

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALTomARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
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, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINew, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan, Hon.	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	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg, Hon.	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew, Hon.	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Kirkfield Park	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 4, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 224—The Unobstructed Access to Health Care and Education Facilities Act

Mr. Shannon Martin (McPhillips): I move, seconded by the MLA for Dauphin, that Bill 224, The Unobstructed Access to Health Care and Education Facilities Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Martin: Madam Speaker, this bill will ensure that individuals have access to medical and educational facilities without being unnecessarily obstructed or harassed. I look forward to all House—all members voting in support of this resolution.

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

Bill 244—The Protecting Youth in Sports Act

Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for St. James (Mr. Sala), that Bill 244, the protection—Protecting Youth in Sports Act, be read for the first time.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for St. Vital, seconded by the honourable member for St. James, that Bill 244, The Protecting Youth in Sports Act, be now read a first time.

Mr. Moses: Madam Speaker, every child should feel safe on their own sports team. This bill would create a policy to protect children and youth in sports from abuse or harassment by creating guidelines for coaches, sports organizations, schools and parents.

Manitoba families have been calling for action from this government to keep kids safe. So far they have missed the mark. This bill will help to give families the peace of mind they deserve when their child joins a sports team.

Thank you.

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

Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Madam Speaker: And I am pleased to table the following reports: report of amounts claimed and paid pursuant to section 4 of the Members' Salaries, Allowances and Retirement Plans Disclosure Regulation for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022; Report on Amounts Paid or Payable to Members of the Assembly, pursuant to subsection 52.27(1) (1.1) of The Legislative Assembly Act, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

I would like to note for the information of all members the report titled amounts paid or payable to members of the Assembly will be distributed electronically to all members.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Families—and I would indicate that the 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

National Day of Action on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): I rise today to recognize that today, October 4th, is the national day of action for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

It feels especially important this year to mark this day and commit to taking serious action to address violence against Indigenous women and girls, given the devastating number of Indigenous women and girls lost to violence this year in our province.

I would like to read into the record the names of six women who tragically lost their lives to senseless violence and to ask that we have a moment of silence to reflect on the loss of Heather Beardy, Rebecca Contois, Doris Trout, Tessa Perry, Danielle Ballantyne, Mackaylah Gerard-Roussin.

These are the names of six Indigenous women that have been killed in Manitoba this year alone, and we know that there were likely many more names who we will never know.

Like everyone in this Chamber, I was saddened and disheartened to learn—disheartened when I learned of each of their deaths. These women were daughters, mothers, sisters and friends. They were loved and they are missed. They all deserved to live long lives, free of violence.

This is why it is important to recognize this day of action and the role government has to play in ensuring that our province is safe for all Manitobans.

The final report of the MMIWG inquiry, guided by the voices of survivors and their families, highlighted systemic issues such as racism, sexism and colonialism that have contributed to the high rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls and the 2SLGBTQIA people that we see in Manitoba today. The final report also emphasized the importance of centering Indigenous voices and community-led solutions to address the violence against Indigenous women and girls.

We are committed to taking concrete steps to respond to the calls for justice in a collaborative way, building on the relationships we have established to support that work here in Manitoba. Our government recognizes the magnitude of work that needs to be done, as well as our role in addressing these harms.

We will continue to work alongside Indigenous families, survivors, leadership, communities and organizations. Real change, in terms of addressing violence against Indigenous women and girls, will only be achieved through sustained and co-ordinated action. We are committed to working with our partners and all Manitobans.

As we mark this National Day of Action on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, I encourage everyone to take the time to listen to the voices of families and survivors, to take part in one of the many events happening around the province today and to reflect on actions that you can take within your own life to help create a society where everyone can feel safe and valued.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): October 4th is missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited honouring and awareness day in Manitoba. It's a day to honour Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited stolen and taken from their families, children and communities while offering support to their grieving families.

The ongoing genocide of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited is predicated on colonial violence waged on our bodies. It's predicated on racist, misogynistic social constructions of Indigenous women as less-than, as less deserving of protections and therefore more deserving of said violence.

More often than not, Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited are blamed for the violence against our bodies. And MMIWG2S families, instead of being on the receiving end of compassion, are often criticized or condemned for not doing enough, as if families didn't protect and fight for their loved ones with every ounce of their being.

While awareness has grown since 2000, when Indigenous women started to organize alongside families and highlight the issue of missing and murdered, said violence has not stopped. In fact, despite numerous government social-justice reports, a national inquiry and some project-based funding, some would argue violence has only grown.

What we haven't seen is a commitment from various levels of government for a comprehensive programming funding towards safe and secure housing, training and education and increase support to women's shelters and resource centres. Until we deal with, in a substantial way, the core issues that make Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited unsafe, we will only prolong this epidemic of violence.

Here's the thing, Madam Speaker: Indigenous women—in particular matriarchs—are not taking this anymore. Not that we ever did, but with the advent of social media and access to increased means of accountability, matriarchs are demanding and affecting change.

Over this last year, we've seen matriarchs come together to take down a serial predator and—held accountable for preying on Indigenous women and girls. We are holding both governments and policing institutions to account on how they choose to address the crisis of MMIWG2S.

Indigenous women will not take this violence anymore or allow those who perpetrate violence, in all of its forms, to continue to exact violence on our bodies anymore. And we expect men to take up that responsibility to protect and stand with Indigenous women.

Today is one of those days where folks can demand more from their government, social service agencies and police in ending violence against Indigenous women, girls—

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

An Honourable Member: Leave.

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

Ms. Fontaine: Today is one of those days, where folks can demand more from their governments, social service agencies and police in ending violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited.

Finally, and most importantly, we continue to stand with MMIWG2S families and send our profound love and strength to each and every one of them today and every day.

Miigwech.

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

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

Ms. Lamoureux: I rise this afternoon to talk about the national day of action for murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people.

Madam Speaker, I want to begin by saying thank you and miigwech to all of those who have come to the Manitoba Legislature today, and for allowing many of us to join you this afternoon in the Rotunda.

There are many events today throughout Manitoba that have been created to raise awareness, further dialogue and create much needed supports and shared understanding for the loss that so many have and continue to experience.

Madam Speaker, it is incredibly heartbreaking that, because of violence, many Indigenous women and girls go missing or are found murdered. I am grateful for recent legislation implementing Clare's Law but we, as legislators, still need to do more.

It is exceptionally important to give that full and proper recognition for every person who has gone missing. Every single person who goes missing has a family whose lives are forever impacted.

Madam Speaker, just in the last two weeks, a childhood friend of mine has gone missing. I want to thank Bear Clan who have been vocal in raising awareness in the hopes of finding her. This was a friend of mine, who I grew up with at church. We used to have play dates—there were about four of us—in her

basement, and her adopted parents would make us snacks and we would often blare music and play games. I am praying that she is found safe.

Our hearts go out to all of you. Those who are missing and those who have loved—or love someone who may be missing or who have been murdered.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister for bringing forward this statement.

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

Please stand.

A moment of silence was observed.

Madam Speaker: Further ministerial statements? The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

Conservation Officers Recognition Day

Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development): I rise in the House today to recognize our conservation officers.

On October 1st, we celebrated Manitoba Conservation Officers Recognition Day, acknowledging the essential work they do to protect public safety and valuable natural resources.

Since 2017, Manitoba has acknowledged Conservation Officers Recognition Day, sharing appreciation for the professionalism and dedication of conservation officers, who enforce a wide array of provincial acts and regulations that ensure natural resources will be preserved for future generations.

Officers preserve and maintain the public peace while carrying out wide-ranging duties. In addition to resource enforcement, Manitoba's conservation officers respond to emergencies such as search and rescue missions, forest fires and floods, working collaboratively with other law enforcement agencies and first responders, and liaise and engage with communities, stakeholders and rights-holders. Conservation officers are highly skilled and versatile, providing service all across the province, from commercial fisheries on Lake Winnipeg to working with polar bears in northern Manitoba.

We also acknowledge the dangers conservation officers face while undertaking these duties. To all members of the Manitoba Conservation Officer Service, thank you for your dedicated service and unwavering commitment to protecting the people and natural resources of Manitoba.

Recently, my department changed the titles of our conservation officers to align with the rank structure used by other conservation or law enforcement agencies across Canada. This reinforces the service as a recognized law enforcement agency.

As our province's third largest law enforcement agency, the Conservation Officer Service provides a vital front-line service that ensures public safety and protects our valuable natural resources and environment.

As part of our long-term efforts, my department has developed a bold new strategy to revitalize our conservation officers' service with the resources and tools they need to protect the safety and security of Manitobans. Our plan will address long-standing issues with recruitment and retention that will enable Manitoba to compete for talented recruits in the job market and ensure we have a robust complement of officers with the skills, training and tools to protect the safety and security of Manitobans and our valuable natural resources.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): October 1st has been designated Manitoba Conservation Officers Recognition Day since 2015, a day when we recognize the important work that conservation officers do to enforce the laws that protect our natural resources, educate the public and aid the courts in investigations.

It's important that we support these public service workers, as they do significant work in preserving Manitoba's natural spaces and wildlife and ensuring sustainability so we can continue to enjoy Manitoba's beautiful outdoors in the future.

Conservation officers have an important role and carry a significant responsibility for protecting people and the environment. Their day-to-day work includes dealing with people who are armed, fishery violations, illegal fish sales and illegal hunting. They enforce acts pertaining to natural resources, fish and wildlife, protected areas and environmental protection.

As part of the work, they catch poachers, conduct investigations into illegal hunting and fishing and testify in court about these cases. They also help to

defend against fires and floods. This is important work for maintaining sustainable wildlife populations, and it's often dangerous work as well. As the third largest armed law enforcement agency in the province, conservation officers deserve unique recognition for putting their lives on the line every day.

Manitoba is home to beautiful natural spaces, and we are proud of our abundant waterways, lakes and wetlands which help make our province such a great place to live and raise a family. We want to protect these treasured spaces and ensure that they are there for future generations to enjoy, and conservation officers are a crucial part of this conservation and sustainability work.

So on behalf of the Manitoba NDP, thank you to all of Manitoba's conservation officers.

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Conservation officers have been important in Manitoba for many, many years. They have been important as stewards of the wildlife in our province and have played an important role in the management of our provincial parks. Conservation officers enforce all resource-based legislation relating to wildlife, forestry, parks, Crown lands and wildfires.

And recently, they've had an additional function on the ground of the Manitoba Legislature, helping to provide security. We thank the conservation officers for their assistance in this regard. Of course, conservation officers have powers similar to police officers.

In the 1980s, it was conservation officers, then called natural resource officers, who were involved in aiding the transplant of young bald eagles from here to Massachusetts and to New Jersey. And this transplant turned out to be very successful, from no breeding—successful breeding pairs in New Jersey in the 1970s to more than 100 breeding pairs in the last few years. It is an example of conservation officers here playing a role in North America, helping to preserve an important wildlife species.

* (13:50)

It's clear that better funding is needed for equipment and technology to monitor wildlife populations. There've been major advances in monitoring using drones, sophisticated telemetry to monitor movements and sophisticated tagging and genetic studies to

monitor population sizes. We need to ensure that conservation officers have the ability to provide better stewardship of wildlife as well as to do the important work they do in terms of wildfires and stewardship of forests.

So we say, on behalf of the Manitoba Liberals, a thank you, thank you, thank you, merci, miigwech to Manitoba's conservation officers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Speakers Chair Replica Unveiling in Stonewall

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): It gives me great pride to have been part of the unveiling of the historic replicated Manitoba Assembly Speaker's Chair last month, on September the 9th at the Interlake regional library in Stonewall.

In 2011, the Town of Stonewall received a donation to assist with the reproduction of the original chair that was lost in the 2007 fire. This solid walnut chair is a replica of the chair presented to Speaker Jackson on his retirement. The town of Stonewall founder, Samuel J. Jackson, served as Speaker from 1891 to 1895. I'd like to thank the Town of Stonewall for their efforts and commitment to overseeing this endeavour to its successful completion.

Only twice in the history of Manitoba Legislature has a Speaker been gifted the Speaker's Chair. The original chair sat in Stonewall-Jackson's home in Stonewall until his death in 1942. The chair was then sold, donated, damaged, repaired several times until destroyed by fire.

Woodworks art, out of Brandon, were commissioned to build a replica chair. Research and design perfection took two years to complete, which took as much time as the actual building. A detailed match of the original, as best it could be, photos from-taken to-difficult to-recreating the stunning craftsmanship.

The Speaker's Chair is an excellent example of how an object may be served as a symbolic and functional purpose. The Chair will be on display at the library in Stonewall until further notice.

Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to know that the Speaker's Chair has returned to Stonewall.

Thank you.

MMIWG Honouring and Awareness Day

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Bridget Tolley founded the Sisters in Spirit vigils in 2005 to honour the lives of missing and murdered women, including her own mother. These vigils are held across Turtle Island, and in 2017, October 4th recognized here in Manitoba. We are the only province to recognize this day, thanks to the member from St. Johns.

While today has been the named the day to honour the lives of MMIWG2S, the grief that our loved ones and communities experience is not just felt on this day. It is felt each and every day. And so, we need to remember and honour them every day. We need to spend every single day working to end this violence.

Honouring doesn't mean just talking; it means action. Honouring means investing in social and cultural supports. It means addressing the root causes of colonialism, racism and misogyny and eradicating them from our communities and institutions. And here in this House, it means considering the needs of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people in all of our policies and decisions.

Today is about creating awareness of how each of us have a sacred responsibility to one another: to love one another, to take care of one another, to speak up and to end the violence, to take up action and to hold space in creating a better tomorrow.

We need your help. We must end this. We must all do our part to challenge this. We owe it to our children and our next generation. I commit to ending violence by not perpetrating violence against anyone, standing up and when I can—and when I witness acts of violence, that I commit to standing up against them. I ask each and every one in this Chamber to take an action, to hold space, to support families.

I want to acknowledge Betty Lynxleg, who is in the gallery today, that spoke at the event; that talked about action that families need so that they're not searching alone and feel alone and that their loved ones are forgotten.

I want to send all of the families my love. And, again, this could happen to anyone. What if it was your loved one, and what action are you going to take?

David Meunier

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to highlight the accomplishments of an amazing Riel constituent that I'm proud to call my friend.

David Meunier is someone who is known by many in the community as a friendly soccer, volleyball and basketball coach, a fair and diplomatic referee and a steadfast volunteer at the Greendell community centre.

I met David 11 years ago when he walked into my campaign office, introduced himself and said he wanted to help with my election and serve the community. From that day forward, not a day went by during that campaign where David wasn't knocking on doors, installing lawn signs and engaging with the team.

Even though we were not successful during that initial campaign, David's commitment remained steadfast. His enthusiasm never waned as we continued on the campaign trail until 2016 when we were finally successful.

I remember at that time feeling as though we'd just crossed a finish line, but little did we know that the work was just beginning.

David accepted a position in my office as my constituency assistant and began helping me set up an office and serving our constituents.

Many times throughout the years, I've had folks in Riel come up to me, whether in the community, in the grocery store or during walks in Henteleff Park, and tell me about the respectful and friendly service that they received from David while contacting my constituency office.

As all of us in this Chamber know, having a committed CA who becomes an extension of the MLA within the community is priceless.

Apart from being involved in politics and community service, David has also spent several years in restaurant management, sales and running a number of small businesses, all the while maintaining a focus on volunteer work and community involvement.

He has volunteered in the Reading Recovery program, coaching at Darwin and helping youth in sport.

David spent more than 15 years volunteering at the Greendell community centre as a soccer coach and 10 years' experience as a soccer referee with the Winnipeg Youth Soccer Association.

I am forever grateful for the years of service David committed to our community.

He has recently retired to spend more time with his wife Lesley and their three children, Matthew,

Michael and Aimee. And David and Lesley are now celebrating 30 years of marriage this month.

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

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

Ms. Squires: I am proud to call David Meunier and his family my friends. And while David is now in retirement, he is still incredibly active in the community and continues to volunteer and help where needed.

I ask all members of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly to help me honour him for the contributions he has made to our great province.

MMIWG Honouring and Awareness Day

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, on this October 4th, MMIWG Honouring and Awareness Day, it's important that we say Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited names to give life to their memory and that their life was valued and worthy.

And so: Melissa Cook, Melinda Lynxleg, Rebecca Contois, Jana Williams, Doris Trout, Tessa Perry, Mackaylah Gerard-Roussin, Amanda Cook, Angela Poorman, Audrey Desjarlais, Barbara Keam, Lorna Blacksmith, Caroline *[phonetic]* Sinclair, Jennifer McPherson, Barbara Bottle, Cherrisse Houle, Cheryl Duck, Constant Camerson *[phonetic]*, Crystal Saunders, Diana Rattlesnake, Felicia Solomon-Osborne, Claudette Osborne-Tyo, Fonassa Bruyere, Frances Ellah, Geraldine Beardy, Geraldine Settee, Glenda Morrisseau, Marjorie Henderson, Hillary Wilson, Jamie McGuire, Jeanenne Fontaine, Kathleen Leary, Krystal Andrews, Leah Anderson, Marie Banks, Marilyn Daniels, Marilyn Munroe, Melissa Chaboyer, Flora Muskego, Nicolle Hands, Myrna Letandre, Rocelyn Gabriel, Shirley Beardy, Simone Sanderson, Tania Marsden, Tanya Nepinak, Teresa Robinson, Theresa *[phonetic]* Silva, Tiffany Skye, Tina Fontaine, Amber Guiboche, Sylvia Ann Guiboche, Eishia Hudson, Serena McKay and thousands more across our territories.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

Mental Illness Awareness Week

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, this week, October 2nd to the 8th, is Mental Illness Awareness Week. We need to focus on reducing the incidence of mental illness in Manitoba.

Let me give some examples.

Individuals with a learning disability often struggle with life and all too often develop a mental illness like anxiety or depression. We need to better support them.

Individuals with specific physical health conditions, where there's not adequate support for preventing it, are more likely to develop a mental illness. An example is individuals with a latex allergy. Providing for a province in which latex gloves are not used anymore would go a long way to helping them.

This week, October 2nd to the 8th, is also Latex Allergy Awareness Week.

Individuals who are exposed to lead have a higher incidence of developing anxiety or depression. We need to act.

Individuals who are involved in any way with the child-welfare system are much more likely to have a mental illness, as a report from the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy shows.

By helping those with learning disabilities, reducing the use of latex gloves, reducing exposure to lead and focusing on better help to support children and youth in our child-welfare system, and even before they enter the child-welfare system so they don't need to, we can reduce mental illness.

On this week, Mental Illness Awareness Week, we should expect action. So far, we have not seen this action in Manitoba. I hope we do.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwech.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Quality of Home-Care Services Need for Investments in Program

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Home-care services are essential health care. That's why it's so important to make sure that it is accessible and reliable. Seniors, families depend on it.

We learned of the heartbreaking decision of Sathya Kovac to access medical assistance in dying because she did not have the right home-care services. We offer our sincere condolences to her family and her friends.

How will the Premier fix the problems with home care highlighted by Ms. Kovac choosing to access medical assistance in dying?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): On behalf of all of us here, our sincerest condolences are sent to the family, friends and loved ones of Sathya Kovac in this—in these incredibly difficult circumstances.

Madam Speaker, we know that ALS is a devastating disease that affects too many Manitobans, and this is an absolute tragedy that's happened to this individual family. I don't know all the details of and the circumstances surrounding this particular case, but what I will say is that I know that the Minister responsible for Seniors is in the process of looking at home care and revamping home care in the province of Manitoba.

And we'll continue to move in that direction to ensure that it's there for Manitobans when they need it.

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

Mr. Kinew: Home-care patients need predictable and good quality home-care services. We hear too many stories of cancelled appointments and inadequate supports, and we know there needs to be more investment in these front-line services, and this case certainly highlights that.

I want to share some of the words of Ms. Kovac. She said, and I quote: I'm mad that I don't have dependable, reliable people and that it has worn me down. I don't have enough help, and that is the reason. End quote.

What will the Premier do to fix the home-care system?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, Madam Speaker, the circumstances surrounding this are devastating to the family of Sathya Kovac. It's an absolute tragedy.

And we know that this debilitating disease, ALS, is devastating and affects, again, far too many people, not just in Manitoba, but around the world.

And we know that, certainly, when it comes to home care in the province of Manitoba, we recognize there is more work to be done, Madam Speaker, and that's exactly why we set up the Ministry of Seniors, to ensure that we're listening to Manitobans and that we are coming to a conclusion on what is—how to best serve seniors in their homes and those who need home care, Madam Speaker.

And that is why the Minister responsible for Seniors is taking on that task to ensure that there is a review done of the home-care system in the province,

and that we find better ways to deliver those services to Manitobans who need it.

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

Mr. Kinew: As case work, we hear too many stories of cancelled appointments and inadequate supports for patients and families, and Ms. Kovac herself clearly said that she felt that the system failed her.

There should be every effort made to ensure our home-care system does not fail another Manitoban.

Will the Premier tell the House today how she will ensure the crisis in home care ends?

Mrs. Stefanson: Part of the review that the Minister responsible for Seniors is undertaking in the province of Manitoba when it comes to home care, part of that is obviously a—staffing challenges that we have.

And, again, Madam Speaker, that is nothing that's unique to Manitoba. We know that there's staffing challenges right across this country and we are working—I know, as my new role of the Chair of the Council of the Federation, I'll be working with my counterparts across the country as well as the federal government to find ways to recognize credentials of those who are coming into our country and into our province, so that we can get them working in the front lines of our health-care system.

So that will all be a part of the review of the home-care system here in the province of Manitoba as well, Madam Speaker.

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

Hospitals in Winnipeg Number of Beds Available

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, we know that the crisis in our health-care system continues to get more serious by the day. Patients suffer and front-line workers are asked to do more with less. We thank them for their heroic efforts, and we come here to this place to demand that this government stop cutting health care.

We've learned that their cuts to beds in Winnipeg continue. I'll table information from the Winnipeg health region's annual report that shows there are 28 fewer beds in Winnipeg hospitals than the year prior.

We know that we need more beds to help ease the crisis in emergency rooms, but the question remains: Why is the Premier cutting beds in Winnipeg hospitals?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, once again, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition continues with his false accusations. There's no facts whatsoever in the statement that the Leader of the Opposition just made on the floor of this Chamber.

I do want to take this opportunity to thank all of those individuals who work within our health-care system. We know that they do work to help and save lives each and every single day, in all aspects of our health-care system, and we help them—nurses, doctors, health-care aides.

Everyone, Madam Speaker, who works in that system plays a very, very important role, and we want to thank them for what they do.

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

Mr. Kinew: The facts are clear. They're in black and white in the document that I just tabled. There are 28 fewer beds in hospitals in the capital region of our province. That affects Winnipeggers; that affects all Manitobans, seeing as we serve people from across the various health regions here in Winnipeg.

When we look at those numbers, we see that even Brian Pallister funded more hospital beds than this Premier. And yet no one thinks Brian Pallister did a good job with our health-care system.

Will the Premier tell this House why she cut 28 beds from Winnipeg hospitals last year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, once again, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition continues with his litany of false accusations on the Chamber floor here today.

What I will say is that we are investing almost a billion dollars—or over a billion dollars—more today than the NDP ever did when they were in power in the province of Manitoba.

We remember those dark days when 20 rural ER hospitals closed under their watch. That was hundreds of beds right across this province, Madam Speaker. We remember those days and Manitobans don't want to go back to those dark days.

* (14:10)

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the crisis in our health-care system is worse than it has ever been. Talk to any patient; talk to anyone who works on the front lines and they will tell you that. And now we table the proof for what is contributing to this. This government reduced the number of beds in our hospitals last year. They cut health care. And it's the folks working in the emergency room who are left to deal with the aftermath. The PC cuts to health care have an impact on the real lives of patients in our province and they need to stop.

Will the Premier tell the House why she cut 28 beds from Winnipeg hospitals last year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, the litany of false accusations continues on the part of the Leader of the Opposition, Madam Speaker. We know that we have more capacity within our ICUs now than we've had in the past. But we also recognize that there's a significant challenge, not just here in Manitoba but right across our country with respect to a shortage of health-care workers, particularly nurses.

And I know that, again, I will be working with my counterparts across the country and the federal government to ensure that we get more—immigration is a very important issue—we want to bring more people to our country, more people to our province who are trained health-care professionals. We have our internationally educated nurses that are here that we want to get the credentials that they need to get them working on the front line. We've announced 400 more seats, nursing seats, in the province of Manitoba.

We are taking action. We've been listening. We've been hearing from Manitobans, and we're taking action on their behalf, Madam Speaker.

Transfer of Seniors for Health Services Request for Patient Care in Community

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): Madam Speaker, northern residents who need health care are being transported hundreds of miles away from their home.

A concerned daughter contacted me yesterday to explain that their mother was being transported from Thompson General Hospital to Flin Flon because there are no beds available at TGH. This senior will be away from family, friends and loved ones just to seek health care. This is a disgraceful way to treat seniors who need health care.

Why is the minister not ensuring care close to home?

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

It gives me an opportunity to state that our government has given \$4.3 million for 37 additional nurse-training seats at the University College of the North. In addition to that, Madam Speaker, we have committed in Budget 2022 \$812 million to ensure that rural and northern communities, individuals in those communities, begin to receive care closer to home.

We're going to create a northern intermediary hub and so much more to ensure that individuals such as the person that the member has raised here gets the care that they need in their community.

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

Mr. Redhead: I've sent the minister details of this case, but the circumstances have been the same for so many Manitobans. People are being transferred many hours away from home, away from their family, their friends, their loved ones, their communities. This is such an undignified way to treat seniors.

I ask again—the minister—why won't she ensure care close to home?

Ms. Gordon: I was pleased earlier this summer to be in Thompson at a table with over 30 stakeholders from northern region. We met in Thompson, talking about the needs, not just of that community but other northern communities. I was in Norway House this—just last week as well, talking with stakeholders about the needs. We are taking action, Madam Speaker.

I know the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) is asking me to put on the record again—\$812 million for the clinical preventative services plan, which will create a northern intermediary hub. We are committed as a government to providing care in the North and to individuals in rural communities as well, closer to home.

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

Mr. Redhead: Madam Speaker, this year hundreds of people were 'transferred'—transferred all over the province because there was no beds for them. We saw today that the government have cut available beds in the city of Winnipeg.

Our communities need care close to home when needed. Instead, seniors are being transported hundreds of miles away just to seek the care they need.

When will the minister ensure that seniors can get care in their communities when they need it?

Ms. Gordon: I want to highlight that the \$812 million will build and expand 38 health-care facilities across rural and northern Manitoba; improve access, quality and reliability of care; reduce our wait times; increase our nursing staff; improve diagnostic emergency medical services and patient transport; create new hospital beds and personal-care home beds; so much more, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased that we have Manitoba's chiefs, grand chiefs, stakeholders all across the North at the table of solutions, Madam Speaker.

What is their solution? They have no plan.

Economic Review of Bipole III and Keeyask Implementation of Report Recommendations

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), alongside her predecessor, Brian Pallister, spent nearly \$2.5 million on the Brad Wall report—the Brad Wall report that infamously covered \$5 billion in Manitoba Hydro revenue.

This report included 51 recommendations for Manitoba Hydro, which called for all manner of privatization, contracting out and P3s. Manitobans want to know if this government plans on moving forward with the recommendations in that document.

Can the Premier confirm whether her government will implement all of the Brad Wall report's recommendations?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Madam Speaker, we on this side are somewhat puzzled by the member's tone and a seeming defiance toward—unwillingness to accept this expert report on Keeyask and bipole; 51 recommendations, two years of work.

And, of course, the NDP is nervous about what this report would say, because what the report indicates is that Manitobans in future must have protections when an NDP government tries to build assets for \$5 billion in addition to the stated cost of the project and then hides those costs from Manitobans.

We will act in the best interest of Manitobans where they never did.

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

Mr. Sala: This government paid Brad Wall nearly \$2.5 million to tell them exactly what they wanted to

hear. And just like this government, he ignored the evidence to get the outcome he wanted, as well.

Surprise, surprise, he recommended that Manitoba Hydro pursue privatization, public-private partnerships and that they contract out services, all while conveniently failing to mention \$5 billion in revenue. Manitobans deserve to know whether this government is still planning on following these recommendations.

Can the Premier confirm whether she will implement all of the 51 recommendations from the Brad Wall report?

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, it's no wonder that this member and his party has concerns about this expert report on Keeyask and bipole because this is the report that, after two years of work, details not just the cost overruns by the NDP, but the fact that they hid these increasing costs from Manitobans, that they bungled the capital project, that they overpaid suppliers and they provided no information to Manitobans about how they were failing. So, no wonder they will be afraid of those recommendations.

We will act in the best interests of all Manitobans to make sure what—that what they did on Keeyask never happens again. *[interjection]*

* (14:20)

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Sala: We are deeply concerned about this report because this report explicitly stated that Hydro should sell off non-core assets. That should be a deep concern to every member on—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —the other side of this Chamber.

This government directed Manitoba Hydro to implement all of the 51 recommendations laid out in the Brad Wall report, the same report that covered up \$5 billion in Manitoba Hydro revenue and the same report that stated Hydro should sell off non-core assets.

It's clear that this report is deeply flawed, and so are its recommendations. The Premier should direct Manitoba Hydro to abandon all the recommendations in this report.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) clarify whether she will rescind the directive to Manitoba Hydro to implement all 51 recommendations?

Mr. Friesen: Yes, the member admits that he's afraid of the expert report on Keeyask and bipole, and it's no wonder because what that two-year body of work does is reveal the mistakes and the misguided actions of the NDP.

As a matter of fact, one of those 'misguided' actions was to circumvent the actual planning processes through the PUB and the Clean Environment Commission that were supposed to be fundamental processes that would guide the development of such assets. They went around it. They hid from Manitobans. They hid the cost. It has resulted in billions of dollars of overage that Manitobans now bear the cost of.

Where they failed, this expert report will help to pave a path to a future where this never happens again. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Health-Care Infrastructure Spending on Capital Projects

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Madam Speaker, Brian Pallister might be gone, but his agenda remains.

In the past year, commitments for health capital were underspent by \$162 million. That means promised projects for our hospitals and our clinics didn't happen. Over the last six years altogether, they've underspent by over \$800 million.

Why does this government continue to copy Brian Pallister and not deliver for Manitobans?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I want Manitobans to know that it's shameful, Madam Speaker, to hear what the Leader of the Opposition and the MLA for St. Johns have said in this Chamber about Manitoba foundations, especially when they both supported and praised the Children's Hospital Foundation recently.

Just yesterday, on the floor of this House, members opposite were telling Manitobans that the ideas that come forward from foundations, that the supports that come along with those projects from governments and from our government and from Manitobans is going against the public health-care system. Meanwhile, in the media, they're praising the good work that's being done by the foundations.

Again, Madam Speaker, shameful. They would rather—

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

The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a supplementary question.

Mr. Wasyliv: Madam Speaker, health care in Manitoba is not a charity, and this government has to stop acting like it is.

Health-care capital has been underspent each and every year. In 2017, \$78 million; 2018, \$197 million; 2019, \$109 million; 2020, \$74 million; 2021, \$106 million. And now, for the year ending this April, \$162 million.

By their own admission, this government is not delivering. Hospitals aren't getting timely upgrades because this government won't spend what they have promised.

Why is this government carrying on the same approach as Brian Pallister?

Ms. Gordon: Second day in a row in the Chamber, the members opposite have said no to Manitoba projects that would assist Manitobans to receive the care they need.

Two—perhaps they should talk to their two former premiers. Members opposite would do well to remember their own history on community contributions. Gary Doer, in 2002: \$11 million, Madam Speaker, for Victoria hospital; Greg Selinger, 2013: for Ste. Anne Hospital, \$14 million. That's \$25 million total for those two projects that they partnered with foundations to complete.

If the members opposite want to complete projects, they have to support foundations in the work of those projects. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Honourable member for Fort Garry, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Wasyliv: Eight hundred million, Madam Speaker. That's the health capital that's gone unspent over the past six years.

They cancelled the expansion of CancerCare. They closed emergency rooms, urgent 'clare' centre and a QuickCare clinic. They closed primary-care clinics and the Mature Women's Centre. They closed CancerCare locations at both Seven Oaks and Concordia. All this government can do is cut, even

underspending their own commitments by hundreds of millions of dollars.

Why is this government operating under Brian Pallister's playbook?

Ms. Gordon: Under the NDP, we would have fewer capital projects because they're going to disband and discontinue foundations.

Madam Speaker, in our budget, \$32 million to enhance—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —and add 23 additional beds at Steinbach Bethesda hospital; \$64.4 million to enhance and add 24 beds at Boundary Trails; \$31.6 million to enhance and add 30 additional beds at the Selkirk Regional Health Centre; \$5 million for a new ER in Dauphin; \$10.8 million to enhance and add 12 additional beds at the Lakeshore general hospital with Ashern.

Madam Speaker, those are capital projects we will deliver on.

Home-Care Services Mileage Rate Increase for Workers

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, home-care workers play an essential role in our health-care system. Thousands of Manitobans rely on home care for their daily needs, yet this government has refused to compensate home-care workers fairly.

To make matters worse, the money they're paid for mileage has failed to keep pace with rising gas prices. Workers are being forced to pay out of pocket for gas, which is essentially a cut in their pay.

Will the minister do the right thing and commit to increasing mileage rates for home-care workers today?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): Certainly, I agree with the member in regard to the important role that health care—or, home-care workers play—excuse me—in the province of Manitoba, and certainly support our seniors.

As I had indicated in the House on many occasions, we in our department are undertaking a seniors strategy review, and we look forward to continuing to address the needs of seniors through home care. It's on our agenda; it's on our radar, and I can assure you we will be addressing the needs of our seniors.

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

Quality of Care Concerns

MLA Marcelino: Home care helps Manitobans age in place and keeps us out of personal-care homes and hospitals. Yet home-care workers are severely underpaid. They suffer from poor working conditions and poor benefits, and this has led to predictable issues with recruitment and retention.

High vacancy rates have led to three WRHA locations—640 Main St., 755 Portage and 80 Sutherland—cancelling all non-essential home-care visits. Non-essential services include bathing, laundry, housekeeping and bulk meal preparation. These are services that people rely on every day for their needs.

This government needs to take action to ensure that Manitobans are getting the home care they need.

* (14:30)

Will the minister do so today?

Mr. Johnston: I do appreciate the issue that the member brings up, and that's why my department is undertaking a seniors review, and we will continue to ensure that we are going to fulfill the needs of seniors.

That's the reason for the study. That's why we've reached out to stakeholders. That's why we've reached out to seniors. We're looking for solutions and we're going to get those solutions.

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

MLA Marcelino: The quantity and the quality of home-care services has decreased under this government across every corner of our province. It's a shame, because Manitoba's home-care system used to be the envy of other jurisdictions. High vacancy rates in all areas have resulted in widespread appointment cancellations that impacts the quality of care provided.

This is wrong, Madam Speaker. Manitobans want to age in place, yet many are being forced into personal-care homes and hospitals due to the lack of home-care services. The government should take action to provide supports for Manitobans to age in place. Will they do so today?

Mr. Johnston: I agree with the member. What I've heard time and time again from the stakeholders that I've been dealing with, and certainly, seniors them-

selves, is that they want to age at home. And this government is looking to ensure that we're able to accommodate that. And again, that's what the whole seniors strategy is about. And I can assure the member, as soon as I'm able to share our initiatives with this House I will be doing it, and we will be addressing those needs.

**Missing and Murdered Indigenous
Women and Girls
Request for Government to Call an Inquest**

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): For decades, this province has had the tragic distinction of its mistreatment of women, especially Indigenous women. It's been called ground zero for missing and murdered. While we use passive terms like domestic violence, we sidestep the issue is overwhelmingly violence committed by men against women, girls and two-spirited who end up murdered and missing.

It's been this way for decades and more, and there's still no place for many women to get safe. I table an article from *The Globe and Mail* from 2012, a decade ago, when the Manitoba NDP refused to even consider calling an inquiry into the MMIWG. On this day of action, will the PC government do what the NDP refused to do, to call a provincial inquiry into the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Manitoba?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): We know, and this government has recognized—and I think that all members in this House recognize—the tragedy when it comes to murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls.

Certainly, from the Department of Justice perspective, working with Victim Services, I know from the Minister of Families and the legislation that she's brought in, whether it's Clare's Law or others dealing with human trafficking, Madam Speaker, there are significant efforts that are taking place when it comes to this government.

And there are more efforts that are going to continue to take place. We're looking at all different things that we can do, working with federal partners and others internationally as well to try to ensure that there is justice brought where there needs to be justice, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Lamont: We know there is a link between children taken into the CFS system and people who end

up murdered or missing, and who end up being trafficked. We all get the reports from inquiries into Phoenix Sinclair, to children's advocate. Yet, when Phoenix Sinclair died, the NDP dragged their feet on calling an inquiry for years, doubled the number of children in the custody of CFS and violated their human rights by taking their special allowance.

They actively campaigned to put more Indigenous children in jail by backing the Harper Conservatives' draconian omnibus crime bill while boasting of the new prisons they were building. Will the PC government call a provincial inquiry into MMIWG and consider the failures of systemic racism of the CFS system in fueling this crisis?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): While the member opposite continues to play politics with the lives of children in care, I'd like to share with him something constructive that he can do: he can come into this House and he can vote in favour of Bill 40.

Bill 40 is a tool that will give everyone in Manitoba, particularly law enforcement and children—CFS agencies—tools to protect children from exploitation. This is a bill that is brought forward after much consultation with the community on how we can help protect children from sexual exploitation and from predators in this community.

So, if he wants to do something constructive, I would urge him to read that legislation and vote in favour of it.

**Violence Against MMIWG2S People
Provincial Response to Individuals' Concerns**

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Manitoba still has one of the highest rates of violence against women and girls in Canada.

Back in 2021, the federal government released the findings of its inquiry into MMIWG in partnership with the provinces, and it demonstrated the importance of our province needing to work in co-operation with CFS, our children's advocate, businesses and non-profits helping to combat violence against women.

In addition to implementing the 2021 national action plan, what has this government done to ensure that when MMIWG2S people bring their experiences forward, that their statements are respected, believed and acted upon immediately?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): I appreciate the member's advocacy, especially on this day, a national day of recognition and awareness into murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls.

And our government is—takes the issue very seriously. That is why we are moving forward with the implementation of many of those calls to action.

That is why our government had introduced Bill 44, otherwise known as Clare's Law, which Diane Redsky had said was a very significant response to two of the calls for action in that report.

Clare's Law will help bring protection for particularly vulnerable women and girls in the province, and I'd ask that member to support that bill when it comes to this floor for debate and a vote.

Indigenous Youth Involved in the Justice System Announcement of Culturally Supportive Program

Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin): Without culturally appropriate supports, youth who are involved in the justice system are often at risk of reoffending in our communities.

Can the Minister of Justice please share with the House how our government is committed to improving the lives of our youth in and out of the justice system?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I want to thank my friend for that question.

I was pleased to join the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), the minister of Indigenous relations and the Minister of Families (Ms. Squires) at Marymount yesterday to announce a new program for 45 Indigenous youth who were involved in the justice system.

It will help youth in Winnipeg and in the city of Thompson. It'll provide a high-intensity wraparound culturally based program for those youth. That programming is very important, Madam Speaker, because we know that if doing time is wasted time, then ultimately, it's repeat time.

I want to thank Marymount and all those who were involved. I understand why the NDP won't ask any questions about justice because they see we have a plan and they have no plan, Madam Speaker.

Provincial Highway Safety Debris Cleaning and Signage

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, tragedy struck last weekend when motorcyclist Denis L'Heureux was killed in a collision on Highway 311.

Denis was celebrating his 45th birthday on a charity ride alongside friends and family. The group hit a patch of mud on Highway 311 which led to them 'colosing' control of their motorcycles and to the tragic accident.

Denis's friends and family are calling on this government to increase highway safety by clearing roads quick—more quickly, and by investing in signage.

Can the minister tell us what he's doing to address highway safety?

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): I want to thank the member for the question.

Madam Speaker, my condolences goes out to the family of Denis L'Heureux that was—his life was lost with a tragedy when it came to a condition on the road, when it came to, you know, the agriculture industry out there, when it come—it was really tragic and I know the motorcycle—family that he actually shared is in grieving at this point, too.

So, my condolences from our department goes out to them—to the actual person who lost his life.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, Denis was described by loved ones as a man with a big heart. On the day that he died, he was riding to raise funds for a local animal shelter.

We owe it to Denis and—to make sure that Manitoba's highways are safe for everyone. Advocates are calling for highways to be cleared more quickly and for signage to be deployed very quickly to prevent further tragic accidents.

* (14:40)

Does the minister have plans to implement these asks?

Mr. Piwniuk: Again, I want to thank the member for the question. Madam Speaker, I know our department is looking at all the situations that happened that weekend.

And I know we are looking at a pilot project that Ontario is putting forward when it comes to situations, when it comes to highways, when there is actually—when mud and debris gets on highways, we want to make sure that we're looking at—and we want, again, Justice to investigate the situation to make sure that the investigation is done to make sure that, you know, when it comes to any kind of fines, we are going to be implementing appropriate in a situation like this, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, highway safety is something that all Manitobans can get behind. One death on our roads is too many. Safety advocates are asking us for concrete steps and for action now to be taken. But we know that cuts have consequences. And with the high vacancy rate throughout the department, staff struggle just to keep up with the very basics of highway safety in this province.

How will the minister implement plans on taking action to improve highway safety in this province immediately?

Mr. Piwniuk: Madam Speaker, safety is the No. 1 concern when it comes to our department. We are investing \$1.5 billion to making sure that our highways are in good conditions. We are investing everywhere in the province, including Highway 6, what the member always comes up for. We are looking at—also looking at maintenance contracts with municipalities. We are looking at making sure recruitment is up there to making sure that our highways are safe.

That is our No. 1 priority—is our safety on our highways, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

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

To the background to this petition is as—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: —follows:

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

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

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

The JRL and Red River Valley School Division have flourished from a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

Their shared collection boasts over 50,000 books and has the fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

Students that are bused in from the neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, are provided with free access to the public library and its fourth largest collection of French books in rural Manitoba during the school year.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

(2) To request the Minister of Education to recognize the value that JRL provides to the student population of ÉHS, as well as the communities of the Village de Saint-Pierre-Jolys and the RM of Salaberry.

(3) To request the Minister of Education and the Minister of Francophone Affairs to recognize that an MOU between the Red River Valley School Division and the JRL is mutually, financially and culturally beneficial.

(4) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community.

(5) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy and devalue the architectural integrity of the building.

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

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

South Perimeter Highway Noise Barrier

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Residents of the River Park South community in Winnipeg are disturbed by the increasing noise levels caused by traffic on the South Perimeter Highway.

(2) The South Perimeter Highway functions as a transport route for semi-trucks travelling across Canada, making this stretch of the Perimeter especially loud.

(3) According to the South Perimeter Noise Study conducted in 2019, the traffic levels are expected to increase significantly over the next 20 years and background-backyard noise levels have already surpassed 65 decibels.

(4) Seniuk Road, which runs along the South Perimeter, contributes additional truck traffic causing increased noise and air pollution.

(5) Residents face a decade of construction on the South Perimeter, making this an appropriate time to add noise mitigation for South Perimeter to these projects.

(6) The current barriers between the South Perimeter Highway and the homes of the River Park South residents are a berm and a wooden fence, neither of which are effective in reducing the traffic noise.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to consult with noise specialists and other experts to help them determine the most effective way to reduce the traffic noise and to commit to meaningful action to address resident concern.

(2) To urge the Minister of Transportation to help address this issue with a noise barrier wall along residential portions of the South Perimeter from

St. Anne's Road to St. Mary's Road and for River Park South residents.

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

Provincial Road 224

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this position is as follows:

(1) The Provincial Road 224 serves Peguis First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation and surrounding communities. The road is in need of substantial repairs.

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

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

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

(5) Concerned Manitobans are requesting that Provincial Road 224 be assessed and repaired urgently to improve safety for its users.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure to complete an assessment of Provincial Road 224 and implement the appropriate repairs using public funds as quickly as possible.

This petition has been signed by many, many fine Manitobans.

Ekosi.

Louise Bridge

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Over 25,000 vehicles per day cross the Louise Bridge, which has served as a vital link for vehicular traffic between northeast Winnipeg and downtown for the last 110 years.

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years as it has deteriorated

extensively, becoming functionally obsolete, subject to more frequent unplanned repairs and cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

(3) As far back as 2008, the City of Winnipeg has studied where the new replacement bridge should be situated.

(4) After including the bridge replacement in the City's five-year capital budget forecast in 2009, the new bridge became a short-term construction priority in the City's transportation master plan of 2011.

(5) City capital and budget plans identified replacement of the Louise Bridge on a site just east of the bridge and expropriated homes there on the south side of Nairn Avenue in anticipation of a 2015 start.

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds.

* (14:50)

(7) The new Louise Bridge Committee began its campaign to demand a new bridge and its surveys confirmed residents wanted a new bridge beside the current bridge, with the old bridge kept open for local traffic.

(8) The NDP provincial government signalled its firm commitment to partner with the City on replacing the Louise Bridge in its 2015 Throne Speech. Unfortunately, provincial infrastructure initiatives, such as the new Louise bridge, came to a halt with the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 2016.

(9) More recently, the City tethered the Louise Bridge replacement issue to its new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. Its recommendations have now identified the location of the new Louise bridge to be placed just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed. The City expropriation process has begun.

(10) The new Premier has a duty to direct the provincial government to provide financial assistance to the City so it can complete this long-overdue, vital link to northeast Winnipeg and Transcona.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge—(1) To urge the new Premier to financially assist the City of Winnipeg on building this three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this vital link between northeast Winnipeg, Transcona and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction.

(3) To urge the provincial government to consider the feasibility of keeping it open for active transportation in the future.

This petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Hearing Aids

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask leave to present the following petition to the—

Madam Speaker: The member does not need leave to present a petition.

Mr. Gerrard: I'm presenting—I wish to present the following petition to the Manitoba Legislature.

The background to this petition is as follows:

A hearing aid is a battery-powered electronic device designed to improve an individual's ability to perceive sound. Worn in or behind a person's ear, they make some sounds louder, helping people hear better when it's quiet and when it's noisy.

People who suffer hearing loss, whether due to aging, illness, employment or accident, not only lose the ability to communicate effectively with friends, family or colleagues, they also can experience unemployment, social isolation and struggles with mental health.

Hearing loss can also impact the safety of an individual with hearing loss, as it affects the ability to hear cars coming, safety alarms, call 911, et cetera.

A global commission on the state of the research for dementia care and prevention released an updated consensus report in July 2020, identifying 12 key risk factors for dementia and cognitive decline. The strongest risk factor that was indicated was hearing loss. It was calculated that up to 8 per cent of the total number of dementia cases could potentially be avoided with management of hearing loss.

Hearing aids are therefore essential to the mental health and wellbeing of Manitobans, especially to those at significant risk of dementia, Alzheimer's, a disorder of the brain affecting cognition in the ever-growing senior population.

Audiologists are health-care professionals who help patients decide which kind of hearing aid will work best for them, based on the type of hearing loss,

patient's age and ability to manage small devices, lifestyle and ability to afford.

The cost of hearing aids can be prohibitive to many Manitobans, depending on their income and circumstances. Hearing aids cost on average \$995 to \$4,000 per ear, and many professionals say the hearing aids only work at their best for five years.

Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, as prescribed by an otolaryngologist or audiologist, will receive either an 80 per cent reimbursement from Manitoba Health of a fixed amount for an analog device, up to a maximum of \$500 per ear, or 80 per cent of a fixed amount for a digital or analog programmable device, up to a maximum of \$1,800. However, this reimbursement is not available to Manitobans who need the device who are over the age of 18, which will result in financial hardship for many young people entering the workforce, students and families. In addition, seniors representing 14.3 per cent of Manitoba's population are not eligible for reimbursement, despite being the group most likely in need of a hearing aid.

Most insurance companies only provide a minimal, partial cost of a hearing aid, and many Manitobans, especially retired persons, old-age pensioners, and other low-income earners do not have access to health-insurance plans.

The province of Quebec's hearing devices program covers all costs related to hearing aids and assistive-listening devices, including the purchase, repair and replacement. Alberta offers subsidies to all seniors, 65 and over, and low-income adults once every five years. New Brunswick provides coverage for the purchase and maintenance not covered by other agencies or private health-insurance plans, as well as assistance for those for whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.

Manitobans over age 18 are only eligible for support for hearing aids if they're receiving employment and income assistance, and the reimbursement only provides a maximum of \$500 an ear.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider hearing loss as a medical treatment under Manitoba Health.

To urge the provincial government to provide income-based coverage for hearing aids to all who need them, as hearing has been proven to be essential

to Manitoba's cognitive, mental and social health and well-being.

Signed by Kay Little, Carol Akerman, Sandy Chase and many others.

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Je désire présenter la pétition suivante à l'Assemblée législative du Manitoba.

Le contexte de cette pétition est le suivant :

1) La Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library, B-R-G, a été avisée par la Division scolaire Vallée de la rivière Rouge, DSVRR, de libérer les locaux actuellement situés dans l'auditorium de l'École Heritage School, ÉHS, d'ici le 31 mars 2023.

2) L'auditorium a été construit dans les années 1960 par le célèbre architecte manitobain Étienne Gaboury et la B-R-G y est installée depuis 48 ans.

3) Une photo de l'auditorium intitulée la bibliothèque régionale est publiée dans un document de 2008 intitulé bâtiments patrimoniaux des MR De Salaberry et Saint-Pierre-Jolys. Il est indiqué qu'il s'agit d'un bâtiment moderne important qui pourrait atteindre le statut de site patrimonial.

4) La B-R-G et la DSVRR ont prospéré grâce à un protocole d'entente mutuellement bénéfique pendant 54 ans.

5) Leur collection commune compte plus de 50 000 livres et possède la quatrième plus grande collection de littérature de langue française dans les régions rurales du Manitoba.

6) Les élèves qui sont transportés par autobus des municipalités voisines qui n'ont pas de bibliothèque publique, comme Niverville, Grunthal et Kleefeld, ont accès gratuitement à la bibliothèque publique, et sa quatrième plus grande collection de livres en français dans les régions rurales du Manitoba pendant l'année scolaire.

Nous présentons à l'Assemblée législative du Manitoba la pétition suivante :

1) demander au ministre du Travail, de la Protection des consommateurs et des Services gouvernementaux d'envisager de concéder l'auditorium à la B-R-G d'ici le 1er mars 2023 ;

2) demander au ministre de l'Éducation de reconnaître la valeur que la B-R-G apporte à la population étudiante de l'ÉHS, ainsi qu'aux

communautés du Village de Saint-Pierre-Jolys et de la MR De Salaberry ;

3) demander au ministre de l'Éducation et au ministre des Affaires francophones de reconnaître qu'un protocole d'entente entre la RRVSD et la B-R-G est mutuellement bénéfique, financièrement et culturellement ;

4) demander au ministre du Sport, de la Culture et du Patrimoine de reconnaître le potentiel patrimonial de cet important bâtiment et son statut au sein de la communauté ;

5) demander au ministre du Sport, de la Culture et du Patrimoine d'empêcher toute rénovation de l'auditorium qui détruirait et dévaloriserait l'intégrité architecturale du bâtiment.

Cette pétition a été signée par Michelle Bouchard, Richard Marion, Henry Marion et plusieurs de Manitobains.

Translation

I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library, G-R-L, was notified by the Red River Valley School Division, RRVSD, to vacate premises currently located in the auditorium of the École Héritage School, ÉHS, by March 31, 2023.

(2) The auditorium was built in the 1960s by famous Manitoban architect Étienne Gaboury, and it has been home to the G-R-L for 48 years.

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

(4) The G-R-L and the RRVSD have flourished by means of a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

(5) Their shared collection boasts over 50,000 books and includes the fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

(6) During the school year, students who are bused in from neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal and Kleefeld, are provided with free access to the public

library and its fourth largest collection of French-language literature in rural Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services to consider granting the auditorium to the G-R-L by March 1, 2023.

(2) To urge the Minister of Education to recognize the value that G-R-L provides to the student population of ÉHS, as well as the communities of Village of St. Pierre Jolys and the RM De Salaberry.

(3) To urge the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs to recognize that a memorandum of understanding between the RRVSD and the G-R-L is mutually, financially and culturally beneficial.

(4) To urge the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to recognize the heritage potential of this important building and its status in the community.

(5) To urge the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage to prevent any renovations to the auditorium that would destroy or devalue the architectural integrity of the building.

This petition was signed by Michelle Bouchard, Richard Marion, Henry Marion and several Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

* (15:00)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Thursday, October 6th, 2022, and, if necessary, on Tuesday, October 11th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider Bill 36, The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Thursday, October 6th, 2022, and, if necessary, on Tuesday, October 11th, 2022, at 6 p.m. to consider Bill 36, The Manitoba

Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act.

Mr. Goertzen: Pursuant to rule 34(11), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be the one put forward by the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont). The title of the resolution is Calling on the Legislative Assembly to Urge the Federal Government to Ensure Health-Care Funding Equity for Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for St. Boniface. The title of the resolution is Calling on the Legislative Assembly to Urge the Federal Government to Ensure Health Funding Equity for Manitoba.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

*(15:10)

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

ROOM 254

HEALTH

Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

Before we begin, I have a leave request for this section of the Committee of Supply. Is there leave to allow the opposition to sit on the other side of the table to allow them to see the screens that are situated in the room? *[Agreed]*

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health. Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I have no further questions for the minister and we'll wrap up this section.

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

At this point, we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the question.

I will now call on resolution 21.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$19,954,000 for Health, Policy and Accountability, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,892,000 for Health, Insurance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$29,525,000 for Health, Population Health, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$76,091,000 for Health, Transition, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,998,426,000 for Health, Funding to Health Authorities, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$180,642,000 for Health, Provincial Health Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,428,211,000 for Health, Medical, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$289,062,000 for Health, Pharmacare, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$207,890,000 for Health, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.11: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,305,000 for Health, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.12: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$288,913,000 for Health, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 21.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Asagwara: I move that line item 21.1(a), minister's salary, be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

MLA Asagwara: I just want to put a few remarks on the record in regards to this motion.

We have been in a global pandemic and we are facing unprecedented challenges in our health-care system, and Manitobans need and are deserving of health-care leadership that puts them first.

And, unfortunately, we've consistently seen this Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) make decisions that do not put Manitobans first. And we've seen this Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) make decisions that do not prioritize the health outcomes of Manitobans.

And, you know, unfortunately, this government's decision making time and time and time again has reflected that they are committed to moving forward, just perpetuating Brian Pallister's agenda, and it's hurting Manitobans across this province, which is why we've brought this motion forward regarding the minister's salary.

Thank you.

* (15:20)

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any other further comments or statements to be made?

Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: We will now do resolution 21.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to her majesty a sum not exceeding \$12,785,000 for Health, Resources and Performance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Health.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply are for the Department of Mental Health and Community Wellness.

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

The committee recessed at 3:23 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:30 p.m.

MENTAL HEALTH AND COMMUNITY WELLNESS

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

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): I do, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the Department of Mental Health and Community Wellness, I am very pleased to present the financial Estimates for the twenty–2022-23 fiscal year.

In doing so, I commit to making Mental Health and Community Wellness an effective and results-oriented department that will respond rapidly and effectively to the evolving mental health and wellness landscape in our province.

The Department of Mental Health and Community Wellness was created in January of 2021 in response to the increased prevalence and complexity of mental health and addictions issues, and increasing demand for services and supports.

We are the first government in Canada to bring mental health, substance use and addiction services, as well as wellness and health promotion programs, together under one department.

Department-led province-wide consultations, speaking to thousands of Manitobans, service providers and experts about opportunities to improve mental health, substance use recovery and wellness programs and services has informed the development of an integrated whole-of-government five-year road map, a path to mental health and community wellness: a road map for Manitoba. The road map's vision is that Manitobans experience optimal physical, mental, emotional, cultural, spiritual well-being across their lifespan.

Our focus will be on developing a more co-ordinated, accessible system where mental health, addictions and wellness supports are available to Manitobans as close to home as possible. The proposed 2022-23 budget, in core, reflects an expenditure of \$390.6 million and 66.2 staff years or FTEs, an increase of \$16.3 million from the restated '21-22 budget, or a 4.3 per cent increase.

In terms of summary, the 2022-23 Mental Health and Community Wellness summary budget is set at \$399.2 million, representing an overall increase of 4.3 per cent.

This year's budget includes investments in the following: \$17.1 million to implement the year 1 of the five-year action plan to invest in core services and programs for Manitobans, to make services more available and easier to navigate.

The strategic area of focus for this investment will include the following: (1) equitable access and co-ordination, (2) mental well-being and chronic disease prevention, (3) governance and accountability, (4) quality and innovation and (5) Indigenous partnership and wellness.

Twenty-three point seven million dollars is to support over 30 effective mental health and addictions programs and services across the province, led by the departments of Mental Health and Community Wellness, Education and Early Childhood Learning and Families.

This investment includes, but is not limited to, the following key priorities: Project 11, Thrival Kits, integrated youth services, access to mental health emergency assessment and treatment services, school-based mental health supports for youth, Indigenous-led health services, withdrawal management services, sobriety treatment and recovery teams, RAAM clinic expansions, eating disorder supports, acute medical sobering unit, community 24-7 drop-in centre and pregnancy and infant loss.

Funding of \$1.2 million in funding for mental health services to address wage and volume pressures, as well as supplies and drug cost increases for the following service delivery organizations: Shared Health, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Prairie Mountain regional health authority, Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority, Southern Health-Santé Sud, northern regional health authority.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to say a few words on this year's Estimates. I'd also like to acknowledge my colleagues in Families, Education and Early Childhood Learning, Justice and Health for their partnership and support in this important work to help improve mental health and community wellness across the province.

I'd now be happy to answer any questions.

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

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

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): So, I'm very clearly not the critic on this particular file. I'm here in place of my colleague, the MLA for Point Douglas today, and so I will keep my remarks short. But I do want to put a few words on the record in regards to this portfolio.

Manitoba, when we talk about what's going on in health care and we talk about mental health and wellness and community wellness, we—I think we all recognize that we're facing some very challenging times in the province.

Manitoba families, in every aspect of the province, are navigating increased mental health challenges, and that includes challenges accessing mental health services and resources. Providers working within our care system and our care communities are struggling with limited resources to make sure that they can meet people's needs.

And, as the opposition, we've been advocating very tirelessly, and our colleague, the MLA for Point Douglas, has done a tremendous job advocating on behalf of families and service providers in the hopes that this government will respond appropriately and accordingly to the needs of Manitobans.

It's certainly a priority, I think, for everybody in the Legislature—in the Assembly, rather, in terms of MLAs, to meet the needs of their constituents.

However, there are some pretty clear concerns that we have in terms of how this government has been taking action—or not taking action to address the needs of Manitoba families.

We continue to see increased wait times in regards to accessing mental health services. We continue to see increases in overdose deaths, preventable overdose deaths, and a lack of action taken by this government in order to be preventative in terms of meeting people's needs.

And so, our hope is that, in asking these questions, we also get a good understanding of what steps this government is going to take moving forward to meet the needs of Manitobans. Because, at this point, when we're looking at unprecedented mental health challenges in Manitoba, we need creative and holistic and compassionate approaches to mental health and wellness in our province.

I'll leave my remarks there. Thank you.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 24.1.(a), contained in resolution 24.1. *[interjection]* Oh, sorry, my apologies.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 24.1.(a), contained in resolution 24.1.

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

Mrs. Guillemard: I'd like to introduce my deputy minister, Kim Kauffman, for the department; as well as the assistant deputy minister and executive financial officer, Sandra Henault; and Susan Crichton, senior adviser to the deputy minister; as well as my special assistant, Jeff Chochinov.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Asagwara: So, I just would like to start in regards to the mental health and recovery fund.

So, under the division of the department, under mental health and recovery, there's a line for \$4.517 million. The explanatory note says that this was for, and I quote, various pilot project initiatives, end quote.

* (15:40)

Can the minister list those projects and provide me a bit of an explanation for each of them?

Thank you.

Mrs. Guillemard: Could I just ask the member to clarify which page they are referring to?

MLA Asagwara: Sure, one moment. Yes. Thank you, I'm going to come back to that. I'll move on to another question, if that's okay. And I'll get that page number for the minister in a moment.

Can the minister provide me the names of her political staff?

Mrs. Guillemard: Today, the political staff I have in attendance is Jeff Chochinov, my special assistant.

MLA Asagwara: More broadly, can the minister provide the names of all of your political staff, generally?

Mrs. Guillemard: Currently, Mr. Chochinov is my only political staff in my office.

MLA Asagwara: Manitoba has an agreement with Canada for mental health and addiction support, the federal government. It's 100 per cent federal dollars.

How much of those dollars were allocated to the Province in these two areas in fiscal year 2021-2022? How much of those dollars were spent? And how much has the Province requested be carried forward—so how much of those unspent dollars were requested to be brought forward?

Mrs. Guillemard: Okay, so in the fiscal year of '21-22, the federal dollars that came to Manitoba was \$23.7 million, of which was—\$20 million was spent in-year; \$3.7 million was delayed due to some of the programs not being able to start because of COVID, and they were fully allocated and spent within this fiscal year of '22-23.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response and for covering all of the asks I had within that.

I'm going to go back to my first question. Got some clarity now.

So, the page number was 30. So, for last year, under mental health and recovery, transition, there's a line for \$4.517 million—and that's new money, \$4.517 million of new money. What was that money for?

And, again, there are piloted initiatives outlined. If you could list, you know, what those projects are, that'd be great.

Thank you.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Guillemard: So, yes, there was a line there for \$4.517 million, of which only half a million dollars was spent on consultation costs for the road map. So that included travel and meeting with various stakeholders and groups to get feedback about what we would involved in that road map, what the priorities of the communities were. And the remainder of

\$4.017 million, \$2 million of which went to United Way for various projects that were chosen at United Way where they felt the greatest need was and most impact would be.

And then there's a list of a number of pilot projects that were invested in: our cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness investments; Healthy Together Now pilot project; Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba received an increase in-year; the nicotine replacement therapy program as well. And then I've mentioned the United Way proposals.

There were some other investments as well that have not yet been announced, and I look forward to speaking about those in the coming weeks.

MLA Asagwara: Can the minister provide a little bit of clarity around some of these programs, so just—are there specifics available in terms of who runs these programs or who they're specifically attached to?

So I've got the titles of them: there's a CBT program, there's mindfulness, there's helping together. The child nutrition I think we have a good sense of, but not familiar, actually, with all of who would be responsible for delivering those.

So, if you could provide some clarity in regards to those details, that would be great.

Mrs. Guillemard: Okay, so these pilot projects—so I'll go to the CBTm. So that's the cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness investment, and that was funded through Shared Health. So that would be distributed through Shared Health to the various organizations that provide those services.

The Healthy Together Now is administered through the department but through different RHAs. So the different RHAs could apply to access that funding for their various programs.

And I think the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba is self-explanatory.

The nicotine replacement therapy is administered through the RHAs.

And, of course United Way proposals were administered through United Way.

MLA Asagwara: I have in front of me an—our response, rather, so information we received through freedom of information regarding an RFP put out by your—the minister's department, rather, for a—to develop a mental health road map, so the five-year

road map. And this is an agreement between the government of Manitoba and Optimus SBR Inc.—incorporated.

Now, this agreement is for \$450,000, nearly half a million dollars. Can the minister provide some clarity around why this RFP was commissioned and, given that we just recently had the VIRGO report completed and there are many recommendations from that report that I know this government has talked about addressing, so why a \$450,000 road map being RFP'd at this stage?

So, again, why was this—another report commissioned, and can the minister provide any clarity around some of the details of what's come of it?

* (16:00)

Mrs. Guillemard: I appreciate the question incoming from the member opposite.

So we did issue the RFP out for proposals to actually address a number of different reports, not just VIRGO. So you'll recall the Peachey report really identified it—many gaps in the health-care system and areas that needed to be addressed and really focused on. But it wasn't prescriptive, so it didn't go through the steps of how to achieve results or how to address some of those gaps.

Similar, VIRGO identified a lot of the difficulties and challenges within the mental health system and came up with 125 recommendations.

So in order for us to come up with a five-year plan to identify the priority areas that could have the immediate impacts to benefit Manitobans, we did issue an RFP for consultation services to also identify and prioritize Indigenous communities within our five-year road map.

We wanted to hear directly from people with lived experience, who worked within the mental health system, about the areas that they would prioritize over the next five years so that we could be very focused and have the biggest impact and most benefits for Manitobans.

MLA Asagwara: So it sounds kind of like—and forgive me for being blunt about this, but it sounds like you commissioned a report to go—to evaluate the reports that were already done. Like, the—I guess I'm not very clear, based on the information the minister has just provided—commissioned a report to address the reports that have already been done and the recommendations that have been brought forward, a number of recommendations brought forward from VIRGO.

You mentioned—the minister mentioned Peachey as well, and the minister has also referenced wanting to ensure that Indigenous—the needs of Indigenous communities are also being addressed. And, you know, Indigenous communities are identified as part of those prior reports.

So I think the issue I'm having with the minister's response is it's a bit vague, and the idea that a \$450,000 report be commissioned to address reports that have already been done and reports that this government has been saying that they are implementing the recommendations of, and yet you don't really have full clarity on how those recommendations—and I'll speak specifically to VIRGO—are being executed and where this government is at, in terms of that.

So I guess I'll be really specific in this question: if you're—if the minister is saying that this report was commissioned to address the VIRGO report, then what has come out of this commissioned report that's—and what does it speak to specifically, in regards to the VIRGO report recommendations?

Mrs. Guillemard: I can appreciate if the comments that I made were not overtly clear, but the monies that were spent for this exercise involved consultations, so organizing conversations with over 3,000 Manitobans to get feedback from lived experience about parts of the various reports, including the MACY report and how that would need to be integrated into our five-year road map.

So our five-year road map is not just simply based on the VIRGO report. It is based on a number of different reports of gaps in the system that need to be addressed in order to create an environment of better access for Manitobans to get mental health supports and addictions services.

So the cost included in this contract included those consultations, direct feedback and then honing in on the priorities that need to be focused on over the next five years, in terms of addressing not only the recommendations in VIRGO but also in MACY and other reports that have come before the government.

MLA Asagwara: Does the minister have available to her the amount—out of that \$450,000, what was allocated to consultations?

* (16:10)

Mrs. Guillemard: So, the reason why there was a little bit of a delay there is that the invoices that come in through the department for the contract, which is up to \$450,000, they aren't broken down into what's spent

on consultation versus what's spent on report writing. So the invoices that come through is all inclusive.

So they would have, you know, participated in the consultation processes; they would have compiled the information, and then they would have put that together and compiled it into a report and then submit the bill for the costs altogether.

So, in order to break that down, we'd actually have to go back to the company itself to have those broken down. We don't have that information available to us.

MLA Asagwara: Okay, I thank the minister for that response. I may go back to that. I think I still have a couple of—I've been going through this document. Unfortunately, most of some of the other documents are almost entirely redacted, but I may go back to that and ask a couple of more questions. But I'll move on for now.

So, my next question is in regards to federal funding. So, Manitoba is receiving tens of millions of dollars a year from the federal government for mental health and addictions.

Why is the report consolidated spending—the reported, rather, consolidated spending for the department down \$5.8 million this year? So, 2021-2022. And it's on page 26 of the annual report.

* (16:20)

Mrs. Guillemard: I hope I convey this as clear as I can.

So, the numbers that you're—you were looking at were summary budget numbers. And summary budget includes a number of different entities within it, some of which we don't have direct control or direction in through our department.

For instance, a number of RHAs run parking lots, and they get revenue and they decide what they spend that on, and they can determine what areas to spend that in. We don't have a say in where those revenues are spent.

But, if you were looking at the core budget or the core expenditures, we actually ended up spending—excuse me—\$23 million more in our department on services. And part of that was due to the COVID service deliveries as well. So, it actually is a function of summary versus core when you're looking at those numbers.

So, we didn't reduce the services—investments by \$5 million. That would have been in the overall—

outside of where we have direct access or direct involvement, services that RHAs are able to determine where the monies go.

MLA Asagwara: So, just so that I'm clear, is the minister saying that the reason why the reported consolidated spending for the department was down \$5.8 million is due to the decision making of the RHAs?

So that spending decrease of nearly \$6 million is a direct result of how the RHAs are determining those funds need to be spent? I just want to make sure I'm really clear.

Mrs. Guillemard: So, yes, I was using that as a generic sort of example in terms of—there are other sort of revenue sources that come in that don't impact how we influence different services.

But we believe that the majority of the amounts that you're referencing have to do with a flood that happened at AFM. And they made an insurance claim, so the insurance paid out, and then that led to a lot of the significant improvements that, therefore, we didn't have to then invest in, because insurance paid for the upgrades and the reparations after the flood.

So, then, that insurance claim that would pay for that—there may have been projects that we would have had to expend on, were covered under the insurance claim.

MLA Asagwara: Does the minister have available the amount that was related to that, then? With AFM?

* (16:30)

Mrs. Guillemard: So, again, the specifics of the amounts that the insurance would have had to pay out—you can find that, actually, online for the annual report for AFM in the 2020-2021 year. And it is roughly around that \$3 million mark, but you can be more accurate in the numbers. It's a public report that's accessible online.

In terms of the overall discrepancy there, some of that also relates to one-time pressure costs, including for COVID expenditures that wouldn't be seen year over year if the same strain or needs were not present for COVID in the following year.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that response.

In the annual report, the consolidated statement says that spending for psychiatry is down \$24.7 million year over year. The details of that, however, are not broken out.

Can the minister explain that?

Mrs. Guillemard: While my department looks up some of the details there, I just wanted to get back to a question you had earlier about the amount spent on the contract for consultation.

We don't have a 'specikvic' number, for the reasons I had stated earlier, but the contract itself that was signed said that 30 per cent of the overall expenditures would be spent on consultation. So we know that we did expend fully the \$450,000. So 30 per cent of that was spent on consultations.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you.

Mrs. Guillemard: Yes, so the number that you were referring to was actually not a reduction of \$24 million from psychiatry. That was actually a reallocation or reclassification from psychiatry into the health authority line.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you for that response.

So, given this is a newly created portfolio, newly created department, obviously there's going to be new expenses, right?

The minister's salary and support has resulted in an increase of \$938,000, nearly \$1 million, and executive compensation and support overall, therefore, is up nearly \$1 million, as I just stated. And yet spending in the department—I know we've kind of gone over it already, but spending in the department overall is down nearly \$6 million.

Now, the minister has provided a little bit of clarity around some of why that—the number is what it is, but there's still a gap, there's still a decrease there that is, you know, based on my quick math, unaccounted for.

So can the minister explain why, despite the increase in these—the funding, quite frankly, for salaries, et cetera, why there's still this decrease noted when you look at the consolidated numbers?

*(16:40)

Mrs. Guillemard: So, again, I know that the member is asking for, sort of, more details on, you know, that, you know, \$5.2 million or so gap there, and we'll have to take that under advisement.

But what I can say is that, in terms of the core services provided, we have invested \$23 million more year over year in those core services, so there hasn't been an underexpenditure in mental health services for Manitobans.

But there is a number of accounting practices that is certainly beyond some of my own understanding, but I trust my department will be able to come up with, you know, the explanation. And I know that, sitting on Treasury Board myself, we had to learn about a whole bunch of terminology about how money is spent and used and moved in terms of the needs of different areas.

So we'll have to take that under advisement and let you know, sort of, the remaining gaps of funding, where that was.

MLA Asagwara: Thank you, Minister, for that response and for offering to take it under advisement. We do look forward to receiving that clarity once it's available to be provided.

Departments used to provide in their annual reports a five-year history of expenditure and staffing in their annual report. That was true even for new departments so that we could see the appropriations through time.

Can the minister provide that for us? And, if it's not available, an undertaking would be acceptable as well.

Mrs. Guillemard: Just want to clarify if the member is asking for the total funding amounts year over year for these positions, or are you asking for the total FTEs comparisons?

MLA Asagwara: The—I don't think I need the FTEs. If you could provide the total expenditure.

I mean, if the minister is willing to also provide the FTEs, you know, why not? The more information, the better. I do think I have that. However, if it is available to the minister, I would certainly appreciate it.

Mrs. Guillemard: Okay. So I have, starting in year 2017-18, a total expenditure of \$330,806,100; in 2018-19, a total of \$341,599,600; 2019-2020 is \$345,301,400. And then you'll have the numbers for 2020-2021 in the report.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that information.

Can the minister provide a breakdown of all of the positions, so a breakdown of all of the staffing as well? I count just over 40 positions in the department, but I'm wondering if the minister can provide a comprehensive—the data around the staffing in totality.

So that's the expenditure information, but I'm hoping you have the staffing as well.

* (16:50)

Mrs. Guillemard: Yes, so in terms of the breakdown of staff, previous to our department being developed, there would've been 11 FTEs in the department plus about 500 staff through the Selkirk mental health. And then they've been moved over to Shared Health. So we, right now, are at 43.7 FTEs.

If you want a full breakdown of everyone within the department, that's best asked, actually, through the Finance Department; they'll have access to the central services to know which positions are broken down into each department.

MLA Asagwara: Thank the minister for that response.

I understand that Finance would have that breakdown. I am a little surprised that you don't have that information. I would have presumed the—somehow the department would have that information in terms of clarity around those details. But I will—you know, I'll ask our other critic, then, to maybe put that forward.

Can the minister provide the overall vacancy rate for her department and the current number of vacancies by subappropriation in her department?

Mrs. Guillemard: Okay, so to answer the question and breaking it down for each section of the department.

So, for corporate services and strategic initiatives, the vacancy rate is 37.5 per cent and that's—

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

ROOM 255

FINANCE

Mr. Chairperson (Brad Michaleski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance. The questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): I'm wondering if the minister can tell us how much tax revenue will be lost this year due to the education and property tax rebate?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for the question and I'm happy to answer it.

If he wants to turn to page 172 of the budget, and budget—under the tax and fee measures, it provides a probably a good context for us to answer the question.

First of all, the premise of the question is wrong. So the member was asking how much tax revenue was lost as a result of the education school tax rebate. There is no tax revenue lost.

So, and as—this is made clearer, on an individual's insert, when they receive the education property tax, it shows the fact that gross school tax continues to be assessed and then that's—the property tax rebate works as a percentage deducted from that total amount of gross school tax owed.

So, think of last year, in the 2021 year when this pledge was made by our government to essentially move to a more fair and equitable treatment that looked more like other provinces in terms of that share, that ratio of the obligation of government to fund education and the obligation of property taxes to fund education.

We made those principal observations to Manitoba, that it creates unequal playing conditions because property tax—or, I should say, you know, land values aren't the same in every part of Manitoba: urban, rural, north, south, remote. And so, a more fair and equitable system smooths out the amount.

And so our government has been moving in that direction with a very principled and significant pledge to return 25 per cent of the school tax paid to every payer of that tax, which we did last year and is illustrated on page 174.

Then, in this year, you see that pledge in Budget 2022 to move to 37.5 per cent rebate. The first year, that rebate average cheque was \$388, as illustrated on this page. This year, that rebate is almost \$600; \$581 for the average cheque and next year at 50 per cent, going to \$775.

However, to be clear, this is coming from general revenue, and I would like to point you to another page in the books to illustrate on summary expenditure on page 12 of the budget, and I'm turning there now and the time permits me to do so. On page 12, the member will see that under the line Education and Early Childhood Learning, he sees a budget for 2021-22, the previous fiscal year. And my numbers are scribbled on top of it but I think it says \$3.22 billion; and he will

see that the budget in this year, at 3.488, was much larger.

Of course, there were issues of timing that we described, but clearly, the education budget is up. And I would want to illustrate this for the member on that page in order to indicate that the cornerstone of this pledge that the government has made to recycle parts of that property tax back to payers is not done with an implication to education.

Completely separate and aside, these payments come from general revenue.

Mr. Wasyliv: At one time, the Province of Manitoba paid 80 per cent of the Education budget through general revenue; income tax and property tax-related, about 20 per cent. When this government took office, that ratio was about 60 to 40. Now, after six years of this government, that's dropped to 56 per cent of general revenue and 54 per cent property tax.

In some school divisions, like St. James and Pembina Trails, people pay more property tax for the education bill than they get in general revenue. And that's the legacy of this government, is that this government has been cutting back so much on general revenue that property taxes have been overtaking it to pay for education.

So it's certainly not accurate or correct to say that this government has been giving more money; it hasn't. It hasn't kept up with the rate of inflation for education, which is running close to 3 per cent a year before we have this cost-of-living increase.

But I'm going to get back to my original question, which you didn't answer. Last year, we lost \$349,900,000 in revenue because of this tax rebate and that's at the same time that this government was posting record deficits in the last several years.

So I wonder if the minister can say whether this is fiscally responsible to cut these taxes at the time that we're experiencing record deficits.

* (15:30)

Mr. Friesen: So, I thank the member for the question, and I am pleased to be able to provide a response and correct the record.

So, the member has referred a second time to a lost \$349 million revenue. Let me see if I can help the member.

So, first of all—first principles, the government's funding of education continues to go up. The government continues to make record funding to education,

K to 12, including in COVID-19—above and beyond the print that you see on that page—I think it was page 12 we were referring to. Page 14? Page 12? Yes, page 12, under Summary Expenditure.

In addition to that, the member would still have to go to page 28 of the Public Accounts to see the \$92 million in Safe Schools Funding, which was held in a separate account and distributed from internal service adjustment to school divisions. And that includes things like you'll see an additional highlight of \$7 million in funding dedicated to upgrade ventilation systems in Manitoba schools. Those amounts are all stacked on top of those base fund increases.

So it's important to keep in mind for the member that the decision and the action of the government to grant rebate cheques to Manitoba households based on that assessment of their property tax and the school tax owing has no implication on school funding. Municipal authorities sent their notice of assessment; notice of assessment included that notice of education property tax owing, 25 per cent last year and 37.5 per cent this year was then granted back. And that is in respect of residential properties and for farm families, farmland as well, commercial and other classes of assessed property at 10 per cent. So, very—two different sides of a ledger: (1) government making good investments in education; on the other hand, government continuing to respond to the concerns of Manitoba families on affordability.

Now, yesterday, the member seemed to spend an inordinate amount of his time saying that the government was not doing enough for people on affordability. Today, he takes the opposite tact and says, you did too much on affordability. And yet, every major bank, every chief economist, the Bank of Canada, the US Fed Reserve, everyone else is saying that the impact on households right now—indeed, the CPI information for Manitoba in—continues to show, and this member should read that CPI data, and maybe he has, is showing that the year-over-year change—the escalation of the cost of goods, services, fuel, food for your table, clothing for your children, shoes—all of those costs are on the increase.

Energy costs in North America, hugely on the increase, and yet I remind that member that Manitoba continues to pay the second lowest energy costs in all of North America. So I would also remind the member, because he seemed to connect the deficit and say that this has a deleterious effect on the results as described in the Public Accounts, I would remind the member that that \$2-billion deficit a year ago was in

the middle of a global pandemic when this government was making exceptional investments in people, in programming, in health care. And on page 28 and on page 29 of the Public Accounts, he should review again that list of COVID-19 responses, workforce development agreements, vaccine initiatives, Safe Schools funding, the Restart Capital program and other—the business payments were substantial.

I had a business owner tell me, simply, probably seven days ago, he said, if it were not for the government assistance during COVID-19, I would have shuttered my doors. He has 30 employees.

The final point I would make is, the government continued to show progress in respect of the Public Accounts and show progress in the first quarter of the new year, even accommodating these payments at this time to Manitoba households. We will continue to respond to Manitobans who are concerned about affordability.

Mr. Wasyliv: I'll remind the minister that when Brian Pallister came up with this scheme, he had several preconditions. This was going to happen over 10 years, and it was only going to happen after the budget had been balanced. Well, two years into this, we're at 37.5 per cent reduction, so certainly more than a 20 per cent reduction. So they're much—far ahead on schedule and the precondition got dropped about doing this when we were in a balanced budget.

So we've borrowed money, here. And, according to the Winnipeg Free Press March 24, 2022 article, just from last year: Manitobans are going to have to pay for these tax cuts—their words—\$1 billion over seven years with borrowed money just to cover last year's tax cuts.

* (15:40)

So, my question for the minister is: How much more money are we going to have to borrow to pay for the education property tax rebate this year? Is it going to be another billion dollars that you're going to saddle Manitoba's children with?

Mr. Friesen: I thank you for the opportunity to answer the member's question.

So, this is an interesting afternoon because we are receiving a lecture from an NDP member on the importance of being in balance for the Public Accounts. And so I would say: physician, heal thyself.

But, to not be facetious, I think we do have to remind ourselves of the performance of the previous government when they were in power. The record of

the NDP was—it was consistent, if to say nothing else; but it was consistently bad and underperforming. It's why bond rating agencies, I remember famously in 2014, I think it was Moody's who said, Manitoba budget continues to disappoint. I think at one point in time they said, you know, continues to miss the mark, was one of the criticisms, that could've been DBRS.

You know, there was an almost billion-dollar deficit, with no global pandemic as a backdrop by the previous NDP government. In the last year they were in power, in the spring, having completely run out of gas and ideas, they returned to the Legislature not with a budget, but with what they called a fiscal update, which was a very, very meagre document that essentially didn't aim at much. And it continued to show that it was not going to be able to square the circle on budgetary progress.

I just want to present to the member page 121 of the Budget. It shows the Manitoba summary budget deficit scenarios, and unfortunately, really, you can only see on this back, you know, a few years, but there's a helpful chart at the bottom of the page which does show—in a better form—it shows the budget net debt scenario. And it shows how that was—it was increasing significantly under the previous government, and I wish that we had charts to show here some of those budgets.

I remember \$300 million loss, I believe, in about 2012 when I was the critic for Finance; 2013 was a very large loss and this was at a time when the NDP government was actually actively increasing its revenues. How? By jacking up taxes on Manitobans. I remember the widening of the PST—my deputy minister will correct me if I'm wrong—but I believe the widening of the PST in 2013 or '12 had an implication of about \$160 million per year. That was simply the adding in haircuts and personal services; and it might have been accounting services at the time, but it might not have been those ones; legal services, I think, had been done before that; property insurance, I remember that one.

I remember my father telling me about that one when he got his property bill and he waved it in front of me and said, who did this to me? I said, I can tell you exactly who did that to you. But the next year, availing themselves of hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money and still not making progress against the deficit was the reason why the bond-rating agencies took a—such a dim view of their progress.

So, I would want to make it clear to the member a couple of things. This government balanced the

budget in 2019 before the pandemic. Many said—some writers in some of our local media said, no government will be able to balance the budget unless they raise the taxes. And, instead, what we did is we held the growth of expenditures by re-establishing the primacy of the Treasury Board and good decision making in order to get the best results. We concentrated on results; we built partnerships; we made progress. We eliminated the deficit; the pandemic came, took us off-line, but that member himself just disclosed that he has seen an amelioration on the bottom line of almost \$700 million in respect to the previous year and now tracking ahead of schedule on this year.

So, it is our position that we'll continue to make progress on behalf of all Manitobans as we work to eliminate the deficit and make good investments in Manitoba services, unlike the previous government did.

Mr. Wasyliw: I think the minister needs to be reminded of some facts. The previous government had 10 balanced budgets; this government had one. And when it failed to balance the budget, it had back-to-back floods of the century at a time we had a federal Conservative government that had cut transfers to Manitoba to an all-time low.

This government had the opposite advantage. They had a federal government that provided record-high transfers that we have never, ever seen before. They inherited an economy that was the second fastest growing in Canada, the first fastest if you removed petroleum-based economies, and they've tanked it now to the seventh fastest growing economy in Manitoba. We now have the second lowest minimum wage in Canada, and for the first time in 20 years, more Manitobans are leaving Manitoba than coming. People are voting with their feet.

Stat came out that under this government, there has been a drop in the percentage of home ownership in Manitoba, meaning Manitobans can no longer afford to actually buy a home under this government. And, of course, this government has had two bond-rating-agency reductions back to back; that has never occurred in Manitoba's history. And this government had the two highest deficits in Manitoba's history. So this government, I think, has a record, objectively, of being the most fiscally irresponsible government in modern history.

So, I know the minister is being obtuse and he understands my question and simply doesn't want to answer it, but the more concerning question is: Did

you bring in these tax rebates without calculating the cost to the Manitoba Treasury of borrowing money and paying it back and what those interest charges are? And if you did do the responsible thing and make that calculation, why won't you disclose that to the public of how much they're going to have to pay back so that you can give Toronto billionaires a cheque?

* (15:50)

Mr. Friesen: Well, it would seem that we hit a nerve with the critic this afternoon, who has become very, very defensive about his government's record on deficit elimination. And I could understand the reason for that sensitivity.

I want to point the members attention to page 124 of Budget 2022. This is a helpful chart, because it shows the annual net income or loss depicted on a fiscal year, but it helpfully goes back to 2013-14. I only regret the fact that it does not go back further in these documents, but you know, there's only a certain amount of picture that you can show.

The member says you don't understand, there was a flood that year. I wanted to be—to get the clarification from the member. Did he mean in 2013-14? Because in that year, the NDP government indicated a loss of \$600 million. So, I don't think that was the year of the flood.

But it might've been in 2014-15. He said there was a flood. Maybe it was 2014-15, because his government showed a loss of \$539 million on a consolidated basis, and in the year when the—their outgoing year, when Manitobans made a change, they posted a \$932 million deficit with no flood.

So I think it suffices to say, as bond-rating agencies, credit agencies said about the previous government, that they continued to disappoint. They were not making progress, and that they had a—I believe the term used was that they had a spending problem, and not a revenue problem.

But to correct the record on something else, I did want to point that member to information that showed federal transfers to the Province of Manitoba and indicated the level of transfers and how those had changed over the years. I think we can't find it right now.

The member was making a comment about things were way harder then, because the federal government's transfers were not as rich. I point the member to page 40 of the Public Accounts. Page 40 increases—or, indicates sharp increases to federal transfers under

the previous government, in 2007-08. Sharp increases in 2008-09, in '9-10, '10-11, '11-12.

As a matter of fact, when you see that ratio of federal transfers to total revenue, it gets much more challenging when you look at the years in which our government was actually in power. So I did want to make sure that I addressed that issue as well.

On the last issue, the member says, well, what is this going to mean for borrowing requirements? Well, this is exactly why it is important that a government learns to live within its means, because a government that consistently operates from borrowing is a government that is essentially not able to meet the obligations that it should in respect of front-line services.

That's why the path to balance matters. And that is why, even though in 2016 when we first described that better approach, a strengthened Treasury Board process, a revamping of the way the Estimates process happened, strengthening of the Treasury Board Secretariat's functioning, a strengthening of the comptroller's function, a strengthening of internal audit, a strengthening of the relationship between the Auditor General and the Province of Manitoba, a rebasing of the government's books to focus on summary budget and not core budget. I think somewhere in my drawers in my office I still have a T-shirt that reads, we are summary, that I think the Treasury Board gave out at the secretariat. So, I can perhaps get the member one of them. There will be no cost involved, I assure him.

But the fact of the matter is, on the basis of those investments, we made progress; we eliminated the deficit. So now, if the question that the member is asking is essentially this: Who should Manitobans believe when it comes to the ability to stabilize the finances and make investments and reduce the cost of borrowing? I think the answer is clear on the basis of page 124 in these Public Accounts. It is our Progressive Conservative government who has eliminated the budget once—eliminated the deficit once and will do so again, not on the backs of front-line services, but while making those excellent and historic investments in front-line services. Why? Because Manitobans need and deserve them.

Mr. Wasyliw: So, just so the minister may know, I was elected in 2019, so it wasn't my government. And you'd be hard-pressed to find anybody in our caucus who was actually around 10 years ago who was in a position of authority back then.

So, I appreciate that he would rather talk about the very distant past than his shameful record. And his

government has a lot to be embarrassed about, because it has been a disappointing result for Manitobans. But I'm going to come back to the question, and we can spend the rest of the day, you know, asking it and you ignoring it.

How much money will it cost Manitoba taxpayers in interest and expenses for this latest round of rebate cheques that you are borrowing for?

* (16:00)

Mr. Friesen: I'm pleased to answer this question on the cost of borrowing, and the impact of deficit financing on borrowing and borrowing schedules.

I want to refer the member to page 67 of the Public Accounts, and he can see the Consolidated Statement of Revenue and Expense. And there's a line at the very bottom that refers to Debt Servicing. And he can see there at the actual debt servicing cost for the 2022 year, we're actually reduced from the budgeted amount. And he will probably see there is an indication in these books that talks about the reason for that variance.

So, obviously, the program costs a little bit less in the year that has completed than was anticipated. I know that in previous years, that cost of borrowing was above \$1 billion. The cost of the—or, the depiction of the accumulated deficit is actually shown just two pages previously. So, the member can see on page 65, there is those accumulated deficits, and that is essentially depicting those years of deficit spending and deficit financing, many of them under the NDP.

The other artifact I would want to enter at this point in today's conversation is from the budget on page 125. And there is a helpful chart that shows the net debt as a percentage of provincial GDP, so a net debt to GDP. And the member was talking about how things were worse under the NDP—well, the performance was definitely worse because the net debt to GDP increased precipitously until 2016.

And what this chart depicts is a very sudden arrest of the 'significad' increase of net debt to GDP that happens concurrent with the PC party that takes government in 2016. And then the member notices there's a stabilization—as a matter of fact, there's a net modest amelioration that is happening in net debt to GDP which, of course, is a—you know, one indicator of the strength of an economy.

And so the member sees, of course, in 2021 the pandemic takes us offline, but there he begins to see thereafter again stabilization happening, including the

very last column, that budget projection of a net debt-to-GDP number that continues to go in the right direction. So between 2016-17 and 2019-20, the net debt slowed to a 3.6 per cent annual growth rate, compared to a 10 per cent annual growth rate in the four previous years—10.9 per cent. That's a very significant change.

So, suffice it to say, I will take no lessons from this member when he talks about economic and budgetary performance. He's living in a fantasy land. The numbers simply do not support his premise. I find it really interesting that the member this afternoon actually walks away from the record of his government for 16 years. He said, I wasn't in these seats. This was not my government. And he disavowed himself of any kind of responsibility.

And yet on his line-lawn sign, it clearly shows NDP. Unless he's expunged the NDP from his lawn sign, he is running on the fiscal record. And I would say to the member, he can run, but he can't hide from the financial record of his own party. Really interesting to see the critic for Finance for the NDP today wash his hands of the financial mismanagement and underperformance that happened for 16 fiscal years—loss after loss after loss. No wonder Moody's wrote: continues to disappoint.

And so he says, it wasn't my government. I happen to know the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) is still on those benches. The member—I can't say his name in the Chamber—is clearly still on these benches. My colleagues could help me out, he has a constituency off of Henderson Highway—and the name of the constituency is Elmwood. He is still on the benches of the NDP party.

So I wonder, are all the members running from the record of their party? And they want to, but Manitobans know the truth, and that is that their government failed to make progress.

Mr. Wasyliw: It's deeply disappointing to watch the minister's performance the last couple days, because it has been a performance.

Estimates is an accountability measure. It's part of our democracy. When I, as the critic, ask questions, it's not on my behalf, it's on behalf of the people of Manitoba. I ask the questions that they would ask if they were in my seat in order to hold this government to account.

I think it shows the utmost contempt to Manitoba people where the minister refuses to answer straightforward, reasonable questions that the people of

Manitoba deserve an answer, like: you have now borrowed—or, the minister has borrowed \$350 million in order to provide rebate cheques, which are going to have interest and carrying costs that another generation of Manitoba voters will have to pay back at some point. And refusing to give that information out to Manitobans, refusing to provide that information is 'absholutely' contemptuous of Manitobans, and it really turns the Estimates process into a farce.

So I'm hoping that the minister will govern himself accordingly. I'm hoping the minister will act in a more reasonable and responsible manner for the remainder of the time that we so pleasantly get to spend together, and will answer this question.

So I'll ask again: how much is this going to cost Manicoba [*phonetic*] taxpayers to pay back the money that was borrowed for this rebate cheque?

* (16:10)

Mr. Friesen: I will start by saying, Mr. Chair, that I would thank the member to keep a civil tone in these proceedings. We will take no lectures from the member about civility or contempt. I've seen the opposition parties use these processes to thump and cajole and scold and threaten, and I would just thank him to return to a—just a tone of civility. We can have a good and frank conversation.

I think that Manitobans take a real interest when the critic for the opposition party sits at this table and disavows any responsibility from 15, 16 years of his party's former performance while he lectures the government on its fiscal performance. How is this not relevant?

Manitobans, if they sat in these proceedings, would find that interesting. If we took a five-minute water break and Manitobans were in this room and we walked out in the hallway and said what did you hear, I think they would say they found that very interesting. Because what it implies is that there should be no way that Manitobans can attach the promises now of this opposition party to the record that they formerly had when they were in government—when they held these seats.

So, I thank the member for his civility going forward. Happy to answer his questions.

There's a few clarifications that are important to make. Programs—including the education property tax rebate—are not debt financed, they are not deficit financed; they are financed through own-source revenues.

I point the member to the Public Accounts, to the budget and actual performance for revenue—revenue budgeted at \$17.8 billion, revenues in actual stated as \$19.1 billion. We could have good and frank and long conversations this afternoon about what the reason is to—for that difference in revenue performance—an increase of \$1.2 billion. Personal, corporate income tax revenue, up; retail sales tax, up; increasing as the economy recovered from COVID-19 and employment and economic activity increased.

We indicated this in Q3. We had indicated it in the forecast. But clearly there was this amelioration taking place. I said publicly—I'm sure that the member heard me say last week that clearly, leading experts underestimated the speed and the velocity and the impact in which the economy recovered coming out of the global pandemic.

So, the member asks, well, what will that tax rebate cost in terms of borrowing? Tax rebates are not borrowed for; they are paid for from own-source revenues. COVID-19 contingencies, indicated in this budget at \$630 million, would be debt financed. The \$100-million emergencies fund that appears every year in the government's books would be debt financed. Capital Programs would be debt-financed.

So, that amortization schedule is completed. There are public sector accounting rules that drive the determination of the length of time in which completed assets are to be paid back. There is that calculation of principle and interest and the government has schedules that it must keep and it must stay within that capital lane, if you will.

So, just to be really clear and to make very clear to the member that I'm completely answering his question: programs are not debt financed. They are financed through own-source revenues, which have grown.

And I would add to this that this government has done a lot to create the conditions in which businesses have certainty, even coming out of the global pandemic. They were able to hire workforce; they were able to sell products and deliver goods and manufacture and send to market. And these revenues for companies and businesses and individuals have meant that government also profits.

So we continue to build the Manitoba economy. We are proud of the work that we've done. We know that businesses are doing a lot of heavy lifting right now, looking for workforce. We're assisting them as we can to be able to make workforce available, but

essentially, we are proud to be making investments in affordability at this time for all Manitobans.

Mr. Wasyliv: Again, that's a deeply disappointing response from the minister. He's clearly not taking the Estimates process seriously and he's clearly not going to give a credible answer to the Manitoba people about a very straightforward and open case.

The Manitoba government cut \$350 million worth of rebate cheques that had to come from somewhere. And we know that they didn't have the money in the bank and they had to borrow it. And we know that when you borrow, there's interest and carrying cost. And that is very much something that he can calculate and provide to the Manitoba people.

He understands the question. He's refused to answer it now multiple times, and I think that absolutely shows contempt of these proceedings and of this process. And it's deeply unfortunate that the minister wants to conduct himself that way and he wants Manitobans to remain in the dark about his own government's fiscal choices.

So, I will move on, and maybe the minister will grace us with an answer on this question.

How much money did it cost the government to send out education property tax rebate cheques in the mail this year?

Mr. Friesen: First of all, I just want to make clear that it's a little disappointing to hear the member persist in this idea that I'm being contemptuous. For those who are watching video proceedings and my colleagues at the table, I think that they can see that I don't look any more, I guess—I don't look contemptuous.

I'm attempting to answer the member's question, but I will at this time take the moment to indicate that I have seated in front of me the Deputy Minister of Finance, secretary to the Treasury Board, the comptroller for Manitoba and the assistant deputy minister for Treasury Division. There are not four more qualified people in the province of Manitoba on these issues that we are discussing, to be able to provide answers. Oh, and I also have the executive financial officer for Finance seated just away from the table, who's been supporting these conversations all afternoon as well. This is in addition to the individuals in my department, within the operations of Finance and the secretariat, who are staffing both in the room and those who join us from probably the video, audio link.

So, I really hope that the member will measure his words. The advice at this table to that member, in respect of the question that he asked, is that the programs of government, including the education property tax rebate, are not debt financed. They are not something that we go and tell the assistant deputy minister at their shop in Treasury Division to go borrow to support the cost of.

* (16:20)

Government has expenditures that are all listed in these Public Accounts in the budget. The government has revenues that are all listed. There's a helpful schedule that shows exactly the growth of revenue over projections by subcategory, all those areas of taxation. And then, on the basis of that, we present those consolidated—the consolidated picture for the government's net income loss.

But I would want to add this as well. The member saw that in respect of the year that is completed, that Public Accounts shows, we started with the budgetary target of \$1.4 billion approximately and showed an end-of-the-year result of just over \$700 million, an improvement of \$700 million in year. But then—even then—on the first quarter result, showing another \$500 million improvement. So, even in respect of those parts of the budget that are debt-financed, the member should know they're dramatically reducing as a result of that improvement to the government's bottom line.

So, I wanted to say that for the record, and invite the member to stop with the talk about contemptuousness and return to a good and frank conversation where he can perform his role, which is important, and I can perform mine and provide him information.

On the cost of the 2021 education property tax rebate cheque costs, I will give him the numbers for last year's total cost. We would assume that the numbers for this year, while not totally costed, would be similar because there's been no significant change in the manner or the form that this work is conducted. Finance works to print, so think of the paper costs and the printing costs are within the Department of Finance. The MDA, the Materials Distribution Agency, which resides actually in the Department of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services, is responsible for the actual physical stuffing of envelopes, affixation—affixing of postage and the mailing of cheques.

Those costs are as follows: printing, \$49,373; mailing, \$442,617; inserts, \$15,510 for a total of

\$507,000. Total number of cheques last year: 456,000. Cost per cheque: \$1.11.

Mr. Wasyliv: Again, I'd like to urge the minister to not treat the Estimates process as some type of game and that—in my respectful view, part of his role is to provide information to Manitobans in a forthright manner.

Now, I think the minister did answer my last question. In 2021, it cost the province \$915,000 to mail out cheques to Manitobans. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has criticized this; Director Todd MacKay saying, obviously, there are smarter ways to move money these days, cheaper more efficient ways to do it. The government needs to put some effort into that. That's a CBC article, June 9th, 2022.

So my question to the minister is this; did the Province consider other ways to send out these cheques and why weren't they chosen?

Mr. Friesen: I'm happy to correct the record for the member.

The answer to his question that I'll begin with is essentially, yes. He asked the question: Were other methods of distributing amounts to Manitobans considered? And the answer is yes. But I want to provide this context and help guide him to the rationale that we took for the manner and the method in which we distributed these cheques.

First of all, a clarification, though. He indicated that the cost—after I just read it into the record—he indicated that the cost was \$900,000. I think I was clear that the cost was \$507,000—\$507,000, not \$900,000 as was just alleged by the member.

The member knows that we have been sending out rebate cheques even before the amount is due, so there is an emphasis placed on the quick sending of the cheque. We want people to understand that their benefit, in respect of the rebate, is arriving before the total amount is due. And we think that there's—it's important to align those dates: the date on which their property tax is due and the date in which this rebate would be in the mail.

On the basis of that, because of the urgency to send those cheques out, we chose to proceed in the manner in which government has sent out cheques before, and that is by physical cheque in the mail. So the member may be asking the question, well, why didn't you just get things reconciled on—somehow on, you know, taxes owing to the government after the

completion of the 2022 fiscal year? Well, that wouldn't then allow people to be in possession of a cheque that would align with the month in which those taxes were owing. So, first of all, we would say that's why the reconciliation is happening in this form.

But also, I think to the member's broader question: Well, why a cheque? Well, look, when it comes to the federal government's climate and incentive program, those quarterly payments—they're right now going out, a combination of cheques and electronic formats. Certainly, in future, this government is interested to know, you know, as the world continues to change, how we can modernize our practices. I can see in future a time; I think less and less people are using cheques. I know that even, you know, for my online banking now, I can deposit cheques digitally—things we couldn't do five years ago. We had to go to the ATM with our cheque.

So, certainly, the world is in the middle of a very, very dramatic and accelerating digitization. But the government has also paid attention to this. The government—the member will see in the Public Accounts and in the budgets our commitments to efficiency and effectiveness. I'm thinking just for a moment about things like the fact that—well, under the NDP, even a ministerial binder per week for the Cabinet or the Treasury Board. These were all paper documents. There were thousands and thousands of individual pages generated every week on photocopiers and then delivered—kind of run across the lawn of the Manitoba Legislature from the offices in which they were printed and delivered to members of those committees. This is now all a fully digitized process. We've gone to a digital format.

* (16:30)

I believe that many of our boards and agencies and commissions in Manitoba now have similarly translated into a digital board book. Way better for the security of documents, where you can grant and rescind privileges to read. And way more efficient and way cheaper, way less wasteful of resources.

But there's so many other areas I could point to. I mean, the Public Accounts that used to be published in four volumes, I remember as a new member of this Legislature—I was elected exactly 11 years ago today, as was the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Wishart), it was our anniversary today—but I remember at the time, volume four was like a thousand pages, and they would print it and it was, like, a big binding system to get that volume printed. It's now all digital.

In Justice, the court modernization is—project is currently underway, that will replace thousands and thousands of documents with digital and electronic forms of the same. So, our proactive disclosure section of the website proactively, digitally discloses documents that used to be only able to be retrieved in a standard, conventional paper base.

So, to the member's question, yes, we are interested in ways to do things more efficiently. I can see in future the transition from cheque form to electronic form, but for the time being, this was the best method in the opinion of the government.

Mr. Wasyliv: Four point one per cent of the cheques the Province mailed out in 2021 have yet to be cashed as of June of this year. That means \$6.8 million of taxpayers' money is still sitting somewhere unclaimed.

It's clear that there's obviously better ways to give people money, and this government obviously chose the one method that makes them look best in their attempt to buy Manitoba votes.

It's likely that some of these recipients didn't even bother to cash their cheques as they were so small. I think it's been reported one condo owner received a cheque of \$8. The \$915,000 price tag, that came from a June 9th, 2022, CBC news article. So, that's where that number comes from.

So, I'm going to ask the minister what other methods were considered in this situation? Why were they rejected?

Mr. Friesen: Could the member just repeat the last sentence?

We were attempting to get information for his answer, but I just missed the very last sentence.

Mr. Wasyliv: So, the minister indicated that there was, in fact, alternative methods of delivery considered.

I'm wondering if he can inform the committee what alternative methods were considered and why those methods were rejected for paper cheques.

Mr. Friesen: I'm happy to answer that member's question about alternatives to a cheque as the delivery mechanism for these education property tax rebates.

A number of things were considered, but, of course, the most obvious alternative to sending cheques would have been to send payments by direct deposit.

It might surprise the member to know that, based on the work that was done to determine, you know, the method of payment, that the rejection rate for direct deposit actually exceeds that of sending cheques, that that rejection rate can be as high as 6 per cent. Why does this happen? People change banking institutions. They close bank accounts.

I know that I regularly have to be reminded in working with my own accountant when he sends me a notice and says, is this still the right account? Oh, no, my account's changed. Sorry, need to update my account. Put my return in this account instead.

So—but there's more to it than that, because the member would have to also realize that we do not have, in Manitoba Finance, a direct deposit system for property taxes. There is no system that exists. So that would have required a registration process, an application process, where every Manitoban would've had to basically register, this is my account.

Then imagine, you know, there had to be a way to test that, because one digit entered incorrectly and you've got the wrong person's account. So there would have to be some kind of a, you know, maybe, like a three-point validation, or a two-point validation of that account's veracity and ownership. And then there would have to be controls put in place. That would've taken time.

This is why I tell the member, I think in future, this is definitely the way we will go. I think that if I talked to my colleagues in other jurisdictions, we will probably all be at a slightly different point on that continuum of making that transition to cashless or chequeless.

But I would also make this point, and this is not a comment on ageism, because I kind of like my chequebook still. But I know that speaking to people like my father and people his age—I was with a person a week ago, and we meant—went to make a payment at a farmers' market. And this individual—I said I have no cash with me, and they said, well, I've got a cheque, I'm going to pay by cheque. And I said, this farmers' market takes cheques? Absolutely they take cheques. And here were vendors taking cheques from Manitobans.

So, I think it would be a little too soon to indicate that the cheque is dead. So, the Finance Minister will make no such pronouncements these afternoons at these proceedings.

Instead, as I said last time, I really believe that, at this point in time, based on the timelines and the desire

to deliver a rebate cheque to Manitobans that would come concurrently with the bill that they would owe for their education property tax, based on the fact that there is no system that exists within Finance or the government to essentially send a direct payment to an individual, that we chose to do it this way.

* (16:40)

The last thing I would want to say to the member is, so what does happen when a cheque isn't cashed? Well, first of all, I would suggest to the member it's too soon to count out Manitobans who might not have cashed that cheque. We continue to have evidence that people are still cashing last year's cheques; that continues to take place. So even now, that cashing of cheques will continue.

But if any Manitoban feels that they didn't cash their cheque, what should I do, remember: that cheque does not stale date. You can take that cheque into a financial institution, take it to the ATM, put it in the slot; it will be cashed. That cheque will be good.

And even if it's lost, all an individual needs to do is phone Finance. They can have an easy process to register their identity. They can say, look, I live at such and such an address; I lost my education property tax rebate; I know I was eligible for it; it didn't come; and Finance can send a new cheque. So we will fully expect that the 4.1 per cent uncashed cheque rate to which the member refers will continue to draw down as time goes on.

I think I had one last comment I was going to make to the member—oh, yes. He talked about—he thought the cost of sending the cheques was \$900,000. That was an estimate. It was a budgeted amount. We've produced the actuals, and that actual shows that number of \$507,000 as a total cost.

Mr. Wasyliw: A CBC analysis of Winnipeg properties found that the top 10 per cent of education tax rebate recipients receive four times more money than the bottom 10 per cent. That was a May 19, 2022, CBC article. Does the minister think that this tax rebate benefited everyone equally?

Mr. Friesen: So, I thank the member for the question, and so will just remind him of a few principles in the way properties are assessed in Manitoba.

On a three-year basis, municipalities undertake to refresh their analysis of property valuations, property values. And on the basis of those property values—and you get those notices of assessment and notice of

assessment changes, and sometimes that is up and sometimes that is down.

And then if individuals feel—and this is for any category of assessed property, it could be residential, it could be commercial or otherwise, there are processes by which there can be appeals made. But essentially, that—then on the basis of those, there's a determination made not just of municipal tax owing for that value, or that assessed value of property, but also of the education property tax owing.

So, when the member asks questions about fairness, yes, the 25 per cent in respect of the previous year and the 37.5 per cent rebate of education property tax is consistent right across, no matter what that bill indicated was the tax owing.

For every single residential property that received that rebate, it was a 37.5 per cent calculation returning that education property tax paid to the individual or individuals—456,000 rebates made, almost a half million dollar rebates in categories of residential, farmland, commercial, railway, telecom and maybe one or two other categories that I might be forgetting—institutional, yes.

And the rebate, 37.5 for farmland and residential and the rebate of 10 per cent for the other categories. The average cheque, \$588, I believe, in this year. I'm checking that number now. It's—there we go, \$581, page 171 under EPTC in his documents. Very good.

And so on the last question, to the member's question about, I guess, equity. So the member will say, well, a person with a larger house—I shouldn't say larger—a person with a home assessed with a higher value got a higher cheque back than a person with a lower assessed value of home. Yes, but the member fails to also then disclose that the person with the higher value of home paid that much more to support public education in Manitoba. So the proportionality exists, and it continues.

* (16:50)

One individual may pay \$4,000 a year to support public education in Manitoba, regardless of whether they have school-aged children and regardless of whether those school-aged children attend public school or not. They are still paying. That is the basis of our social compact. We pay for the provision of services for all of us. Even if we do not seek health care, we pay to have a strong and vital health-care system. Even if we don't have school-aged children, we pay to support a strong and vital K-to-12 education

system. Even if we are not sending children to university or attending there ourselves, we are paying for a post-secondary institutional system.

So the member might say, well, one person got a larger cheque back. Yes, and that individual paid a larger amount. And the proportion on which the rebate was paid back to them was exactly the same: 37.5 per cent. At the end of the day, these are times in which Manitobans are focused more than ever on affordability. They know the cost increasing for groceries, for gasoline, their mortgages on renewal, their car payments as those schedules change, any lines of credit that are floating that are subject to higher costs. Manitobans know right now the importance of being able to meet those household obligations, and, indeed, fewer Manitobans feel confident right now about meeting those end-of-month obligations, and that is why our government is taking historic measures to help Manitobans now, including our education property tax rebate.

Mr. Wasyliv: Wondering if the minister knows who Emanuele Saputo is. Charles Koch? David, Taylor or Peter Thomson? They all received cheques from this government.

And in case you don't, Emanuele Saputo is the eighth richest person in Canada, estimated net worth of \$5.2 billion US. This government gave him a \$12,813 education property tax rebate.

Charles Koch is the 15th richest person in the world with an estimated net worth of \$70 billion US. He's a massive donor to the US Republican Party and funds groups that lobby against environmental regulation. This government sent him a \$80,414 cheque.

The Thomson family are the 26th richest in the world with an estimated net worth of \$49.2 billion, and they're the third, fourth and fifth richest people in Canada as individuals. The Thomson family received a whopping \$259,709 from this government.

Does the minister believe that these people, some of the richest in the world, need a tax rebate, and would you like to revisit the notion that this rebate is benefiting people equally?

Mr. Friesen: So we understand what the member is playing at, and he's busy trying to play to his base, and he's playing the game of class warfare. He's trying to say that there are some people who should get benefits and some people who should not.

But let's make a couple of things clear. He's conflating the names of people who have been

enormously successful in their personal lives and in their professional lives with people who live in Manitoba.

So if he's aware that the CEO for Koch International—K-O-C-H, that is—resides in Manitoba, I certainly have no evidence to that end. I believe that the Koch family still resides in the Midwest. I think that the global headquarters for Koch International is actually in Kansas City or maybe Wichita.

But—so let's be very clear. There are no residential education property tax payments made for the personal residences of any of the individuals that the member just noted. I believe without question these might be American citizens.

However, those companies are doing business all over the world, and those companies, of course, are doing business here in Manitoba. And even in this committee room this afternoon, we have members of our government who have had a chance to meet with executives and the local leadership team at Koch Fertilizer in Brandon, Manitoba.

And so I'm citing for the member this afternoon, Koch Fertilizer in Brandon employs 265 full-time employees. Koch Fertilizer in Brandon recently completed a new Canadian global headquarters on the Brandon property. I had the opportunity to tour it with the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and other members of the government probably less than six months ago. It is phenomenal to see the number of employees who make their home there.

Now, the member could think about the amount of corporate income tax that Koch Fertilizer pays—not in New York, not in Nebraska, but in Manitoba. Or the amount of personal income tax that employees who work for Koch Fertilizer—I could imagine, I could run some quick numbers based on a, you know, a notional amount of salary to determine what the total payroll would be.

But then also include the fact that this company pays the post-secondary education tax, which is that payroll tax in Manitoba. And even though we're making progress on that tax, those are very, very significant obligations. But don't forget about the fact that the retail sales tax is paid and the fuel tax is paid. And you're talking about a company that has 400 to 600 trucks on the road every year delivering product and three to four hundred rail cars.

So the contribution to Manitoba causes me to cite again for the member to go back to the budgeted and actual revenues for the Province of Manitoba for the

year 2022, ending 2022. Those revenues were estimated first at \$17.8 billion, but actually came in at \$19.1 billion.

It is in part the Saputos and the Koch Fertilizers and the many other companies who do business on—that that member would declare war on who are helping to contribute to a robust economy.

No wonder the Bank of Canada recently said that Manitoba as an economy is one of the leaders in Canada right now based on a number of different metrics. They were citing strength in the Manitoba economy, a favourable net debt-to-GDP ratio that is moving in the right direction, attention given by the government, making good investments in front-line services—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

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

CHAMBER

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Executive Council.

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

Would either member like to introduce their staff?
[interjection]

As previously stated in accordance with subrule 77(16), during the consideration of departmental Estimates questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner.

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Mr. Chair, I'll just introduce my staff. I have with us today Don Leitch, the clerk of Executive Council, and Philip Houde, the chief of staff.

Mr. Chairperson: The floor is open for questions.

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): And the Tories' worst nightmare is currently monitoring a scrum, so he will join us shortly.

* (15:10)

I wanted to just ask the Premier about what's taking place outside at the moment. There's a—I guess—a—you know, Winnipeg Police Service members and correction officers are sort of, it appears, taking down

the protest camp out the front. So I was just wondering if the Premier could share what she's able to about what's taking place.

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Before I get into that, I did want to—yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition ended off on speaking about Lake St.—the Lake St. Martin outlet and I just wanted to offer some clarification there in response to his statement that he made, just right at the end of the day.

I did indicate to the Leader of the Opposition, of course, we have signed off on our part at the Lake St. Martin outlet. Again, the ministers are out and have been out for quite some time and engaging with local communities as well, and First Nation communities. I think it's important to reiterate the fact that this is going through a federal environmental process right now, and until that process is completed and the licensing is completed, as well, the federal government will not sign off on this. So, this is in the hands of the federal government.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition said, you know, why are we not pushing this along?

Well, again, we've done what we can on our side, but I will say to the Leader of the Opposition as well that in my first face-to-face meeting with the Prime Minister, just prior to the flooding in the spring, I did raise this issue as a very important issue and urged him and the government to move along.

And, so—and I know that our ministers have also been in touch with the ministers as well, the federal—their federal counterparts, to do the same. So, I did just want to take an opportunity to get that on the record, just so that the Leader of the Opposition and Manitobans are aware that this is in the hands of the federal government and we have, in fact, done our urging to move it along for some time now.

With respect to the Leader of the Opposition's question, this—obviously we want to do what is in the best interest of the safety—all of our staff and MLAs. And there's work out of this building. We have members of the public coming from outside. We've got schoolchildren coming to the building here at the Manitoba Legislature, for tours and to visit and to learn and to understand more about this democratic institution, which we want to be able to offer them that opportunity moving forward, especially after having been shut down for some time during COVID, again, out of the safety of Manitobans. But we want to ensure the safety of all Manitobans coming and going from

this building. It is open to the public but it's also a workplace. And so we want to ensure that it is a safe workplace for those who work here, as well.

And, so, again, what is going on right now, in terms of what is happening on the grounds of the Legislature is under the purview, I believe, of the Winnipeg Police Service. So, I don't get involved and certainly our government does not get involved in how the police conduct, you know, their operations. The Leader of the Opposition will know that, so I won't weigh into that at this point in time.

Mr. Kinew: And appreciate the information shared there by the First Minister.

And, just by way of a follow up, I'd ask if there's, you know, information that can be shared about what brought this on. Like, why was today selected or why is this happening now?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, again, the operations of the Winnipeg Police Service are under their purview and under the purview of the chief of police. And we—you know, they—that's—we leave that. They're the experts in this field and we leave that, the operations, up to them.

Mr. Kinew: I was—I wanted to speak about health care, moving to a different topic, and just begin by asking, what are the Premier—plans to continue with the Manitoba clinical and preventative services plan?

Mrs. Stefanson: Thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question.

Of course, that is a question that should come out of the Estimates of Health, which I believe is ongoing right now, and those questions can be asked in that Estimates—those decisions are made there in conjunction with those—with Shared Health and with the RHAs and so for the operations of the government, that's where those questions will be best asked.

Mr. Kinew: Just, you know, given that the Premier is the former minister of Health, wanted to know whether she plans to continue with the Manitoba clinical and preventive services plan, which she should be familiar with as minister and would be aware of as a First Minister. Is that going to continue?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think what will continue, obviously, is that we will continue to work with stakeholders in Health to ensure that we provide better health care closer to home for Manitobans. We have said that for a number of years; we continue to stand by that. And we will continue to take actions to ensure that Manitobans from wherever they are in this great

province of ours, whether it's northern Manitoba or rural Manitoba, east, west, or in the city of Winnipeg, it's access to those health-care services that they need, when they need them.

And again, those are discussions that take place in the Department of Health, along with Shared Health and the RHAs, in terms of the implementation of those strategies, and I think, again, that would be most appropriately asked in the Department of Health Estimates.

Mr. Kinew: The first wave of the clinical and preventive services plan saw the closures of the emergency rooms at Concordia, Victoria General Hospital and Seven Oaks.

Does the Premier believe it was correct to close those emergency rooms?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question.

Of course, what we want to do is ensure that Manitobans get access to the services that they need when they need them, and part of that was, obviously, a restructuring of things to ensure that patients were not moved from one building to another across the city to get—if they needed an MRI or a CT scan, they are now able to get it right in where they are hospitalized and in the emergency room that they go to. And so it's very important to have access to all of those services right there in those buildings, and that, of course, is part of that plan to ensure that there's easier, more efficient and effective access to the diagnostic services and the surgical services that—needed at these hospitals. So that, certainly, was a discussion at the time.

There is also, you know, there is also a need for, you know, a discrepancy between what is emergent service—what are emergent services and what are urgent services. And so urgent care is often needed for specific things: broken limbs and stitches and so on. Those are accessed in an urgent-care centre. We see this, you know, in other provinces across the country and we see them around the world where people are able to get quicker access to those services and those urgent-care centres, but don't necessarily need to get the access to those in emergency-care centres.

And so that has helped alleviate some of the pressure, obviously, through COVID. It's been very, very difficult, Mr. Chair. We know that, you know, we—there's been a backlog as a result of the pandemic in some of those surgical and diagnostic procedures. Again, that's nothing unique to Manitoba. That is right

across the country; it's why we took action immediately, listening to Manitobans again. We took action immediately and we set up that Surgical and Diagnostic Task Force to help reduce the wait times on those surgical and diagnostic procedures.

* (15:20)

So we think that that's the prudent way to go, that—and I just want to take the opportunity now to thank all of those individuals who sit on that task force who have been working day in and day out to ensure that we develop a system that is more efficient and effective to get those surgeries and diagnostic procedures to Manitobans when they need them.

I know the Leader of the Opposition has talked about not wanting to contract out services beyond the existing system; we think that that would be a mistake. We think that there's thousands of surgeries that are now contracted out there and for Manitobans who need those surgical procedures and who need those diagnostic procedures. Again, within the single-payer system but, you know, we're looking beyond just the system because we don't—because the capacity—we're trying to increase the capacity right now beyond the previous capacity to ensure that we can start to chip away at those—at the backlogs. It's very important.

So for those thousands of Manitobans who are looking to get those procedures, in this way, it's very important for them to be able to get those procedures.

And so, again, I want to thank the task force. I want to thank all of those working on our front line and, indeed, with those that we're contracting out services with: with Maples Surgical Centre, with western surgical, with those outside our province as well right now.

Ideally, we would like to be contracting out those services right here in the province of Manitoba and expanding those services to ensure that Manitobans have the access that they need to those surgical and diagnostic procedures. That's what will help reduce the wait time for Manitobans; that's what will help get rid of the backlogs that are existing in surgeries and diagnostics in the province of Manitoba.

And we'll continue to do whatever we can; we won't take an ideological approach to this. We'll continue to do what we can to ensure that Manitobans get those surgeries and the diagnostics when they need it.

Mr. Kinew: I just wanted to point out that privatizing public health-care services is an ideological decision.

The first wave of the Clinical and Preventive Services Plan—which the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has just endorsed in her previous answer—the first wave of the Clinical and Preventive Services Plan led to the closure of the Misericordia urgent care centre.

Does she believe it was correct to close the Misericordia urgent health care centre?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, once again, the Leader of the Opposition continues to put infactual information on the record and—but what I will say is that what we are concerned about is ensuring that Manitobans get the procedures that they need when they need them.

And we know that there is a backlog in surgeries and diagnostics right now, not just in the province of Manitoba but across the country. And now is not the time to take an ideological approach; now is the time to find innovative ways to ensure that we deplete those backlogs so Manitobans can live the healthy lives that they need, want and deserve, Mr. Chair, and so that's obviously what we are doing there.

What I will say is that some of the actions that were taken, again, prior to COVID and some of the changes that were taking place, what we started to see just prior to COVID is that the ER wait times were down and reduced significantly as a result of some of those changes.

So, again, I prefer to look at what is getting the best results for Manitobans; I don't look at it from an ideological—or an ideological standpoint. I look at it from a very practical standpoint of wanting to get those services for Manitobans when they need them.

And so I'll just point out too, and it is a fact—again, the Leader of the Opposition may not like this, but it is a fact—that some of those changes that took place resulted in shorter ER wait times at the time.

And again, that was prior to the pandemic. Obviously, the pandemic hit and it's been a very challenging thing; again, not just, you know, for here in Manitoba, but across the country and, indeed, around the world.

Mr. Kinew: I appreciate the opportunity to just correct the record there. Almost the entirety of what the Premier said there was incorrect.

We know that emergency room wait times increased month after month, report after report from the time that they started—and by they, I mean the Premier's PC Cabinet colleagues led by Brian Pallister, whose name none of them can say, apparently, anymore, even though they all owe their

electoral, you know, history to him. Every single month, those ER wait times went up following the closures of the emergency rooms at Victoria, Concordia, Seven Oaks and the urgent care at Misericordia.

Looking at a chart here, and it is very clear that there was an upward trend ticking further and further into a visual illustration of the amount of time spent suffering in an emergency room on the part of Manitobans.

Again, fast forward through a couple years of PC mismanagement of both the pandemic and the health-care system, we know that those ER waits are even longer. Those ER waits are even longer.

Concerningly—and this is a concern that I think is echoed by many folks who work in health care—the last respiratory illness season prior to COVID is one that saw our health-care system under considerable strain.

And as Manitobans now look ahead to another respiratory illness season in which we have the additional illness of COVID to contend with relative to that one that we saw in the winter of 2019, 2020, certainly, folks are concerned.

So, again, clear trend, month after month, report after report, ER wait times increased from the closures which began in 2017 through to 2020.

Things got even worse over the course of the pandemic, and so that's why I ask the Premier if it was correct to close the Misericordia urgent health-care centre along with the emergency rooms at Concordia, Victoria and Seven Oaks.

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, false information that the Leader of the Opposition continues to put on the record is, I guess, no surprise to Manitobans.

* (15:30)

But I do recall, back in the days of the previous NDP government when peeper will—people were not just lining the hallways and the emergency rooms, Mr. Chair, they were lining our hallways; they were—it was certainly a dark time in the history of our province.

I remember one Brian Sinclair who waited for 33 hours under their watch in an emergency room and died. And we just know that Manitobans don't want to go back to those days, those dark days. They were certainly wanting to look at challenges and changes that would improve those, and that's, of course, what

we did at the time. And certainly, you know, what we don't want to do is go back to those dark days of the NDP government.

I will also just—one of the things that we learned in the process is about 40 per cent of people who were presenting at emergency rooms would've been better treated in other areas, in other clinics, either walk-in clinics or urgent-care centres. And those, you know, the urgent-care centres, didn't exist under the previous NDP government, and those are things that we brought about.

And so I'm not sure if the Leader of the Opposition's saying we should get rid of those now. But I will say that that's taken a significant strain off of our emergency rooms to free up more time for the patients that really need that emergent care within our system.

And so I'm hoping the Leader of the Opposition isn't suggesting that we go back to those extremely dark days of the previous NDP government where people were not well served in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Kinew: The Clinical and Preventive Services Plan led to the closure of the Corydon Primary Care Clinic and the St. Boniface family medicine centre.

Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) believe it was correct to close these primary-care centres?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's imperative at this point in time to remind Manitobans and remind the Leader of the Opposition, members opposite, of the times when—I believe at one point there was a former premier that promised to end hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million, and those were the kind of promises that were made by the previous NDP government.

Of course, that never came to fruition at the time. In fact, you know, it went from hallway medicine to highway medicine, and things continued to get worse, no matter how much more money they put into the system.

And so, of course, Manitobans remember those times. Those were dark times and we certainly don't want to go back to those times. They can remember times, certainly, in rural Manitoba, where 20 emergency rooms were closed under their watch. Those are the dark days of the previous NDP government that I think Manitobans don't want to go back to.

And certainly, when, you know, the Leader of the Opposition mentioned St. Boniface Hospital—well, you know, just recently, we announced a \$141-million

increase to the St. Boniface—or new St. Boniface emergency department, which will, I believe, triple the size of it, I believe. And that is very significant for St. Boniface Hospital, Mr. Chair. Those are things that we are doing and that's part of our plan, again.

Of course, the Leader of the Opposition loves to talk about, you know, various things and put false information on the record about, you know, what we're doing, Mr. Speaker—or Mr. Chair.

But I would say that the fact of the matter is he has no plan of his own. And I think Manitobans are looking to see what his plan is. What is his plan for health care in Manitoba? Because our plan is very clear. We're making improvements to our health-care system.

New hospital developments in Manitoba are taking place right across this great province of ours. These are some of the things that we've announced and that we're working on: \$185.5 million for a new hospital in Neepawa.

So, again, while they were shutting hospitals down in rural Manitoba, we are looking to expand services in rural Manitoba: \$5.1 million for a new endoscopy chemotherapy spaces at Dauphin Regional Health Centre.

Again, something that we are doing for rural Manitobans. When they shut down, we are, in fact, offering more services for Manitobans living right across this great province of ours: \$45.7-million expansion of the Selkirk Regional Health Centre. Again, very, very positive for the people within that community.

Also, a \$73.6-million expansion at the Boundary Trails Health Centre, \$40.6-million expansion of the Bethesda Regional Health Centre—the list goes on, Mr. Chair—\$331.8 million for a new hospital in Portage la Prairie, which will be great for people in those surrounding areas to ensure that they have the services that they need and the diagnostic and surgical services that they need closer to home, and the health care that they need closer to home.

* (15:40)

Mr. Chair, \$70 million to enhance health services in Brandon, including an addition and renovations at the Brandon Regional Health Centre and expansion and renovation of the Western Manitoba Cancer Centre. Again, offering cancer care local—closer to home within that Westman region.

Mr. Chair, \$10.8 million for renovation to Ashern's lake shore—Lakeshore General Hospital, \$115 million in northern Manitoba for an intermediate hub, and the list goes on.

So, this is what we are doing for Manitobans. Again, the Leader of the Opposition can stand up and oppose those things. We think that would be wrong.

But it would be nice if he would let Manitobans know, what is his plan for health care in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Kinew: Mr. Chair, my plan is one shared by all my colleagues on the health-care side of the House, the NDP side of the House: we plan to fix the damage the PCs have caused to our health-care system.

It's going to take years to accomplish this goal, seeing as how badly damaged our health-care system is today, but we are committed to it. Guided by those heroes working on the front lines of our health-care system, I'm very optimistic that we will be able to turn things around should we get the chance to govern.

Continuing down the extensive list of cuts made by this government, cataloguing already the closures of the emergency rooms at Concordia, Seven Oaks, Victoria General, the closure of the urgent care at Misericordia, the closure of the clinics on Corydon and at St. Boniface.

I'm also reminded of the fact that the first wave of the Clinical and Preventive Services Plan led to the closure of QuickCare clinics across Winnipeg.

Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) believe it was correct to close five QuickCare clinics around the city?

Mrs. Stefanson: So, the Leader of the Opposition can make all the statements that he wants that he and his colleagues want to fix health care in Manitoba, that it's going to take years to do so, but he doesn't ever state how he's going to do that.

Just making a statement is not a plan, Mr. Chair. You know, the Leader of the Opposition should come out with his plan. Manitobans are looking. I mean, if he's going to be—if he wants to be the next premier of the province, Manitobans are looking to see, what is his plan?

Because I can tell you what our plan is. And I've just gone through a whole litany of things that—of good, positive things that are coming in the way of health care across this great province of ours, in all corners of our province.

So, where they chose back in the day to make statements like ending hallway medicine in six months with \$15 million, those are things that never took place, you know. So we can't trust the NDP because we know from past history that they say one thing—and they can make all the statements that they want, but the fact of the matter is, they never got the positive results that they—that Manitobans needed, wanted and deserved.

And so, we are committed to ensuring that—you know, we know that there's absolutely been some challenges in the last couple of years with respect to a worldwide pandemic.

Again, those are not—that's not something that was started here in Manitoba and something that's unique to Manitoba. That's something that has been happening around the world. You know, health-care systems around the world, right across this country, have been challenged in ways that we've never seen before.

And so, of course, you know, here in Manitoba, we've got some challenges, no question. But part of those challenges are staffing challenges, and we've talked about this and we've had debates about this across the floor. Leader of the Opposition knows that. Again, he doesn't have a plan to deal with that.

We have announced 400 new nursing seats in the province of Manitoba, and we'll continue to look at ways to work with the college of nurses to ensure that the internationally educated nurses get licensed in the province of Manitoba so they can start working in the front line.

I have committed, as well, with my counterparts across the country, and with the federal government—the Prime Minister and his ministers—to work with them to see how do we, you know—from the immigration standpoint, because immigration is extremely important when we talk about bringing people to our country. And immigration has been a negatively impact in the last couple of years because of the pandemic.

We want to bring more people not just to our country, but obviously to our province. And we want to bring people who have the credentials that could go and work in the front line of our health-care system here in the province of Manitoba.

It's not right that people can go elsewhere and across the country and get licensed, but they can't here in Manitoba. And that's the challenge with our college here in Manitoba. We've been trying to work with

them. They've made some changes. There's more changes and improvements that need to be made, there's no question.

But we need to look across the country to find ways to ensure that the federal government—and that's on the federal side—that they find ways to look at what the foreign credentials are of those individuals who are coming to our country. In health care, but in other professions as well, whether it's engineers, or whatever it may be. Architects, whatever it may be, Mr. Chair. It's very important that we work together across the country to—with—and with the federal government to ensure that we can move forward on this.

We know that in order to fix some of the challenges within our health-care system, we need more people working within our health-care system. That is, again, nothing unique to Manitoba. It is a challenge faced across the country, and I look forward to working with the other premiers across the country and, indeed, the federal government, to ensure that we find ways to respect those credentials and make sure that we get people who are educated for—in certain professions, that they have the opportunity to work within those professions. Getting the necessary training that they may need to get them on those front lines, working in those front-line areas in health care and other professions.

We know there's a shortage of labour, and again, we'll continue to work with our counterparts across the country to help find solutions to these challenges that, again, are faced across the country that are not unique here just in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Kinew: The Clinical and Preventive Services Plan also calls for the closure of EMS stations across rural Manitoba.

Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) plan to continue with closures of EMS stations across rural Manitoba in communities like Grandview?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, when the Leader of the Opposition and the previous NDP government were busy shutting down hospitals in rural Manitoba, we're looking at ways to work with them and that includes EMS services in our rural communities, as well as ensuring that Manitobans get the access to the health-care services that they need when they need them.

That is not something that took place under the days of the previous NDP government. But we are committed to working to ensuring that, under our plans, that Manitobans get the access to health care

that they need, closer to home, when they need it. And we're committed to that.

Again, the Leader of the Opposition hasn't offered any solutions, any plan whatsoever. He makes statements, but statements are not a plan. You know, again, I think Manitobans would like to know what his plan is.

Mr. Kinew: Again, my plan would be to stop cutting health care as the Premier has done.

We heard in question period today how some 30 beds were cut in Winnipeg alone, to say nothing of the long-term-care system. We know that, throughout the pandemic, one of the key lessons we should have learned, and that I thought was beyond partisanship, was that we need to do better by seniors and other folks who live in long-term-care facilities.

And yet, under the Progressive Conservatives, we saw, in last year's budget, a funding freeze for operations of personal-care-home beds in the province and a continuation of Brian Pallister's policies with respect to seniors care with this First Minister.

* (15:50)

Under Brian Pallister, this Premier's government committed to building 1,200 new personal-care-home beds.

Does the Premier still agree that that is the correct target and is her government still seeking to meet it?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes.

Mr. Kinew: And can the Premier tell this House how many—

Mr. Chairperson: Just on a matter of procedure, I think the—if the Leader of the Opposition could repeat the question. I think we had a technical glitch and the mic cut out.

Mr. Kinew: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: Can the Premier tell this House how many net new personal-care-home beds have been added to Manitoba's health-care system since 2016?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, I think those are questions best asked in the departmental Estimates of the Department of Seniors, which we're very excited to have a new Department of Seniors. I think it's indicative of how important seniors are to our government.

We established that department last year and we believe that it's certainly very important for the advocacy of seniors and what they're—and I want to commend the minister in his role in what he's doing and working with various stakeholders out in the community.

He is out listening to those stakeholders, to seniors in Manitoba. He is hearing from them and taking a collaborative approach with them and developing a plan and a strategy and he is getting things done.

And I commend him for the work that he is doing.

Mr. Kinew: So not only have the Progressive Conservatives not built any new personal-care-home beds, but our system is actually net negative when it comes to personal-care-home beds. So we lost some 200 personal-care-home beds with the closure of Parkview Place and other instances that occurred under the First Minister's time as Health Minister.

So I just wanted to clarify whether she's sticking to Brian Pallister's 1,200 personal-care-home-bed target, or is this going to be a net target reflecting both Brian Pallister's failures and her own, which would result in a commitment to 1,400 net new personal-care-home beds.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I believe I've already answered that question.

And again, the Leader of the Opposition, I'd refer him to the new departmental Estimates of the Minister responsible for Seniors. And I know that he's more than happy to answer those questions for the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: Following the closure of emergency rooms at Concordia, Seven Oaks, Victoria General hospitals, as well as the closure of the urgent care at Misericordia, we saw chaotic scenes at St. Boniface emergency room and HSC, such that those very important hospitals were put on diversion, meaning they could not longer accept patients.

The government brought in their consultant to try and assess what was going on, and he said that the plan had been so poorly managed that he was effectively washing his hands of the PC government's approach to health care.

Was it a mistake to so poorly manage the closure of these emergency rooms in Winnipeg by the PCs?

Mrs. Stefanson: And again, the Leader of the Opposition mentioned chaotic scenes in his preamble

to his question. And I think I certainly can recall back in the days where it was chaotic in Manitoba's health-care system under the dark days of the previous NDP government, where things were not going very well at all.

Times when people were lining hallways and highways, and certainly, there were big challenges in the system. Waiting 33 hours in an emergency department to get to—only to pass away. That's the way their health-care system was run in the province of Manitoba.

Manitobans know that there needed to be some changes made, that what—the way that the NDP managed health care in the province of Manitoba was not good. They couldn't manage it. They mismanaged it, in fact, Mr. Chair.

And so I know that, you know, the—Manitobans do not want to go back to those dark days of closing rural ERs and closing access to health care closer to home and all of those things that they have better access to.

Again, I mean, we've come through a worldwide pandemic that's been a very significant challenge, not just here in Manitoba but around the world. Leader of the Opposition should know that.

And—but I do know that, prior to the pandemic, we were making significant headway in reducing the time people were waiting in ERs. And, you know, ideally we want to move back and want to make sure that we continue to make progress when it comes to our ERs.

I don't want to see Manitobans waiting for long times in our emergency departments. We don't want to see Manitobans waiting for surgical procedures that they need, waiting in pain. We don't want to see that. We don't want to see them waiting for diagnostic services in the province of Manitoba.

Again, if we look at what the plan is, or lack thereof, of the Leader of the Opposition and the NDP, what we see is that they will take an ideological approach which, when they do that, they will be preventing Manitobans from getting the surgeries that they need when they need them. They will be preventing Manitobans from getting the diagnostics that they need when they need them, because they will take that narrow ideological approach to the delivery of health care in our province.

Well, we can't afford that, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Mr. Chair. We can't afford that. Manitobans can't afford to go back to those days.

Manitobans know that we are working towards—through our surgical and diagnostic task force—that we are working at reducing those wait times for those surgeries and for those diagnostic procedures.

* (16:00)

And again, you know, those came about as a result of a worldwide pandemic that was a significant challenge at the time, where surgeries had to be shut down, where diagnostics had to be shut down because we had to focus on those—and helping those who were most in need at the time through our ICUs.

And so, you know, we had to move resources over to help in those areas. And that was the prudent thing to do at the time, to ensure that we—you know, that we had the safety of those that most needed it at the time. But, of course, that affects other areas of the health-care system.

If we had an—increase the capacity, again, outside that system, where we're contracting out services, we're increasing the capacity there that is able to ensure that those who are waiting in pain right now for surgical procedures will have more likelihood to get them faster under our plan.

Under the NDP plan, or lack thereof, they won't get those services at all. And that worries me a lot. And we certainly don't want to go back to those dark days of the ideological approach when it comes to health care.

What we want to do is a practical approach to ensure that Manitobans who are waiting for surgical procedures, who are waiting for diagnostic procedures, that we're able to find innovative ways for—to get them those procedures—again, within a publicly funded system, a single-payer system, but able to get them the services that they need.

That's what our priority is—

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

Mr. Kinew: Yes, I heard the First Minister say that closing health-care facilities is bad, which is why we are listing the litany of health-care closures that occurred under her government as well as her predecessor, Brian Pallister.

They closed the emergency rooms at Seven Oaks hospital, which serves not only folks in northwest

Winnipeg but also the Interlake. They closed the emergency room which—at Concordia Hospital, which serves not only folks in northeast Winnipeg but also in Eastman. They closed the Victoria General Hospital, which serves people across southern Winnipeg as well as some parts of rural Manitoba on the south side of town.

They closed the urgent care at Misericordia health-care centre. They closed five QuickCare clinics. They closed the clinic on Corydon. They closed the clinic at St. Boniface.

They've announced closures of many other health-care facilities—and we're not even talking about the programs that they've cut, like outpatient physiotherapy, like CancerCare community clinics.

So it's an interesting argument the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is attempting to unveil as a contrast argument, but the PC time in office, I think, certainly will create a lasting impression in the minds of Manitobans when it comes to health-care closures.

The Premier speaks also of challenges brought on by the pandemic, but I just want to reiterate that ER wait times were rising consecutively month after month in the lead-up to COVID arriving in Manitoba.

What's more: the last respiratory illness season prior to COVID arriving here saw our health-care system strained to the brink. And while other jurisdictions had to contend with COVID, Manitoba was unique among jurisdictions in being the first where our health-care system collapsed. And that happened during the First Minister's time as Health minister.

So when we speak about highway medicine, we speak about times under the Progressive Conservatives when Manitobans were sent out of province and were sent out of country to get health-care services that would rightly be provided here.

Can the Premier explain why the St. Boniface emergency room project, which has been re-announced several times, was originally projected to cost \$90 million in 2019?

In 2022, when the government got around to one of its many re-announcements, this project cost was now pegged at \$141 million. That's an increase of some \$51 million.

Can the Premier explain how this project increased by 44 per cent in cost in those intervening years?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, I—the Leader of the Opposition is bringing up detailed questions that are best answered, I think, in the departmental Estimates of Health that are right down the hall in room 254. And I know that his Health critic, I'm sure, is asking questions in there and I'm sure you could send them a text and perhaps get them to ask those questions there.

I will say, however, when it comes to the St. Boniface ER—emergency department expansion, again, the details of those, I think, certainly, you can get in those Estimates. I will say, though, this was, yes, announced in perhaps 2019. I'm not sure if there were things that changed during that time, but I do know that what happened between now and then, of course, is what's called a worldwide pandemic.

So, the Leader of the Opposition will know, during that time, that many things were shut down. Services—some services were shut down. Again, not just here in Manitoba, but from—I mean, building services and being able to move forward in some of the planning phases with respect to that.

And so, I know COVID did have an impact on some of that, as well, and obviously that could have had an impact on it, as well. But again, I'll leave that up to the Department of Health to explain further what some of the challenges were.

But I think the important part about it is that we're committed to that. And that project will be—certainly when we were at the announcement just a little while ago, the people who showed up were very, very keen on getting this done; that this is a very, very important part of the hospital.

And I know that the Leader of the Opposition started to talk, the other day, negatively about foundations in Manitoba, the incredible philanthropic work that has taken place in the province of Manitoba and across our country and around the world; of foundations that are set up the—you know, to help out in our health-care services and in other services. I mean, these are things that have been going on for decades. There's people who work very, very hard at raising money in these foundations and they're very proud of the work that they do.

And the Leader of the Opposition has said that he wants to just unilaterally shut them all down, that he doesn't want them to have any part of health care whatsoever, at all. That's what he and his party is saying, and that's their plan. Their plan is to shut down

foundations, health-care foundations across the province, because they don't want them to be involved in health care in the province of Manitoba.

Well, we say that that is wrong, Mr. Chair. That is just plain wrong and I want to, for the record, say to all of those individuals who have contributed over the years to those foundations, who have helped build various parts of our hospitals over the years, those people have contributed—made significant contributions.

And just—you know, and the Leader of the Opposition's dismissal of the work that those people have done to raise those monies to help, you know, to help in our health-care system is just plain wrong. It's certainly not something that we would ever, ever entertain.

In fact, we want to thank those individuals for the incredible philanthropic work that they do throughout our communities, not just for hospitals but for other very important parts of our communities.

* (16:10)

And I want to thank those people for the work that they do.

Mr. Kinew: I just wanted to return to the topic that we began the afternoon discussion with and just to share that the Winnipeg Police Service put out a press release recently about the activity taking place on the front grounds. The police service press release, and I'm—I'll read a direct quote here. Quote, the Winnipeg Police and Manitoba government officials made the decision to dismantle the camp today. And end quote in terms of reading directly there.

So, I'm just wondering if the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) can convey what sort of, you know, involvement and contributions her government made to that shared decision with WPS?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it's important to note here that, again, this is left up to law enforcement, and the Winnipeg Police Service work in conjunction with security, as well, to get their feedback and input into this.

But certainly, by no means is this being politically driven in any which way, shape or form. This has not come to the political level. This is being dealt with the professionals within the system to deal with this.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, and just wanted to make reference to that quote again. It said the Winnipeg police and Manitoba government officials made the decision.

So, who would these Manitoba government officials be in that instance?

Mrs. Stefanson: I don't know the answer to that question. That would have to be asked by the Department of Justice.

Mr. Kinew: Could we ask for that answer to be taken under advisement?

Mrs. Stefanson: No. I'll make it very clear to the Leader of the Opposition: He has the opportunity to ask those questions in the departmental Estimates of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Goertzen). There is a way to get the answers to those questions, and he can do it in that fashion.

Mr. Kinew: Does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) believe the decision to close the Concordia and Seven Oaks emergency rooms prior to the expansion of St. Boniface emergency room was the correct decision?

Mrs. Stefanson: Believe I already answered that question earlier. And, again, these are questions that are best put to the Department of Health Estimates.

Mr. Kinew: Does the Premier believe that more private operation of home-care services would be a good thing for the health-care system?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, you know, Leader of the Opposition, I mean, what we want to do is increase capacity within the system. We don't take an ideological approach to it.

I know the Leader of the Opposition does. That would be prevent more spots from—personal-care home beds from being built in the province of Manitoba, and, you know—so, I would say that there's partnerships that can be played with—that there's partnerships that can be had there.

And again, I would refer any further questions or discussions about that to the Minister responsible for Seniors, who is developing that strategy on the personal-care home side.

Mr. Kinew: So the Premier won't rule out further privatization of home care. How about health-care premiums? Are we going to see a return of health-care premiums as Brian Pallister proposed?

Mrs. Stefanson: The Leader of the Opposition, I believe the previous question was about personal-care homes. I was responding personal care—to personal-care homes. So just to correct the record on that.

Mr. Kinew: I'll just rephrase the question, just to return to the one that I just asked. So I was curious about health-care premiums. Is that something that's on the radar here? Are we going to see health-care premiums proposed, as we heard from Brian Pallister?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I mean, we're looking to make life more affordable for Manitobans, and that certainly is not on our radar.

Mr. Kinew: Does the Premier believe that we should reduce the use of agency nurses in Manitoba hospitals?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think the important thing here is that we need to look at patients who need care, and what I would say is that our focus will remain on getting that care for the patients.

We have, again, increased the number of nursing seats in the province of Manitoba. We are looking to get our internationally educated nurses the credentials that they need to get working on the front line. We're looking at immigration—I mentioned this earlier—and increasing the number of immigrants coming to Manitoba as well through our very successful Provincial Nominee Program, which we are in the process of revamping, and we have a task force in charge of that spearheaded by Dr. Lloyd Axworthy as well as the minister responsible for Immigration.

And these are very important ways that we can increase the number of nurses and health-care workers within our system. And those are the—that's our plan.

Again, the Leader of the Opposition has not offered any plan up whatsoever as to how he would magically somewhere find extra nurses. But I think, certainly in the interim, our focus is we want to ensure that Manitobans get the care they need when they need it. We've got our surgical and diagnostic task force that is ensuring that we reduce those wait times for surgical and diagnostic procedures for Manitobans.

And so, you know, to that extent, I mean, we have a plan. Again, the Leader of the Opposition has no plan.

Mr. Kinew: But I would then ask, should it be an aspirational goal? Should we be trying to reduce the use of agency nurses in Manitoba hospitals?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I know the Leader of the Opposition likes to talk about aspirations and, you know, grassy knolls and all of these other things out there and what we could do and what we might do.

* (16:20)

The fact of the matter is we've come out of a worldwide pandemic. These are facts. These are real issues that happened to real people. We have a challenge that, again, is not unique to Manitoba when it comes to surgical and diagnostic backlogs, but we have a plan to deal with those surgical and diagnostic backlogs.

Again, the Leader of the Opposition has offered nothing up.

We will continue to utilize nurses but, again, you know, within that system, to fill in for other nurses because we need to ensure that people get the surgeries that they need when they need them.

So again, we have a plan put in place—I just outlined that—to train more nurses, to get more nurses working on the front line here in the province of Manitoba. I've outlined that for him.

Again, the Leader of the Opposition has offered no plan or vision for the future when it comes to this. He may have aspirations for a plan. I don't know. Perhaps that's what he's talking about today.

I can tell you we have a plan, and we will continue to work with stakeholders in the community to ensure that Manitobans get the the surgical and diagnostic and health-care procedures that they need when they need them.

Mr. Kinew: Will the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) commit to reducing the use of agency nurses in Manitoba hospitals and to publishing whether any progress is being made on this measure?

Mrs. Stefanson: What we will commit to is reducing the surgical and diagnostic backlogs that transpired as a result of the pandemic.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to point out that the surgical backlog was aggravated by the cuts that the PC government made to health care. The fact that we had nurses leave the system is a phenomenon that began with the closures and the cuts of emergency rooms.

You know, I remember in 2017 and 2018, when they began these closures and implemented their plan for cuts, we saw nurses being forced into the hallways beneath the Health Sciences Centre where their jobs were being—which had previously just been deleted, a.k.a. cut, were then posted publicly for everyone to come and try and compete and jockey against one another to land a replacement job from.

That sort of disrespect of the people who work in the health-care system is a direct contributor to folks

leaving the health-care system. And when you have difficulty staffing an operating room or a recovery room or an emergency room today, it's directly related to the cuts and the closures that this government implemented and continues to implement to this day.

The Premier mentioned transfers from the federal government. I wonder whether the Premier would commit that—if the federal government is going to provide any new dollars for health care to Manitoba, that she would commit that every single one of those dollars would be spent at the bedside on health care in this province.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, the Leader of the Opposition once again puts false information on the record. The facts of the matter are that we're spending a billion—or we're investing a billion dollars more in health care than the NDP ever did when they were in government. And those are investments that go to the front line of our health-care system to help Manitobans in need. So, once again, his litany of false accusations run hollow out there to Manitobans and for Manitobans.

I will say that we have—you know, the Leader of the Opposition knows we have signed a collective agreement with the Manitoba Nurses Union and that offered increases to their wages and beyond just wages, but it's all part of the collective agreement. And so we are moving forward. That was a positive, I think, step forward and path to—path forward to helping address the challenges faced within the system.

I think, also, addressing it as well is offering up 400 more nursing seats to the province as—for the province as well. And, again, we've talked about the internationally educated nurses, the importance of immigration to the province. We've talked about all of those things, and, again, that's our plan and our vision for the future, whereas the Leader of the Opposition has no plan or vision at all for the future.

He will know that as provinces across the country, we have been talking about the Canada Health Transfer, and I do know that over the years—I mean some 60 years ago we were in a position where between the provinces and the federal government, the costs and the investments in health care were split 50-50. And today, that has been dwindled down to 22 per cent by the federal government, 78 per cent by the provinces.

And so that's very significant, and this is becoming a larger and larger and larger part of our budget, and all that does is squeeze out other areas of

extreme importance for the Province: areas like, you know, important areas like education and social services that are needed for Manitobans.

And so we take that discussion very seriously across the country. We would like to see that moved up to, as provinces, moved up to 35 per cent. We're not saying back up to the 50 per cent where it originated, but up to 35 per cent for right now. And we've had those discussions with the federal government.

What we need to do is get them at the table to ensure that we can have those discussions further so that that money can flow to the provinces. And when that money flows to the provinces, it will be flowed right to the—right into the health-care system.

And so, we need to sit down and have those discussions. Until we come to an agreement with the federal government, the rest of the discussion is moot, frankly, because we're talking about dollars that don't even exist right now. And—but we're hoping, and I'm hopeful, that we'll be able to move forward on this file because I think it's just—it's so important not just for Manitobans but it's very important for Canadians.

And so I'm hopeful that we're able to move forward on that file.

Mr. Kinew: So does the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) commit that if the federal government provides more health-care funding to Manitoba that every single dollar in Manitoba would be spent on health care at the bedside?

Mrs. Stefanson: Where we've consistently said is that we want this money—these monies to flow right into the baseline of our health-care budget.

* (16:30)

We want to ensure that there's better equity between the investments made by the federal government and the province. And so, you know, that's where those monies would go.

Mr. Kinew: But is there a specific commitment that all new monies from the federal government for health care will be spent on health care?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, there are no monies on the table right now, an increase—in the way of increases by the federal government, and so we will look at that.

But again, like, we're looking at a—an increase to the base funding that will, you know, into the Health budget. So, that's an increase to the budget. That

would be, you know, directly to the bottom line of the Health budget.

I mean, I don't know if they're going to specify that it has to be, you know—like, I have no idea what they're going to look for in terms of how the monies would be required to be spent. You know, I'm hoping we don't have to get into that and it just goes to the baseline funding, which increases the monies into the health-care budget by that amount into the health-care budget.

Mr. Kinew: Will the Premier tell this committee when the surgical and diagnostic backlog dashboard will be made public, as was previously committed to in both July and then September?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, I think those are detail questions that can be best—be asked in the departmental Estimates that are taking place right now in room 254 just down the hall. And again, they can be asked of the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) in those Estimates.

Mr. Kinew: Like to ask a few questions about a price on pollution.

Does the Premier plan on bringing in a so-called made-in-Manitoba carbon pricing plan this year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, for right now, they—the federal government rejected, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, our previous plan to deal with carbon emissions in the province of Manitoba, and that was unfortunate.

And so, that took place and now we're subject to the backstop by the federal government. That was the decision by the federal government, again, out of our purview.

But what I will say, and I have been calling—and we have been calling on the federal government to put a pause on that for right now. Inflationary pressures are very, very significant to Manitobans and we know that the carbon tax being imposed by the federal government is having a significant impact on affordability in the province of Manitoba, and so that's why we've asked them to put a pause on that for right now.

Mr. Kinew: The Premier herself committed to bringing forward a Manitoba-based carbon pricing plan by December.

Is that still her intention, to bring a carbon pricing plan like that forward by the end of the year?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, again, the Leader of the Opposition will know that there was a plan in place

and we had to take the federal government to court for that and that was ruled on where it was, you know, the federal government could impose a tax on the Province of Manitoba and on Manitobans.

So, there was a plan in place, and unfortunately they rejected. We tried to have discussions about that further, but they just decided that they would impose the backstop.

So, we have no control over that in Manitoba. We don't believe that that backstop is doing what's in the best interest of Manitobans.

Affordability is the No. 1 issue out there right now. Manitobans are really, really looking at ways to make ends meet out there.

That's why we've announced our \$87-million affordability package. That's why we have taken other steps and measures to reduce education property taxes, to give rebates back through MPI. We've done a whole host of things to make life more affordable for Manitobans, and we'll continue to do so.

And we think part of that, as well, should be—you know, and we have been calling on the federal government to put a pause on that carbon tax so that's not taking out of the pockets of Manitobans more money when they cannot afford it.

Mr. Kinew: Yes, just to clarify and perhaps reiterate, the court case that was lost—you know, just setting aside the question of all of the money the government wasted on the court case over the years—PCs suffered a loss on that court case, and then the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), after that, came out and said that there would be a Manitoba-based carbon pricing plan that she would bring forward in December in response to that news.

So, is that still her intention, to bring a carbon pricing plan forward?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, I think that the Leader of the Opposition—I mean, in effect, we tried, but the federal government said that they were just going to impose the backstop, and that's—you know, we didn't take them to court further to, you know, cause any more, you know, tax dollars to be spent on that.

We accepted the court ruling on it, tried to just work with them on, you know, on that. But they decided that they would just impose the backstop. So, there's not really much we can do there when they've—that's what they've decided to do.

Mr. Kinew: I just want to just clarify that this is all an announcement that the Premier made herself after the court case. Again, the, you know, timeline with the federal government that she's laying out had to do with Mr. Pallister's carbon pricing plan, and the court case that, you know, he was very committed to and that the PCs continued to pursue. They lost on November 17th, 2021.

In response, and in announcing that there would be no appeal to that aforementioned court case, this PC government put out a press release. The final paragraph of this press release says, and I quote directly here: "Manitoba is developing its policy approach to the new federal legislative and regulatory framework with its Dec. 31, 2022, timeline." End quote. And this is attributed to the member for Tuxedo, the First Minister.

So, again, this is something that the Premier committed to. They put it in writing. It was a press release by the government. This was following all the court action. This was following a back-and-forth with the federal government. There was a public commitment by the First Minister to bring forward a carbon pricing plan by December 31st, 2022.

Is that still the plan, yes or no?

Mrs. Stefanson: So, again, the—what we did is, we tried to work with the federal government outside of court to get our plan—to try and have a conciliatory approach to work with them, to get them to accept our plan. Our plan would have been very, very positive and reduce emissions in the province of Manitoba.

* (16:40)

We wanted to take it out of courts and try and have, you know, a collaborative approach to things, and the federal government rejected that and imposed a backstop.

So, we can't control that. But I think what's important is that we are taking steps in the right direction and getting results in Manitoba.

So we've undertaken a number of actions to advance a Climate and Green Plan and I'll just indicate some of those for the Leader of the Opposition now.

Efficiency Manitoba has developed over 35 programs to help improve the energy efficiency of buildings and homes. The Conservation and Climate Fund has grown from \$600,000 in 2020 to \$1.5 million in 2022. And the third call for proposals in May 2022 yielded 14 potential projects to help advance the Climate and Green Plan.

The Efficient Trucking Program will save millions of litres of fuel and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing rebates for fuel-saving devices and technologies for heavy-duty trucks. By increasing ethanol content in gasoline from 8.5 per cent to 10 per cent and biodiesel from 2.5 per cent to 5 per cent, we'll reduce the tons of CO₂ emissions.

Manitoba announced an investment of \$42 million to help Manitoba Hydro construct a transmission line from Birtle South Station to the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border to expand Manitoba's capacity to export clean power and support Saskatchewan in reducing emissions.

So those are just some of the initiatives that were taking place to support a cleaner, greener environment here in Manitoba.

Mr. Kinew: I just wonder if the First Minister could spell out what she meant by tried to work with the federal government outside of court.

Because there was this court process and then the PC government lost in court. And then the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) asserting that after that loss happened in court, that there was some process by which they tried to work with the federal government.

And then how does the statement from the November 17th, 2021, press release fit into that timeline of events, wherein the Premier committed to bringing in a carbon pricing plan by the end of 2022?

So, I'm just looking for a timeline beginning with November 17th, 2021, and the public statements that the Premier would bring in a carbon pricing plan that would bring us up the present, and update us on what the status of the Premier's announced carbon pricing plan would be.

Mrs. Stefanson: So we chose not to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court as a signal of—or a sign of goodwill. And we were hoping to sit down and have that discussion with the federal government, but they made it clear to us that they would reject that, and they would not entertain any further discussions on that, and that they would be implementing their backstop.

They would not accept anything other than what they were doing. And so it was clear to us that they were going to implement their backstop, which was, I think, unfortunate for Manitobans.

And—yes, leave it at that.

Mr. Kinew: So, how was this communication on the part of the Province carried out to the federal government, this entreaty to try and offer some sort of plan on behalf of Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, as with any negotiation, officials carried out discussions, and it was just found that the federal government was refusing to accept where we were.

Again, we thought it would be a sign of goodwill not to carry this forward to the Supreme Court. We wanted to take it out of the courts, have officials have those discussions and come to an agreement.

There was no agreement to be made, and so they imposed the backstop. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: Thank you, and I bid you a sincere apology for not waiting for the recognition from the Chair, Mr. Chair.

So, again—so, what was the offer there? Like, presumably, the PC government didn't just take the same, you know, scheme from Brian Pallister that it just lost in court, forward to the federal government.

So what was the proposal that was made to the feds in this, I guess, outreach, on behalf of the Province?

Mrs. Stefanson: Again, I'd just go back and reiterate the fact that we chose not to appeal to the Supreme Court as a sign of goodwill, that we could sit down and have a discussion there, but the feds made it very clear to us that anything short of what they were proposing would not be acceptable.

* (16:50)

And so, what we were proposing, which was under, you know, our green plan in Manitoba, they still rejected it. And so, they imposed their backstop.

We can't—you know, so we decided to do our own thing. And I read out what we already have done over the course of the last little while to ensure we advance our Climate and Green Plan. A number of initiatives under that that we decided to move forward on anyway to get better results for Manitobans.

But it's unfortunate that the federal government, you know, rejected that and imposed a backstop for Manitobans.

Mr. Kinew: You know, it's fascinating to watch the machinations in here as a response is discussed and

then shared and, you know, like, there's all these assertions made about, you know, this effort and that effort. And then, like, you have the historic record. Right?

Like, the backstop was not imposed this year. The backstop was imposed years ago, prior to the court case proceeding. So the federal government didn't impose a backstop in response to any entreaty from Manitoba.

First Minister made a public comment at the end of last year to bring in a carbon price here in Manitoba. It's a simple question, like—are you still going to do that or not? And I—of course, I say you through the Chair in a rhetorical fashion.

Is there going to be a price on carbon implemented by the Manitoba provincial government? Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has declined to comment on that, but I do find the machinations fascinating. Because again, I'm looking at a briefing note here from this government—PC government briefing note.

And I'll just read into the record, Canada—and I quote, Canada requests a jurisdiction to communicate what approach they will adopt on carbon taxation on a go-forward basis by April 1st, 2022, including confirming that the federal tax will be administered in their province, developing programs of their own equivalent to, or greater than, the federal benchmark levels or continuing to have the federal backstop applied. Period. Next sentence: Manitoba did not communicate its approach in advance of the April 1st deadline. End quote.

Manitoba did not communicate its approach to the federal government. Those are the words of this government itself.

So, what does the neutral, non-partisan, impartial observer make of the display this afternoon? When you have the government itself in writing, in black and white, saying they did not communicate, and then we hear in this Chamber that there's—then, you know, this communication and that communication and what kind of communication? Well, we can't tell you what kind of communication.

Seems to be an odd situation, you know? Again, pretty straightforward question. Are you still going to do the—again, through you, the Chair—are you still going to do this carbon price that you previously announced, or are you going to reverse course, much as Brian Pallister did in announcing a carbon price and then rolling it back?

So, are we going to have that sort of flip-flop again? Just like Brian Pallister. I believe that's where a famous phrase was first uttered, yes, relating to pickerel.

So, again, I just want to put on the record that the, you know, documentation of this government is at odds with the statements that we've heard in the Chamber today.

But again, just one more time: if yes, there is going to be a PC carbon price, is that plan going to be made public? Or, if no, there's not going to be this announcement in line with what the Premier previously announced less than a year ago, what's the rationale for the change? Why has there been a change?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think I've already answered this question several times for the Leader of the Opposition.

We did not appeal to the Supreme Court as a gesture of goodwill, to try and put our—you know, to sit down and have a discussion about, you know, our plan, and they still refused.

So, what they did was—they didn't like our plan and so they imposed their own—or continued to impose their own backstop. We were hoping that we could have those discussions and that they might change their mind and, you know, with a more collaborative approach to things, but they were not willing to go in that direction and imposed their own backstop.

So there is nothing we can do with respect to that. The federal government made its choice and, again, we think this is a negative thing for Manitobans.

We think that we are taking, obviously, various measures already that I had indicated to the Leader of the Opposition earlier to help with greenhouse gas emissions in Manitoba, to help in that area, that we continue to do on our own.

And, you know, and the federal government, I guess, can continue to impose the backstop. They continue to reject our plan. And so, you know, they made it very clear to us that anything short of what their plan was was going to be rejected, even though in other provinces they accepted similar plans to what we had.

And, you know, so that's just where it was and it is what it was. I tried—we tried, you know, once again to try and get them to see the light, but we saw, obviously, that they were not prepared to change their position and accept Manitoba's plan.

And so they imposed their plan, and that's the end of the story. There was no point in negotiating anything further when they'd already decided to impose their backstop and they decided to continue to impose their backstop.

So no further discussions have taken place as a result of that. What we have done is started to implement some good policies, which I outlined earlier for the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Kinew: The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) asserted there that they had communicated their approach to the federal government. But again, I just want to read from this briefing note again, prepared by this government reflecting this government's action, which said, on the carbon tax, quote: Manitoba did not communicate its approach in advance of the April 1st deadline. End quote.

What is the impartial, non-partisan observer supposed to make of the cognitive dissonance between those two assertions—both of them made by the PC government, I would say—one by a briefing note, one in the Chamber here this afternoon? And again, the Premier's answer there also makes reference to the federal government imposing a backstop in response to the communication which the briefing note says never happened.

And we know—anyone examining the historic record or media reports filed contemporaneously would know—the federal government did not impose a backstop this year in response to any government action here in Manitoba. That backstop was implemented years ago. So how does that reflect upon the answer that was given here?

Again, I think the Premier should just make a clear statement as to whether there is going to be that PC Manitoba carbon price by the end of this year, as she announced less than a year ago, or if there's not going to be that plan. I mean, it seems pretty straightforward, right? You would think.

So, perhaps I will just leave it at that.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

Have a good evening.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 4, 2022

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