing a wage grid and also lowering parental daycare fees to \$10 a day. We were the first province in the country to reach that threshold, by the way, well before this government took office.

And so I'd just like to rewind to a previous answer of the minister's. She mentioned a new child-care capital agreement that was signed earlier this year, detailing an additional \$20 million, I believe she said. That's on top of the \$1.2 billion in the Canada-Manitoba, Canada-wide child-care agreement, if I am understanding the minister's comments correctly.

So, in addition to the 23,000 spaces that the \$1.2 billion was supposed to create, in addition to the wage grid, et cetera, how many additional spaces does she hope that this \$20-million separate deal will build in underserved communities?

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you for the question.

I'm glad to continue sharing with Manitobans the great success we've had in signing this additional infrastructure funding agreement due to our rosy relationship with the federal government, a relationship that will continue regardless of who sits in the Prime Minister's chair—because that's what Manitobans elected us to do—was to serve their interests, to work across

jurisdiction, to work across party lines to produce real results for Manitobans.

So this funding agreement is a great example of that. It will provide \$20.9 million over three years to further support the agreement already entered into between Canada and Manitoba.

So to answer your question: No, there are no specific space targets associated with this new funding. This new funding is to further support the expansion of projects in both the public and nonprofit space in these underserved communities that require additional supports for a variety of reasons.

So we're very proud of this work. This work is going to benefit Manitobans. It's going to benefit the Manitobans that are most in need.

I can share with the committee that the specific terms of the action plan under this funding agreement are currently being negotiated and finalized. So the action plan is not at the point where we can discuss it, but we're very excited to share those details when we can, and I know the department is working very hard on finalizing the terms of that agreement so that Manitoba families in some of the more—some of the most underserved communities in our province will be able to get the additional support that they need.

Thank you.

**Mr. Jackson:** I thank the minister for her comments on that.

So, just to be clear, reiterating the minister's comments, a \$20.9-million deal over three years on top of the \$1.2-billion deal that was signed in 2021, the additional \$20.9 million—there are no targets for creating additional spaces, and instead additional supports will be provided to underserved communities.

Can the minister give some examples of what those supports might be?

**MLA Schmidt:** I apologize to the committee if I wasn't clear. I thought the name of the agreement made it clear that what these dollars support is infrastructure.

This agreement will allocate infrastructure dollars to advance the goal of creating 23,000 new daycare spaces in the province of Manitoba. And why this funding is necessarily—necessary—pardon me—is because not all communities are in the same circumstances. There are some communities in our province that require additional infrastructure funding support in order to ensure that they can have those spaces within their communities.

So, again, much work to be done. We're happy to admit that. Our department is doing the work. Our government is doing the work.

\* (15:50)

We've been left in a situation where the needs of Manitobans were not met under the previous government. That's clear. We all saw that play out in the last election, and we saw it play out on October 3. Manitobans felt neglected by the previous government, Manitobans were looking for a government that would advance their interests and understands the needs of average Manitoban families, working families, families that struggle to find and afford child care, of which there are many.

We've made a lot of good progress since being elected in October. We're continuing to make progress, and we're just getting started, and we'll continue that great work with the support of this infrastructure funding agreement.

Thank you.

**Mr. Jackson:** The minister is reminding us at the end of every answer that she has a job to do; I appreciate that. She probably doesn't have to reiterate it every time, but I guess that's her purview to do so.

I just—so, just to be clear: \$20.9 million over three years, no additional spaces on top of the 23,000, so what the minister is putting on the record is that \$1.2 billion was not enough money, in addition to the other things that it was supposed to do—wage grid, \$10 a day supplementing parent fees—\$1.2 billion was not enough to build the 23,000 spaces, and so their government has negotiated an additional, let's call it \$21 million, to support that work, to reach the goal by 2026 of opening 23,000 new spaces in the province.

Is the minister confident that that additional \$21 million will be enough to get her government to the 23,000 new spaces or will she be going back to Ottawa to ask for further funds?

**MLA Schmidt:** It is a strange line of questioning to criticize our government's success in obtaining tens of millions of dollars of funding, additional funding, funding that their government didn't secure. We were able to get it done.

I suppose maybe the member's question was: Why didn't we reject \$20.9 million? The question insinuated that there was already an agreement signed. Why would you need 20 million more dollars? I suspect that the member opposite and his colleagues don't understand the needs of underserved communities. I don't think

that their record shows that they served those underserved communities.

I'm very proud of this infrastructure funding agreement, and if the federal government, to answer your question, comes to the table and wants to partner in expanding this agreement and giving Manitoba more funds for Manitobans and their kids and their families, we'll be at the table, every single time. And that's what Manitobans are looking for.

And that's what Manitobans did on October 3. They rejected the nonsensical positions of the previous government, and they elected a common sense government that is going to work with the federal government to get every dollar into Manitoba that we can, and make sure that those dollars go to the people that need them most. That's what this nearly \$21 million will do.

Again, it's a strange line of questioning: \$21 million, you know what it will do? It'll do more. It'll do more. Yes. I know that's a strange concept, perhaps. It sounds like it's confusing to the members opposite; seems pretty straightforward to me. We got more money, we're going to do more with it for the people who have the most need. That's good governance. The members opposite should listen.

I'm really scratching my head at this question. I really—I can't imagine that we would criticize the ability to negotiate a further funding agreement. But that's what Manitobans got for seven and a half years. Manitobans—there were millions, I would say maybe even billions of dollars left on the table thanks to the reckless governance of Brian Pallister and Heather Stefanson after him. Reckless. Left millions of dollars on the table again and again and again, whether we're talking about child care, or whatever we're talking about.

They had an inability to play nice in the sand box. They continue to have that same approach in the Legislature today, and I'm very proud of the work that our team and our department is doing to move forward, to secure additional funding, to use those dollars in the most responsible way possible and to make sure that the Manitobans that need those dollars most are the ones that benefit from them.

Thank you.

**Mr. Jackson:** Well, the only thing that's disappointing about this situation, honourable Chair, is the fact that the minister's been asked a very simple question and all she has is political attacks as a way of an answer.

I'm not criticizing the fact that she got the \$21 million, I'm just asking her where she's going to spend it. And she's either so badly briefed on her file or hasn't done the homework herself to give us—and all Manitobans—a straight answer on where she's expending those funds.

So if that's a, you know, confusing question to her, that we're in Committee of Supply, asking questions on her budget and where her department is spending her money, then I'm not sure she really knows why we're here. But that's the purpose: to give Manitobans the details on where this government is spending the money that it allocated in its budget in this fiscal year. And the agreements that it signed with other governmental partners, and so if she can't answer those questions, then she should probably ask for a recess, go get better briefed on where this \$21 million is going and then we can start this process back again.

So if the minister wants to come forward with a straight answer about where and what that \$21 million would be spent on, I think all Manitobans would appreciate it. I'm not criticizing for her for having gone and got it, or if it was the previous minister. Good for them. But Manitobans deserve to know where it's being spent.

Will she share that with Manitobans today?

**MLA Schmidt:** I accept the congratulation from the members opposite on securing this additional funding and signing this agreement. It is a huge success and I'm glad to hear that we agree.

I would urge the member to perhaps listen when I'm answering the question because, not in my last answer but in the answer prior, I clearly stated—and you can pull up the Hansard and bring it here tomorrow. But the Hansard will reflect that I shared with the committee that the action plan under this new infrastructure funding agreement is currently being negotiated and finalized by the department. And that until those details are finalized, we can't discuss the details of our action plan. There is an action plan and I can't wait to receive your congratulations on it when we release it. It's a great thing.

What I can share is that the action plan will be targeted, will be thoughtful and will be designed to have the greatest impact, serving communities that are traditionally underserved and that need extra help.

\* (16:00)

And on the topic of help, I would just like to, frankly, shame the member opposite for his suggestion that I was not properly briefed. The Department of Education

and Early Childhood Learning has some of the most fantastic folks that work incredibly hard. And in incredibly challenging circumstances that we find ourselves in—no one's fault. This is life; life happens. We're all human beings. The minister responsible—sorry. I need to think about what I'm going to say because of the words that the Chairperson has already—the warnings the Chairperson has already given me.

Due to these human circumstances that we're dealing with, our team has pulled together. We've come up with a plan to be able to keep things rolling in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning, and we're doing that to great success. And that is not because of me as the acting minister; that is because of the fantastic work of the folks you see sitting at this table beside me here today and of—how big is the department—hundreds—hundreds of other public servants that work in the department.

The materials they have been able to provide me, the guidance that they have been sharing with me is second to none, and I feel it's very important to put on the record how embarrassed I am by your comments insinuating that I was not properly briefed. Second to none is the job that these folks are doing under incredibly challenging circumstances, and I want to lift them up and commend them and thank them so much for the support that they are giving to me and to our government as we work to clean up the absolute mess that Manitobans were left with after seven and a half years of a government who didn't take meetings with stakeholders, didn't take meetings with their own department officials.

I am so grateful for the briefings that I have received. I'm not going to pretend to be an expert in this department yet. I probably never will be. That's not my job. These folks are the experts. I'm here to answer to Manitobans. I'm here to work in the public interest on behalf of Manitobans. And I would encourage the opposition to think about Manitobans and the people they represent and the public servants who do the work on behalf of Manitobans and to respect them.

**Mr. Jackson:** And I'm equally as embarrassed at the minister's answer, I guess, as she is at my question.

Me questioning whether she has been well briefed on her new file or not is not a reflection of the hard-working civil servants but rather her ability or interest in actually reading and learning the briefing materials that they are providing to her, which I have no doubt are prepared in an exemplary and professional manner.

The minister has said that this new action plan for the additional \$21 million is still under negotiation. The news release was issued for this agreement on May 14. So that's five months ago to negotiate, I guess, and write the details down of the action plan.

Can the minister share with Manitobans how many more months she believes the action plan is going to take?

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you to the member for the question.

We're working hard to get it done. The department is working to the best of their ability to get it done. Obviously a negotiation is a two-way—at least—street, so it's not entirely within our control, but rest assured that the agreement will be signed as soon as is reasonably possible.

There's a lot of work going on in the department. As I mentioned, we've been left in quite a mess. This is one piece of the work that we're doing to right the ship. There's a lot more work being done—not to suggest that this isn't a priority because it absolutely is.

We'll continue to work with the federal government on finalizing this agreement and any other agreements that they're willing to come to the table to discuss.

Thank you.

**Mr. Jackson:** For the record, another non-answer from this minister regarding timelines. I'm sure hoping that the federal government will start imposing some timelines because they are looking forward to getting these child-care spaces and this child-care funding rolled out, because it does not seem to be a priority for this minister or the Premier's (Mr. Kinew) government.

Can the minister answer whether they will be proceeding with the RTM model for child-care centres that was acclaimed across the country when implemented by the previous government?

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you to the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Jackson) for the question.

It delights me to take the opportunity to applaud the work of our assistant deputy minister on this model. I understand that it is an award-winning model, developed by her department—or her branch. It's been implemented to great success, and the simple answer is yes.

**Mr. Jackson:** Wow, that was a shocking revelation today. Good to hear that the minister can admit when

one thing was done right under the previous administration, and we thank the departmental team for getting that project off the ground. I think all Manitobans will be relieved to hear that the RTM model is proceeding, it was effective and got the job done.

With the passage of Bill 18 in the spring sitting, can the minister outline if money has flowed to post-secondaries for the child-care learning labs and, if so, how much funding has flowed to post-secondaries?

\* (16:10)

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you to the member opposite for the question about—and which gives me an opportunity to talk about Bill 18, which was an excellent piece of legislation, something that was overdue.

The member opposite knows that this was a piece of enabling legislation. So that's all the legislation really did was enable the partnership to exist between the department and public bodies. So we are deeply committed to working towards those partnerships.

I can advise the committee that the department is—so after the enabling legislation was passed in the spring, the department has been hard at work finalizing and implementing these arrangements that will produce these partnerships and will support public sector in expanding access to early childhood education.

I'm very proud of the work of our government in expanding its early learning and childhood care capital program through engagement and partnerships, not only with post-secondary institutions, but also with municipalities and Indigenous governing bodies and other public-sector organizations, while continuing its existing partnerships with school divisions and community-based non-profit organizations. Bill 18 allows us to pursue further support of the public sector.

And, again, I mentioned earlier about the fact that I've experienced the shortcomings in the child-care sector during the last seven and a half years under the PC government. It was not so long ago that I was a student at the University of Manitoba with a newborn child, and there was a child-care program there at the time, at the University of Manitoba. But they were very limited. I spent my entire four-year degree there on the wait-list, so never got access to the child care I needed on-site.

So Bill 18 is a really important piece of legislation for students. It will support students; it will support workers. We are thrilled at its passage and we look forward to finalizing and implementing those projects.

Thank you.

**Mr. Doyle Piwniuk (Turtle Mountain):** I just wanted to have the opportunity to put some words on this Estimates process.

I had the opportunity to meet with a council of the town of Baldur, Manitoba. And they—we were—they were so grateful that we actually were able to get them a 74-unit children's nurse-daycare, which also includes nursery school and age group up to 74 students—or, children for the daycare for different age groups.

And then when they were—actually, we were under the construction last summer. It's about to be completed, but the concern that they have now—and they were waiting for nine months to know that—they've been told that they may only get coverage up to 40 students. So now this facility is almost twice the size, and they're not able to get the full 74 students—or children—daycare—the grant money to continue the operations of the daycare.

And so they're been asking this department, they been writing letters. They're not hearing anything from this department, so I want, like—this is why I'm—I came up with this question today, was to see what—why is—why no one's getting back to them to talk about the opportunity of—the need that Baldur has, the region has.

I know I have an ex-employee who actually now works at the insurance agency in Baldur, and she has to travel many, many miles—or, kilometres to the next towns to get her twins to two different daycares. Baldur would be so grateful if—she would be so grateful if Baldur would have got that daycare to have a—74 spaces. And now they've been reduced to 40.

And now they've been budgeted, they've been planning for the full 74 spaces and they're very disappointed. But they're not hearing anything from the department.

\* (16:20)

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you to the member for Turtle Mountain for the question.

I know that access to child care is an issue that affects your constituents. It affects my constituents. I relate wholeheartedly to your constituent that you were speaking to that has two kids in two different daycares. My sister has had that experience. I have had that experience. I know many Manitobans are suffering with that experience, so I appreciate your advocacy in bringing forward the concerns of your community.

I am getting a little bit of different information for the department, so I would encourage us on this issue—

we can continue to talk about it here in Committee of Supply, absolutely. I would also welcome a discussion offline here today so we can make sure that we're speaking the same language here.

The department that—I'm sorry, the information that I'm getting from the department is that department officials were actually in Baldur, at this daycare, just this week, that work is well under way to get the final licensing condition approvals that, as far as—from the information that we have here today, that the centre is on track to open on time and that the operational funding—and that's why I'm a bit confused about your question, when you say the 74 spaces, and then there's 40. So I'm not talking—I'm not sure if you're talking about operational funding. But my understanding is that the operational funding will flow for every space that is filled.

So I'm not sure if there are additional challenges in the community to filling the spaces, and perhaps that's the issue. Again, we've talked at length already here today about the fact that there are recruitment and retention issues in the early childhood education sector that we are working hard on improving. I've talked about it at length already today—about the wage increases, the tuition reimbursement program, the additional post-secondary programs that are established, the increased operational funding.

So my understanding is that things are on track in Baldur, but I'm happy to hear your feedback and have this discussion further and, again, happy to have that here today, happy to have it at another time, happy to follow up with the department, and we're happy to dialogue with you, honourable member, and with the community.

We're here to work with all communities to try to make sure that their child-care needs are met and that they have the adequate space and the adequate staffing and the adequate operational funding to serve the community—so.

**Mr. Piwniuk:** Thanks to the minister for, you know, getting a follow-up from the department.

I got an email just on Friday that that's the concern that they had. I was there probably a month ago—over a month ago. The—I'd say the capital cost of the facility—they were fully—totally funded for that. It's the operation grant that they're concerned about, because it was supposed—like, again, how do you operate when you actually have capacity for 75 students? You budget for 75 students, and then you're only going to get grant funding for 40 students. That's a big impact.

And there's a need in the community. Yes. There might be—but, again, they've been on hold for even hiring workers because they weren't reassured that this operating grant would cover the additional staff, and that was the biggest concern that they had.

And so, it's to clarify it if we could. If you could come back with an answer, that'd be great. If there was a meeting with Baldur, that's good to know. I'm hoping that this was clarified, that—because it's not just the one community; there's other communities out there that have actually, they were talking to, that are in the same situation as they were.

But I'm going to pass it over to my colleague because he has the same question with one of his facilities.

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you to the member from Turtle Mountain. Yes, we're happy to continue this dialogue and make sure that we're on the same page.

Thank you.

**MLA Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail):** So as my colleague was mentioning, and I didn't ask this question in question period, I have a daycare in Landmark called the Legacy—not Lagassé, but Legacy Daycare Centre—and they are facing similar challenges. They've got the space, they've got—but they can't seem to get the funding to hire more people and/or they're having a challenge hiring more people.

So I'm wondering if there's some kind of immediate solution we could offer them because there's definitely space there and they're even able—they did all this, pretty much privately funded. They're even able to add on and put more space on that daycare, if the opportunity became available to them.

\* (16:30)

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you to the member for Dawson Trail for bringing up this question again.

I know it was mentioned in question period and like, to the—like I've said to the other members, I do really want to sincerely thank you for your advocacy for your community. That's important work, and I'm glad that you've been able to connect with the folks at Legacy daycare and advance their queries.

My understanding from the department is that just this week we did receive contact, so I don't believe that dialogue has been initiated yet, and I hope that you would understand that—there are over 12,000?

**An Honourable Member:** Twelve hundred.

**MLA Schmidt:** Twelve hundred. There are over 1,200. My apologies. Yes, it would be great if there were 12,000.

Currently, there are over 1,200 facilities in the province, so we don't always have these situations at the top of our minds or at our fingertips. But we were able to locate some correspondence from the daycare sharing their concerns.

And so we're happy to follow up with you again, either here at committee or offline, and we can make sure that we're on the same page.

I think it is important for the committee to note that the way in which daycares and these types of facilities are funded is by occupied spaces, not necessarily available spaces. And so it's not necessarily, in my understanding, uncommon for these types of facilities to open in phases. So it's not necessarily uncommon for a 75-space facility to perhaps only have 40 occupied spaces in those early phases of their operation.

I'm not sure if this analogy is correct—you guys can kick me under the table—but I'm thinking, like, you know, I think there's a bit of a chicken-and-egg challenge. You need the spaces to be occupied to get the funding; you need staff to be able to fill those spaces. So I don't think it's so uncommon that these phased-in approaches occur.

But certainly we want to make sure that the facility that you're referencing in Landmark has the resources that they require to make sure that we can take advantage of that space. Happy to work together with you going forward and—again, and I'm sure the department will follow up in due course.

Thank you.

**MLA Lagassé:** So I'd like to thank the minister for the answer and the department as well.

I just would request that perhaps when you do meet with them that you could let me know. Like, I would gladly come down. And this isn't a partisan issue; this is a matter of trying to meet the needs in that particular community. And I know there's quite a large need in the community of Landmark as it's growing.

I'm going to kind of go over to Ste. Anne here. And it's not a jab; this is not—this is, again, working in collaboration, trying to ensure that the needs are being met in these communities, as Ste. Anne is the fastest growing community in the southeast right now.

I have over 3,000 people in that community, and with the school that was supposed to be coming under the P3 model, we lost—I think it was about 75 daycare spaces. You can correct me if I'm wrong on that.

But that would have—actually have met the needs of the community if we would have hit where we were at the time when that was announced, would have met all the needs of daycare in that community. I'm sure it's greater now because the community is growing quite fast.

I'm just looking to see if we can maybe get a timeline as to if those needs are going to be met or if they're going to be kind of—like, I just—I'm just looking for clarity on that particular matter.

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you to the member for Dawson Trail (MLA Lagassé), again, for the question and for his advocacy for his community and for his willingness to work in a non-partisan way, which I'm always happy to do whenever possible.

I'm happy to share with the committee that it's my understanding that construction is almost complete on a new child-care facility in the town of Ste. Anne; 74 spaces is what—my understanding is what that facility will have. I can't give an exact timeline, unfortunately, for when that will be fully operational, but I'm glad to hear that there is a construction project nearly complete and that will hopefully alleviate some of the need that's happening in this growing community.

**Mr. Jackson:** I thank the minister for her responses to my colleague's constituency questions.

I would be remiss if I didn't ask a few of my own related to my community as we're in the waning hours of the Estimates process here, Committee of Supply.

And the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister will be familiar with two of these, because I wrote to the minister regarding the Wawanesa Wee Care facility on April 29, and I wrote about the Rivers early learning centre either in March or May, I'm not sure which order they were in. Both towns, as well as Souris, the third community, have one facility each that are completely full and have between 80 and 100 kids on each wait-list.

I've met with all of the facilities. I have another meeting with Souris early learning co-operative daycare on Tuesday, and all three facilities have applied under the early learning and child-care agreement for capital funding to build secondary facilities to meet these needs in their communities.

Can the minister update Manitobans and these facilities on where those applications are at, or are they tied up in waiting for the federal government to announce, as she referenced earlier?

Thank you.

\* (16:40)

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you to the member opposite—the member for Spruce Woods (Mr. Jackson)—for the question, and I also thank him for his advocacy for his community. It's great to see that folks in the community have a elected representative that's bringing their issues forward to committee.

I can confirm that for the Souris facility, the answer, simply, is yes. There were 104 spaces announced. The other two facilities, we are still following up on. This is—sincerely, this is not in trying to be non-transparent, but just in the interests of time—I know we're trying to get out of here—so I guess what I'll say is for the remaining two facilities we'll have to just take that under advisement for the moment.

We were—we will follow up with you. And, again, our staff are working diligently here trying to get those answers. If we can get them to you before the end of the day, we'll get them to you before the end of the day.

**Mr. Jackson:** I thank the minister for that. That's very good news about the 104 additional spaces for Souris. I'm not sure that they're aware of that, because I get asked from members of the board that if the secondary facility, which had land provided by the school division, is proceeding. I get asked that question from board members. So I have a meeting on Tuesday night with them. If I can confirm that to them, that would be very helpful. But we can take that offline.

I have one last question that I want to get actually on the record today. I wrote to the Minister of Education on September 9 regarding the Souris School senior years science lab renovation, and I have not received an answer from the minister. Obviously, there's been a lot of things going on, so not a criticism or a partisan shot, but I did write that letter.

Very curious to know if the pause on the Souris School science lab renovation was sort of just an accidental pause or if that's intentional and when we may be able to get that project back on the books because I can attest that I was in that science lab over a decade ago, and it needed help then. So it does need some TLC.

Thank you.

**MLA Schmidt:** Thank you for the member for—to the member for the question.

\* (16:50)

Yes, there are certainly multiple pressures on our department. We've been discussing them over the last two days. The department has a finite amount of resources and is working very hard to strike and find the right balance between upgrading existing infrastructure, recognizing that there's a need, but also weighing that against the pressure and the need for new capital projects.

So the Souris School senior year science lab is a project that has been deferred from this budget cycle. My understanding is that the division is aware and that we will defer that project into the upcoming Estimates process and budget cycle.

So you know, I wish we could fund every project across the province. That's my sincere wish and desire; I know it's your wish and desire as well. But the reality is, is that there are finite amount of resources. We are working diligently as a government to chart a path towards balance after being left a historic deficit.

And so this project is deferred. Happy to consider it going forward in next year's budget process. And again, I thank you for your advocacy for your community.

**The Chairperson:** Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions relevant to this department.

I will now call resolution 16.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$34,528,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Student Achievement and Inclusion, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,470,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Bureau de l'éducation française, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,429,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, System Performance and Accountability, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,866,290,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Support to Schools, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.5: resolved that there be—*[interjection]* Sorry, my—slight correction.

Resolution 16.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,606,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$459,506,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Early Learning and Child Care, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$109,301,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Cost Related to Capital Assets of Other Reporting Entities, capital investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$160,000,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

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

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

The floor is open for questions.

Seeing no questions—

Resolution 16.1: RESOLVED there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,739,000 for Education and Early Childhood Learning, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

**Resolution agreed to.**

**The Chairperson:** The next department to be considered is Housing, Addictions and Homelessness.

The hour being 4:57, what is the will of the committee?

**Some Honourable Members:** Rise.

**The Chairperson:** Committee is adjourned.

## CHAMBER

### EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

\* (15:10)

**The Chairperson (Tyler Blashko):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Executive Council.

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

**Hon. Wab Kinew (Premier):** Mr. Chair, I present to you: Sarah Thiele, the clerk of the Executive Council; Mark Rosner, my chief of staff.

**Mr. Wayne Ewasko (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Braeden Jones, chief of staff, is joined me this afternoon.

**The Chairperson:** As previously stated, in accordance with subrule 78(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So if the Premier can update the House on the Lake St. Martin outlet channel project.

**Mr. Kinew:** The channels project is a piece of flood mitigation infrastructure that's planned to move water from Lake Manitoba through the Interlake and then, of course, eventually by Lake St. Martin towards Lake Winnipeg.

This is often described as Brian Pallister's legacy project, even though nothing ever really got done through two terms of PC misadventures in government, shall we say. It's clear that there's a need for flood mitigation in the Interlake; in this region, in particular.

Speaking with civil servants, it's been described to me that several of the communities in, I guess the northern part of the Interlake, are to be the communities that benefit the most from this piece of flood-fighting infrastructure.

So this would include First Nations like Dauphin River, Little Saskatchewan, Lake St. Martin, Pinaymootang, and small towns like, you know, Gypsumville and, I guess, St. Martin and others in the area throughout the Interlake.

But, of course, it serves a broader region of the province. There are many ranchers and cottagers and First Nations people around the shores of Lake Manitoba who would stand to benefit from this.

And, of course, if we are to think of the entirety of the flood control structures and diversions and floodways around the province that help us to move water around during flood seasons and otherwise, especially within the southern half of the province, if you will, this could be seen to be an important province-wide priority, insofar as there is basically one watershed that moves water along: Souris, from the Shellmouth Dam to the Assiniboine, through the Portage Diversion into Lake Manitoba, currently via the Fairford Dam into Lakes Pineimuta and St. Martin, as well as the Fairford River, and then eventually on to the Dauphin River and Lake Winnipeg.

Anyway, I can tell you that the civil service, working with engineers and subcontractors, examined several different alternatives for ways to control the water level on Lake Manitoba and subsequently the water levels in these downstream rivers and bodies of water that I'm describing here. This included different approaches to moving water out of Lake Manitoba, but it also included various scenarios in which water would be prevented from entering Lake Manitoba in the first place. So, for instance, like in the Waterhen-Skownan region, you know, looking at potentially diverting water north from there to Cedar Lake as one example, Winnipegosis to Cedar Lake.

And that's just one particular scenario. There were a ton of various scenarios. All of them were examined in great detail, both for the hydrology, potential cost/benefit implications, as well as, I guess, the net effect on regulating water within both Lake Manitoba and, again, some of those downstream lakes.

These analyses were conducted while the PCs were in power, primarily during Brian Pallister's time in office, and in spite of the expense and the horsepower that was deployed in these directions, nothing got done. You could have built something within seven and a half years, but not if you're the PCs.

And so when we entered office, we entered a very challenging state of affairs, for the provincial government under the PCs had broken trust and broken

relationships with a lot of communities in the region, who as I said are supposed to benefit from this project. And as a result, ever since, we've been trying to clean up the PC mess, much as we are doing in health care and public safety.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So I know that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) failed to answer any of the questions earlier today on this topic. I'd like to know, when he sat as leader of opposition, he said how very important this project was, and how it needed to be expedited.

\* (15:20)

He also said that when he would get elected, if elected, he said that he would be personally involved in the project and he would get it done.

We all know that this is an important project. We know that the previous NDP government had flood in 2011, 2014 and there was floods all the way—reaching all the way back to the 1970s. And I know that his multiple staff that he has hired in his just over one year of tenure and had increased the amount of staff, that he had staff out during the scrum and had staff listening to question period so, hopefully, he knows these answers.

We know that various—many, many, many communities have been affected for decades. We know that housing has been wiped out, honourable Chairperson. We know that infrastructure's been destroyed. We know that there's Manitobans that have absolutely lost everything and at times now are still displaced. Yet the Premier and his Cabinet minister have cancelled the project.

So can he tell the House, can he tell Manitobans, can he tell the people directly affected by his decision when he's going to start it again? Or what is his timeline plan?

**Mr. Kinew:** Member's using very irresponsible language. It's irresponsible to try to play on the fears of people affected by flooding in the past in order to try to get your name in the bottom third of a news article today.

So the only thing our government is doing is trying to save the channels project from the oblivion that it was left in by the PCs. They had two terms in office to try and show progress. I believe the progress that's been shown is perhaps a road, but as far as flood infrastructure will not accomplish much in that part of the Interlake.

I've spoken extensively with people in the region. Actually was a news reporter during a flood of 2011 and spent a lot of time speaking to people in the area

around St. Laurent, Twin Lakes Beach and seeing the impacts there. Very damaging: homes flooded, knocked off their foundations by wave action on Lake Manitoba, the impact of ice being thrown up on the shore. We saw a similar thing near Delta in Portage la Prairie area, I guess further south and to the west.

So it's clearly needed. There's an attempt to cast some aspersions there, I believe, in the form of saying I've committed to being personally involved and that we'll get it done, and I'd like to take this opportunity to confirm: I am personally involved and we will get it done.

Again, the member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler), the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), Brian Pallister, Heather Stefanson, they were all personally involved for many, many years. And has one litre of water been moved through the channels? One millilitre? No.

So now, after falling down on what was to be Brian Pallister's legacy project, not getting it built, I guess there's a bit of a desire to try and revive an issue that they had the ability to move forward. The reason why they were not able to do so, I think, has to do with the combination of their own incompetence and inability to manage large-scale, long-term projects, but also the inability to cultivate meaningful relationships with folks who need to be onside in order for projects to move forward.

If you're looking for an example, I can recall a few summers ago visiting a group of families in the Interlake, alongside the MLA for Concordia, who's now the Attorney General (Mr. Wiebe). And this was a mix of ranchers and landowners and households whose land was to be expropriated at that stage—using that verbiage and tense—and whose homes would either be moved or that they would have to relocate. And it's a simple communication, simple showing of respect. And talking to these folks was not really forthcoming from the PC administration of the day. And so as opposition I was happy to be there and to build relationships and to try and advocate for folks to get more fair dealing done.

And it's the same sort of approach that we're working on today. It's communities in the Interlake, it's the federal government; there's a number of First Nations governments that all need to be worked with in a comprehensive fashion. We know St. Laurent is a Métis community as well. So there's the Manitoba Métis Federation and municipal leaders.

In all, we're working hard to reset the relationship, and after years of mistrust sown by the inactions and failures of the PC government I can report that we are taking significant steps to ensure the viability of this project by ensuring that everyone's on board with the direction that we're setting.

### Introduction of Guests

**The Chairperson:** Before we move on to the next question, I will just direct all honourable members to the gallery. We have joining us six guests from the Secrétariat aux affaires francophones.

Welcome to the Committee of Supply.

\* \* \*

**Mr. Ewasko:** The Premier (Mr. Kinew) sits in his chair and again casts stones in glass houses from which he's throwing them. It was the Premier, back when he was the opposition leader, that said things on how important this project was and that if he got elected he would get it done. But it's his record that is going to show that he's actually cancelled it.

And I'm not sure if now, maybe, because we've seen this from this Premier, maybe, and this is sort of his opportunity, if he chooses to take it, maybe this is one more example of him not really knowing what his minister has done. I mean, we've seen that from various other MLAs and ministers within his government that have acted and done things that the Premier now wants to either see reversed or he didn't know anything about.

\* (15:30)

In Estimates, in October of 2022, this now-Premier, then-leader of the opposition, in regards to the Lake Manitoba project—*[interjection]* Does the, Mr. Chair, does the Premier have something to say? Does the Premier have something to say? There's all—there's always lots being said, honourable Chairperson, when the microphones are off. So does he have something to share with the committee now before I finish my question and give him the five minutes that he's going to waste on the record.

I am just going to repeat that he said, and I quote, why can't the government move things along more quickly? This project, I quote, this project is important enough and urgent enough given the flooding situation in Manitoba. He continues to say, and I quote, he's calling for a more substantive intervention to expedite the approvals process. And he references the floods of 2011, '14 and previous other floods.

So today, he talks about fear. Well the fact is him and his minister are the ones that cancelled this project. And to say that there were no—for him to say that there were no consultations, there was no meetings, is totally disingenuous. And, once again, maybe he should put it on the record and apologize again for misleading Manitobans. He continues to flip-flop. When he was in opposition, this was an important project. Now that he's in government, he's cutting it.

It's unfortunate, and it's again a sign of behaviour from this Premier that is not becoming of a premier.

So I've put some questions on the record there, honourable Chairperson.

And, again, timeline. So then, I guess, he's going to get this project done in a year, two years, three years? What is it? Say it on the record. What's your plan? It's seven and a half years being in opposition, and you come into government with no plan. What's the plan, what's the timeline, when are you getting it done, Mr. Premier?

**The Chairperson:** Just a reminder that comments should be directed through the Chair.

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, you know, if seven and a half years go by and two successive—knock on wood—NDP administrations have not built the channels, then we'll entertain questions from the members opposite. But right now we're certainly proceeding much more quickly than the PCs did.

I want to remind the member opposite that Brian Pallister committed in 2016 that the channels project would be built within two years. So that was clearly a failure, clearly a broken promise.

And I know he won't take the bait, because nobody on the opposite side of the aisle can say the two names Brian Pallister, even though they haven't won an election in 30 years without Brian Pallister. The only one who will say Brian Pallister is the member for Portage la Prairie (MLA Bereza), because he makes the fundraising call to Brian Pallister every year at year-end.

So I look forward to unveiling the portrait for Brian Pallister in the Legislature very soon. We'll invite all the members opposite, see if any of them are going to show. *[interjection]* And, again, they're very boisterous when it's time to heckle, but when you turn that microphone on, that circle of courage kind of scatters and runs for the hills real quick.

The channels project has not been cancelled. To suggest otherwise is irresponsible and is the hallmark

of a politician desperate for media coverage. This project was left in such a state of mistrust and limbo that it is taking serious personal intervention from myself and many others from our team to set it on the right track.

And so the real shame is that for close to eight years, the flood risk in this region has been allowed to continue because the PCs could not get the job done.

Est-ce qu'on est capable d'utiliser la traduction maintenant dans la Chambre? Je pense que oui.

Je voudrais juste dire à tout le monde qui est ici aujourd'hui que, oui, le Manitoba c'est une province bilingue. Et vous avez toujours le droit d'engager avec votre démocratie dans votre langue maternelle. Et puis, en tant que Premier ministre du Manitoba, je suis toujours fier d'engager avec vous dans votre langue maternelle.

Et puis, quand on engage avec ce projet dans cette région du Manitoba, c'est toujours important de se souvenir qu'il y a bien beaucoup de monde à Saint-Laurent qui parle le français, qui parle le mitchif. Et puis, en temps que le chef pour toute la province, ceux qui—pour ceux qui parlent français, pour ceux qui parlent anglais ou même des autres langues, c'est important pour moi de vous dire que nous sommes toujours engagés dans le projet d'avancer cet — channel.

C'était un grand défi qui était nous laissé par les Conservateurs. Il y avait sept ans et demi où ils ont eu la chance de construire ce projet. Ils ont presque rien fait. Il y avait des réunions, des rencontres, mais est-ce qu'ils ont construit une pièce d'infrastructure qui nous aidera avec les inondations? Non. Ils ont rien fait. La seule chose qu'ils ont avancée, c'était une espèce de défi dans cette région. Parce que maintenant, un an après l'élection, il y a toujours des grands défis quand on essaie d'engager avec cette question de comment est-ce qu'on pourrait construire le — channel — dans cette région. Et c'est à cause des fautes des Conservateurs.

Beaucoup des mondes — beaucoup du monde qui ont rien fait ou qui ont nullé à ce projet sont toujours dans le caucus des Conservateurs. C'est le membre de Springfield-Ritchot (M. Schuler), le membre de Lac du Bonnet (M. Ewasko). C'était l'ancien premier ministre, Heather Stefanson et puis Brian Pallister. Ils ont eu la chance pendant beaucoup d'années, ils ont rien fait. Et puis maintenant ils ont besoin de regarder leurs noms dans le papier, alors ils disent des choses qui sont pas correctes.

Mais à moi, la chose qui est pas correcte, c'est d'essayer de faire peur à ceux qui habitent dans cette région.

### **Translation**

*Can we use interpretation in the House now? I think so.*

*I would just like to say to everyone here today that yes, Manitoba is a bilingual province. And you always have the right to participate in your democracy in your mother tongue. As Premier of Manitoba, I am always proud to engage with you in your first language.*

*As we work on this project in this region of Manitoba, it is always important to remember that there are many people in St. Laurent who speak French and Michif. As the leader of the entire province, of all those who speak French, all those who speak English as well as those who speak other languages, it is important for me to tell you that we are still determined to move this channel project forward.*

*It is a great challenge that we inherited from the Conservatives. For seven and a half years, they had the opportunity to build this project. They did almost nothing. There were meetings and gatherings, but did they build a single piece of infrastructure that will help us with flooding? No. They have done nothing. The only thing they created was a huge issue in this region. Because now, a year after the election, there is still a big issue when we try to engage on the question of how to build the channel in this region. And this is because of the mistakes made by the Conservatives.*

*A lot of the people who did nothing or got in the way of this project are still in the Conservative caucus— notably the member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler), and the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko). And then there are the former premiers, Heather Stefanson and Brian Pallister. They had the opportunity for many years to do something, and they did nothing. And now they have to reckon with seeing their names in the headlines, and they retaliate by saying things that are not correct.*

*As far as I am concerned, what is wrong is trying to scare the people who live in this region.*

**Mr. Ewasko:** And still no timeline. Still no timeline. The Premier (Mr. Kinew) sits there—and I have to commend him on his French, absolutely, great. I understand what he said. I understood what he said.

And we'll see when this project—he says it's not cancelled. Well, I tell you, honourable Chairperson, I have heard multiple times—and why he didn't answer this question earlier today, I have no idea. It's unfortunate that he was unwilling to answer these questions.

In regards to the MLA for Wolseley, who the Premier (Mr. Kinew) himself is saying that obviously they wanted some publicity in the media, and that's why they brought this up in regards to the cancelling or the pausing on the environmental assessment or anything else on this project—I can't answer his question as to why the MLA for Wolseley went out on their own to try to get publicity in the media. But I think it's because she's probably—they are probably not getting the recognition that they feel they deserve from this Premier.

He talks about building relationships. Well, honourable Chairperson, I know that, you know, earlier this week in Estimates, I know he spent some time trying to dodge Estimates because it's heating up. It's heating up a little bit and he's being held accountable to some of the things not only that he's been doing as Premier but also he's been doing as leader of his party.

\* (15:40)

So we've seen on many occasions, honourable Chairperson, that when the NDP used the terminology pause—they're going to pause a project—most times what they're meaning is they're either cancelling it or cutting it. He says it's not cancelled.

So then I've asked, Honourable Speaker, what is his timeline? Is he getting done in a year, two years, three years or is he—does he have to do some direct-award contracts again on some Tiger Dams, right? It's interesting, honourable Chairperson.

And I think, honourable Chairperson, I'm looking—I'm thinking back to Estimates here—there a couple of days ago and there were some serious allegations again brought forward, and tidbits of information in Estimates that—I looked back at the video and not only was I not only amazed; shocked at some of the things that were brought forward by the MLA, the independent member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw), but I saw it on your face as well. And I think there was a lot of shocking information that was brought forward that day.

And so I am going to ask the Premier again. What is his timeline to get the project done, since he said how urgent and that if he was re-elected, again we've

seen time and time again, this Premier say anything to get elected and to try to hold on to power. And again, it's all about photo ops for the Premier because we know he's self-serving. We know that. We've seen evidence of that many times.

So what is the timeline? When is the project getting done?

And the next question to the Premier is going to be coming from the MLA for Fort Garry because the Premier has been dodging many questions over the last few days. And so we will get back to questions from myself after the MLA for Fort Garry has a couple of questions after the Premier asks about the timeline that he's going to get the channels done.

**Mr. Kinew:** Certainly we'll beat the seven and a half years to do nothing timeline set by the PCs.

It's funny that the member opposite said untendered contract and then immediately backed off. The reason why he did that is because actually it was the member for Springfield-Ritchot (Mr. Schuler) who was found to have had an untendered contract used to build the—a road that was supposed to be involved with the site prep for this project.

And I recall when Brian Pallister did a scrum on this and he said, you know, the minister made a mess, talking about now the member for Springfield-Ritchot, and the minister is going to clean it up.

And so the member opposite knows, not only did the PCs not build the channels project but on even just the question of doing some site prep and getting things ready, they somehow made a mess. And the member for Springfield-Ritchot was the one left to clean up the mess of his own making.

But, unfortunately, at the end of the day, it was the people of Manitoba left holding the bag because, again, representations were made, promises were issued. Brian Pallister famously promised in 2016 that it would be done within two years. The only thing that had been done by 2018 was this untendered contract regarding a road.

So that's unfortunate but we're doing a lot better than that.

One of the exercises that we've been undertaking is to rebuild trust with some of the flood-affected communities in the region. And sometimes these are tough conversations, I'll be frank with you. Nobody gets a free pass on some of these conversations. We have to spend the time, just like anyone else, building a

relationship. But we just try to deal with it in a straight-up fashion.

Whereas the PCs managed to alienate and aggravate seemingly everyone in the Interlake who was looking for the channels project to get built and also alienated and aggravated folks who should rightly have been partners in the construction of the project and should have been buying in, because, again, some of these communities are thought to be the biggest potential beneficiaries of this project when it gets built.

But then, again, after causing all that discord and misharmony and lack of trust, nothing got done.

I would draw your attention to the mill in Minitonas–Louisiana-Pacific mill. There's a situation there where you got a lot of hard-working Manitobans who show up in hard hats each day and put in the work. You got many hundreds of others of people who are in the bush, swinging a chainsaw, providing the raw material for the mill. You have land users and rights-holders in Indigenous communities in the region.

And whereas the PCs managed to bring the situation there to the precipice, again, of all sorts of potential challenges in the region, we came into office, we sat down with workers, with business, with Indigenous governments, and we were able to arrive at a deal. And it was a positive deal that, you know, the PCs had several years to be able to try and make happen, but they didn't.

The reason why I'm pointing in that direction is, again, to say that these things are not easy, they don't happen overnight, but they do happen, to move in a more positive direction when you show up and engage in good faith.

And so I offer that as a rough parallel for the channels project. And similar to what we were able to do in arriving at a deal that the PCs couldn't, it's my hope and it's my intent that we'll be able to do something similar with the channels project, meaning we're putting in the work now, we're putting in the efforts, we're bringing people together in a way that hasn't happened up to now but should have been happening all along, with the eyes of building this flood-fighting infrastructure.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I am conceding the floor to the member for Fort Garry 'til 4 o'clock.

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** Thank you.

On Tuesday, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) told this committee that it was the families of Morgan Harris

and Mercedes Myran who convinced him to search the landfill. That conversation happened, according to him, late November or early December. They were remarking on a comment that was out in the media that the search was not feasible. The Premier quoted Ms. Harris saying, are our lives not feasible, and, apparently, that was the tipping point that the Premier began to see the victims' families in a humanized way for the first time. And that, apparently, changed his opinion.

But it's very clear from the record that he was opposed to the landfill search prior to that fateful conversation. So I'm wondering if the Premier can advise this committee as to the reason for his opposition to the landfill search. Was it a lack of belief in the feasibility? Was it the money? Was it both? Or did he not see these victims' families as actual human?

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Kinew:** I'm just asking for some documents to be brought into the Chamber so I can share them for all members of the committee. These are in reference to an article published by Global News on December 8, 2022. The headline is: Manitoba NDP supports Prairie Green Landfill search, calls on Province's support amid homicide investigation.

So, as I was sharing with you and the committee last we met, this scrum happened on December 8, which would've been the state-of-the-province address that year. Most people would remember this as Heather Stefanson's last state of the province and a remarkably poor-received speech at that, I would add. It was full of contrast and political attacks, which have since been disproven, and really left a lot of people in the room with a bad taste in their mouth. But, such as it is, that was the final state of the province that Heather Stefanson got to deliver.

Anyway, so we scrummed on the day and the comments that I made are reflected in this news report, and so we'll of course share copies with this. And you know, it's important to understand that these families have been through a lot. I've always respected the perspicacity, the intellect, the smarts of the young spokespeople who've been leading the charge. And Cambria in particular—because her words were invoked by myself the last time we met at this committee—has been an eloquent and articulate speaker.

And so her comments that she made to the general public, that she made for all Manitobans to hear, are the words that I referred to and moving me. And when I say moving me, what I mean is when I hear

somebody with that level of smarts, articulating their call for human dignity in such an insightful and passionate way, it moves me for a few reasons: (1) because I wondered why the PC government of the day did not respect the dignity of these family members or their lost loved ones; but (2) I just tend to get fired up when I hear people who are advocating for themselves and do so in an excellent, thoughtful way.

And so this was an important inflection point of sorts, when she made the comments about our lives not being feasible, because I think it was one of the first times that we saw that even though Heather Stefanson and Marni Larkin and the 2023 PC campaign would try to turn the search of the Prairie Green Landfill into a political wedge issue, that they had met their match with one young Cambria. And over the ensuing 10 or 11 months from the point roughly that I'm speaking about here on the calendar, we saw that happen time and time again.

Politicians have a responsibility not to exacerbate divisions within the society at the very least. One would hope that politicians could also unify people and provide a positive vision for the future. But when it comes to not exacerbating divisions in the society, the PCs not only failed to uphold that responsibility, they made the intent decision to go against it, and they sought to divide Manitobans for what they thought would be political gain.

I'm happy to report that that was rejected by the people of Manitoba and that the Prairie Green Landfill is being searched. In fact, I was at the Prairie Green Landfill earlier today and look forward to updating Manitobans on the progress we're making very soon.

**Mr. Wasyliw:** It's concerning that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) now on three occasions have been asked to be accountable to Manitobans as to why he was initially opposed to the landfill search, but he referenced this Global News article from December 8.

I've obtained it; I've actually watched the video. The headline of that video actually doesn't reflect what was said in the video. This is what the Premier says: I take seriously technical considerations, feasibility; safety people conducting the search has to be first and foremost. And so at this point in the video, he basically is repeating PC talking points.

He then goes on and says: When I look at the grieving daughter, pair of grieving daughters, I look at the grieving family members, I think it's important to make an effort. He never says what that effort is.

He never says he supports a full search of the landfill. He never promises any money to pay for the landfill.

So I'll ask the Premier, you know, given his media comment, what was his position on December 8 and what search of the landfill in what manner was he talking about?

\* (16:00)

**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara (Deputy Premier):** You know this—the question asked by the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliw) talks about a matter and an issue that is, obviously top of mind for Manitobans.

And what I want to share and what I want to offer is the approach that I've had the immense privilege to witness over the past several years—even before becoming an elected person, just as a member of our communities here in Manitoba—that I've seen from Indigenous MLAs in our caucus, including the Premier. And it's been really very humbling to witness Indigenous leadership which has made very clear supports families—MMIWG2S families—which supports Indigenous communities and voices being leaders in the approach that our government takes on really important issues. It is a really, incredibly powerful experience to hold space with Indigenous communities, to listen to survivors, to listen to families.

I've had the privilege of attending events hosted by Indigenous ministers, MLAs, who have hosted annual events for families, MMIWG2S families, over the past many, many years. And one of—one event in particular stands out to me; it was many years ago now, maybe six or seven years ago, somewhere around there. And it was hosted by the now-Minister for Families and Minister for Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, and it was for families at Christmas-time. It's an annual dinner that they would host.

And being in that space for this annual holiday event, Christmas event, where families, so many families, would come and share a Christmas meal, holiday meal, and their kids—everybody—everybody got gifts, kids got gifts. And these are families who have endured and survived incredible trauma, who navigate systems which still enact harm on their families. And it was humbling to be in that space and to see the joy that was created in that space for these families who show up every year, sometimes new families. Due to the ongoing targeting of Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited, unfortunately, new families sometimes are in those spaces.

And it was something else for me to be in that space and to see leadership not in maybe the ways in

our roles now that we think about leadership, political leadership. It was incredible to see the impacts of leadership in community on the front lines in a grass-roots way. And it's been, over the years, been really, really, again, humbling to witness that level of leadership in community and service in community, and to see that continue into the roles that folks are now in in government.

And something that I learned many years ago, and that I continue to be reminded by the Premier (Mr. Kinew), by the Minister of Families (MLA Fontaine), Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness (Ms. Smith) and mental health, by several of our colleagues who are Indigenous, Métis, is the importance of letting and making space for families to lead the way.

And we see that, and we've seen that in the approach in terms of the landfill search, the prioritization of ensuring that families' voices are leading the way. And it's a deep, deep lesson, and I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from folks in caucus and on our team, and it's certainly something that I continue to hear and see from leaders, including the Premier, in terms of whose voices should be centred in this work and conversation.

**The Chairperson:** Before I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition, I'd just ask the Deputy Premier to introduce their staff.

**MLA Asagwara:** I'm joined right now by, well, my friend and staff. First name is wanted and desired here? Charlie, and last name again: Nancinus, right? Nancini, Nanson, Mason, Mancini? And the Clerk remains here. Thanks.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you.

**Mr. Ewasko:** You know what? I've had the pleasure of being elected in 2011 and spent, you know, I guess, sorry, I'm in sort of my 15th year here. Make sure that, you know, as you're walking around the building and getting to know people and just saying good morning, and doesn't matter what side of the House they work for, whether it's the civil service or staff from the NDP or the Liberals or our staff—and I appreciate, to a point, the Deputy Premier's position, that it is a large building at that, you know. You know, some people that possibly work in this building you might not have ever met them or something along those lines.

But, you know, we're seeing evidence again today, honourable Chairperson, as I've put on the record before, the fact that the Premier continues to not only dodge Estimates and QP processes and fails to answer

questions, but then I don't know how, when we're in Executive Council Estimates asking questions on behalf of hard-working Manitobans on Budget 2024, making sure that this NDP government is using and spending and being prudent with their finances—I just want to welcome Mr. Matcini [*phonetic*] into the Chamber as well, because it might be a while to have the conversation, and it's—and it is upsetting, but it's telling.

And, I mean, you can't give me a facial expression or a nod or anything else, I'm not asking you to. But it is telling that a staff person who has come in to assist a minister, also, like the Deputy Premier, and it's unfortunate that the Deputy Premier themselves doesn't necessarily know who is working with them. It's unfortunate.

\* (16:10)

But, that being said, we heard from the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv), and we've seen evidence—we've seen evidence, honourable Chairperson, and you've seen it, but I'm not asking you to confirm nor deny—that the NDP are having troubles keeping staff. We know that.

They could stay for a—you know, a few years until the next election. What has the NDP done? They've hired—what's the number—694 new employees to the tune of almost \$40 million. And they're having troubles keeping staff. They're losing staff. They've increased wages like crazy. But yet why, why are they losing staff? Toxicity is the answer. Dysfunction is the answer. And, according to the former NDP MLA for Fort Garry, who is now the MLA for Fort Garry sitting as an independent, abusive. Abusive environment on the NDP side. It's unfortunate.

That being said, I'll ask the Deputy Premier a quick question. The NDP and this Premier had asked and had promised—not asked, promised—to enhance the renter tax credit. They told Manitobans struggling with rising rents that they would increase the credit to \$700, but the NDP, as we already know, are not as advertised. And so, when it came time to take action, they increased the credit to \$575. For quick math, because I know NDP math is a little off, that's \$125 short what they guaranteed. Why?

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank you to my friend, a staff member here, Mr. Mancini, and the Clerk for their support.

You know, it's interesting that the Leader of the Opposition chooses to shine a light on the fact that under the previous PC government, they made life less

affordable and more expensive for renters. I welcome the opportunity to talk about how our government and our Minister of Finance (MLA Sala), who's doing an excellent job, working tirelessly—and I know that this is a person who truly works tirelessly not only because he cares deeply for Manitobans and their well-being and he's, you know, unapologetically committed to making this province a better place for all Manitobans, but, quite frankly, he has to work tirelessly to clean up the massive fiscal mess that was left behind by the previous PC administration.

And, you know, it's wonderful to see what our Minister of Finance and our government has been able to do already. First budget: 21 ways to save. Making life more affordable for Manitobans. Again, doing the work of repairing the damage done to the fiscal health of this province by the previous PC government, who went out of their way to make life more expensive for renters in this province. It's truly a shameful record.

You know, the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, talks about all of the staff, all the folks who were eager to work with our government to make health care better, education stronger, life more affordable. He's correct when he says that folks have been hired under our administration. Our government has hired a net-new 873 health-care workers to the health-care system.

Under the previous PC government's failed leadership, we lost hundreds of folks from the health-care system. We lost nurse practitioners, we lost paramedics, we lost a whole host of allied health-care professionals, technologists, nurses, physicians, health-care aides, health-care support staff, facility support-staff workers, environmental workers, housekeeping. We lost so many people from the front lines of the services that Manitobans depend on. Because for seven and a half years, the Leader of the Opposition was proud, almost eager—I think one could say he was eager—to cut, slash services, drive people away out of the province.

The Minister of Finance, our Minister of Finance, you know, recently shared the over 5,000 folks who are working, newly hired in Manitoba. Private business hiring people, public services hiring people under our government.

It's become very clear to Manitobans that there's a new approach being taken. That's prioritizing making sure that Manitobans have opportunities for good employment and that there's a minister responsible for the fiscal well-being of this province that cares deeply about taking an approach that is sustainable and

responsible, something we didn't have for seven and a half years under the previous PC administration.

And so, again, I certainly welcome the opportunity to talk about all the folks that are being hired under our government. We set a really ambitious target, something that was never done by the Leader of the Opposition when he had the opportunity to do so. They didn't set any targets and then were able to go to Manitobans and share the news about how they achieved it transparently; they didn't do any of that.

Under our administration, within our first year of our mandate that we were so privileged to be given by Manitobans, we set an incredibly ambitious target; 1,000 net-new health-care workers, my goodness. Admittedly, I thought to myself, oof, that is pretty ambitious. It's going to require a level of commitment that Manitobans have not seen for several years. And yet, we knew it was the right thing to do.

And so recently, we were able to share with Manitobans that we are well on track to achieve that net-new 1,000 health-care worker target; 873 have been brought into the health-care system. And every day I learn of more folks.

I actually was at an event this morning and met someone who's eager to join the front lines as well, so happy to share more about that if the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask.

**Mr. Ewasko:** I appreciate the advice from the Deputy Premier, the Health Minister, on the questions I should or should not be asking, because it just doesn't seem that they are willing to give any answers anyways. So I should almost turn the floor over to them and have them tell me what questions they would actually answer.

\* (16:20)

So far, five minutes of them being in the chair, not much. Not much that we can report back to Manitobans, Mr. Chair. I can imagine those caucus meetings are quite draining with this level of dodging and denying to answer anything.

Since I have the Health Minister in the chair, I'll ask them. It's unfortunate that, again, the Health Minister even talks about the fact that they went out with another minister and, again, up to a podium. Premier (Mr. Kinew) said the other day that he's not going to go to a podium, I quote: Not going to go to the podium unless the work has been done.

Well, this Health Minister took a long ride out to Carberry, stood in front of a podium, patted them-

selves on the back. Community members had baked cookies, brought them out for the Health Minister and the Premier (Mr. Kinew). I don't think they shared any of those cookies anywhere. Matter of fact, I think the members of Carberry—community members of Carberry are probably asking for their cookies back, honourable Chairperson. I don't know if you received any cookies or not, but I tell you, the promises made by this Health Minister and the MLA for Fort Rouge, the Premier, are just starting to pile up on broken promises.

The question I had asked to the Health Minister on the—enhancing the renter tax credit, they didn't give any answers to the question I had asked. Was I surprised? Not really. They put on misinformation, disinformation on the record. Our government had froze rent increases for years, and—just to reiterate, put back on the record—that the NDP ran on the promise that if they were elected, they would increase the tax credit to \$700 and they got in and they put it to \$575; \$125 short. Not surprising.

I know the Minister of Finance (MLA Sala) is chomping at the bit; he'd potentially like to answer some questions. I don't know if he's got any answers either, really. Because it was actually the Finance Minister that was at a debate with me about Education and Early Childhood Learning, and we were both at the debate. And I'm just going to reference another promise this NDP government made under this Premier, and that's \$10-a-day summer daycare pledge. It was a corner store—cornerstone for their campaign.

Well, to the Premier, to the Deputy Premier, to the Health Minister: Summer's come and gone. Another broken promise. That's not surprising, though, because that's your—that's their MO.

That's their MO, Honourable Speaker. They remain silent as parents pleaded for answers. And on this one, it's not just the Premier or the Deputy Premier; this is definitely the Finance Minister has to be held accountable for this one. The money was there, could have got it done, didn't.

So I guess my question, since the Health Minister's not going to answer it anyways is: Can they confirm, yes or no, that what the Premier put on the record the other day, that the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home is going to cost \$66.4 million, and have they shared—and how have they shared that with the community of Lac du Bonnet and the committee?

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home is going to cost \$66.4 million. We've been hard at work carrying out a bunch of engagement—due

diligence, if you will—on some aspects of this. I can also tell you that I've very recently received an invitation letter to meet with the local leadership and we will assent to that request. It's a lot of good news to share here.

I know that CBC Radio was broadcasting, I believe, from Lac du Bonnet last week. And, of course, you know, as I alluded to earlier, there's that skepticism out of having an MLA in government, the member opposite, for two terms, not building a personal-care home.

And so I would be happy to meet with leadership once we can find some time to schedule that in, to provide an update, to provide reassurance and, again, to repeat that commitment that even if I have to go down on my birthday, the last day of the year, with my own shovel, we will break ground on this project this year.

Of course, the personal-care-home challenge that we inherited from the PCs is going to take years to fix and will involve investments, not just in Lac du Bonnet but in other communities, including here in Winnipeg.

Time was, Brian Pallister—he who shall not be named by the members opposite—campaigning in the 2016 election on a bid, a promise, a commitment to build 1,200 personal-care-home beds. Well, once he was chased out of the building by the member opposite and the rest of the colleagues who stuck behind to cheer on Heather Stefanson, and once Heather Stefanson was shown the door by the people of Manitoba, there were zero personal-care-home beds built, zero. And not only were there zero personal-care-home beds built, but we actually suffered a net loss of personal-care-home beds, and that's because one of the facilities—I believe it was Parkview Place, you know, maybe a kilometre away from where we sit right now—actually closed, and those beds were not replaced.

So, you know, the member opposite, I guess, does have a duty to advocate for the people of Lac du Bonnet, who he did not build a personal-care home for, despite being at the government table for two terms. And as a result, yes, you should ask us questions about where the PCs couldn't build it, when and how will the NDP build it.

I invite him to continue to ask these questions. And as I committed to him on Wednesday, when we do drag that podium back out to Lac du Bonnet and there's a personal-care-home building behind said podium, he can attend that press conference too, just

as he did attend a press conference on March 21 of this year.

Of course, it was such a good-news story, he ran and reported to the Clipper that this was, quote, great news, end quote. And I agree. It is great news that there's an NDP government that's willing to do things that the PCs failed to accomplish.

So the beds there will certainly help. But, again, there are other personal-care-home sites in the province that we're going to have to construct. We also know that it's an integrated system for many Manitobans who would be coming from hospital and eventually needing to be panelled for a personal-care home or a long-term-care facility.

But one of the issues, the challenges, that emerged under the PC time in office, in part, due to them closing emergency rooms, is a lack of transitional-care facilities. So here, I want to thank the Minister of Health for their excellent work to stand up many, many transitional-care beds. Of course, you've heard them in question period sharing the impressive number of transitional-care facilities that they've been able to construct and transitional-care beds that they've been able to add.

And so, again, we are improving health care. We are improving seniors care. We're making life better in Lac du Bonnet constituency, as well as right across the great province of Manitoba.

So an important subject, to be sure, and one that I'm always happy to engage in and, you know, find it important to respond to.

So more good news to come for Lac du Bonnet. More good news to come for other folks who are cheering on the long-term-care sector here in Manitoba.

**Mr. Ewasko:** And, again, here we go. Premier (Mr. Kinew) of Manitoba, the artist of the flip-flop.

The other day—and I know that he's, you know, been dodging this whole process, so he's sometimes taking a deep breath and refocusing and regaining his own composure, especially when there's some hard-hitting questions being said here in the Chamber.

\* (16:30)

Just to remind the member, under his former—well, his role model, Greg Selinger, the former NDP government—they had closed 22-plus emergency rooms all across Manitoba. He continues to dodge the facts, even in today's Chamber.

A couple days ago, he mentioned that his next trip to Lac du Bonnet was going to be a ribbon cutting on the personal-care home. Today, he's talking that he received a letter from the community—and I told him that the other day, so I'm glad that I could help him with his inbox as opposed to his Health Minister hitting delete and—on unread emails. That's the record of this Premier and the Health Minister and some of his other ministers. They just hit delete.

And so now he is agreeing to meeting with people, Lac du Bonnet community. Great. As a Premier, went out, came out to Lac du Bonnet and re-announced what we had already announced. Said that the shovel's going to be in the ground sometime this year, and his birthday is late December. And even if on his birthday, he's going to bring a shovel. Well, I don't know. Maybe he doesn't get outside the Perimeter often, but he's going to bring—need more than a shovel because the ground is going to be frozen.

But, that being said, I want to talk about another broken promise by this Premier. And he'll have to read Hansard about the non-answers from the Health Minister to our questions here in the Chamber as well as, again, he just seemed to want to dodge the process.

Fact is, is that he stood up again—again, the theme is not only broken promises but it's the fact that he will say anything, Honourable Speaker. He will say anything to get elected and to hold on to power. And I think more and more Manitobans are starting to see that. Because if there's not a photo op opportunity, much like we've said here earlier, when the cameras are off, the microphones are off, different individual, different individual.

But he stood up on the stage during the election that he was going to fix bail reform, that he promised at the end there was going to be tragic consequences. Stood on the debate stage, misled Manitobans about his ability to affect bail at the provincial level, misled Manitobans. Because he knew, deep down, that he had no ability to do that because it's a federal—that's a federal level.

But no, he promised it. And he said—he doubled down, tripled down, much like his cost estimate on the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home, and he repeated it again today: \$66.4 million. He doubled down, and he said he's going to not only fix bail reform but he's going to do it within 100 days of taking office. Very misleading, again, because it falls under federal jurisdiction.

So what are we seeing? We're seeing crime is up. We're seeing stabbing; we're seeing theft; we're seeing vandalism. We're seeing repeat offenders day in, day out, committing crimes on our streets. Can't fix it. And he's not fixing it because he's—he has no plan. He has no plan. Matter of fact, what his plan is, is he's going to punish those employees and employers who are now starting to take things into their own hands, and let the criminals go. That's his MO.

I wish he would just apologize to Manitobans for his broken promises on bail reform.

**Mr. Kinew:** So our action on bail reform has been commended by the National Police Federation. That is, the representative of the front-line RCMP officers who work both in Manitoba and across the country. In fact, Brian Sauvé, president and CEO of the National Police Federation said, and I quote: We applaud the Manitoba government for their continued commitment to enacting smart and progressive approaches to Canada's bail system. End quote.

Seems like there are actions that a provincial government can take on both public safety specifically—or, generally, and bail reform specifically. And no less a group than the National Police Federation said that not only was this possible but Manitoba is leading the way, and they encourage other provinces to follow our lead. It's nice, in the past year, that Manitoba is able to say we're leading in a lot of different areas. You didn't hear that very often under Brian Pallister or Heather Stefanson. And so there's a lot of optimism out there.

When it comes to the Lac du Bonnet personal-care home, again, \$66.4 million—we're talking the same scope, I believe 95 beds. This is all contained within press releases. And so the member opposite tries to feign like, you know, there's a air of, you know, suspicion in his voice when he asks these questions, but it's right there on the public record for him to refer to.

Though I will say that as somebody who's been a lot of time in the country, you can dig a hole in the winter time. I've had to do it, unfortunately. And basically the technique is you light a fire at the site that you want to dig. You let it burn for some time and heat the ground, and then of course you extinguish the blaze and start digging. And lo and behold, it is possible to use a shovel to dig a hole in rural Manitoba in the winter time.

So I don't know if the member opposite doesn't get out of the Perimeter very often but those of us who do would be able to share tons of useful information with him, such as that.

But again, public safety is an important issue. We have the retail theft initiative to point to, which is—we have the retail theft initiative to point to—[interjection]

**The Chairperson:** Order.

So I'll just remind all members that me in this chair, I'm a representative of the Speaker. This is a neutral role and I'm just here to keep this committee moving forward. The Speaker has recently ruled on a similar issue and I'd ask that I not be brought into debate.

**Mr. Kinew:** So again, the retail theft initiative has been very well received. We have received a lot of correspondence from people who have said as a business owner that they feel it's made a difference in the community, they feel it's made things safer for them.

We held a public safety summit earlier in the year and we partnered in a supporting role with the Retail Council of Canada to have a summit on retail theft. And on the retail theft initiative in particular, you know, the media and the scrum that day were basically just saying well why don't you just extend it, everyone loves this thing. And we took the time to say, well, we're going to work this up and see what the long-term viability of this approach is, and of course if this is the best course forward then we'll pursue that. But we need to work with the WPS and other partners in order to get it right.

There's a retired judge who spoke that day at the Retail Council of Canada event and I had a very, very I guess illuminating and inspiring reaction to the words that he was sharing from the stage. And what the retired judge Wyant was saying is that, you know, he just says in a very kind of straightforward and matter-of-fact way: yes, there is a need for more police officers. There is an important role for the justice system to play. But he also used the analogy of a train track and he says by the time you expect us to deal with the issues, we're the last stop on the train. And if you want to address a lot of the public safety issues, you need to intervene earlier on the tracks, upstream if you will. Prevention, recreation, education in particular.

\* (16:40)

And so that's why we're doing things like the school food program. PCs said it was a bad idea. They're bringing back the person who said that to host their party event at the end of the month. We're busy feeding hungry kids.

**Mr. Ewasko:** So, the Premier (Mr. Kinew) puts on the record for all Manitobans the fact that he knows that he had no plan. He had no plan to help with retail theft, vandalism, stabbing, theft, repeat offences. Said he could fix bail reform within the first 100 days of being elected. We all know that's come and gone, so that record is on him. It's on you.

So, honourable Chairperson, it's unfortunate, but that will be his record as crime continues to increase and he continues to let the repeat offenders out on the street because they know that they have a get-out-of-jail-free card with this Premier. Just take a look at past records. Many chances, many chances.

With that, honourable Chairperson, I'm going to concede the floor for two questions to the leader of the Liberal Party, for her to take two questions—or, to ask two questions.

So thank you.

**The Chairperson:** The honourable First Minister.

The honourable member for Tyndall Park.

**MLA Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Thank you, honourable—

**The Chairperson:** So there was a question within the remarks, so the First Minister will have a chance to respond.

**Mr. Kinew:** Yes, I just want to point out that the member opposite, daily, weekly, runs out of things to ask about. Question period is opposition time. Question period is opposition time, and he—first of all, right from the very beginning he never used the two top sets of questions, except on a maybe a rare occasion or two. But then, he can't fill time with questions from the PC caucus.

And I feel bad for, you know, MLAs from constituencies like Lakeside or Agassiz who've been able to ask maybe one question. But the member opposite, time and time again, will prioritize other people to ask questions. So again, I've got a lot of respect for my colleague from Tyndall Park, but the Leader of the PC Party has allowed her to ask five, six more questions than any of the MLAs in the PC caucus.

Imagine what it's like to be the MLA for Borderland and you're watching the leader of the PC Party give time to the Liberals when the PC backbench doesn't get any time. I don't know what priorities the member for Borderland (Mr. Guenter) would want to bring forward; maybe he'd just say it's great to have a Premier who appears on Golden West

radio regularly and provides an update to the people of his riding on all the great things that are going on in government, but certainly there must be some frustration with a PC leader who gives more time to a Liberal MLA than a PC one.

And that's just in Estimates. I mean, question period and on and on and on. The Leader of the Opposition is supposed to be able to carry the day and ask questions, and it's just a commentary on the state of the PC Party that they can't even, I guess, think of enough questions to carry the day in Estimates or in question period.

And so, it's interesting that they've got a PC leadership contest under way. I don't know if this is going to be the long-term plan for the PC Party of Manitoba. Personally, I don't think so. I think the party eventually will get stronger than it currently is under the member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Ewasko), you know, first PC leader to lose the constituency of Tuxedo. So I think it's likely that they improve.

But it's—I guess the more positive way to look at it is it's not just the PC Party's failing; maybe it's just the Manitoba NDP government is doing so many great things.

Member opposite has a chance to raise questions about health care; he's got none. I guess he supports what we're doing with health care. Member opposite has time here to ask us about the economy. He doesn't have anything to say. So I guess he supports our economic development initiatives. Haven't been any questions on the environment. Guess he supports the climate plan. No questions about child care from the member opposite. And so I suppose that the work of the education and early learning department is going very, very well.

No questions about PC political staffers whose pensions were not even recognized by their former political masters. We had to, in this year's budget implementation bill, make sure that PC staffers' time in the former government could be recognized as pensionable earnings. We're fine with it. Again, people worked hard; they deserve to be not only compensated in the form of pay but also in the form of pensions. But there was no questions about that, so, again, I can only assume that the leader of the PC Party is grateful for that further evidence of us cleaning up the mess that they left behind.

So there are many, many priorities that the member opposite could be raising and is not, and I therefore can only conclude that he supports our

government's agenda on each and every one of those areas that he neglects to raise in his Estimates time.

And I'm sure there'll be some sort of spin or message about how this is all part of some grand scheme, but really it just appears that there's—Leader of the Opposition could perhaps apply himself more to the job that he's been entrusted with, which is a very sacred responsibility and an important role to perform in our parliamentary democracy.

And look at that: I'm leaving time on the board.

**MLA Lamoureux:** I'm going to keep this short because we are very tight for time here this afternoon. But I do want it on the record how much I appreciate the willingness of the interim Leader for the Official Opposition for sharing time outside of his caucus as well. There are 57 MLAs in this House, and I would argue—which checks out with the question I'm going to be asking the Premier (Mr. Kinew)—I would argue that is a very democratic way to use his time. So I would like to thank him for that.

My question for the Premier is—I'm hoping he can explain to the House: Why would the government allow any piece of legislation to go through first reading, second reading, committee—and never mind a committee with incredible testimony and showing of support for the legislation—to then be reported to the House but then be prevented by this government to move forward to third reading and a vote? How is this democratic? Why would a government do this, stall legislation at this point in time?

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, there's a number of technical, I guess, details we—that we could get into. But I guess part of the answer to the question that the member's seeking is that the official opposition has negotiated with us a schedule for the remainder of this sitting, and it involved us calling Estimates this afternoon.

So I think that there's going to be more Estimates time next week from what I understand, and so that is foregone bill debate time. So that's part of the answer.

\* (16:50)

I think there's a broader theoretical question that the member is bringing forward. And without granting the presuppositions that she advances in her preamble, I would say private members' legislation that comes forward has an important role to play.

I can think back, I think, to the first private members' bill that I brought forward, and it had to do with ensuring that there were adequate policies at post-secondary institutions to be able to address

sexual misconduct and other terrible occurrences on campuses in Manitoba. And this was effectively a carry-over from a previous NDP government piece of legislation, and so it applied, if I recall correctly, to seven universities and then community colleges, which are publicly funded.

The government of the day, led by Ian Wishart, who was the Education minister at the time, somebody that I respected and found pleasant to work with, they talked it out, right. And a short time later, they brought in their own version of the bill, we could say. And their version of the bill actually expanded the scope of what was contemplated in the legislation to also include private vocational institutions—PVI, as they're called in some of the post-secondary circles.

And so, obviously, I was a little chippy, shall we say, in, you know, the House on the day that I had a chance to maybe have a little back-and-forth with them. But with the benefit of hindsight, I think I can legitimately say that the bill was better having been expanded. Like, it—like, there are many students who go to a Herzing College or a Robertson College or some of these private institutions, right. And so, yes, I think, you know, the government of the day—you never would have caught me saying this at the time, but, you know, there was an improvement there.

And so, sometimes, I do think that the role that private members' legislation can play is to put an issue that is important, that does serve a social good, that does have a public priority, forward, and then there may be deliberations and discussions about whether that is the full scope required to deal with an issue in all of its substantiveness.

Speaking hypothetically, I also know that there are limits as to what private members' bills can do. We know that, for instance, if something is to require money to be spent, it has to be a government initiative, it has to have that royal recommendation designation and a minister of the Crown would need to introduce it. So that's just a hypothetical scenario that I'm sharing about why something that's taken up as a legitimate public policy issue might need to move forward as a government initiative.

The member and I actually share something in common, which is that we both, I think, engaged with the topic of Orange Shirt Day being recognized in Manitoba. And here I would just indicate that I think that shared experience, shall I say, shows how this can evolve over time, too.

I brought forward, I think it was in 2017, a recognition day bill to recognize Orange Shirt Day. I brought it forward as a recognition day, because I was told that we couldn't do a statutory holiday as opposition because it would involve spending money, because government resources would be used to pay people overtime pay, et cetera. I think my colleague from Keewatinook received the same advice. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Leg. Counsel, but I believe, in time, they gave different advice to the member opposite and she was able to bring it forward.

So just to indicate—and then, eventually, our government brought this in, made it law and Orange Shirt Day is now a statutory holiday. So just to indicate that there is flexibility when it comes to the legislative process and multiple ways for things to come forward.

**MLA Lamoureux:** Bringing the bill forward to third reading is completely at the discretion of the government. They have the ability to do it at the drop of a dime. All they have to do is snap their fingers and the bill will go to a vote at third reading.

And I believe that the survivors and those who desperately need this legislation enacted deserve for it to go to third reading. And my hope is that the Premier (Mr. Kinew) would see this as well.

We have tried to negotiate it, even up until today. I have asked for leave to allow it to go to third reading and a vote, and it was denied by the Government House Leader (MLA Fontaine). We have tried going through media, honourable Chairperson. We have worked with organizations here in Manitoba.

We have lobbied other MLAs, different jurisdictions. Ontario supports the legislation. The federal government supports the legislation. We have municipal councillors who support the legislation. We have members of Parliament, which I know this NDP government supports, such as Leah Gazan, who supports Keira's Law, Bill 209; yet this government does not want to seem to get on board.

I'm very grateful that the PCs here in Manitoba have supported the legislation. At the very least, the Premier could allow for it to go to a vote at third reading. Otherwise, why would he have allowed it to go this far through the legislative process.

So my question for the Premier is, for those survivors who came and presented at committee, that took incredible courage. What does he have to say to them? Why would he allow it to go this far, if he knew he was going to stall it at this point in time?

**Mr. Kinew:** First, I would thank all the people who spoke at committee for the courage and for the preparation work and for the thoughtfulness and for the emotional labour that was required for them to speak in that venue.

The second thing that I would say is that our government is listening to you. We agree with the member for Tyndall Park that there is an important priority here, a substantive public policy issue that needs to get addressed, and we are working on this issue.

And so I think extending the offer to have a committee was so that we could give a forum for these folks to express their perspectives. And our Minister of Justice (Mr. Wiebe) was there, on behalf of our government, as well as other members of our team, to listen to you. And we take seriously everything that was shared and we are working on this priority.

I also know that those who lead the judiciary are working on this broad set of issues as well, too, and they are making important progress that I think will help to ensure that our society and the administration of justice within it will continue the evolution of more closely resembling our society and its needs as we go forward into time, as is necessary in our democracy and free society. And so, we are working on this issue.

And I did undertake and commit to the member that I was going to talk to the Minister of Justice about this. I will still do so, and I know that he has been working on this with his team as well, internal to government.

And in saying that, I want to point out that I guess there is part of this that could be legislation or regulation. There's part of this that has to be policy. There's part of this that has to be dealt with by the judiciary because we can't cross that divide, if you will, between the legislative and executive branches of government that separate us from the judicial branch of government.

And there are probably resource questions as well, meaning there's aspects of this that only government would be able to bring forward. And that's not to say that the member's advocacy and legislating this hasn't been important. It certainly has been very important. It's been very important to us. It's been very important to everybody who has participated in the process, including the people who spoke at committee. And her contributions are recognized by me and will be recognized by the people of Manitoba as we continue to work this forward.

And so I just, more than anything, want to reassure her that, you know, her work is valid and valued and recognized by me and by our team, and will continue to work with her to be able to make sure that we do right by the survivors and the broader community. I think we will all benefit from this.

And so, let's keep working together—

\* (17:00)

**The Chairperson:** Order.

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

Call in the Speaker.

**IN SESSION**

**The Deputy Speaker (Tyler Blashko):** The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, October 28.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Thursday, October 17, 2024**

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