

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

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Myrna Driedger
Speaker*

Vol. LXXV No. 72 - 1:30 p.m., Monday, May 31, 2021

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GORDON, Audrey, Hon.	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	Assiniboia	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Woleseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Turtle Mountain	PC
REYES, Jon	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 31, 2021

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): It is my duty to inform the House that the Speaker is unavoidably absent. Therefore, in accordance with the statutes, I would ask the Deputy Speaker to please take the Chair.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Doyle Pivniuk): O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. O—grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire in which is accordance with Thy will, that we seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Please be seated. Good afternoon, everyone.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 237—The Elections Amendment Act

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): I move, seconded by the honourable member for McPhillips (Mr. Martin), that Bill 237, The Elections Amendment Act, be now a read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Isleifson: I am pleased to be able to introduce bill 238, The Elections Amendment Act, to the Legislative Assembly today. Bill 238 would require the leader of a registered political party to file their tax returns with the chief elections officer.

Bill 238 will benefit Manitobans by increasing transparency in who is running for public office and would settle the debate held every election cycle with leaders calling on each other to release their tax information. Bill 238 would proactively address the questions that many Manitobans have for those running to represent them in public office.

I look forward to debate on this topic, and I hope that all members in this House can agree to support this bill to increase transparency.

Thank you.

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

Now we'll go on to the next bill.

Bill 235—The Scrap Metal Recyclers Act

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): I move, seconded by the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), that Bill 235, The Scrap Metal Recyclers Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Maloway: The Scrap Metal Recyclers Act addresses the recent spike in catalytic converter and copper wire and other metal thefts due to large increases in precious metal prices. It's aimed at organized groups of criminals stealing catalytic converters, metallic wires and other valuable scrap metals.

It requires scrap metal recyclers to verify identification of sellers and keep proper identification and transaction records for a period of five years. It also eliminates cash payments for prescribed 'scrap'—scrap metals.

Penalties prescribed under this legislation include fines of up to \$10,000 and/or one year in prison for first offence and \$30,000 fine for corporations. Second offence fines are up to \$30,000 and up to \$100,000 for corporations.

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

Now we'll go on to committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance): I'm pleased to rise today in Assembly to table the Manitoba Finance report related to the supplementary loan and guarantee authority for the 2020-21 year.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we're going on to ministerial statements. The required 90 minutes—oh, the honourable member—Minister for Indigenous, Northern Relations. The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings has been provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

The honourable minister, please proceed with your statement.

The honourable Minister for Indigenous and Northern Relations, your mic is not—is still on mute. We still have your mic on mute. Oh, here we go.

Children's Remains Found at Former Residential School (BC)

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Last week, Canadians were shaken by the discovery of the remains of 215 children who were found buried beneath the ground at the site of the Kamloops residential school in British Columbia. This was a horrifying reminder of the suffering endured by thousands of Indigenous children who were forced to attend residential schools and a reminder that as we work to reconcile our relationships, Canada must also reconcile with our past.

Indigenous children at residential schools were isolated from their families and communities. Many neglected children went hungry due to the lack of food, were forced to face freezing temperatures with inadequate clothing and insufficient housing or were victims of terrible physical and sexual abuse.

The flag of the Manitoba Legislature was lowered to half-mast in conjunction with the lowering of the Peace Tower flag in Ottawa to honour the lives of these children. Residential schools are very much a part of Canadian history, but today we can recognize that they represent a very un-Canadian idea.

It has been my privilege to serve as Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations for five years. I've been honoured to engage with Indigenous Manitobans across the province but, in my time as minister, I have also seen that the legacy of residential schools still has the profound impact on many people and their communities.

The news from Kamloops last week was a grim reminder of the impact residential schools had on the lives of Indigenous children, families and communities. Today, I look at my three young grandsons and I try to imagine what I would feel to have them forcibly removed from their parents and us as grandparents. I can't imagine not seeing them, spending time with them or preparing their favourite foods.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the survivors and families as they are painfully reliving the past through the discovery of these tiny little bodies at a place where their lives ended, never to be reunited with their families again.

We owe it to those 215 children in BC, and we owe it to 150,000 others who were forced to attend residential schools across Canada, including in Manitoba, to remember the tragedies of the past and to use these lessons we have learned from them.

We owe it to those children to make sure that the tragedies of yesterday will never happen again. We owe it to them and we owe it to ourselves, as Manitobans and Canadians, to take a far different path in the future and to make sure that every child matters as we work together with Indigenous people in Manitoba to help their communities build a better tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

*(13:40)

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): It is difficult to find the words today to describe the atrocities that have taken place for Indigenous people, the atrocities that we know that have been happening and have happened and have not been disclosed and discovered and talked about for generations now.

As we all know, just days ago, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation found the remains of children as young as three years old on the site of what used to be Canada's largest residential school. The discovery of the mass grave of 215 children reverberated across the country, bringing a terrible reminder of the horrors experienced in the schools to both survivors and their families.

Each of these children was somebody's child or grandchild, brother or sister, niece or nephew, cousin or friend, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they were also future mothers, future grandmothers, future fathers, future grandfathers. While the intent was to assimilate First Nation children, the real intent was to exterminate.

In a lot of residential schools, family trees were destroyed, family trees that would never and will never grow to fruition. So all those young mothers, grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers will never get to see their family tree. Their family tree will no longer exist.

And I think of myself, and if my father or my mother or my grandfather—my grandmother was a victim who was killed in a residential school—I would not be here today. And for that, we owe the resilience of other First Nation citizens and other First Nation people that survived those atrocities that took place in residential school.

Families deserved the dignity of being able to bury their child and have some sense of closure, but they were denied even this. It is the darkest possible reminder of the importance of having every level of government and every Canadian committed to implementing all 94 calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

It is important to note that this discovery was only made because of the initiative of the local Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation. We have a commitment from every level—we must have a commitment from every level of government across the country to search the sites of all other residential schools.

Every former residential school site in Canada should be examined for more mass graves like this one, so that Indigenous families can have a chance at closure and to know what happened to their relatives and their ancestors. And as a country, we must come to understand what happened to residential schools. Truce—truth must come from reconciliation.

Since the discovery was made, vigils across Canada paid tribute to these children and pressed governments to do more to help Indigenous communities recover from the colonial legacy of residential schools. But we need more than temporary vigils.

A TRC report by archeologist deputy—Dr. Scott Hamilton recommends a co-ordinated effort to document, maintain, memorialize this shameful chapter in our country's history. Let us never forget those taken far too soon, because while there was a discovery of 215 children, we know there is more. We know that for a fact, and it's been mentioned many, many times by First Nation citizens across this country.

So the truth shall come out and the truth shall be disclosed and it is something that—as difficult as most Canadians may find difficult to talk about—it is something that we need to do.

So today, we again join these calls and ask this government to begin searches in collaboration with Indigenous communities of every residential school site in Manitoba so that these children, and all those who loved them, can finally find some peace.

Miigwech.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for St. Boniface have leave to reply to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamont: The discovery of 215 children who died at a residential school in Kamloops in BC is a tragic shock, but it should not be a surprise. The federal government knew a century ago that they were complicit in a crime.

The story of children forced to attend residential schools who lost their lives is also the story of parents and communities who had their children forcibly taken from them by the government, only to hear that their child had died. The heartbreak is unimaginable.

In 1922, P.H. Bryce published *The Story of a National Crime* that laid out the federal government's refusal to act on tuberculosis in residential schools, and he called it then a criminal disregard for treaty pledges. It built on his own reports from many years earlier, as far back as 1907.

The residential schools were deliberately created not just to indoctrinate Indigenous children and erase a people, but to shatter families so they could be driven off the land that was often being given free to settlers.

For the sake of the families and of residential school survivors, we hope the Manitoba government will join with the federal government to provide resources to ensure that all human remains are found, identified and granted a proper burial. This is the least we can do to help put the minds of families and survivors at rest, and that the souls of the departed can have peace.

We cannot turn a blind eye to present reality because governments have never stopped tearing apart Indigenous families with terrible consequences. The residential schools were followed by the '60s scoop, and then by CFS.

And in the last 20 years, many children have died in Manitoba who were, at one point, in the custody of Child and Family Services. At one point, CFS was seizing a newborn a day, every day, with so-called birth alerts.

The present-day issue of Indigenous children in custody of CFS is the single most important moral and political issue that Canada and Manitoba face, not just

for righting historical wrongs, but in order to create a future together for those children, their families and their communities.

That means ensuring that Indigenous peoples have equal access, not just to service, but to the opportunities that many of us can take for granted, that Indigenous people have been deliberately denied by their separate and unequal treatment under the law.

This means that after the flags have been lowered, we need to commit to the real and hard work of reconciliation, which is an ongoing act of justice, healing, care and mutual support.

We must not shy away from it. We have an obligation to forge a new peace to the benefit of all of us.

Thank you.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Is there leave of the House for a moment of silence?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave in the House to have a moment of silence on this ministerial statement? [*Agreed*]

Please stand.

A moment of silence was observed.

Manitoba Access Awareness Week

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to the next ministerial statement.

The honourable Minister for Families. The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Accessibility): As Manitoba's Minister responsible for Accessibility, I am pleased to proclaim this week as Manitoba Access Awareness Week with a theme of Creating a Culture of Accessibility in the Workplace.

I am also proud to share with this House our government's two-year plan for accessibility. Chief among our government's commitments are the continued development and establishment of the remaining three standards under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act by 2023.

Another highlight of this week is the launch of new accessibility training that is available anytime from anywhere in Manitoba, on accessibilitymb.ca. This new learning program initially focuses on

training required by the Accessibility Standard for Customer Service.

A second learning module targeting employment is coming soon. Both modules include videos featuring the perspectives of Manitobans, along with knowledge checks and certificates to verify completion.

Our government announced new provisions under the Province's Accessibility Standard for Employment on May 1st of this year, which came into effect for public sector organizations and will affect the private sector and small municipalities as of May 2022. These requirements call on all organizations to ensure enhanced accessibility, include workplace accommodations policies and other initiatives to remove barriers.

* (13:50)

In addition, earlier this spring I was pleased to announce \$20 million through The Winnipeg Foundation, a trust that will provide a sustainable revenue source for all organizations, non-profits and municipalities to make their physical 'space'—spaces, digital platforms and services more accessible.

Our government is committed to supporting Manitobans with disabilities and increasing the accessibility of our province so that all who live here can access the services they need and enjoy throughout our province.

I would encourage all Manitobans to reflect on accessibility and how their daily routine would be impacted by a disability. We all must take an active role in ensuring that our province is accessible for all Manitobans.

Once again, it is my honour to proclaim this week Manitoba Access Awareness Week, and I look forward to continuing to work to build a more accessible future for all Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): We are happy to acknowledge and celebrate accessibility awareness week.

Many people across Manitoba live with varying accessibility needs, and this week is a reminder for everyone in our province to reflect on how we can be inclusive for—of all Manitobans and remove these barriers. It is important that we take part in reducing barriers faced by people living with disabilities and create an inclusive environment for all Manitobans can thrive.

Here in Manitoba, this year's theme is Creating a Culture of Accessibility in the Workplace. We know it is so important for people living with disabilities to feel empowered in their homes, communities and workplace.

National AccessAbility Week is also being celebrated at the federal level, and the theme for this year's campaign is Leaving No One Behind. This week is celebrating the valued contributions of Canadians with disabilities, the accomplishments of individuals, communities in the workplace to remove barriers to accessible and inclusion, and we need ongoing work to have all-of-encounter discrimination against persons with disability and promote a culture of inclusion.

I think this theme is especially important this year as we begin the work on our post-pandemic recovery. The pandemic has left many ways to open doors for accessibility for people living with disabilities. Our collective shift of a virtual has shown and allowed those with accessibilities to have greater access to education, health care and, among others, a critical way of not losing the ease of accessibility in a forward post-pandemic.

All creations for accessibility week this year is, of course, to be online as we continue to navigate our way out of the pandemic. That is why it is especially important this year to honour accessibility awareness week throughout the year, and although our actions—and not just for one week.

I encourage all members to promote, respect inclusion for people living with disabilities. When Manitobans feel included and empowered, our province has the best chance to succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the accessibility awareness week—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, the honourable member for River Heights, if you can ask for leave.

Mr. Gerrard: Oh, I ask for leave to speak to the minister's statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for River Heights have leave to reply to the ministerial statement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Gerrard: Accessibility awareness week is an important week. It's a week dedicated to achieving greater understanding and support for children and

adults with disabilities—or, as we often say, special abilities.

We all need to be aware of the physical and mental or brain disabilities. Too often the mental or brain disabilities are hidden and not recognized and, as a result, not accommodated for. Such mental and brain disabilities include, as an example, learning disabilities.

Learning disabilities, in part because they're less visible, are often inadequately recognized and inadequately helped. We need to do much better to accommodate such learning disabilities as well as to recognize and accommodate physical disabilities.

Under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act, there are five accessibility standards. Two of these, the regulations have been passed—customer service and employment standards. But we are still waiting for progress on three of these standards: the information and communication standards, which addresses barriers to accessing one-way static information, as well as two-way interactive communication; the transportation standard, which applies to barriers for Manitobans that are encountered when getting to work or school, shopping, socializing or other aspects of daily life; and the design of public space standards—the built environment—deals with the accessibility to the design and construction that falls outside the jurisdiction of the Manitoba Building Code.

We have objected right from the beginning to the exclusion of addressing issues in the Manitoba Building Code, and this needs to be changed. But there have been major delays in the last three standards, and there needs to be a lot of more progress and a lot more emphasis on achieving these.

The excuse may be given that the pandemic has been upon us but, in fact, the pandemic has realized, for all of us, the deficiencies that we have in achieving these standards. And the pandemic should have been a time when more, not less, effort was dedicated to achieving these standards for those with disabilities.

One of the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

The—now we'll go on to the next ministerial statement, by the honourable Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mrs. Cox). The required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister proceed with her statement.

Special Olympics Awareness Week

Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage): I am so pleased to have the opportunity to remind everyone that June 13th through to June 19th is Special Olympics Manitoba Awareness Week 2021. My colleague, the Honourable Heather Stefanson, was proud—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I just want to remind the minister to refer to people as either their constituency or their positions.

The honourable Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage.

Mrs. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologize for that.

She was proud to have collaborated with the members of Special Olympics Manitoba Honourary Board in 2013 to create bill 209, which proclaimed the second week in June each year as Special Olympics Manitoba Awareness Week. This initiative has been instrumental in promoting the awareness of people with intellectual disabilities who participate in sports, not just here in Manitoba but around the globe.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the athletes of Special Olympics Manitoba just as it has all of us, in one way or another. Special Olympics Manitoba realized at the onset of the pandemic that, in order to continue supporting the health and safety of their athletes, that a shift to online or virtual opportunities was paramount to develop until such a time as athletes could return to in-person programming.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the past year, Special Olympics Manitoba has invested in several initiatives for their athletes. A virtual website, www.somflex.ca was developed, which houses all programs including fitness, health and wellness activities and opportunities for social interaction.

With this shift to virtual programming, Special Olympics Manitoba realized that not all of their athletes had access to the Internet. In response, 50 tablets were purchased and loaned to athletes and their families so that they could be connected to new virtual programming.

Another Special Olympics Manitoba project was the creation of Safe at Home sports kits—kits for group homes and @Home fitness and activity guides, along with fitness and sports equipment, was distributed

to over 10 group home organizations across our province. These kits have allowed individuals to stay healthy and active safely from their homes.

This year's awareness week campaign involves an integrated social media platform that is focused on Special Olympics Manitoba overarching message of inclusion: Accept With No Exception. And it will highlight, in particular, why I love Special Olympics Manitoba.

I sincerely congratulate all members of the Special Olympics Manitoba family for accepting and conquering the challenges this pandemic has put forward upon us. Our athletes continue to show their competitiveness and dedication to sports. Their efforts and resilience is a shining example for all Manitobans to respect and embrace.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

*(14:00)

Mr. Diljeet Brar (Burrows): Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are all excited to celebrate Special Olympics Awareness Week 2021. This year, it will be the week of June 13th to 19th, and it is the eighth year we are formally celebrating this week as a province.

This week recognizes the hard work and dedication of athletes who live with intellectual disabilities in Manitoba. It reminds us of the importance to promote inclusion in sport so that all Manitobans feel accepted.

This week's campaign is focused on the message of Accept With No Exception, and is shared and celebrated across the social media platforms of Special Olympics Manitoba. This is a time for all of us to appreciate the many achievements of athletes, coaches and families in Manitoba.

Special Olympics Manitoba noticed early on in the pandemic that athletes would appreciate virtual supports to feel connected to one another, so the organization created numerous opportunities for online engagements that would ensure their members could still access fitness and health and wellness resources.

Further to this, Special Olympics Manitoba has created platforms for all athletes to stay connected and keep relationships with one another, irrespective of the distance that may be dividing them. More information can be found online at www.somflex.ca.

We are so happy that the Special Olympics Manitoba has really come together for the community

during these unprecedented times and that they have found so many ways to support athletes as well as their families whenever possible.

Happy Special Olympics Awareness Week, everyone. Sport unites all of us as Manitobans, and we look forward to supporting Special Olympics Manitoba and all athletes at sporting events together very soon.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for Tyndall Park have leave to reply to the ministerial statement? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Lamoureux: I'd like to thank the minister for bringing forward a ministerial statement about Special Olympics Awareness Week.

The reason it is important to talk about and acknowledge Special Olympics Awareness Week is because Special Olympics Manitoba has done such incredible work in creating opportunities for all. Through their work they have helped open the hearts and minds of Manitobans and they have created awareness about those who have disabilities.

It was ex-NHL hockey player, Ted Irvine, who brought the concept of Special Olympics to Manitoba back in the 1970s, and this has prospered into Special Olympics Manitoba having over 18 sports and over 1,800 athletes in seven different regions of our province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Special Olympics Manitoba has done a phenomenal job at creating a more inclusive community and advocating in schools and communities and even to us MLAs. Typically, every year, we get to celebrate and play sports with members of the group right on the Legislative grounds. However, due to the pandemic, we have had to postpone. And I think that when it's safe to do so, we will really have to make up for it.

So just before wrapping up, I want to thank Special Olympics Manitoba, all of the staff, the countless volunteers and of course our skilled athletes for all they do.

Thank you, merci and miigwech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Raj Phangureh

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I rise today to recognize and honour a remarkable man who lives in my constituency of Riel.

Raj Phangureh has been a dedicated member of the Winnipeg Kinsmen for the past 20 years, as recently highlighted in the Indo-Canadian Telegram. And through his time and dedication he has helped the club raise money to support Manitoba groups and organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters, Winnipeg Harvest and Special Olympics Manitoba.

Raj has said that he prides himself in giving back to the city he has called home, and for the past five years has served as the chair for the well-known Kinsmen Club bingo. Through its success, the club has been able to donate close to \$8 million to organizations like the Toba Centre for Children & Youth, Ronald McDonald House Charities and STARS ambulance.

Prior to the pandemic, Raj could always be seen serving meals for those less fortunate in our city at a variety of charity events with joyful laughter and a welcoming smile.

The role as philanthropist comes naturally to Raj. As I was pleased to learn, in the 1930s, his grandfather, Gandha Singh Phangureh, started a school for girls in Punjab at a time when there was little support for female education.

Raj is a remarkable individual with a remarkable family, and I ask all my colleagues to help me honour Raj and the Winnipeg Kinsmen Club for the contributions they have made to our great city and province.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thompson Crisis Centre

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Domestic violence against women and girls is an issue that is much too common in Manitoba.

Northern Manitoba has the second highest rate of violence against women and girls in all of the North, at 4.9 times higher than southern Manitoba. Just one in 10 women and girls under the age of 24 will experience violence, most often at the hands of a male partner or a family member. Indigenous women and girls in particular are three times more likely to be a victim of special-spousal violence compared to non-Indigenous women.

This situation is exactly why the Thompson Crisis Centre is invaluable for northern Manitoban women and girls. The Thompson Crisis Centre is the only family violence centre in the North, which means that they also can provide support for male children over 16, as well as transgender and non-binary individuals.

The centre acts as a safe place for women and girls—women and children who are victims of abuse. The centre provides immediate assistance for women going through domestic violence and provides supports through support groups, all-day services for women and girls as needed.

Unfortunately, many women across the North lack resources like the Thompson Crisis Centre. Now, more than ever, supports are needed in Manitoba's north. There are far too many remote communities that don't have access to resources like the Thompson Crisis Centre provides.

The Province should look at the Thompson Crisis Centre as a model for what works in northern Manitoba for women and girls and look to grow the number of centres across the North so women and families experiencing domestic violence have the services they need.

Please join me in honouring the Thompson Crisis Centre for the great work they do in advocating for similar services to be accessible to all northern women and girls.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to the Minister of Economic Development and Jobs.

Manitoba 150 Award Recipients

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Economic Development and Jobs): I rise virtually in the House today to introduce the seven honourees in my constituency of Lakeside who have received the Manitoba 150 award.

The seven constituents of Lakeside who have received this honour exhibit attributes that all Manitobans should aspire to have. All seven of the Lakeside honourees are pillars in their respective communities, and each have volunteered countless hours to better not only the communities where they reside, but also the province as a whole.

Along with receiving Manitoba 150 award, Canada Life will make a \$500 donation to the charity of each of—honourees' choice.

The selflessness of—these individuals have shown in volunteering their time in order to better the communities that they live in is remarkable.

I'd like to put their names on record in Hansard: Monica Baldwin of Grosse Isle, Jim Lindsay of Grosse Isle, Danny Kleinsasser of Stony Mountain, Dave Van Heyst of Stony Mountain, Paige Proctor of Stonewall, Cheryl Stock of Elie, and Ron Watson of Argyle.

I want to thank these amazing Manitobans of Lakeside for all they have done and will no doubt continue to do in the future in order to better their communities. Your spirit of volunteerism is truly unbelievable, and people like you make this province a better place for all.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Right to Repair

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): The right to repair consumer electronic products and home appliances is an idea whose time has come. It's come to Europe this year, and individual countries within it are finding innovative ways to protect consumers and the environment. Consumers want free access to repair and maintenance information, they want spare parts to be actually available, and they want repair and durability labelling. They want a ban on planned obsolescence.

* (14:10)

In 2021, the European Union set minimum design requirements for many electronic products with new right-to-repair legislation.

The right to repair enables consumers access to the resources needed to fix and modify their products, appliances, including smartphones, laptops, tablets, washing machines and refrigerators.

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

In addition, the right to repair ensures manufacturers replace electronic products at no cost, or refund the amount paid by the consumer to purchase the electronic product where they refuse or they're unable to provide manuals or replacement parts.

My hope is this Legislature gets on board with consumers in Manitoba and Canada to give them what they want—what Europeans are now getting—namely,

products that last longer, are repaired when broken and where the planned obsolescence that threatens a sustainable future disappears.

National Indigenous History Month

Mr. Jon Reyes (Waverley): Last week, I was able to bring forward Bill 233, The Filipino Heritage Month Act, for second reading. This act will recognize June as Philippine heritage month here in Manitoba.

Over 50 years ago, my dad came to this country as an immigrant. Every day, I'm thankful for him immigrating to this country and our province. However, today we must take the time to thank the Indigenous people of Canada for allowing and accepting immigrants like Filipinos into this country. Over this past weekend, we learned of the graves of 215 bodies of innocent Indigenous children that were found in Kamloops; 215 unfathomable lives taken far too soon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, June is National Indigenous History Month. Thank you to Revka Smith for reminding me of National Indigenous History Month, a month and beyond where we must take the time to mourn over the loss of these innocent children. We must also take the time to learn more about the culture that the Indigenous people give. This culture is the backbone of Canada, a culture that is like the Filipino culture, a culture surrounded by food, family, celebrations, rituals, dances and music.

Thank you to my good friend Chris Eccles, of Métis descent and a schoolteacher, for taking the time to talk and educate me more about Indigenous peoples and some of their teachings and rituals yesterday.

As I stand here on Treaty 1 territory and on the cusp of National Indigenous History Month, I'd like to thank the Indigenous community for everything they have given to me and my family.

To the Indigenous community, I thank you for your contributions. We mourn with you. We must take the time to celebrate this month with you, to remember the significant contributions of Indigenous peoples and to help restore and learn more about your culture as we always all learn from each other.

Thank you, merci, salamat po and miigwech.

Deputy Speaker's Statement

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I have a statement for the House.

We have three of our pages are serving their last day at the Chamber today, and I wanted to share comments from the members.

The first comment was from Erin Van Veen:

In order to even have this opportunity, I had to survive a stressful interview with David Shuttleworth. Working as a page during COVID has really kept me informed on the Manitoba state of the pandemic among other important issues. I enjoyed learning how Manitoba provincial government is run, and I especially appreciated it when members took the time to answer my questions.

The most difficult part of the job, besides calling the vote, was trying to carry the three cups of hot beverages into the Chamber. One day, I was allowed to help with the mace, and then I decided I was going to take over Dave's job and become the Manitoba's first female sergeant of at arms. Just kidding—but one day; you never know what life takes you—While I am not graduating this year, I hope to pursue a career involving American Sign Language and training service dogs.

I would like to thank all of the people who made this year one of the most memorable. Thanks to Dave, Ray, Cam, all the Chamber attendants, the other pages, the MLAs, the Speaker and all of the other employees that made this time here so enjoyable.

Next are comments from Laura Boyd:

Laura will be graduating from the Collège Churchill High School this June and will be attending the Carleton University in the fall to pursue the bachelor of science degree. She is also going to continue as a-page duties, working as the page at the Senate in Ottawa.

She is grateful for her time she was able to spend learning about the legislative process in Manitoba and knows that it is a privilege to be—have this opportunity.

Lastly, comments from Alex Rogers over there:

Alex will be graduating from the French immersion program at Collège Saint-Norbert Collegiate in 2022 and plans to attend the Price Faculty of Engineering at the University of Manitoba. In the years to come, he aspires through—enter the world of politics and sit here as an MLA.

Working as a page he—has certainly has been relished the opportunity for Alex, being in politics—being as a political nerd that he is. Seeing how the legislative process functions in practice has been a superb learning experience.

Coming to know all of the MLAs, even if it's just their beverage preferences, has been a grateful delight. Of course, this opportunity has been made even more unique by the presence of COVID-19. He has been able to witness things that will, hopefully, never need to happen again—and hopefully for the rest of us too.

Alex wants to thank the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, MLAs, staff and pages for making this such a wonderful experience, one that he will most certainly not forget. He considers that a great honour and privilege to be able to work here and with all of you.

On behalf of all the members—legislative members here, all the MLAs, the Clerk staff, the legislative staff and probably all the other pages, too, I just want to wish to all three of you the best of luck in your future endeavours, and it was a joy having you all here, especially when you guys read the votes. It was—you guys rocked.

Thank you very much.

Now for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Federal Assistance for Manitoba's ICUs Critical-Care Nurses and Respiratory Therapists

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, congratulations to Erin, Laura and also to Alex. I hope that you've learned something here that you'll be able to take forward with you, and certainly it's been a great honour to have you calling the votes for us.

On Saturday, 17 people were admitted into ICUs across Manitoba. That is a one-day record none of us wanted to see happen. Now, because the ICU capacity is so stretched right now, there are now 35 patients transferred out of province receiving life-saving care. And as we all saw last week, every time that happens there is a risk in play. That's why we need to be assured that everything is being done to keep Manitobans safe.

Will the Premier double the request for federal assistance in the form of critical-care nurses and respiratory therapists?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): First of all, Erin, Laura, Alex, all the very best as you move on in your lives.

We've seen—they say there are two things you shouldn't watch being made: wieners and law. And now you've seen law made and so at some point in the future, you may see wieners made as well—I don't

know. But the point being that you've seen how things work inside a legislative assembly. It's not always pretty, but it's a lot prettier than dictatorships where people aren't allowed the freedom to communicate, to express their points of view and to differ on those points of view.

We don't differ on the state of affairs in Manitoba in respect of our concerns for those who are afflicted with COVID. Here in the Chamber, we are all vitally concerned with their well-being.

To give a quick update, federal assistance—a small percentage of our overall efforts, but nonetheless important and appreciated—is coming.

We've now got close to eight nurses that are assisting. I should mention they are freeing up our nurses to move into the intensive-care units. They're not intensive-care nurses per se; they're ER nurses, and we appreciate their presence here very much. A couple of RNs, as well, assisting in the alternate isolation centres that we have for our folks that need that protection, and I can continue that update in a moment if the member would like.

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

Mr. Kinew: Yes. I do take that information seriously, and I thank the Premier for updating this House about that.

The concern that we have is that as these nurses arrive the continued admissions to the ICU will quickly exhaust, perhaps even exceed, the additional bed spaces that can be created.

Again, if we think about that 17-patient figure that was admitted just on Saturday alone, well, if we had the full complement of nurses here that had initially been requested, those 17 patients would have immediately exhausted that additional capacity in the ICUs.

And so that's why we are asking the government to increase the request. Our health-care system needs this support and fast.

Can the Premier, included in his next update, tell us whether he will increase the ask of the federal government for more critical-care nurses and respiratory therapists?

* (14:20)

Mr. Pallister: Well, I should mention that we're going to continue to take our direction, in terms of prioritizing asks for assistance, from our public health leadership as we should and will continue to do that.

I'll—just to conclude, though: additional help with our medical air transport team—there was one medical team that was provided to us by Ottawa. In addition, 12 med techs. This is paramedics principally, I understand, who are assisting at the alternate locations, again to allow people to be able to isolate safely and to, hopefully, protect them from the possibility that they might contract COVID, were that facility not available.

So, we expanded that to include a second isolation—alternate isolation facility, and that's very much appreciated. And in addition, three lab techs. Others on the way in various categories, we are told by the federal government.

And again, should the need grow, our health-care leadership will, I'm sure, be alerting us to the need for additional support and we will be bolstering or annexing the ask to the federal government most certainly.

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

Mr. Kinew: So, I just want to acknowledge that the, you know, Premier says that ask will increase. However, given the current trajectory, it does seem as though the ask may need to be doubled.

And again, that's because we just went through a difficult weekend here in Manitoba. We had the record 17 admissions-to-ICU patients on Saturday. Sadly, that was followed by seven people who passed away in the update that was provided on Sunday. We know that, of course, there are also all those Manitobans who were transported and may continue to be transported out of province for care.

So can the Premier specify that increase to federal reports? Would that include doubling the number of critical-care nurses and respiratory therapists?

Mr. Pallister: I should alert members of the House that I just received notice a few moments ago that the downtown supersite at the Convention Centre has been evacuated. There is a gas leak in the facility.

The source of the gas leak at this time is unknown. Winnipeg fire service is on-site right now. Carlton and York are closed to traffic and there's, as I say, no confirmed source of that leak at this point in time.

Overseers of the facility will be immediately communicating to anyone that has an appointment, obviously, in the next couple of hours, at least, to not come and, sadly, to have to rebook. I shouldn't say

sadly because we, of course, don't want them to come into a facility that's not certainly safe for the—for all.

I want to share that with the members and also say, yes, there are—I will continue to update the member and I appreciate him asking these questions because I think it's important to know this additional help is there when needed. That's how the Canadian federation should work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, on a different question.

COVID-19 Updates Workplace Transmission Data

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Well, certainly our thoughts are with all those Manitobans who were expecting to have the relief of being provided with a dose of vaccine but are now dealing with that unexpected and probably very frightening situation. And certainly we are thinking of the first responders. Hopefully, the whole situation is allowed to be managed in a safe way that protects everyone's lives.

We know that the situation—you know, what else can go wrong, right? When-it-rains-it-pours type of thing these days in Manitoba. And so, certainly, we do stand shoulder to shoulder with those on the front lines of our health-care system.

Manitobans also want to be able to judge what is happening, what may happen next. And that's why many people have been asking for an updated release of modelling data and workplace transmission information.

Can the Premier commit to this House to update Manitobans with that info?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, our medical leadership will continue to—as they have, with great diligence and dedication and we thank them for that—update Manitobans on their modelling. They've done that on a regular basis throughout the pandemic. And I understand there are more briefings coming up later this week.

I'm not sure of the content of them at this point in time, other than I can share with members that we do plan to announce an incentivization strategy later this week for vaccine, because we do believe that those two keys are central to getting control of our health-care situation and of this pandemic curve: the key of following the public health orders while also getting the first available vaccine or, if you've been fortunate enough—like a higher percentage all the time of

Manitobans—to get your first one, to line up your second appointment as soon as you possibly can.

We encourage Manitobans to do that and—so that we can get through this together.

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

Gas Leak at Convention Centre Rebooking of Vaccine Appointments

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I do want to return to that update—upcoming briefing information that will be provided.

I do just want to follow up on the point about what is taking place at the Convention Centre this afternoon. Certainly, it's early on and, again, top of mind is the safety of everyone and the protection of everyone in the facility there.

But at this hour, seeing as how people will have to be rebooked, can the Premier update the House if those people who were scheduled for vaccine doses today—will they be given priority? Will they be immediately able to rebook tomorrow or at the earliest opportunity, or will they have to wait until some further date to get that vaccine?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): I can't give the member the information he's requesting. The vaccine team will be making modifications as a consequence of this gas leak and the delays in appointments that are appropriate—to their leadership, and I thank them again very much for their leadership.

We've improved our number of vaccinations, of course, rapidly. We're getting a higher and higher percentage of Manitobans getting their vaccines, and I encourage Manitobans to pursue their vaccines.

And, most certainly, we've ramped up our contact tracing capabilities so that we're able to follow up on those cases diagnosed. I'd encourage all Manitobans who—to share that information. If they are tested and do subsequently find that they have COVID, please co-operate with the contact tracers so that we can get the message out to others to protect themselves as fast as possible.

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

COVID-19 Updates Projected ICU Admissions

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): So we'll look for an update on that as soon as we can get it.

And, again, just to return to the topic of the information that Manitobans should rightfully have at their disposal, we know that this was a difficult week-end. Some 10 people in our province lost their lives to COVID. It's been a difficult month: 225 people admitted to ICUs over the month of May, 35 patients sent to other provinces.

Now, Manitobans want action to be taken to preserve our health-care system, put—to preserve lives here in Manitoba. They also deserve to have a bit of a roadmap in terms of what to expect and to be able to judge the response that is being mustered.

So the—can the Premier commit that this release of information will include an update of what's projected for ICU admissions for the near future in Manitoba?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Well, we are, as a government, very dedicated to fixing the health-care system and improving it. Of course, no one anticipated this pandemic would motivate us to double the number of ICU available spaces, but that is what's happened.

That being said, the additional assistance that we've received is pivotal—and we hope for the short term—but again, I say thank you to our partners in Ontario and Saskatchewan and the federal government for their willingness to step up and do their part.

Manitobans have done our best to contribute to the Confederation and to our partners in this country throughout our history. And so if it's a little bit of pay-back at this point in time, I think it's well deserved and well earned.

That being said, we do hope that this is—that we're seeing a plateau at this point in time. But, again, COVID is a nefarious enemy and it's an adversary we cannot let our guard down on. And so, again, I encourage Manitobans, follow the public health rules, make sure you get vaccinated at the earliest opportunity, and if you've been vaccinated, make sure you get that second appointment as soon as possible.

We're moving ahead with percentages all the time, 64 per cent of Manitobans now, 18-plus, vaccinated, but we need a much higher percentage than that to get ourselves into a time when we can reduce

restrictions on all of us. And so I encourage all Manitobans: take part and do their part.

Nurses Collective Agreement Timeline for New Contract

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic presents the biggest public health challenge we've ever faced. The Pallister government calls our health professionals heroes, but then fights them in court with their unconstitutional bill 28.

Nurses have been without a contract for over four years. It's time for a fair settlement that represents the important work of our health staff, especially after the incredible work they're doing during this pandemic.

Will the minister and the government finally conclude a fair deal for nurses today?

* (14:30)

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I think the member knows that bargaining was really only be—was only started after the conclusion of the restructuring of the bargaining units, which took place late in 2019, which meant that bargaining began early in 2020. Then, of course, the pandemic started, which also slowed things down. So my understanding is that bargaining began in earnest in the fall of 2020.

There has been significant sessions that have already happened. There are more that are scheduled. Certainly all Manitobans and certainly we as a government would encourage that bargaining process to continue in earnest, fully and fairly and in good faith.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station, on a supplementary question.

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're talking about four years without a deal, and there are 1,300 positions vacant in Winnipeg alone, hundreds more across the province. That's care by the bedside that's missing because of this government's actions. There's a surgical backlog now over 20,000.

Nurses want action to rectify this situation. Nurses want a new contract. They deserve a new contract that respects the work that they do. It's past time for them to deal with them fairly.

When will the minister and this government come to terms with nursing professionals?

Mr. Goertzen: Again, the member will know that negotiations only began in earnest after the bargaining units were settled by the unions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Since that time, there have been a number of sessions.

My understanding is that there have been competitive and long-term monetary proposals and special-arrangement incentives proposed for the nurses that are most affected by COVID, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There clearly is an understanding and a recognition of the great work that nurses are doing in these days but all days, and that's also being recognized at the bargaining table.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Union Station, on a final supplementary question.

MLA Asagwara: Mr. Deputy Speaker, nurses and health professionals are working double shifted; they're completely overloaded. The impacts of the COVID pandemic will be felt for our health system for many years to come.

There is going to be an epidemic of burnout and exhaustion in our health system if our health professionals are not reinforced, and that means filling vacancies, that means addressing what Lanette Siragusa says is a nursing shortage, and it means a new contract for nurses, not more spin from this acting Minister of Health.

They've gone over four years without a contract.

Will the Pallister government finally come prepared to make a fair deal today?

Mr. Goertzen: In fact, we know that there was a recognition of a nursing shortage by the former minister of Health, Theresa Oswald, by—her successor, Sharon Blady, acknowledged the nursing shortage existed under the NDP.

In terms of these negotiations, there have been, in terms of my understanding, competitive long-term monetary proposals that have been put forward. There has already been special incentives that have been provided for those who are working in the nursing sector most directly affected by COVID-19; there's been additional proposals for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So my understanding is that there are certainly those incentives and those undertakings already on the bargaining table. We want to ensure that the bargaining continues to take place, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Former Manitoba Residential Schools Request to Search for Burial Sites

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Many Canadians and Manitobans were shocked and horrified by the recently discovered mass gravesite at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. These findings are heartbreaking and unfortunately for us—for many of us Indigenous people, this story is all too familiar.

Manitoba has many horror stories of its own. Just a few years ago, a forensic anthropology student uncovered the names of 70 students who died while attending the Brandon Indian Residential School, almost all buried in unmarked graves.

Will the minister support efforts to search for other unmarked gravesites at former residential schools here in Manitoba?

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): I thank the member opposite for his words that he put on record today in regards to the tragedy that they've uncovered in British Columbia this past week.

We all know that this—kids that were taken from their homes to attend these residential schools has been a part of our past that has marred so many people and it has changed their lives forever. And here we are, generations later, and we're still uncovering the untruths of the past. And I think we all have to work harder and we have to work together to ensure that, going forward, these types of events never happen again.

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

Mr. Bushie: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission includes a call for strategies to identify and document residential school burial sites. All of Canada's former residential schools must be examined for graves that haven't been uncovered yet, and Manitoba must do its part by examining all Manitoba residential school sites and areas.

These are shameful parts of Manitoba's legacy, but to ignore them or hide them only further exacerbates the shame.

Will the minister commit to financially supporting efforts to search residential school burial sites?

Ms. Clarke: I thank the member opposite for the question and, in my time as Indigenous Minister in this government of Manitoba, we have worked with Brandon, in regards to burial site, with the mayor of

Brandon as well as Indigenous stakeholders there that are also interested in finding the truths about what is considered the burial site in Brandon.

Our efforts will continue.

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

Mr. Bushie: We are looking for a real commitment here. Residential school survivors should not have to tell and retell their traumas in order for it to be real to the Canadian and Manitoba governments. Indigenous people deserve governments who are willing to admit that this was a genocide, both cultural and literal.

All levels of government must work to commit to doing the real, very hard work of uncovering the truths of the traumatic and devastating history of the treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada and here in Manitoba. For the provincial government to defer to the federal government on this issue is offensive and shameful.

Will the minister commit provincial resources to undertake, and in collaboration with First Nations communities, the search for residential school burial sites and will the results of this work be done as well—and the results be search—and the results of these searches be made public?

Ms. Clarke: I thank the member opposite again for his questions in regards to this matter that's before us today.

And we have, as a government, put forward our path to reconciliation for the province of Manitoba. To date, even during COVID, we have met with 42 organizations in regards to finding a path forward, in regards to having a solid strategy in the province of Manitoba, and the issue, in regards to what we're looking at today as to burial of these young children near residential schools, I'm sure will be addressed in that.

It's now come to the forefront now, but it is only a part—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Manitoba School Divisions Staff Reduction Concerns

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): Base funding to schools was reduced last year for the first time in a generation. That is an absolute cut, after years of funding below inflation and below a growing student population. It has put our schools in a desperate situation where they have no choice.

Winnipeg School Division has announced that there will be 130 fewer teachers in the classroom next fall because of disinvestment by the Pallister government.

Why is the Pallister government reducing teachers in the classroom when we need them the most?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education): First of all, I will say, on behalf myself and our Department of Education, we were deeply saddened by the tragic news coming out of the former residential school in Kamloops. We acknowledge the families and the community and we join in the mourning and loss of their children.

Out of respect, and to grieve alongside the community, we're encouraging schools and school divisions to do the following: lower flags flown at schools half-mast for four days, beginning today; hold a moment of silence over four consecutive days at the same time each day; identify space and time to support those who require social, emotional and spiritual supports while they grieve; and invite the school community to participate in virtual smudge, song and prayer.

* (14:40)

And we also—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

The honourable member for Wolseley, on a supplementary question.

Ms. Naylor: While I definitely appreciate the words from the minister, I want to remind him how many Indigenous children are in the Winnipeg School Division, the Winnipeg School Division that is being forced to lay off staff because of cuts from this government.

We need every tool possible to help children address their learning gaps that have occurred as a result of the pandemic. River East Transcona has also announced less staff, explaining it's impossible to find \$3 million for a shortfall without reductions to staffing.

We need stronger classrooms, not fewer supports as schools recover from the pandemic.

Will the minister reconsider and give our students—all of our students, including Indigenous students in the inner city—what they need?

Mr. Cullen: I'd like to thank our team at our Indigenous Inclusion Directorate under the leadership of Helen Robinson-Settee, along with Elder Myra Laramee, in terms of developing these recommendations.

I will say—and it's quite interesting—we had a couple of school divisions go out and start negotiating in the media without consultation with the department. I look forward, on behalf of our department, to working with those school divisions to make sure we do provide better education for all students in Manitoba.

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

Ms. Naylor: Classrooms are getting bigger, not smaller, under the Pallister government. Base funding for schools has been cut in absolute terms for the first time in a generation.

I will table again the budget documents we received through FIPPA. The minister still has not released the FRAME report, which shows this clearly, and it's months and months overdue. There will now be dozens of school divisions forced to delete positions and lay off staff to meet this government's demands. This is a completely inappropriate response to the challenge our students face in recovering from the pandemic.

Why is this government forcing hundreds of teachers out of their jobs when we need them the most?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reality is we've put over \$1.3 billion into K-to-12 education. That is a historic amount. And we've also committed to 'spanding' an extra \$1.6-billion investment over the next four years, another historic investment in K to 12.

I will also say we set aside, last year, \$185 million for the COVID recovery. We've set aside \$160 million in this year's budget for COVID recovery. We will be there when students need recovery learning.

Consolidation of Dynacare Labs Accessibility Concerns

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Northeast Winnipeggers are having a miserable time getting timely access to medical lab tests they need. Pallister government has turned a blind eye as Dynacare has closed half of the labs in the city.

It's now gotten worse. We recently found out that Dynacare has closed more locations at 701 Regent, 1210 Rothesay and 1400 Henderson, which will reduce access to those with mobility and transportation issues.

Has the Pallister government done any work to consider the impact on so many people living in northeast Winnipeg, and will they reconsider the consolidation of labs across the city?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Acting Minister of Health and Seniors Care): I thank the member for the question.

We know that that particular provider has been setting up sites that are larger, that are more efficient, that can handle more tests, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Certainly, where there are challenges and there are difficulties with the establishment of these larger facilities, we'll work with that provider to try to ensure that no Manitoba individual who is looking for a test is unable to get it in a timely and a reasonably accessible fashion, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Altomare: Many people who need access to Dynacare services are those with health conditions or have limited mobility. The closure of these clinics is an inconvenience for many and a real mobility challenge for those without means or transportation.

A monopoly has been handed to this company with no accountability. And it gets worse. Patients like Claudette Wills are only finding out that these clinics have closed when they show up at the front door. Claudette found many others like her surprised by this sudden closure of their local lab.

Will the minister reconsider these cuts to local labs and restore access to the people like Claudette?

Mr. Goertzen: We know during the pandemic that there's been a great reliance on a number of different providers who are not normally providing testing in the way that they are now during this pandemic, and we're very grateful for that support. That has allowed testing to happen in the robust way that we have needed it to in Manitoba during the pandemic.

More generally, though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there obviously are efforts underway to ensure that there are not only accessible sites but they are designed in such a way that individuals can get their testing quickly, they can get the results in a timely

fashion so they can get the medical treatment that they need. If there are individual challenges or cases, I would be happy to speak to the member individually.

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

Mr. Altomare: The consolidation of Dynacare labs means decreased access and longer lineups. This company has been allowed to monopolize public services without proper accountability to the public.

This is a real disservice to many, especially seniors and those with mobility or health challenges, because it is all about getting to the lab. This change adds more stress to clients and could even deter them from accessing the services they need to get. Further Dynacare closures will make this situation even more dire.

Will the minister reconsider this ill-considered consolidation and will he ensure no further labs are closed across the city of Winnipeg?

Mr. Goertzen: We're grateful for the work that that provider has done during the pandemic in ensuring that testing in a number of different ways not only can continue but can be increased during the increased demands during the pandemic.

Certainly, when there are changes within the system, they are designed to ensure that there is a greater effectiveness, that individuals can get tests more quickly, that they can still remain accessible, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the member opposite has particular issues or concerns within his particular area or with an individual constituent, he is always welcome to contact me or the office of Health and we can have direct discussions about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Transfer of ICU Patients Out of Province Coverage for Patient Transport Costs

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): It's very clear that our health-care system has been overwhelmed in this third wave, not just by cases, but because the government kept cutting before and during the pandemic.

ERs, ICUs and labs were closed; nurses and workers are burned out and working without contracts. So Manitoba's health-care system could not handle the surge, and we know that because we've been transferring sick patients, at incredible risk, out of province.

I table, virtually, a Shared Health memo from May 18th which details the script people are supposed

to follow. It says the cost of patient transfers will be covered, but only to May 31st, which is today.

Are Manitobans going to have to pay out-of-pocket to be shuffled around or out of our health-care system as of tomorrow, June 1st?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Let me educate the member a little bit on the Peachey report and its recommendations. It was commissioned by the previous government to improve care in ICUs and ERs across the province. The system had fallen into disrepute. The previous government knew it and it asked for recommendations.

The conclusions were, among others, that acuity of patient care was, quote, limited and variable with some sites lacking specialist support. In other words, ICUs weren't well equipped. In other words, people were put into a hospital—an emergency room or ICU setting—and then asked to move or told to move or simply moved to another facility. Transport among multiple sites was common. The critical-care transport system was established to accommodate the safe transport of critically ill patients to another site because patients will require transfer among multiple sites.

That's the way it used to be done. We supersized our emergency rooms and our ICUs, increased the capacity of real care with staff and equipment. That wasn't the case before it was the case. Thank goodness this pandemic didn't happen in 2016.

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

*(14:50)

Patient's Option to Refuse Transfer

Mr. Lamont: It's a—this is not the only very concerning aspect of this memo, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It may—does not adequately mention out-of-province transfers and it appears in this memo that patients have no option to refuse.

On page 2, in a script it delivers, it says, and I quote: if asked about an option to refuse, the answer is supposed to be our first priority is to ensure we provide the appropriate environment of care for you. At this time, that requires a transfer to insert facility name. End quote.

This is a 'dision' that should require a triage protocol, which we have asked for.

Is Shared Health giving patients and their families and option to refuse a transfer? And if there is no

triage protocol, how are physicians making the call about who gets transferred?

Mr. Pallister: Let's move away from fantasy to the reality of what we've done as a consequence of the Peachey report. Its recommendations—I remind you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—were given to the previous government and not acted upon.

From the Peachey report, it says—and this is in 2015—centres that continue to provide critical care have been challenged with the lack of capacity to sustain delivery of these essential services. This is why, very likely, in part, people were frequently moved to other facilities: because there wasn't the capacity to care for them, there wasn't the expertise. In some cases, there wasn't even the equipment. In fact, it says here—again, on the '15 report from Peachey—it was difficult to ensure in-hospital coverage, especially overnight, because certain ICU sites had limited respiratory services.

Again, the previous system was a mess, the previous government knew it. They didn't act to fix it; we did. We increased the capacity for ICU beds by 40 per cent in the first four years we were in government. Thank goodness that this pandemic didn't hit in 2016.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park, on a final supplementary question.

COVID-19 Pandemic Third Wave Request for Safe Reopening Plan

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Throughout the pandemic, the Pallister government has refused to listen to the experts and learn from other provinces and territories, which has resulted in a horrific third wave. Currently, we are having to send Manitobans out of province because our health-care system is at its limit with no more ICU beds available. Other provinces have made recovery plans open to their economies—to open up their economies, yet Manitoba again is falling behind.

A reopening plan would provide hope and guidance.

Will this government listen to the science and present a safe recovery plan to encourage as many Manitobans as possible to get vaccinated?

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): It is true, most certainly, that we are a hot spot for COVID cases, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It should not be forgotten that we were not so for well over two thirds of the time since this pandemic hit.

And so I wouldn't want any comment from the member to be taken as disrespectful—and I know she wouldn't intend that—to our health-care leadership, whose advice we follow and will continue to.

Plastic Recycling Initiatives Agriculture and Health Industries

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): Last week, the Minister of Conservation and Climate announced the establishment of a stewardship program for recycling agricultural plastic waste and products, as well as a program for recycling products like needles and lancets.

Can the minister share with the House how our government is making sure Manitoba continues to be cleaner and greener?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate): I just want to really thank the honourable member for Riding Mountain for that fantastic question.

I'm pleased to let the House know that with this announcement, Manitoba will become the second Canadian jurisdiction with a provincially regulated agricultural plastic stewardship program, and the first to include multiple designated materials. Cleanfarms has established an industry-funded stewardship program to take responsibility for recycling the products and materials produced by its industry members.

Our government has also approved the Health Products Stewardship Association's Manitoba medical sharps collection program. This industry-funded stewardship program provides Manitobans with safe disposable—or, disposal options for household—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable minister's time is up.

Employment and Income Assistance Clawback for CERB Recipients

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Last year, when the federal government announced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, they urged provincial governments not to claw back existing social-assistance supports such as EIA. However, between April and July of 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic, this government decided to count CERB as income for Manitobans on social assistance, and then they reduced or eliminated EIA benefits to approximately 2,200 Manitobans. Now Manitobans who access the Canada Recovery Benefit or CERB are experiencing the same clawbacks from this government.

Will the minister admit that it is the wrong approach to claw back—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member's time is up.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Our government recognizes that there are many benefits that should not be included in a claw-back, and that is why we've taken action to ensure that certain benefits that many individuals have received over the years, whether it be payments from another level of government or compensation for wrongdoing that they—that was done to them, should not be clawed back.

And we're certainly working towards modernizing the EIA system so that it is more fair for all individuals in the province of Manitoba.

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

Ms. Marcelino: These federal programs were designed to build upon provincial income supports and not to be a substitute for them. They were not designed to provide the—this provincial government with cost-savings.

This minister's cuts to EIA has left many Manitobans unable to pay their rent, their bills and they are at greater risk for homelessness. Many low-income seniors will not be able to afford their \$400-per-month rent increases coming their way at the next lease renewal due to CERB repayments. These low-income seniors are very much at risk for eviction and low-income Manitobans are financially struggling now more than ever.

Will this minister stop punishing Manitobans for accepting federal emergency benefits and stop the clawbacks to EIA today?

Ms. Squires: We've certainly joined with other provinces in a unified approach to some of these benefits.

I would also like to confirm for the House that our approach to EIA—we've got some of the most generous benefits in the country, and while EIA recipients in the province of Manitoba have been able to access other benefits, we have been able to maintain their 'dental'—dental, optical and prescription benefits under the Rewarding Work health plan, as well as many other initiatives.

We certainly do understand the challenges that many Manitobans have had to work through over the last year, and we're going to be committed to working

with all Manitobans to ensure that they get the benefits they deserve throughout this period.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for River Heights? Does the member for the River Heights have a petition?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, I won't be reading my petition today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, well, then we'll go on to the honourable member from Elmwood. The honourable member from Elmwood, would you unmute your mic?

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): No petition today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No petition. Okay.

Okay, now we'll go on to the honourable member for Notre Dame.

Health-Care Coverage

Ms. Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

(5) Jurisdictions across Canada and the world have adopted access-without-fear policies to prevent sharing personal health information or immigration status with immigration authorities and to give uninsured residents the confidence to access health care.

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

* (15:00)

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

(2) To urge the Minister of Health and Seniors Care to undertake a multilingual communication campaign to provide information on expanded coverage to all affected residents.

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

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

Signed by Tiffany Pau, Geethanjali Jayasinghe, Carly Nicholson and many other Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Any further petitions? No further petitions?

We'll go on now on to the honourable Opposition House Leader.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): In accordance with rule 38(1), I move, seconded by the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), that the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the devastating discovery of a mass grave of 215 children at the Tutslem te Secswetuem [*phonetic*]-sorry, Deputy Speaker-First Nation who died at the hands of the Kamloops Indian Residential School, and the need for the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to call on all levels of government to immediately implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 94 calls to action, including searching for all former residential school grounds to investigate whether similar mass graves exist.

Motion presented.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize that honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), I should remind all members that the-on-under rule 38(2), the mover of a motion of the matter of urgent public importance and one member from the other recognized parties in the House are allowed not more than 10 minutes to explain the urgency of debating the matter immediately.

As stated on Beauschlesne's [*phonetic*] citation 390, urgency is the content's means of urgency of immediate debate, not the subject matter of the motion. In their remarks, members should focus exclusively on whether or not there was an urgent of debate or whether or not the ordinary opportunities for the debate will be-enable the House to consider the matter earlier enough to ensure that public interest will not suffer.

Ms. Fontaine: This is a seminal moment in our collective histories, and it demands that this Legislature, among all other legislatures across our territories, set time aside to honour, acknowledge the lives of these little ones, of these babies, and seek resolution in the closure for families whose loved ones never came home from Indian residential schools.

Miigwech.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): Under our rules, a matter of urgent public importance, one of the criteria that must be met is that there's no other time to debate the issue. That's a difficult bar to meet in our Assembly, as there's question

period and other opportunities such as members' statements and, of course, it was subject of a ministerial statement.

So while I don't suspect that you will be able to rule in favour of this being a matter of urgent public importance, all of us, all of us in this Chamber, in person or virtually, recognize this is an extremely, extremely important issue that should be discussed in this Assembly, and it should be discussed this afternoon.

So following your ruling, I'll have a leave request to allow such a debate to happen.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank members of their advice-oh, the honourable member for River Heights.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): -and support-

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for River Heights seek leave for-to speak on this urgent issue?

Mr. Gerrard: No, I don't believe I need leave to speak-

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, you do need leave, yes. We're just determining the urgency of the-before. We haven't started the debate yet.

Mr. Gerrard: That's exactly-I just want to say-

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, you have to have leave first.

Mr. Gerrard: I ask for leave to comment briefly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the honourable member for River Heights have leave to comment briefly on the matter? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Gerrard: I just want to say that we, in the Liberal Party, fully support having a debate and are in agreement with the leave request that is going to be brought forward by the Government House Leader.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank all members of their advice to the Chair on the motion proposed by the honourable member for St. Johns.

The 90 minutes notice required prior to the state-routine proceedings, under rule 38(1) was provided, and I thank all honourable members for that.

Under all-our rules and practices, the subject matter requiring urgent consideration must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the matter is not given immediate attention. There must be also no other reasonable opportunity to raise this-the matter.

I have listened to it very carefully—to the arguments put forward. As members will know, under Manitoba practice, there are very few matters that are the criteria as a matter of urgent public importance, as there are other opportunities that can be used to raise the issue, including oral questions, members' statements, petitions and grievances.

Despite having been addressed as a ministerial statement, this issue is a historical and cultural significance to our country. I feel it is my duty, as Deputy Speaker, to let the House decide if the matter should be debated.

Therefore, I am satisfied that the matter is so pressing that the public interest will suffer if the debate does not proceed. I rule that the member's motion is in order and the urgent public importance.

Is there leave to have the—this matter—the MUPI before the House? Is it—yes, is there agreement to—the question before the House is there agreement to—shall the debate on the motion proposed by the honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) proceed? *[Agreed]*

The House has agreed that the debate should proceed.

Each member wish—okay, this is now—the honourable Government House Leader.

Mr. Goertzen: Could you please canvass the House for leave to organize the debate on the matter of urgent public importance today as follows: the debate shall be no more than one hour; the first 25 minutes shall be allotted for members of the official opposition caucus to speak; the next 25 minutes shall be allotted for members of the government caucus to speak; the last 10 minutes shall be allotted for independent Liberal members to speak, with the understanding that within each speaking block, as many members of each group may speak as they wish?

* (15:10)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there leave to organize the debate on the 'manner' of urgent public importance today as follows: (1) the debate shall be no more than one hour; (2) the first 25 minutes shall be allocated to the members of the official—is it—caucus to speak; (3) the next 25 minutes shall be allocated to members of the government caucus to speak; and (4) the last 10 minutes shall be allocated—allotted to the independent Liberal members to speak, with the understanding that within each speaking block as many members of each group may speak as they wish.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Fontaine: First, I want to just say miigwech to all of our colleagues in the House for allowing us to take some time this afternoon in honour of our loved ones that were found in the last 72 hours that came to our attention.

First, I want to acknowledge and send love out to all of our relatives across the country from coast to coast to coast. It has been an incredibly devastating, raw, brutal 72 hours upon learning this information. And I often say and our people often say what happens to one of us, happens to all of us. And so I send my love and deepest respect and strength to each of the families across the country who are now sitting in their communities and sitting among their families, wondering if the little ones that are found in the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School are their loved ones—is that their brother or sister or auntie or daughter or son. I send all of my love to each and every one of you.

This morning, I had the opportunity to go to The Forks to pay my respects to the vigil that is being set up there. And as I laid down my tobacco, an elder came up. Her name was Sandra *[phonetic]*. She's from Swan Lake First Nation, and she just started crying and I comforted her. And once she stopped crying, she asked me if I would put down her flowers and the two pairs of little shoes that she had, and I did that.

And we started to talk and she said to me, she said, these little children are pushing the truth up through the ground. And I thought that was so poignant and so true and so beautiful, that here are these little ones that are putting right in our face, in all of our faces, the colonial legacy of this country and what colonization took out on the bodies of our children and the heart of our families and our communities.

She said, as well, she shared with me that she hopes that all of those little ones make it back home. And she says, you know, people will say that it's so difficult, it will be so difficult to find their homes. And she says, but it wasn't difficult to take them out of their communities, away from their families, so we should put more effort into the repatriation of these little ones.

I want to say here that this moment, it is a seminal moment in our collective history and it demands from all of us that we do more, but it certainly demands more from settlers and even more from all levels of government. It demands that governments, all levels of government right now commit to the TRCs 94 calls

to action, that we do not go another day in this country, in our territories, where we do not have strategies and commitments on how to implement all of those 94 calls to action, which includes searching and investigating all sites of former Indian residential schools across the country to see if there are similar graves of children who never made it home.

I reached out to my uncle yesterday, as many of us have done to our relatives who are former—or are survivors of residential school. My uncle actually received one of the highest awards across Canada in respect of his settlement, which is the level of abuse that he went through.

And I asked him if he was okay, and he said yes. And he said, what I want, he said, in Sagkeeng, where my mom is buried and my grandparents, in the back of that burial there are so many little crosses. And we don't know who's there. And he says, I want that—I want us to find out who's buried there, who's buried there and to bring them home for those families.

I thank everyone in the House. Again, I thank—I send my love to everyone across the country.

Miigwech.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to acknowledge my sister colleague from St. Johns for bringing forward this important matter of urgent public importance today. This is but one of the reasons why it's so good that we have anishinaabekweg [*Indigenous women*] in the Chamber of the Legislative Assembly.

At this time, it is with a heavy heart that I want to send my condolences to the families of the 215 children who were found in that mass grave. And I also want to take a moment to acknowledge and to say to the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation that we grieve with you and we honour you for bearing the pain it must have caused to share this news about 215 of your children so that this country could be reminded of the truth.

At least five of us MLAs here are the descendants of survivors, but all of us inherit their legacy—every single one of us.

I myself am the survivor of a son who shared a bunk with a boy who was killed while the two of them were incarcerated at St. Mary's Indian Residential School. I am a father to three children, the youngest of whom is the same age as the youngest victim found in Kamloops.

If my wife Lisa and I were born a generation earlier, would we be raising our own children? We all know the answer to that question. And every single Indigenous mother, father and parent that I know has been asking them some variation of those words over the past few days.

And so I ask every non-Indigenous person out there to contemplate how you, your family, your community would have been affected if all the children had been taken away. What would have happened to the child taken and to the parent left behind?

Now, at this time, I want to acknowledge the many non-Indigenous people who have used their platforms to raise awareness about the 215 children over the past few days. But I also have to acknowledge that many Indigenous people still ask: how would our country respond if the remains of 215 children were found at the site of a former public school? Until we can answer honestly that our collective response to this has been the same as our collective response would be to that, then the project of reconciliation still lays before us.

Sadly, we know for a fact that was happened at Kamloops is not an isolated incident. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada documented thousands of deaths in residential schools and, as Commissioner Marie Wilson said, many residential schools had cemeteries but no playgrounds.

Brandon Indian Residential School listed 11 names buried there, but researcher Katherine Nichols has documented a number of additional deaths and believes that there may be more than 70 children buried at the site.

*(15:20)

There are more than a dozen other former residential schools across Manitoba. There is a former residential school five kilometres away—less than five kilometres away than from where we are gathered now. There's another residential school an hour down the Trans-Canada from there. There's another residential school one hour to the northeast of where we meet today, and so on and so forth.

Every one of these sites must be searched so that we can know the truth, for without truth there can be no reconciliation.

I want to acknowledge that it was the Indigenous government of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation that undertook the heart-wrenching research that uncovered this mass grave. In a just world, that

work would have at least been shared by the governments that facilitated and funded the residential schools. Federal, provincial and municipal governments must now join the effort. Of course, Indigenous peoples must lead this, but I only mean to make a simple point.

If we live in a Canada where reconciliation is a priority, then it cannot only be Indigenous peoples who seek dignity for Indigenous children who lay in unmarked graves. As TRC chair Senator Murray Sinclair said, words are not enough. Specifically, we must implement all 94 calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I want to remind the House of the words that residential school survivor Ted Fontaine shared with us here when he spoke at committee on The Orange Shirt Day Act in 2017. He beseeched us all to implement the 94 calls to action.

He said, and I quote: The 94 recommendations that came, they weren't devised by government or a body selected to come up with recommendations. Those 94 recommendations came from people like me in our hearings. We sat for hours and hours talking about what was required for this country. It's not a document of guilt. It's a document of love and hope and justice. End quote.

Ted passed away earlier this month.

People like Mr. Fontaine have always known the truth about what happened in residential schools, and they carried that burden with them throughout their lives, and today we are being collectively asked to bear only a tiny fraction of that.

And yet they emerged from that pain with a road map for the future of our country, grounded in love and hope and justice. None of us in good conscience can ignore those calls. Let us meet their calls with action. Let us support the calls made by my sister colleague here today.

And I want to say to all the young neechies [*phonetic*] out there: wear your hair long for all the times that they cut our hair, speak your language for all the times that that was forbidden, live your life to your fullest potential. Make your mind strong, your body strong, your spirit strong because when you do that, you will show the survivors the reward of what they have been fighting for all these years.

Miigwech gi-bizindawiyeg. [*Thanks for listening to me.*]

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I just want to acknowledge my colleagues that spoke before me and my colleague from St. Johns for bringing this MUPI forward. This is super important.

I want to also acknowledge all of the survivors who are suffering right now and since this brought up so many painful memories, and all of the Kamloops community that are grieving and are grieving the loss of 215 of their children—children, Deputy Speaker, as young as three years old.

I had my two grandchildren this weekend and was watching them play together thinking, like, who can do this to children? Like, who does that? Monsters. Like, people entrusted to take care of these children, to love, to care for them, to nurture them, to educate them.

I'm an educator and I can tell you every single child that entered into my classroom was like my child. I did whatever I could to take care of them, to love them, to nurture them, to educate them, to let them know that they were valued, that they were sacred, that they had a place—that there are people who cared about them.

And I think about these children and how they must have felt being away from their families, feeling unloved, unsupported, nowhere to go, no one to take care of them, and how, you know, people could do this to little defenceless children.

I want to, you know, remind people, because I know there's people watching today that are survivors or family members of survivors, and they've watched the pain that their loved ones have gone through and they've lived it with them, that there's some help lines. There's the Indian residential school support line, which is 1-866-818-3505. And then there's also the crisis line, which is an emergency line, that's 24 hours. That's 1-800-721-0066.

And I also just want to, you know, implore all of our colleagues in the House, this is something that we should all be standing up for, we should all be supporting, and we should all be demanding that all levels of government do more. We can't allow this to continue to happen.

We know that there's more children out there. There's 160 residential schools throughout Canada and probably 160 unmarked graves and thousands of children in those graves that never came home, whose families are wondering where they are, what happened to them, when they were told, oh, they ran away,

they ran away from the residential school, we've never seen them.

Well, I'm sure these 215 families were told the same thing. And we know that there's more children out there, and our government has a responsibility. And I want to implore all Canadians to write their governments to demand that their governments search every single one of those 160 residential schools and do what Kamloops did.

I want to say, also, thanks to the BC Pathways to Healing program, because they're the ones that provided the funding, not the government. This group provided the funding to that community who were able to take ground-penetrating radar, which brought those 215 children to light. And we can't allow those other children out there to remain in unmarked graves.

So I just want to say that, you know, we need to all stand united in this and that we all have to support this and we have to do much better. And when we talk about reconciliation, this is part of reconciliation. Reconciliation is bringing home all of the children.

Miigwech.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): It is with a heavy heart and a heavy spirit that I sit here being able to have this venue and have this avenue and have this privilege to be able to address and bring awareness, and it is something that generations of our people have never had the opportunity to do.

I do want to make mention that over the course of these sitting sessions virtually that I've had, I've had the opportunity to have a number of different backgrounds, a number of different star blankets to represent my culture, to represent our people, to represent our generations to come, our generations that have been lost.

And today I have my favourite. I have one that was made by an elder, Isabel Phillips, in our community, and also carries the name of my six children on it. And I'm fortunate that I do have that ability to have my children with me and to know where they are.

*(15:30)

As of this moment, this exact moment in time, I know where they are. And that was taken away from our ancestors, from our grandparents, from our parents. That ability to be a family, cohesive unit, was taken away and it's still something that's not answered to this day.

Some people know—some Indigenous people know what happened to their families. They know where they are. They survived or they know where they are. Others don't; and my condolences to the 215 lives that were lost and the families that were forever torn apart. But we know the number is higher. We know that number is in the thousands, and it's something that is very difficult.

As our leader had mentioned earlier: what if this happened someplace else? What if this happened in a public school in the city of Winnipeg? And there is—there was a residential school, as he had mentioned, just a matter of kilometres away from where that Chamber sits today. So what if that happened today, five kilometres from where you sit today? What would happen?

And even just simple questions like that are now being asked by youth, by Indigenous, by non-Indigenous people, not only in Manitoba, not only in the country, but around the world.

So why not answer those questions? Why not answer the question of why? Why did this happen? Why did this need to happen? Why is this still continued to this day being a denial, being something that is not talked about, that is something that is looked at as shameful if you talk about it? It's a part of history. It's a part of our history back then and it's a part of our current history right now as we speak.

When we talk about all the young lives—the brothers, the sisters, the nieces, nephews—in my ministerial statement today I also talked about the future mothers, the fathers, the future grandmothers, the future grandfathers that will never come to be, that'll never come to be that. So those family trees that were planted when our youth were born and then they were taken away to residential school to never ever return again, they had their family tree destroyed.

So we've never seen those results. And if anybody's sitting in the Chamber today—or anybody in this country in this province today—was ever or ever had a potential parent that was to become a victim and killed in the residential school system, you would not be here today. And that's an eye-opening experience for some people, to not be able to comprehend exactly what that means.

Entire generations of people were extinguished. It was meant to assimilate, but it came down to being an extermination.

And it's something that if you ever had the opportunity to read about a residential school survivor, let alone be able to have that discussion with a survivor and have them still have the ability within themselves to disclose and tell and retell that—and the courage that that takes to be able to say that and to be able to relive that experience time and time again, and they relive it for the hopes that nobody ever has to go through that again.

The sacrifices that were made by our ancestors in the residential school system, those sacrifices can't be for naught. It has to be used as a tool to improve the lives for Indigenous people and those Indigenous generations, and those families that are still feeling those effects to this day. And it can't fall on deaf ears—so when we talk about, oh, it's with a heavy heart, a heavy spirit, those atrocities still survive today and they still show and rear their ugly head today.

When the member from Fort Rouge had spoke about, you know, grow your hair. That meant something that's—that may be just symbolic to somebody else, but in this part of our culture—so I also tell those same youth, you know, beat your drum. Dance your spirit. Because that is who we are and that is our lost ancestors now living through us today, and it's something we can't forget.

When we talked about the definition of what the matter of public importance is, you know, will the public interest suffer? Yes, the public interest will absolutely suffer if we continue to ignore the atrocities that occurred in residential school, if we continue to not talk about it and discuss it like it was something so shameful that it can't be talked about.

We have to be able to talk about it—not just Indigenous people. We can't be looked at the ones and the only ones to be able to talk about it. Society in general has to talk about it so that we can improve, so they can bring closure, so that we can bring a sense of worth to all those Indigenous lives that were lost.

They were people. They were our generations. They were our future generations that were wiped out. They were wiped out and we never have—we'll never have that ability to see them again and hear from them again.

So, with those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say miigwech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go on to the PC debate.

Hon. Eileen Clarke (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations): I want to thank the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) for bringing this MUPI forward today. I think it's very relevant that we do deal with this.

I also want to acknowledge the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith). As grandmothers, the time with our grandchildren is very precious to us, and I'm sure for her, within her Indigenous culture, this is extremely painful.

The discovery of the remains of the 215 children last week was a sad reminder of an ugly and an unfortunate chapter of Canada's history. Canada's residential schools were established as a part of a policy of assimilation, or, as it was put more bluntly in the past, to kill the Indian in the child.

The residential school system removed children from their homes. The system was designated to separate children from their families and from their communities. Residential schools are an unfortunate relic of the past, but the impact of residential schools is still felt by the survivors and the families of those children to this day.

While Canada's residential schools are now closed, it was only last year that the Manitoba government ended birth alerts. Many of our Indigenous colleagues felt that the old birth alert system unfairly impacted parents who are Indigenous Manitobans, and decades after the last residential was closed, they felt that the government was still unfairly separating Indigenous mothers from their children.

We all felt the same way, and that's why I'm glad that birth alerts are over and we built a new system. We'll focus on keeping mothers and their children rightfully together. Ending birth alerts is a hopeful sign, a sign that we are recognizing the mistakes of the past and taking the lessons we learned to work with, in partnership, with Indigenous Manitobans and moving forward on a path of reconciliation together. However, it's also regrettable that this hopeful sign came so late and the birth alerts continued until 2020.

I mentioned earlier today in my ministerial statement how much I enjoyed making my three grandsons their favourite meals, and I thought about that over the weekend. And I think of those young Indigenous children, taken out of their homes, not having their mom or their grandma's or auntie's fresh bannock or duck soup or fresh fish that their dads had caught that day. I can't imagine what it would be like if they were removed from their homes and they went hungry at

residential schools instead and I not knowing where they were.

Sadly, many Indigenous Canadians do not have an image of that horror. They actually lived through it. The mistreatment and the neglect of the children at these schools was appalling. Children faced abuse, starvation and poor living conditions. The trauma of residential school survivors and their families is inter-generational trauma, and many Indigenous communities are still feeling the effects today.

One of my first visits in 2016 when I was appointed to this position was to Waywayseecappo, and I was going to meet with the chief and council that day. It was midsummer and the chief was away that day and we were waiting for some of the council, but we started the meeting.

* (15:40)

After not too long, a tall, lanky gentleman clearly much senior in years to the other councillors came into the meeting—a tall, lanky guy with a cowboy hat, cowboy boots and, clearly, a good heart and personality. He explained that he was regretful that he was late for the meeting, but he had been at his school reunion.

It was either a Wednesday or a Thursday of that week and I thought it was rather funny. Typically, school reunions are at school on weekends. And I said, well, it must've been a really good school reunion if you're only getting home now, and he just kind of smiled and he said, it was great, it was really good.

And I said where was your reunion, or what school? And I thought, you know, for an elder his age, having a school reunion, that was quite something. He said, Brandon residential school, and I immediately felt some shame for making light of this reunion and I apologized. I said, I'm very sorry, I didn't realize, you know, is this something new? And he said, well, for about the last year, we've been meeting once a week and we are learning to talk about our experience in residential schools.

And he alluded to the fact that he felt like he—that he was a survivor, but he also told me that he had never spoke of that time in his life until one year ago. And I thought, wow, you know, how sad that he wasn't emotionally able to be talking about it.

And he said, it just wasn't talked about, we did not talk about it. But he says, I can talk about it now. And he did, and he shared a lot with us, and that was

probably one of the most remarkable experiences of the past five years.

Since then, I've talked to many more survivors and there are a lot of different stories. I've talked to a couple of nurses from up at Sasye Dene [*phonetic*], twin sisters who'd been in residential school. They told me about their time there, but they had survived well and they both went on to be nurses so that they could help other people. It had pushed them in a good direction. Not all people were that lucky.

But I do feel fortunate for the experiences that I've had this past five years with survivors and families who have spoke to me of their experiences.

When Prime Minister Harper issued a formal apology for residential schools in 2008, it was believed that over 4,000 of the 150,000 children who attended these schools had died while in care at the residential schools. And I agree with the member from Point Douglas, how many of the ran—were told they ran away but perhaps they didn't.

There is a lot of truths that need to be told, and maybe those truths are coming out now through the tiny shoes of these individuals that we're talking about now. Perhaps they are going to be the catalyst that moves us all to a better discussion and doing the right thing. And if it is, I'm thankful for that.

The discovery of 215 children in Kamloops could mean that this number is undercounted. Truth and—pardon me—truth and reconciliation calls to action Nos. 71 to 76 are mainly directed at the federal government and relate to identifying and documenting deaths and burial sites related to residential schools, and have appropriate memorial ceremonies and commemorative markers to honour all the deceased.

Manitoba and other provinces are still at an earlier stage in exploring the grounds of residential schools. However, our government is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous leaders and communities, residential school survivors and the federal government to advance the missing children burial information calls to action.

Our Province has also made a public commitment to take measures to advance reconciliation in response to the national inquiry's call to action. Work is ongoing on a wide variety of activities that align with the calls to action and support efforts and are still illustrated in our path to reconciliation annual report.

This government will ensure that the ceremonial rites are considered and proper reburial practices are

respected. As Canadians, we must move forward together, without forgetting the lessons we've learned from the injustices of the past. We must remain committed to working together with Indigenous Canadians to improve people's lives. We must continue to take action in helping to protect Indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBQQIA+ persons who in recent years have faced an even greater risk of experiencing violence.

I was pleased last fall to attend the Portage residential school at Keeshkeemaquah when they were declared a historic site of residential schools—one of only two in all of Canada. It's a real honour to have this historical site named in Manitoba. And I look forward to working with all the survivors and Long Plain First Nation as they restructure this building into a museum that will tell the stories so that people that come to visit Canada—all visitors, whether you're from Manitoba, Canada, or beyond—that they will have an opportunity to actually learn.

I walked through the halls of that school with an Indigenous law officer when I was there. There was still in some rooms that were locked, there was little beds, there was desks, and there were other remnants of that actual school because it was only closed in 1975, the year my son was born. And we went downstairs to some of the locked rooms down there, and she explained to me what each of those rooms were.

And it was cold, and it was damp, and it was eerie. And I've known this young woman for many, many years, and she said to me, sometimes, Eileen, I can feel—I hear the children crying. I hear them sobbing and, you know, it just made my blood run cold. It was such a grim thought, even of them existing inside those facilities so far from home.

So today and going forward, I think we need to make a renewed commitment that we will do better. It's on us. We are the present. If we want a better future for our children, for our grandchildren, we have to do better. We have to do collaboratively. But finally, we must remember that all children matter.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: I want to begin by thanking members of the Chamber who were instrumental in making this discussion happen this afternoon.

I want to thank the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), who I was able to speak to this morning about arranging for this time. Thank her leader, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew). Of course,

thank our Indigenous Minister and also the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie), who I had the opportunity to hear the majority of his comments as well, and I look forward to hearing the comments by the Liberal members.

This is a place where there's often great debate and sometimes great division. I don't believe that that will be the case today.

All of us were extremely saddened. I—you know, I was going to say that all of us were shocked, but I know that some of my colleagues, maybe the member for St. Johns and others would say it shouldn't have been shocking, that this has been discussed for a long time.

And yet I know for many Canadians it will have been a—not just sad piece of news that they've heard but a shocking piece of news as well. And that speaks for the fact that we still have much to learn, that our own journey in reconciliation is far from over, and then all of us have things that we need to reconcile with either individually amongst ourselves, collectively as a society and that we all have much to learn.

Yesterday during the morning, I understand that there was some discussion about the lowering of the flags at the—outside of the Legislative Building, and so I had some discussions. There was probably more of a protocol in lowering flags on the Legislative grounds than maybe there should be. But there is a long-standing protocol for that to take place.

But, certainly, initially, when I heard the call for flags to be lowered at half-staff, I and members of our government were very much supportive of that. I know that the member for Fort Rouge publicly, I think on social media, was calling for that as well.

And so my family and I came into the Legislature in the late part of the morning. We understood that that the federal government would be making some declaration, and they did, ultimately asking that the flags be lowered at half-staff at the—on the Peace Tower, I believe, in Ottawa.

* (15:50)

And we—of course, then we asked then that the flags be lowered here on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislature, and when we arrived yesterday there was a group that included survivors outside as well, and I had the opportunity to speak to a couple of the organizers but also the survivors as well, and they held a smudge ceremony.

My son was able to participate, my wife was able to participate for the cleansing of our ears, the cleansing of our eyes, the touching of our heart, as well, and it was quite an emotional thing to participate in and to hear from some of the survivors, who didn't speak much, but when they spoke, it was very, very powerful.

My wife commented on how moved she was by and for my son. I think he had more questions about it because he's only 14 years old, and while he has certainly heard, both in the school and, more broadly, in the news a little bit about residential schools, he doesn't have a full understanding.

So it was actually a very good opportunity for us to speak not only about the cultural significance of a smudging ceremony but then also about residential schools and the atrocity of it and learning from it. And so I thought that that was also very helpful for us, you know, to have that opportunity.

And then I was—we weren't able to—we didn't lower the flags immediately. The participants at the ceremony wanted to be involved in that and we encouraged them to be involved in it and so I think there were some pictures that demonstrated the survivors and others who were gathered near the—gathered but still distanced with masks—but nearby the flags and they held a little ceremony as first the Canadian flag and then the Manitoba flag were lowered at half-staff.

And so, I'm glad that they were there. I'm glad that they're still here and they were able to participate in that little ceremony.

I know that it doesn't—some people might say, well, it's just symbolic. It's just symbolism. But, you know, sometimes symbolism does matter. Sometimes that is important. And that isn't the last step, and it should never be the last step. But it doesn't mean it can't be something that is important.

I know as well that the Legislature—there'll be an orange light that was shone on it last night and it'll continue to be shone for four days. And I think that that is also important because it causes people to ask questions and it causes people like my son, who might not have all of the historical knowledge, to then ask about what is it that happened at residential schools and how could it happen and how could it be avoided?

Because I think that all of us, as parents in this generation, can't imagine—it's been spoken about today and I think it would be spoken about in other places—just absolutely can't imagine the loss of

our children, and then potentially never knowing what happened to them. I mean, it's just absolutely unfathomable.

So sometimes in this Legislature we talk a lot and there a lot of words and we all sometimes get a little bit prideful about the things that we say, but then there are a lot of times, like today, where the words don't seem to be enough and that there really isn't anything that you can properly say on a day like today when we've learned about this terrible discovery in Kamloops, and I don't pretend to have those words, but I hope that all members know I think that we share a common grief for this discovery and for what happened and a dedication to learn from it.

So, again, I want to say thank you, miigwech, to the member for St. John's (Ms. Fontaine), to the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), to all the members who have reached out on this issue, and I look forward to all of us finding a way for a brighter path and better days.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there any more speakers on the PC side?

If there isn't, we'll go on to the independent Liberals and we'll go to the honourable member for St. Boniface.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I'll try to be brief. I want to save some time for my colleague from River Heights.

Thirty-one years ago, I think this month, I attended a student conference in Brandon and the speaker was Tomson Highway. He was born on a trapline in northern Manitoba and was also a classically trained piano player and a very fine playwright, and he was the first person that I ever heard about residential schools from.

And though we didn't know it at the time, we were nearing a turning point in Manitoban and Canadian history, because the Meech Lake Accord—a constitutional amendment—was meeting resistance in Manitoba, especially from First Nations. And it would be defeated in this building by the lone voice of Elijah Harper, an NDP MLA holding an eagle feather and simply saying no.

And when he did that, there was an incredible sense of unity in Manitoba and a real gratitude, because there was a genuine sense that First Nations had saved Canada. There were people who'd said that at the time. And it was—there was an incredible atmosphere at the time.

And Tomson Highway said at that conference: you know, we're going to hear a lot of those stories about residential schools. The stories are going to come out. And they did. And they are horrifying and they're very difficult to deal with, because we're talking about the suffering of children, the suffering of families and communities, and grief—unfathomable grief and unanswered questions.

As Canadians, we tell ourselves stories about the people we think we are, the people we want to be. But the story of residential schools and what was happened—not what has happened, what Canada has done to First Nations, what we have done to First Nations—is the bitter reality of our country and our province.

Because even at that time—30 years ago, as a university student—we opposed apartheid in South Africa. We saw it as being terrible and unjust. We were willing to stand up and oppose injustices in other countries but were often blind to the terrible injustices in our country.

And here in Manitoba, in the 1930s, the government burned out Métis settlements in Manitoba. In the 1950s there were starvation experiments on children—First Nations children in The Pas. There was the forced relocation of the Dene—resulted in half the community dying.

And we have to accept that Canada betrayed its responsibility, that when we talk about treaty land acknowledgements—treaties are agreements between people—that Canada betrayed its responsibility to uphold the integrity and honour of the Crown and fulfill our obligations.

And if you read the book *A National Crime*, it's all laid out. The person who wrote it—it was printed in 1922, that's 99 years ago—and he was calling for justice. And as it happens, my aunt went to law school. The number of First Nations in the 1970s—including Ovide Mercredi, she was a law partner with Marion Meadmore, who was the first First Nations woman to be called to the bar in Canada—and I remember even then my aunt talking about how easy it was for a social worker to take a child away.

And, ultimately, the call from a century ago was a call for justice. There were people who knew the truth and called it—for it—for a century ago. He was calling for the Crown to meet its obligations through treaties. It was calling on governments to keep their promises and live up to the lofty principles we all espouse.

And the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada is fundamentally about justice. It was modeled on what happened in South Africa, but in South Africa they dismantled apartheid first and then they had a truth and reconciliation commission. Here we had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but the system is still in place, and we're still tearing apart Indigenous families.

We need to accept and recognize the truth of the past. And we need to commit to changing the present and the future, and that means energy and action and resources.

I want to thank the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) and all members for bringing this forward, the member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie) and the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) and the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) for your very touching words.

But the arc of history will not bend toward justice on its own. It requires our toil.

And I'll end with a saying. It's said that when faced with a hard moral decision, the hard one is usually the right one. And committing to the work of healing and reconciliation is hard work, but it is the right work. And ultimately, as all members of this House, that is our shared responsibility.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The honourable member for Tyndall Park (Ms. Lamoureux). *[interjection]* It's okay, the honourable member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: Seventeen years ago, in the spring of 2004, I visited the friendship centre in Brandon. I was shown a plaque by Andrea Hinch-Bourns, which honoured children who'd stayed at the Brandon residential school between 1896 and 1923.

During this period, children were brought to the Brandon residential school from communities all over Manitoba. Sadly, as marked by the plaque, too many of these children never got to go home.

* (16:00)

Before this, I hadn't realized the tragic toll in lives which has resulted during times when children attended residential schools. It was a shock to learn this. It was a shock I will not forget.

Recently, we've learned with shock, at the discovery of the bodies of 215 children who died at the Kamloops residential school. It is a shock that has resonated across Canada.

I begin by extending my sympathy to the members of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation who were, have been or are again being traumatized by the experience that this residential school or by its recent discovery.

Since I visited the Brandon Friendship Centre and saw the plaque, much more has been learned of the situation there. We now suspect that there were many more children who attended the Brandon residential school who died while they were there and were never able to go home.

Sadly, too many of the families of the children who died were not even properly notified. The loss of a child for any reason is one of the most tragic things that can happen to a family. A child being lost without any word of what happened is unbelievable.

If we consider our reactions to the discovery of the bodies of the 215 children found in Kamloops, we reflect upon the increased awareness we are experiencing of the tragedies which occurred at residential schools. We live today in the shadow of the work of Justice Murray Sinclair and his fellow Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners: Dr. Marie Wilson and Chief Wilton Littlechild. They and many who worked at or told stories to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have provided so much detail of what happened at the residential schools.

Their work and subsequent efforts have identified more than 4,000 who died from disease or accident while attending residential schools. The recent discovery emphasizes what has long been suspected: that there are many more still to be found.

We must use today to rededicate ourselves to implementing all the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Progress so far has been too slow.

Recommendation 71 to 76 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission deals specifically with missing children and burial information. These recommendations highlight much of the work that still needs to be done to identify burial sites and to search these sites, and to provide information on children who died when they were in residential schools to the families who lost children.

In Manitoba, we need a major effort to search all sites in our province to look for additional missing children. Let us all ensure this effort occurs.

These and many other calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission need attention. They

need attention so that more can be known of what happened. They need attention as an important part of the process of reconciliation.

It is a disappointment that the Province has not made more progress on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There needs to be much greater urgency to act. It is to be hoped that the incredible loss, which has just been discovered in the Kamloops community, will re-energize all of us to act, to move forward in reconciliation in what we do every day, to reveal more of the history, even when it is painful, and to rededicate ourselves to improving how our precious children and grandchildren are cared for today.

And in particular, helping children and families so that no more need to be apprehended and put in the care of Child and Family Services, and that where children are still apprehended, as about 10,000 children still are, their connections to their family are maintained and they are helped to the extent that we can do as well as they possibly can.

These are my thoughts today. My prayers and thoughts continue for this children who were lost, and I share with all MLAs the hope and expectation that we can do better in the world ahead.

Miigwech. Merci. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We'll just have a little bit of a pause here for a bit.

I'm going to recognize the Minister of Justice to call Estimates for the rest of the afternoon.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Deputy Government House Leader): I move that we resolve into the Committee of Supply for the rest of the day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You don't need to move, you just mention if—the announcement that we're going into Estimates is all we require.

Mr. Friesen: Would the House—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Resolve into—

Mr. Friesen: Please—would the House please move to Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. The House is resolved into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair after you have a few—a short break.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

ROOM 254

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (16:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Executive Council. As previously announced, as there is only one resolution, the discussion will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): I want to thank all of our colleagues on the committee today and also to the Premier and his staff for continuing to, I guess, work through this committee process of the Committee of Supply.

I wanted to begin just by picking up some of the discussion that we were having in question period. We know it is a really severe situation in the ICU and, you know, the time limits in QP don't always give enough time for a thorough accounting of some of the information to be shared.

So I recognize the Premier did share that there were eight nurses which have arrived, ER nurses, if I recall correctly off the top of my head. There was an additional request for nurses and respiratory therapists. Just to begin, I wonder if the Premier can let us know when those additional resources—human resources—would be expected.

Hon. Brian Pallister (Premier): Yes, beyond the information I shared with the member earlier, I'll commit to updating him when we have more to share. But I don't have anything else to add to the personnel that I had referenced earlier.

I didn't reference earlier contact tracing, I don't think. That—we had asked for 50 contact tracers. I should emphasize that that will only add about 5 or 6 per cent to our actual contact-tracing contingent list that's been working double time here recently, but it would be helpful. But I have nothing to add on that front yet. So I'll continue to provide updates as I get them to the House, and I'd certainly share those with the member.

I gathered up some—the member raised Hydro and then in a subsequent question and raised Hydro issues as pertaining to privatization or something to that effect. So I gathered some additional info on questions that were asked there. I can share that, but I'll probably run out of time. I'll just see if there's any subsequent questions.

* (16:20)

Mr. Kinew: So, also in question period today, the Premier said—I forget the exact verbiage—but basically that there was an ongoing conversation, perhaps additional resources being requested from the federal government.

So can the Premier give us an update in terms of what has been requested in addition to the initial ask of 50 and—50 critical-care nurses, 50 contact tracers and the RTs as well?

Mr. Pallister: Yes. No, nothing's changed from the original information I shared with the member on the asks last week, and then on the update today, there's nothing new there. But I will share with the member and the committee the information I undertook to provide on Teshmont, since it was raised. It was raised in the context, I think, of an accusation about the government or Hydro wanting to privatize.

I should just clarify for members that Manitoba Hydro purchased, back when they were in the midst of taking bipole west line under—to task. Against the advice of experts at Manitoba Hydro and against the position of their own board, they decided—the previous administration, not, I should mention, the members of the opposition presently—undertook to build the bipole line up the west side of the province and back, in a big giant loop that would carry it several hundred kilometres further than was necessary, at great loss of transmission.

At that point in time, Manitoba Hydro undertook to buy a share in Teshmont consulting, which was to give it primacy when it needed engineering services for the bipole construction. When it finished the bipole waste—west line, it then sold its share in Teshmont consulting to Stantec Consulting.

So in 2002, it bought shares in Teshmont for local HVDC expertise that would help it construct Bipole III, transmission line and converter stations, and that would give them consulting work, for a time at least, relevant to those two projects for stations and HVDC divisions. When bipole went into service on July the—of '18, Hydro decided that was the right time to divest itself of its shares in Tesmont [*phonetic*].

So, far from being an example of the intention of Hydro itself to be private or of the government to—this was simply a practical business decision since there wasn't a need for the services to the degree there had been during the construction period for the Bipole III west line. There were no job losses at Hydro as a consequence; no impact on Hydro's operations. Hydro will continue to be a customer of Stantec, which now has Teshmont consulting as part of its operations. So, the business relationships will continue as needed.

The business decision made in the best interests of customers doesn't constitute privatization in any way, shape or form and to link the two is erroneous and factually inaccurate, and I would tell members of the committee to understand that the Manitoba government had no role whatsoever in any decision around Teshmont. That's a Manitoba Hydro decision.

So just to share that with members and to put that issue to bed. I hope that gives clarity and peace of mind to the members that I am sincere when I say I believe that the real owners of Manitoba Hydro should remain Manitobans. And so that is not on the agenda nor has it been on the agenda.

Mr. Kinew: I think many Manitobans were really disappointed to hear the Premier attack people in ICU and to blame people who are fighting for their lives, many of whom were intubated at the time when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) went out and carried out that—basically what resembled a partisan attack, although, of course, it was on the people that his government has a responsibility to care for.

But I wondered whether the Premier can share any information about the following: you know, can the Premier tell this committee the number of people who are currently in hospital that violated public health orders or in some other way didn't co-operate with public health?

Mr. Pallister: Sharing that information with him would—clearly, based on the member's earlier preamble, open me up to charges that I'm somehow blaming the people in the ICUs who didn't follow public health orders for not following public health orders. It's not my intention to blame anyone. It's important that Manitobans know the importance of following public health orders on their own merits.

I would encourage the member to apologize, as the federal leader has already done—the NDP leader—for violating public health orders, immediately apologizing. And good for Mr. Singh for doing that.

That being said, it's—you know, that horse is out of the barn for quite a while. It appears the member's pretty proud of his willingness to break public health orders. He shouldn't be. He should be ashamed of himself and he should apologize.

That being said, the member did say on October 1st, and this is why I'm addressing—October 8th, I'm sorry—that—and I'll quote from Hansard: nonetheless, this Premier and his Cabinet and his advisers sold off Teshmont. Now it looks like they're making moves to sell off other subsidiaries soon, while Manitoba Hydro—and then he asked the question: which Manitoba Hydro subsidiary does he plan to sell off next? Would it be Manitoba Hydro Telecom, Manitoba Hydro International? And then he appropriately and quite rightly ran out of time.

So I'll simply say to the member: there's absolutely nothing in his assertions from October 8th, which he's repeated numerous times since then. And I should share with him in respect of Manitoba Hydro International, that it's a relic the NDP maintained—in particular, the foreign-consulting aspects of Manitoba Hydro International—long past any point of logic that, really, as much as there may have been great work undertaken by Manitoba Hydro International, it was not a focus on Manitobans, most certainly, that guided that work.

I can also share with him that other Canadian utilities long ago abandoned their overseas consulting operations because they were incredibly heavy on capital and risky. And so overseas activity undertaken by the previous NDP government through Manitoba Hydro International was not something that Manitoba Hydro of the present day felt was in keeping with their focus on strategically going into Manitoba-centred activities that could benefit Manitobans.

The overseas business that has done good work, I'm sure, in more than 60 countries over the last 20 years and worked with various governments is an unpredictable and high risky—a highly risk-oriented type of business. It's perilous potentially. It's—the focus of the work is in unstable countries in Africa and Asia.

To give the member an example, one of the contracts was a World Bank contract in Kenya through the Kenya Power and Lighting Company, which has 10,000 employees. It's a big operation; a million customers. But back in 2008, Kenya was hit with clashes—violent clashes that killed hundreds of people. And so you're talking about Manitoba Hydro personnel in their foreign-consulting operations being exposed to

that very, very high level of risk in these other countries. It's a huge challenge and a highly—one that exposes Manitobans to high risk.

* (16:30)

So this is not—that's just one example; I can give the member many more—and I think weighing those risks was what other provinces did when they decided that it wasn't a wise investment for them to continue doing through public utilities. Yet, under the NDP, we continued to stay on the global stage, quietly, most certainly. I don't think most members are aware of the operations. If they are, the member could certainly share some of his knowledge of Manitoba Hydro International's consulting arm with the committee about that. I—for me, a lot of this is news—and I followed things around the province and particularly with respect to Manitoba Hydro, their operations and goings and comings—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I'll just note the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is responding to question period questions from the last sitting, and I guess it took his team that amount of time to work up their comeback, so we'll look forward to their comebacks in the fall sitting for some of the issues that we raise today.

I do note that even though the Premier went out and publicly attacked people, that he can't provide any numbers to back it up on the hospitalization front, so I'd ask about the ICU front.

Can the Premier provide the number of people currently in ICU that violated public health orders or who didn't co-operate with public health?

Mr. Pallister: My—I would remind the member that close contacts to known cases is the cause of over two thirds of the people who've acquired COVID. They may have done that through accident, but given the public health orders, it's highly unlikely, unless the known case was someone in their household because we have public health restrictions which the member continues to not apologize for breaking, which would limit such close contact.

So, again, though the member keeps misrepresenting it, I will continue to urge Manitobans to follow public health orders he so willingly and blatantly disregarded; and I will remind all Manitobans to get vaccinated, and I will remind all Manitobans to co-operate once—if they are, unfortunately, diagnosed with COVID—co-operate with the contact-tracing

folks who are working their tail off to try to reduce the spread of COVID by notifying folks who are in contact with those—have been in contact with those who could have exposed them to COVID.

I would also remind the member that it was he who raised the issue of privatization at our last discussions with respect to Manitoba Hydro, and it is I who have undertaken to answer his questions. And so I'll continue to do that, as I have, throughout this process, as he knows every year he's been involved in it, unlike the previous NDP administration who wilfully ignored any request for information I might have had of them.

I should remind him that when he makes an accusation which is as significant as that this government is trying to privatize Manitoba Hydro, he should expect me to answer it, and I will. I'll remind him that virtually no other utility in Canada has any dealings outside of its own jurisdiction at all. Most Canadian utilities abandoned their overseas work for—years ago to focus on domestic issues.

So when he talks about privatization as a goal of the current Manitoba Hydro management, he's out of touch with reality. Hydro-Québec got out of their international involvement in 2005 and '06, back when the member opposite was a—I'm not sure—a, rapper or something.

In—Ontario Hydro used to have an international arm that did consulting work; they got out of that international operation in 2003. I don't think—they might've been accused at that time of privatizing, but I'm doubting it. Hydro-Québec got out of their international involvement. Ontario Hydro got out of their international involvement. Manitoba Hydro's talking about doing the same thing now, repatriating what they can use to provide better services to Manitobans, getting out of the international consulting field.

So, BC Hydro got out of their international consulting in 2001; SaskPower in the mid-2000s as well, entirely out of it. They do domestic work; that's what Manitoba Hydro is talking about focusing on—domestic within Canada at least, I understand.

I can share with the committee members their vision document if I can get it from somebody here and give you a better picture of their rationale, but their focus would be on Manitobans and power in, you know, Transcona and not so much in the Transvaal.

So they're going to be focusing on Manitoba services and Manitoba customers. Hardly an example of

anything other than focused management, and, certainly, it follows the decisions that were taken in other Canadian hydro utilities a decade or a decade and a half earlier than were taken here.

I guess it could be argued, if the member would like to, they should have done this sooner, but it could hardly be argued effectively based on other examples around Canada that they took the action. It could be argued too late that they took the action, not too early.

So, just sharing that with the members because it's Manitoba Hydro's decision to better reorganize their business model. That's what they're going to focus on doing and that's the intention. The arguments—the boogeyman—of privatization that the member likes to raise at every opportunity—like Pavlov's dog, he salivates every time I say hydro, he says, privatization.

The fact remains that the two examples—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook): Is my audio okay? Can I get a thumbs-up if I'm good there?

If I could ask the First Minister: with the discovery of the 215 children in Kamloops Indian Residential School, I'm wondering—and this was a discovery—it was something that's happened many generations ago, it's many years ago, but it's still happening today.

I'm just wondering if the First Minister can respond and comment exactly how Manitoba as a government is going to support the search for and the disclosure of potential massive grave sites here in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, I've got a good list of activities that we're undertaking. Most of them are in partnership, as the member understands, with the feds, because it's the feds that have the lead on this. But I'm looking for a list, so they're just going to track it down—of activities, and I'll share that as soon as I get it from my able assistant.

* (16:40)

But this is heartfelt pain, this event in Kamloops, for many; a reopening of sores for so many people that I'll throw a couple of quick things on the record here. I had the experience of visiting that site in Kamloops when I was working with a friend of mine named Manny Jules.

Mr. Jules was a chief for many years of that Kamloops band. And we were working through ideas

on how to advance equality of opportunity for Indigenous Canadians through a variety of means. It was—had a couple really good days benefitting from Mr. Jules's experience. And there was an awareness then of the—that there was a site, but it wasn't the detail that came out on the weekend. And that work has now resulted in the knowledge of over 200 children buried on that site.

And I can't begin to fully appreciate—but I try to—the degree of pain that is being experienced now by victims of residential schools and by survivors and by their families from this. I shared my sympathies with the Opposition Leader earlier, sincere sympathies, because I know his dad had this experience. And I know that wasn't a good experience, to put it mildly and not to be euphemistic about it.

This is a conversation that has to happen, you know. And when survivors tell their stories, it's not just so they can lament. People sometimes say—that's not the reason. The reason is so we can learn together, heal together, move forward together. It's vitally important that Canadians understand and listen to these stories and they understand and listen to the realities of the experiences, life-altering experiences of people who had their families disrupted and abused. It's critical that we have that conversation and grow together in our understanding. That's what the—purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I was proud to be part of the government that set it up. But it's not for political points I say that. I think it was long overdue. It should have been something we had done generations before.

And it's, I think, critical we act on these—the work and the recommendations together. It's critical that we move into, in every respect, more than redress—into a direction of equality of opportunity: economic opportunity, social equality. And that's—sure, a lot of that is money. A lot of that is attitudinal change, too. And I think part of that has to come from hard lessons like this getting out there. And I'm proud of the work that the folks that did this discovery and the research they did, that they—the time they invested in this is important.

We have to understand that for many people, this is going to tear them up. I put on record for anybody who was listening outside of our—well, for our members, too, this is something they can benefit from.

The Indian Residential School Survivors Society has got counselling support. People should avail themselves of it if they think it's necessary and helpful. I hope they do: 1-800-721-0066. Also, the

survivors society has a crisis line: 1-866-925-4419. Our government's been very conscious of the path to reconciliation annual report. We've moved to act on a number of the recommendations in the TRC already. I'm—I have reminded on several occasions the federal government on a variety of the TRC recommendations in our chances to lobby for them to act.

The calls to action 71 to 76 are on the burial information piece, and in the TRC, they make a variety of—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Bushie: I was—the Premier (Mr. Pallister) alluded to a list of items that they were going to be implementing. I was wondering if he could table that list and the timelines for that implementation of that list.

Mr. Pallister: The report I have is largely, by its nature, directed at pushing the federal government. And so as far as timelines are concerned, that'll be a federal government responsibility. But, you know, we have—certainly, our minister and I have familiarized ourselves with the TRC on numerous occasions. We endeavour—the recommendations that we endeavour to pursue at the federal level are many.

On section 71 to 76, on the missing children and burial information piece, really important ceremonial rights are considered when remains are discovered. Proper reburial practice is undertaken. These are points that we have emphasized to the feds and they've got—I don't have the list here.

The member probably has more information on this specific piece than I do, but I understand there are—numerous across the country—initiatives under way, many locally driven that need to encourage the federal government to support.

We're supporting their endeavours in respect of providing any records that the federal government needs: Crown land records, ownership information, anything to do with residential school burial sites. I'm familiar, to some degree, with the Brandon situation there. We've endeavoured to assist ownership information that helps with getting to the facts—is important. Appropriate memorial ceremonies, commemorative markers, things like this are really critical to making sure that not only the people involved in this are not forgotten; the children are not forgotten, but that we don't forget, that we do not forget—and this is critical.

And so, you know, I can't speak for justice—former Justice Sinclair that I know that much of the TRC in the section on missing children and burial information was, by necessity, directed right at the federal government because the documents, most of them, are in federal hands already. And the burial sites and the documenting of deaths that occurred there is work that the federal government needs to undertake.

That being said, we're working with our Indigenous partners on protection of Indigenous cultural heritage, which was one of the aspects that was recommended in this section of the TRC.

Let's go back for a sec because he—I referenced the Manitoba Hydro Strategy 2040. I'd shared it with the members last Thursday, I think, so I'll just quickly review that.

Manitoba Hydro is shaping their long-term strategy to align their provincial energy and economic policy and working to mitigate risks and leverage opportunities. So this strategy 2040 is a 20-year outlook with strategic direction anchored in the best interests of Manitobans.

I'd emphasize to the members who like to make this, you know, accusation of privatization that there is no reference in the Hydro 2040 plan in their 20-year strategy to privatization, but there is reference to five key components of their strategy that will articulate Hydro's commitment to their customers: (1) safe, reliable energy; (2) serving customers efficiently, responsively and digitally; (3) helping Manitobans efficiently navigate the evolving energy landscape; (4) maximizing the benefit of our clean energy advance; and (5) keeping costs as low as possible.

None of these things were the emphasis of the off-shore Manitoba Hydro International consulting operation that was—that grew so much bigger under the NDP administration previously. It was apart from this.

So these are the new priorities of Manitoba Hydro. They want to focus on Manitobans' needs, serving Manitobans with reliable low-cost energy, and I support them in their effort: implementation as business models already under way. There's no change in the overall head-count plan at Hydro, but there is intention to get out of the foreign consulting business which, again, no other utility is involved in and nor will Manitoba Hydro be involved in it, except, as I understand it, to finish off some contracts that are already in process.

Mr. Bushie: And, for the record, I didn't remotely ask a Hydro question and it somehow led to a Hydro response.

The tragedy that is before us today and it's been existing for a number of generations, and it is at the forefront today, and the Premier (Mr. Pallister) is somehow feeling it—the need to dodge the question.

* (16:50)

So I do want to get back and focus on the question of the mass gravesites that Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation discovered and they knew about it. They knew about it for generations and nobody took it to heart, but they knew where their people were. And that same thinking and that same knowing goes across the country and—including the province of Manitoba, including the residential schools that existed here in Manitoba.

So I'll ask the Premier again: Will there be a commitment from the provincial government to either partner with the feds or actually take the initiative to commit to funding these searches for these mass grave sites in residential school areas here in Manitoba?

Mr. Pallister: Far from the member's accusation about dodging the question, he—I believe—also raised questions about Hydro on Thursday and I undertook to answer his questions, and I'm attempting to do that.

As far as his accusation about dodging the issue, I just spoke passionately and sincerely about an issue that matters deeply to him and me, and so I resent that, I really do. I think he's not right in making an assertion. I'm—I've undertaken, on every question the NDP has raised through this process now since I became Premier, to get them the information they ask for, sincerely.

And now I'm giving him information on a specific issue he raised in addition to the questions about grave markers and so on. And the investigation into the graves of children that—buried on the sites or near the sites of residential schools. So I don't think that's very fair, and I'll say that to the member as I had—I thought him to be a fair man, but on that one, not true.

Lookit, we all have a responsibility to learn and to educate ourselves about the legacy of residential schools. I've endeavoured to do that personally. I encourage every member who hasn't, to do that; and if they have, to do it again and repeatedly.

As far as the focus, the focus should be nationally. And with the federal government, we have offered

support in every respect to encourage them and in support of their efforts. The member has specific questions he wants to raise about specific projects that he feels should be undertaken, I will most certainly offer this commitment to him: We will encourage the federal government and support them in every way to address the sad legacy of residential schools.

Mr. Bushie: So, further to that commitment, will the Province also financially commit to these searches and in support of the potential federal program or whatever the federal government comes up with? Will the Province, then, financially commit to that also—not just in terms of moral support, but will there be a financial commitment? If there is an ask from the federal government, will the provincial government commit to that financially?

Mr. Pallister: Yes, well, I can't give a blank cheque to the federal government, so—I don't know what their projects are. We've encouraged them to undertake, under the truth and reconciliation recommendations, to follow those recommendations and act on them in this respect and in several others, and we're already offering staff time and support to some of the initiatives they have under way.

But again, I just encourage the member, if he's got initiatives that he wants to be specific about, I'm certainly interested in hearing them and we'd certainly be interested in pursuing additional avenues of attack on this—a joint statement or a unanimous statement from the House encouraging the federal government might be helpful.

I see the Liberal leader on here; it'd be nice to have him join with us on this. I know he's reticent to offer, you know, any direction to the federal government that might be taken as disloyalty to the federal Liberal Party, but in this case, I think he might consider that his primary source of interest should be—I'm sure, sincerely, is the best interests of Manitoba families affected directly and indirectly by the residential schools that operated here.

So if—I'm very open to the suggestion that we could do a unanimous statement calling on the federal government to do and—do take some action in Manitoba on some specific issues beyond what they're doing. I'd be very supportive of that.

But, again, you know, just a couple of months ago that—in Hansard—that the NDP leader said that we were cutting Manitoba Hydro International and that it meant privatizing. So I'm, you know, attempting to put his mind at ease. He's clearly worried about it or he

wouldn't continuously reference it. And the fact that he has referenced it means that it's important that I put his mind at ease. He shouldn't have to worry about that. So I will continue to provide information to the member on why he's wrong on the assertion that Manitoba Hydro International's disposition as a foreign consulting operation is somehow indicative of a desire to privatize Manitoba Hydro. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As far—I just got an update for the members on—I've got it somewhere here—on federal information that they were made available to us. Yes. The member's asked about this last Thursday and again today, and so I hope the member doesn't think I'm dodging his question by answering. Federal support—we began discussions a couple of weeks ago with the feds to pursue some specific supports. We didn't think, as I said the other day, that it would be appropriate much earlier than when we began the discussions because there were at least four other provinces in far worse shape than us, and as much as we had—there was one possibility that we would need additional help, there were many other provinces needing additional help at the same time.

However, now, we're in a different boat and so back a couple weeks ago, we began to elicit support for ICU nurses, lab techs, contact-tracing support, air medical resources and some other things. It was apparent from the planning discussions between officials that some of that support might be more readily available than other support. So I'm continuing to give the members updates on the information that is being made available as soon as it is made available. I've undertaken to do that since the start of this pandemic.

In respect of the nurses to support ERs and ORs, they were more readily available. Some of them are here now. I believe we have three RNs, one LPN in ERs right now, which frees up our people, our nurses, to go and work in the ICUs.

I won't get into—because the members, I know, are very appreciative of the training that we'd done, the orientation programs and so on, to upgrade the skill sets of our nurses here in Manitoba so they'd be able to go and work readily in an OR. We began that early in the pandemic, as early as more than a year ago, that training. So the fact that Ottawa isn't sending us ICU nurses shouldn't be taken as a slap at them. They're sending us some additional ER nurses. That frees up our trained ER nurses to move into ICUs. That's good stuff.

It's important also to understand that we're very, very appreciative—and I know the nurses, in particular, are appreciative that we have some backup coming in because there's been some pressures—obviously, they're immense—on our front-line staff. Not just front line dealing with patients; I'm talking front line throughout the system. I reacted badly the other day when I felt the member—the NDP leader was being critical of some people. I overreacted; I apologized for that. But I take it sincerely: these people are working their tails off. And so I get a—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable First Minister's time has expired.

Mr. Bushie: So to be clear, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has committed to providing a statement and nothing but a statement so far. There've been numerous questions asked about a financial commitment to actually bring some closure and some openness and responsibility to Indigenous people, Indigenous communities and Indigenous children that have been lost to residential schools. And the only commitment given by this First Minister has been about a statement. And that's just insulting.

You have the opportunity today to make a financial commitment to bring some closure, to bring some clarity, to bring some openness to this discussion of residential schools and the atrocities that were—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

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

ROOM 255

FAMILIES

* (16:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Len Isleifson): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Families. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Adams. Ms. Adams?

Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson): Can you hear me?

Mr. Chairperson: There we go. Yes, the floor is yours, Ms. Adams.

Ms. Adams: The basic budget for—EIA recipients receive for food, toiletries and other basic household

supplies has not creased for a single individual in years and has seen only a nominal increase for other household types.

Can the minister explain why the funding for Employment and Income Assistance transformation has been frozen and when will—and when the need for increased investments will be clear?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for that question, and I do look forward to continuing my dialogue with the MLA for River Heights. I certainly hope that we have an opportunity during this Committee of Supply. If not, I will certainly be able—I would be more than happy to chat with him offline, because he asked some significant questions last week which I think deserve an answer. And so, I certainly do hope that we have an opportunity for that exchange.

In reference to the MLA for Thompson's question posed right now, once again, this member is—needs to be corrected in terms of the budget for EIA. So I would be—I would like to take a moment to share with the committee that the budget for EIA in 2016, when the member's government left office, was \$425 million. That budget today is \$470 million. That is an increase of \$45 million; \$45 million more for helping low-income families, which—this also includes money for Rent Assist.

We know that Rent Assist is an incredibly valuable program for many people who have circumstances that might otherwise make it very hard for them to find housing—stable housing for themselves and their families. That is why, in many cases, we have—in some instances we're quadrupled the budget for Rent Assist, where we're making it more housing affordable for many individuals and providing those benefits to individuals on EIA as well as others who are experiencing challenges and, you know, financial hardships.

* (16:20)

I do also want to reiterate to the member that there are many benefits that are not clawed back on for our EIA recipients. And we know that, for example, the Canada Child Benefit, which has had some increases, we have recognized that our—many of our clients on EIA are experiencing financial hardships and that this is an additional money for them at the end of the month. And so we're not clawing that back.

There are many other programs where, if we know some of our EIA recipients have received money for experiencing hardships in the past related

to the residential schools or they've been part of a class action lawsuit and they've received monies, we have not clawed that back and are working on several initiatives to help EIA recipients achieve a quality of life and achieve the tools to create a better destiny for themselves and their loved ones and their families. That is why, recently, our government was pleased to partner with The Winnipeg Foundation to establish an endowment that would create an annual revenue stream for creating initiatives and programs that would help recipients on EIA to access more programs or services.

And I've stated before, as someone who once received these services myself, when I was on EIA several years ago I was very fortunate to participate in a program—it was called a building life skills program—that helped me obtain the school—the skills and the knowledge and the confidence that I would need to return to school, as my case was. And other individuals might be looking to enter into the workforce and it would be transitioning them to obtain the—what they need to enter the labour market.

So these programs, I know, are incredibly vital, and that is why we were very pleased to partner with The Winnipeg Foundation and other community partners to expand on some of the work that we've already done in making these initiatives available to our EIA recipients. And we're excited that next year we will have the first intake from that \$20-million endowment made recently.

And I'd also just like to point out that we also provided a \$2-million line item in our budget to give opportunities for employment and other initiatives, which is specifically geared towards helping single-parent households and those who might be experiencing other barriers to either going back to school or entering the labour market. And personally speaking, I know the challenges that come when you are a single-parent household and that those barriers are real and that—but they can be overcome with some—in some instances, with certain programs.

And so this \$2-million EIA investment that we recently made and the opportunities for employment is certainly geared towards that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Adams: Can the minister please explain why they made the decision to claw back people who were on EIA and received CERB payments?

Ms. Squires: I would like to take this opportunity to update the table with information about the

exemptions that our government has provided throughout the pandemic.

For example, when we created the \$45-million Seniors Economic Recovery Credit that went to 225 senior households, we certainly exempted any of those benefits, dollar for dollar, from EIA eligibility, and we also exempted the \$4.6-million Disability Economic Support Program that went to 23,000 Manitobans with disabilities. And any Manitoban with disability who received these benefits were exempt—or those dollars were exempt from their eligibility.

We also do maintain access to dental, optical and prescription drug benefits under the Rewarding Work health plan for any recipient who leaves our program for a variety of reasons including those who left our program to go on the Canada—the CERB benefit introduced through the federal government.

And I would just like to just remind the member that when CERB was created, it was intended to replace income that had been impacted by the pandemic. Our government worked in collaboration with the majority of other jurisdictions across the country to have a consistent, collaborative approach to treating the CERB income for all of our EIA clients and certainly do work to provide benefits and allow certain benefits to continue to flow while they were eligible for newly created federal programs.

Ms. Adams: I'd like to thank the minister for that response.

For individuals who had to pay back the CERB that they were—that they took, it is—I don't know of anywhere where income is classified as something you have to pay back.

Can the minister explain why her department made the choice to include CERB as income for many families who are now facing increases in other programming that they were originally taking prior because they made more money because they were on CERB? And could the minister please provide any briefing notes on that?

* (16:30)

Ms. Squires: I would like to just inform the member and reiterate that our government is treating CERB as income, like many other provinces, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and many, many other provinces and territories around the country, and working in a consistent fashion across the federation.

I can also assure the member that in some instances where an EIA client has received CERB and then were deemed to be ineligible for the CERB benefits and are needing to repay that to the federal government, that is certainly not our decision to make. That is the federal government's decision to make and I certainly invite her to have those conversations with her Member of Parliament.

But what our policy is is when one of our EIA clients is now not eligible for CERB or needing to repay the CERB for a particular period of time, we reinstate their benefits immediately and then we'll even backfill for that time period in which they are—in which they were deemed to have been ineligible and were needing to return that money. We ensure that they get those benefits for those particular months.

So, just to provide a bit of an anecdote or a clarification to what I'm saying is, if someone received CERB for the month of February and then were deemed to—later deemed to have not been eligible and they needed to repay that money to the federal government, our government will go in and make sure that they received what they were entitled to for the month of February and are made whole for that month.

Ms. Adams: Part of my question pertaining—that maybe the minister is not understanding is that there were many Manitobans that were employed part-time that were eligible for CERB and took CERB while we were in the first wave and things were locked down. And as a result, their income is now higher and now they are facing increased costs.

Like, Rent Assist is—their geared-to-income rent has gone up, their access to Pharmacare deductible has gone up; all because this government made the choice to include CERB as income.

So I ask again: Will the minister please provide any briefing notes on why CERB is being classified as income?

And there are other provinces, like British Columbia, that made the decision not to include CERB as income.

Ms. Squires: I'm not exactly certain where the member is getting her information.

As I'd explained in one of my previous answers, all of our EIA clients who left EIA and went to CERB or are staying on EIA or coming back on EIA, they had received uninterrupted health benefits through their reward—through the Rewarding Work health plan that our government had extended to any individual

during this period, and therefore the Pharmacare deductible would not apply.

In regards to the rent geared to income, that 30 per cent threshold, as—as the member would know if she had a conversation with her Member of Parliament, that is part of the CMHC agreement, and if she is in dispute with that 30 per cent threshold, I certainly do invite her to have a conversation with her Member of Parliament.

* (16:40)

Ms. Adams: We've heard from Manitobans who are concerned about wait times for EIA are excessive. Often—sometimes folks have a hard time communicating with their caseworker, especially if they have unreliable Internet or phone. This has resulted in service delays or miscommunications and ultimately means people can't get the supports they need in a timely manner.

What steps is the minister making to ensure more timely and accessible communication between EIA caseworkers and Manitobans they serve? And how many EIA caseworkers are currently employed by the Province?

Ms. Squires: I can confirm for the member that currently we have 170 caseworkers.

One of the things that we did do in response to the pandemic is that we opened up a call centre, which we know has been very effective in helping to provide quick information and services for people who've experienced disruptions or having urgent needs that need to be addressed on a timely basis. This call centre has really helped individuals on EIA get access to their benefits and have their requirements looked at after—in a more timely manner.

We do know that, as many workplaces transition to working from home throughout the pandemic, the one area that we did not transfer or transition to having work-at-home arrangements was our front-facing EIA offices because we know that there's a significant high volume that goes through these offices, and sometimes that's the only way that an individual can meet with an intake worker or their caseworker is face-to-face because they don't have access to maybe even something like a telephone or a computer or other amenities. And so we've kept these public front-facing EIA offices open.

And I do want to acknowledge the risk that went along with that and really commend the—all the workers in the department who showed up for work

day after day even though many other offices across the country were transitioning to virtual. They were in agreement, in many cases, that providing face-to-face service was, indeed, the benefit for their clients.

And I'm very pleased that the member had asked this question about what emergency assistance we do provide, because that follows up on the colleague for River Heights, who didn't get an opportunity to have his question answered last week.

I can share with the committee that we do have an emergency assistance set up for basic needs. So, when we have someone coming in and while they're waiting for their intake appointment, if they have immediate needs for food or shelter, we will work them individually through this program to ensure that they get the services and the supports that they need immediately. And that has been up and running throughout the entire pandemic.

And, again, as with many of our other services in this division, providing that front-facing opportunity for the clients, in recognition that people were experiencing hardships and oftentimes needed someone to listen as they explained their circumstances, what led to them being in the circumstances and, more importantly, just the dire need that they had to receive funding in a very 'expedient' manner so that they would have a place to sleep that night or, in some cases, even have bus fare and an opportunity to buy food for the interim days while they're waiting for that intake appointment.

And we recognize that a two-week wait-list to get into some of the programming needs to have other avenues for people who are experiencing immediate and urgent needs, and we'll continue to work with people on that basis so that no one is without services from the department.

Ms. Adams: How many people current—or, are currently receiving EIA or disability payments and how many are on the wait-list?

* (16:50)

Mr. Chairperson: Minister Squires. Minister, you're muted.

Ms. Squires: Not on my end.

Mr. Chairperson: You're good now. Go ahead, Minister Squires.

Ms. Squires: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can confirm for the committee that there is—the average monthly caseload for all categories of

employment and income assistance for last fiscal was 39,723. That includes people that were on EIA that needed assistance, that were living with disabilities, or single parents or any other category of households requiring assistance.

I can also confirm for the member that there is no wait-list to get on EIA or disability income support programming. As soon as someone is deemed eligible, they are immediately brought into the system and are receiving benefits immediately.

And as we talked about in my previous answer, there are circumstances where there might be as long as a two-week delay in getting the services, and that is why that emergency support program is so vital in getting individuals the money that they need so that they can ensure that their immediate needs are taken care of, whether that's for shelter or whether that's for groceries or whether that is for—even just any of their basic needs—getting something for their children that they absolutely need.

And so there is no wait-list to get into the program and there is no wait-list. The minute they are deemed eligible, they receive the benefit.

Ms. Adams: I'd like to ask the minister a few questions about the rent bank.

What is the criteria people have to meet to access supports through that program, and how many people have sought support through that program so far?

Ms. Squires: The Manitoba rent bank is something that our government was very proud to initiate and to spearhead. It's something that we know in other jurisdictions has really prevented homelessness, where we've had people who were renting and were experiencing sudden hardship and were concerned that they wouldn't be able to make their immediate rent payments. And the establishment of a rent bank, which has been well utilized in many other jurisdictions quite successfully, has been able to avert disruptions in housing and allow further security for people who were normally experiencing housing insecurity.

The criteria, Mr. Chair, as outlined on our manitobahelps.com website, will inform anyone who's interested in applying that the criteria is 18-plus, and it's—the rent bank is established to support low- and moderate-income households. The threshold for that is if you're someone without any dependents, the threshold is \$56,000, and if you're a family with dependents, it's \$75,000 for your household income to apply—or under that—to apply for the Rent Bank assistance.

And I do want to acknowledge the hard work of the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association, which has been absolutely instrumental in developing this partnership with us. They have—I know they've fielded many, many calls. In fact, their phone was quite busy in the immediate days after our announcement, and I know my office and the department has received many, many calls.

There's a lot of interest for this, and we certainly are excited to offer this as an additional program for people who are experiencing housing insecurity, and an opportunity for them to have that security that they know that they're going to get their rent paid for when they're experiencing financial hardship for one reason or another. And so, certainly want to congratulate the Non-Profit Housing Association, as just one other initiative that we've taken to ensure that there's housing needs that are being met.

The other initiative that I do want to take a moment to highlight was our mission 50—which turned into mission 68—which is really about reducing those barriers into housing that we know many people were experiencing, particularly those who were homeless or housing—precariously housed. We were able to find these individuals, reduce those barriers so that they could access not only housing but those wraparound supports that are so vital to ensuring their success in their housing, because we know that providing them with access to addictions information and counselling, information pertaining to opportunities that they might want to pursue, whether that be for furthering their education or receiving counselling or even just a life-building program that would help them to have those skills and knowledge and training so that they can live successfully and independently in their own homes.

* (17:00)

And so we're very pleased that we had 68 individuals currently, and counting, that have been housed under this low-barrier initiative to housing. And so, certainly more work to go in that regard, but I do want to acknowledge the hard work of my staff who made this happen and everyone who was involved in this project and—as well as the rent bank project.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Adams: What is the turnaround time—average turnaround time for somebody who applies, from the time they apply to when they receive the financial aid?

And has anybody been denied from receiving supports from the rent bank?

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

CHAMBER
CROWN SERVICES

* (16:10)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Pivniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of Committee of Supply is now resumed with the consideration for the Estimates for the Department of Crown Services.

As previously agreed, questioning for the department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): I just wanted to just briefly, before we head into committee here, just do something important, which is to take a moment to acknowledge what's been discussed today: the discovery of the graves of 215 children outside of a former residential school in Kamloops this past weekend.

And I'd like to thank specifically my colleagues, the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine), member for Keewatinook (Mr. Bushie), member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) and other members of our caucus for their really powerful words today.

The discovery of those graves is a pretty powerful reminder of the traumatic legacy of residential schools in Canada, one that's been covered up by Canadian governments at every level. So my deepest condolences to all families who've been impacted and re-traumatized by this horrifying discovery. We need this discovery to spur action; we need to ensure that the grounds of residential schools are searched for more of these types of sites, and we need much quicker action in responding to the calls outlined in the TRC. So just wanted to make those comments before starting.

I'd like to ask the minister a bit about the IBEW strike, and we'll dive right into that. And I'd like to begin by asking him and, first of all, maybe just welcome him and it's good to see him and thank his team again for being here today to help in answering some of these questions.

But I would like to ask him, regarding the IBEW strike: during the strike, we had several storms and pole fires, among other things. These incidences, in

supplying power, relied sometimes on the contracting out of services.

Could the minister provide the committee with how much the strike has cost Manitoba Hydro?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Crown Services): And again, I would like to open, as well, by echoing the comments from the member from St. James on, obviously, the discovery over the weekend of the 215 children in the residential school in Kamloops. And first off, I would like to thank the member from St. Johns for issuing this MUPI today to have this discussion and to, again, move forward with this—with the Truth and Reconciliation, of course, and also understanding the—this terrible, terrible event that was discovered over the weekend.

But again, I would also like to thank members of the House from both sides—all sides of the House—from the independent member—Liberal members—to the members from the opposition to members from the government that spoke today. Everybody spoke very passionately, very—it was quite moving to listen to everyone put some words on the record that are important as we move forward with reconciliation.

* (16:20)

So with those shorts words, again, I'd like to thank the member from St. Johns for bringing this forward today.

Also to, as well—to the member's question regarding the cost of pole fires and other issues that happen on a regular basis, but in this case, he's referring to while the IBEW strike was in place. We—of course, we know that the issue is now in front of the Labour Board, and it is being reviewed by the Labour Board. And, again, pending a decision in the coming weeks and months, this issue will move forward, and at that time, I'm sure Manitoba Hydro will have a better understanding too, as well, of what those costs were during the strike.

So, at this point, certainly, it would be premature to comment, and certainly, it's not a discussion that we've had from our department with Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Sala: I thank the minister for that.

Can the minister endeavour to provide that information when it's available?

Mr. Wharton: I assume that the wave is working well today because you're picking up on me quickly. It must have been the five-minute break that you're afforded, so thank you for taking that break. You're

very quick on the draw today. And, of course, it's Monday, and we have to have a little bit of sense of humour as well.

So, during—again, during the process of a year, and there's a number of repairs and maintenances that go on, whether it be issues of just failure to—old infrastructure or storm-related or like, so. Certainly, that information is provided on a regular basis, on an annual basis, by Manitoba Hydro. I know, depending on the severity of the issue, like the October storm of two years ago, I'm sure those numbers haven't even been fully recognized yet.

But certainly, Manitoba Hydro, I would, at this point, assume that numbers—costs would be put on a global basis for all Manitobans and the owners of Manitoba Hydro, no different than what they have been in the past.

So, to the member's question, I assume that that'll continue; there's no reason why it shouldn't.

Mr. Sala: Specifically, the concern here is that there are additional costs above and beyond the typical costs that would be incurred to respond to these kinds of scenarios as a result of the strike. Hiring on contractors to perform these services at premium costs has cost Manitobans an additional amount of money to deal with, as the minister states, things that do happen routinely as part of managing our distribution network across the province.

Will the minister commit to providing the additional costs that were incurred as a result of the strike, in responding to those issues in—that have happened, such as pole fires, et cetera, since the beginning of the strike?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly, to the member from St. James, to his question, as he knows, Manitoba Hydro engages in third-party support on a regular basis. There's no doubt that during a strike by IBEW, there would be a call, for sure, for—to ensure that Manitobans are protected during the time potentially where there is a storm and power can be put back on quickly, especially when we're in—you know, into a season change where temperatures can fluctuate and, certainly, I know personally what that's like. You know, several years ago when our power went out for four days, with a gas furnace; thankfully, we had a gas fireplace or we probably would've froze.

But, yes, it's a challenge and I know that Manitobans were the No. 1 priority for Manitoba Hydro way to—would be to protect Manitobans. So if

there were any opportunity or issue, third-party contractors would come in and certainly pick up where the IBEW folks were not available because of the strike.

So—and I would certainly commit to the member from St. James that those numbers will be available when they're ready. I can't commit to a time or a date or a month or a year, but I can tell you the—tell the member that those numbers will be available and—because that's what we do: we're a clear, open, transparent government and we expect Hydro to be the same.

Mr. Sala: Okay, well, I appreciate that from the minister. It sounds as though he's committing to making clear the additional costs that were incurred as a function of contracting out some of that work due to the strike.

One additional result of the strike was that—the loss of emergency services at a number of Hydro sites, and I'm wondering if the minister could provide the committee with how much was spent on the contracting of emergency service throughout the strike. This is specifically to protect Hydro dam sites or other Hydro infrastructure that normally would've been protected by emergency services crews working for Hydro who did go on strike.

What were the costs associated with providing those emergency services to protect Hydro infrastructure throughout the duration of the strike?

Mr. Wharton: Sorry, Mr. Chair, and the member from St. James will appreciate that I'm just conferring now to endeavour to get some answers. So I'll put you on hold for a minute, please.

* (16:30)

And certainly, I wanted to be sure that I was providing the member from St. James some information that will be helpful for his question.

And, again, back—leading back to his first question on essentially a third-party involvement with respect to pole fires and electrical outages and those kind of things—this is right along the same lines and I appreciate the member, you know, obviously trying to separate third-party support during a strike or during any time because certainly there's third-party involvement with Manitoba Hydro on an ongoing basis and likely will continue to be based on volumes and need and, obviously, weather events and those kind of things.

So, again, emergency services to protect Manitoba Hydro assets during the strike or outside of the strike are done in a combination of our own staff again, and third-party. So I would assume then that Hydro would be able to, again, at some point have an understanding of what the overall costs were in reflection of the 60-day strike by IBEW to Manitoba ratepayers.

Mr. Sala: And I apologize to the minister if I missed it in there but I just want to clarify: was that a commitment to provide that information to Manitobans?

Mr. Wharton: Thank you, you got me, Mr. Chair? Can you hear me?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. Wharton: Okay, great, thank you.

Certainly, the commitment again is to ensure that Manitoba Hydro, as they do every year, can commit to what their third-party costs were annually, as they do. And we committed to that during the strike and we'll commit to it again for emergency services.

So, to—don't shake your head too soon, Adrien.

Mr. Sala: I appreciate that, minister. Thank you.

I'll take that then that you are committing to providing that information, given you've consoled me there and have assured me that I've nothing to worry about. I think that information is really important so I do appreciate your willingness to provide that and your commitment to ensure that Manitobans can separate out those costs from the typical yearly costs that might be incurred to protecting our hydro infrastructure and our distribution network. That's important for Manitobans to know: that they have clarity on the costs that have been incurred here.

I'm going to move forward to talk a bit about the 20-year strategic plan that Hydro has developed here and I just wanted to ask the minister: has the minister and his government approved Hydro's 20-year strategic plan as of yet?

Mr. Wharton: Just wanted to—before we tackle the next question, just wanted to backtrack a little bit, if I may, for folks that are listening online and certainly the member from St. James was very clear, as I was, that Manitobans deserve to know what the costs are because they are the owners of Manitoba Hydro. And certainly on that note, they certainly deserve to know why the former government put the burden they did

on Manitoba ratepayers when it comes to Bipole III and Keeyask.

So I'm really pleased that the member from St. James and I are aligned on ensuring Manitobans have clear access and clear, transparent information on current and past issues, discussions and projects that will come forward as Manitoba Hydro continues to go down the—you know, the road of providing green, clean energy for Manitobans.

So I'm pleased that the member from St. James is in support of also supporting the Wall report and ensuring that we do get to the bottom of what happened during the last—the former NDP government's tenure through the Manitoba Hydro Keeyask-bipole project. So, thank you for that. I thank the member from St. James for that.

Now, again, the Manitoba Hydro board has—understanding—has approved again the 20-year plan. And discussions with government now, as I can share with the member, are ongoing and they will continue to be ongoing for some time.

Thank you.

Mr. Sala: Just in response to that: I'm not sure that we are in agreement, Minister, on the need for clarity. And I only say that because if we were, I think we would both agree that a general rate application should go forward, and I don't see that from your government. I don't see a desire for that transparency.

But going back to this question about the plan, the question was: Has your government approved Hydro's strategy yet?

And so I understand discussions will be ongoing, of course, but at some point, this strategy which will govern Hydro's future direction for 20 years will be put in place and will be enacted upon. So there will be a point at which, I would assume, this government will have approved it.

And I'm just looking for some clarity as to whether or not this government has, in fact, signed off on Hydro's 20-year strategy as of yet.

Mr. Wharton: Again, to the member from St. James, certainly, as I mentioned, discussions are ongoing and they'll be—continue to be ongoing and so I ask the member to stay tuned. I know Manitobans are tuned, as well, and they'll respect the process and I expect that the member from St. James will, as well, as we go through and continue to review and have discussions.

Just, again, wanted to close on the last statement, again, by the member that I thought we were aligned. But, you know, obviously, we need to ensure that large projects are reviewed by Manitobans on a go-forward basis. And Manitobans are obviously responsible for the outcomes of the projects, whether they be billions of dollars overbudget or not, somebody has to pay. And certainly, we're—we want to make sure that that transparency is available for future governments and future generations.

So I just wanted to close on that, but again, discussing—discussions are ongoing with Manitoba Hydro and their board.

Mr. Sala: Yes, I thank the minister for that. So, knowing that those discussions are happening, one question I'd have is whether or not his government has requested any changes to the content of that strategy. Sounds like discussions have been ongoing.

I'm hoping the minister can, for Manitobans' sake, help us to understand whether or not his government has requested changes or any modifications to the strategy as was released some months ago.

* (16:40)

Mr. Wharton: Again, the member from St. James knows that—and I've answered the question, you know, and discussions are ongoing—and certainly they are. And, you know, we will continue to ensure that, you know, we—government is part of the shaping of its long-term strategy with Manitoba Hydro for sure.

Obviously, we talked about this last week, last Friday, about the ever-changing energy market, too, as well. So there's lots of areas that Manitoba Hydro needs to consider going forward. Good for them for going with a long-term strategy and looking at 20 years from now.

And we know that the energy landscape is going to change over the next couple of decades, and potentially even further on as we get into new technology like hydrogen, as the member from St. James is aware of as well. And where government can ensure that they help with the—not the direction but the support required in order to move forward for the betterment of Manitoba ratepayers, that's exactly what government will do.

So without, you know, getting too far into the weeds for the member today, Manitobans appreciate that we have ongoing discussions, and we will certainly be there to share those discussions as we go forward. At this point, again, there's really not much

I can share with Manitobans right now, other than the fact that the support is there when Manitoba Hydro and the board are looking for it. It'll continue to be there. Again, that's what government does is help support those initiatives, and that's exactly what we'll continue to do to ensure that Manitoba Hydro can, again, continue to move forward in a sustainable way in this ever, ever-changing global market.

Mr. Sala: Thank the minister. We can see now that your government has released an RFP to develop energy policy for the province, and I think for most people, it would seem odd to have an energy policy for the province follow the creation of a strategy by Hydro, which is obviously there, to some degree, to service our energy goals as a province and to meet Manitoban energy demands.

So, in the absence of a policy, Hydro seems to have created its own strategy that's not in any way strategically guided by the Province of Manitoba. And so I'm looking for some clarity from the minister. Does this mean that Hydro is determining energy policy for Manitoba instead of government?

Mr. Wharton: I—you know, I believe the member is fishing in an empty pond; maybe try casting in another one because no is the simple answer. And certainly, Manitoba Hydro has been engaged with our government throughout the process, as I said. We're there to support.

However, again, you know, there is a partnership, as well, with Manitobans here that the member obviously is aware of too, as well. So, I mean, we're certainly well engaged with Manitoba Hydro and their board and we'll continue to be throughout this, again, ever-changing energy market.

It's an interesting time and it's actually an exciting time, but certainly, we need to ensure that we can put Manitoba Hydro back on a solid footing as well, and they're well on their way. And part of that journey is to ensure that they have a good, solid strategy and that's exactly what they're doing.

But again, not always looking in the rear-view mirror at that \$23-billion debt that is staring them in, you know, always in their eyes. And they look in the rear-view mirror and there it is again, and oh, my God. What are they going to do, because they have to find a way to try to tackle that big burden as well, you know, with, you know, obviously, keeping in mind the balance of Manitoba ratepayers and ensuring that they're engaged throughout the process too.

So I'll leave it at that. I'm sure the member's going to go back to that question, but certainly—yes—no—we're pleased to always be engaged with Manitoba Hydro on all processes, so.

Mr. Sala: You know, I appreciate the minister's response, but it is concerning to hear from him that he has summarized, essentially, that his government does not have an energy policy to speak of and that is not—that they're ultimately not helping Hydro to understand their role in this broader—a broader plan for meeting Manitoba's energy needs as we go forward. That's really concerning, I think, to a lot of Manitobans to know that.

So it's good that they're engaged, but this does seem to be putting the cart before the horse, which is having Hydro develop this strategy which will outline their 20-year plan without that 20-year strategy being reflective of the Province's overall energy policy, which itself should meet a broader set of concerns and outline a path for Manitoba getting to our energy goals at a broader level that would clarify Hydro's role within that. So that's very concerning, I think, to a lot of Manitobans to learn that and to hear that today.

Highlighting that, the 20-year strategic plan makes almost no mention of electrifying transportation in this province and it also makes almost no mention of the need to electrify heating across the province. And we know, if we listen to experts in every corner of the globe, the future of heating and the future of transportation is an electrified one.

And, you know, looking at that 20-year strategic plan and seeing almost no mention of that is really concerning. It's really concerning from the perspective of families and Manitobans who are worried about how we get to a cleaner energy future in Manitoba.

So I'd like to ask the minister, how does the government view its role in helping to electrify transportation and home heating in Manitoba?

* (16:50)

Mr. Wharton: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and—sorry about that. Again, to the member's question, he knows that our government put forward our Climate and Green Plan that outlines a number of initiatives on a go-forward. Again, we're—what—we pride ourselves on being the greenest and cleanest province in Canada, and we should, and we certainly are looking to get some of that credit back from the federal

government, understanding that we do have hydro-electricity, of course, that is the cleanest and greenest at this time, too, as well.

In the strategy, they do talk about electrification. As a matter of fact, we know that the—as we talked about, the de-carbonization of the world, we can really go global on this one—is talked about in a big way and now moving forward quite quickly. And that's why we talked about this—the new energy landscape, too. And, again, electric vehicles are definitely—well, they're here; I mean, we know that. I'm sure the member has taken a ride in a Tesla or two or perhaps even has one. No? Come on. Wow. I thought maybe you would've for sure. But, well, maybe you and I'll have the opportunity to share that ride one day, maybe on different terms, but there you go.

So, certainly, we know that Manitoba—again, the changes in Manitoba are expected to include increased electrification. We talk about that, too; Hydro talks about it in their plan. Government is supportive of that, naturally; I mean, we need to go that way. The emergence of any energy services market behind the meter, again, such as solar self-generation—the member and I have talked about solar; we talked about hydro—or, pardon me, we've talked about hydrogen; we've talked about wind power and other sources, too, as well. And, certainly, they're coming.

I know that hydrogen vehicles are here in different jurisdictions, and my understanding—again, there are a number of companies that are looking to look outside and start to build their businesses. And Hydro's doing a good job at ensuring that, you know, we prepare, and that's what that 2020 strategy is for; in particular, we want to talk about electrification.

I know that Hydro's well engaged on that, and government will support absolutely those initiatives on a go forward. We need to move away—we know that—to protect our climate. We know the issues just—not even talk about that, but let's talk about, you know, things like Lake Winnipeg and the investments in the North End treatment plant that need to take place to protect our waters and lakes and streams.

Certainly, that's an investment our government recognizes, and it needs to be done. It should have been done 20 years ago, and it hadn't been, and now it's going to cost us well over a billion dollars.

So, definitely, lots of areas in conservation and climate in our whole-of-government approach to discuss with our colleague as well and as we go forward with that, we look forward to engaging

Manitobans as we have, and we will continue to, and engaging our colleague from St. James, too. Again, we had that discussion well over a year ago now, pre-pandemic, and certainly welcome those discussions again in a collaborative way, much like the discussions I had briefly with the member from St. Boniface. That's the way we get things done for the betterment of Manitobans, and certainly, my door is always open for those discussions.

Mr. Sala: Thank you, Minister, for that. I don't think we got much clarity there in terms of this government's plan to electrify transportation in Manitoba. And I am glad to hear that the minister is in, you know, routine contact with Hydro executive and that they're engaged in those conversations.

But I'll share a couple quick data points, and I won't digress too far here, but just for consideration for the minister: almost one third of our provincial emissions in this province come from transportation, and almost one third of our emissions come from the heating of our buildings. And yet, the 20-year strategy that was released by Hydro makes almost no mention of how we are going to electrify those areas of our economy.

That is hugely alarming to a massive number of Manitobans who want to know how their government is going to get us to that cleaner-energy future. And by the way, that path is a path that will create a huge number of green jobs in this province, and it's a path lined with opportunity. And yet—and I say this really pleading with the minister—we don't have clarity on that path.

You know, we've got a lot of wonderful, brilliant people working at Hydro, but it's not exclusively Hydro's responsibility to making—to be making those

determinations about how we get there. That is a provincial energy policy piece that apparently is lacking right now. And that is a huge concern, and I would argue five years in is a real failure of this Conservative government, and I don't mean that as an attack or to be overly partisan. I mean that as somebody who cares deeply about the environment, about the future that we're leaving for our kids. It is incredible to me that we still do not have clarity on the path to electrifying transportation and heating in Manitoba.

The presentation in the—on the strategy spoke to a decentralized future where aspects of Hydro become unbundled: our generation, our distribution, our transmission. This is—the strategy specifically references this notion of decentralization. And Manitobans can look back to Texas not too long ago to see what happens in those jurisdictions that have been fully decentralized.

So I'd like to ask the minister: Does the minister support Hydro's view of the future, one with more decentralization in terms of the delivery of energy services to Manitobans?

Mr. Wharton: Certainly appreciate the comments from the member and his passion, obviously. You know, we do—I do share his passion when it comes to—you know, we like to look in a crystal ball, you know, but sometimes that's not reality, and we know that—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and is adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 31, 2021

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS		Oral Questions	
Introduction of Bills		Federal Assistance for Manitoba's ICUs	
		Kinew	3678
Bill 237–The Elections Amendment Act		Pallister	3678
Isleifson	3669	COVID-19 Updates	
Bill 235–The Scrap Metal Recyclers Act		Kinew	3679
Maloway	3669	Pallister	3679
Tabling of Reports		Gas Leak at Convention Centre	
Fielding	3669	Kinew	3680
		Pallister	3680
Ministerial Statements		COVID-19 Updates	
Children's Remains Found at Former Residential School (BC)		Kinew	3680
Clarke	3670	Pallister	3680
Bushie	3670	Nurses Collective Agreement	
Lamont	3671	Asagwara	3681
Manitoba Access Awareness Week		Goertzen	3681
Squires	3672	Former Manitoba Residential Schools	
Adams	3672	Bushie	3682
Gerrard	3673	Clarke	3682
Special Olympics Awareness Week		Manitoba School Divisions	
Cox	3674	Naylor	3682
Brar	3674	Cullen	3683
Lamoureux	3675	Consolidation of Dynacare Labs	
Members' Statements		Altomare	3683
Raj Phangureh		Goertzen	3684
Squires	3675	Transfer of ICU Patients Out of Province	
Thompson Crisis Centre		Lamont	3684
Adams	3675	Pallister	3685
Manitoba 150 Award Recipients		COVID-19 Pandemic Third Wave	
Eichler	3676	Lamoureux	3685
Right to Repair		Pallister	3685
Maloway	3676	Plastic Recycling Initiatives	
National Indigenous History Month		Nesbitt	3686
Reyes	3677	Guillemard	3686
Deputy Speaker's Statement		Employment and Income Assistance	
Piwniuk	3677	Marcelino	3686
		Squires	3686
		Petitions	
		Health-Care Coverage	
		Marcelino	3687

Matter of Urgent Public Importance

Fontaine	3688, 3689
Goertzen	3688, 3695
Gerrard	3688, 3697
Kinew	3690
B. Smith	3691
Bushie	3692
Clarke	3693
Lamont	3696

ORDERS OF THE DAY**GOVERNMENT BUSINESS****Committee of Supply**

(Concurrent Sections)

Room 254

Executive Council

Kinew	3699
Pallister	3699
Bushie	3702

Room 255

Families

Adams	3705
Squires	3706

Chamber

Crown Services

Sala	3710
Wharton	3710

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>