

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

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

Vol. LXXVI No. 72 - 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, October 12, 2022

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

Wednesday, October 12, 2022

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

We acknowledge we are gathered on Treaty 1 territory and that Manitoba is located on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of treaties and treaty making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

Good afternoon, everybody. Please be seated.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development Seventh Report

Mr. James Teitsma (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development.

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

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on the following occasions in the Legislative Building:

- *October 6, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.*
- *October 11, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.*

Matters under Consideration

- **Bill (No. 36) – The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Hydro-Manitoba et la Loi sur la Régie des services publics**

Committee Membership

Committee Membership for the October 6, 2022 meeting:

- *Hon. Mr. FRIESEN*
- *Hon. Mr. HELWER*
- *Mr. MICKLEFIELD*
- *Mr. SALA*
- *Mr. TEITSMA*
- *Mr. WASYLIW*

Your Committee elected Mr. TEITSMA as the Chairperson at the October 6, 2022 meeting.

Your Committee elected Mr. MICKLEFIELD as the Vice-Chairperson at the October 6, 2022 meeting.

Committee Membership for the October 11, 2022 meeting:

- *Hon. Mr. FRIESEN*
- *Hon. Mr. HELWER*
- *Mr. MICKLEFIELD (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Mr. REDHEAD*
- *Mr. SALA*
- *Mr. TEITSMA (Chairperson)*

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

Non-Committee Members speaking on the record at the October 6, 2022 meeting:

- *Mr. LAMONT*

Public Presentations

*Your Committee heard the following 41 presentations on **Bill (No. 36) – The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act /***

Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Hydro-Manitoba et la Loi sur la Régie des services publics:

October 6, 2022 meeting,

Patricia Fitzpatrick, Private citizen
Amanda Leighton, Interchurch Council on Hydro Power
Shawn Kettner, Private citizen
Lorena Mitchell, Manitoba Sustainable Energy
Heather Fast, Manitoba Eco-Network
Shoshana Kraut, Private citizen
Niall Harney, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba
Ted Scoles, Private citizen
Dennis Woodford, Private citizen
Dudley Thompson, Private citizen
Anna Weier, Private citizen
Les Scott, Private citizen
Ian Smith, Private citizen
Michelle Bergen, CUPE Local 998
Mary Louise Chown, Private citizen
Emma Higgs, Private citizen
Peter Hudson, Private citizen
Bonnie Hoffer-Steiman, Private citizen
Laura Tyler, Private citizen
Gisele Roch, Private citizen
Meghan Mast, Private citizen
Wendy Barker, Private citizen
Gina McKay, CUPE Manitoba
Jade DeFehr, Private citizen
Mathew Scammell, Private citizen
Elizabeth Hamilton, Private citizen

October 11, 2022 meeting,

Laura Cameron, Private citizen
Rachael Howgate, SEED Winnipeg
River Woods, Private citizen
Wendy Boyd, Private citizen
Katharina Stieffenhofer, Private citizen
Barry Wittevrongel and Madeline McKenzie, Private citizens
Stephanie Grout, Council of Canadians Winnipeg Chapter
Jocelyne Lalonde, Private citizen
Dale Friesen, Manitoba Industrial Power Users
Natalia Ilyniak, Private citizen
Drew Caldwell, Private citizen
Lydia Schroeder-Hart, Private citizen
Theresa Thordarson, Private citizen
Lynne Fernandez, Private citizen
Peter Kulchyski, Private citizen

Written Submissions

*Your Committee received the following written submissions on **Bill (No. 36)** – The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Hydro-Manitoba et la Loi sur la Régie des services publics:*

Kevin Rebeck, Manitoba Federation of Labour
Wendy Buelow, Private citizen

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 36)** – The Manitoba Hydro Amendment and Public Utilities Board Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Hydro-Manitoba et la Loi sur la Régie des services publics

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill with the following amendment:

THAT the proposed subclause 15.2(2)(b)(i), as set out in Clause 5(2) of the Bill, be amended by striking out "system, or" and substituting "system, and".

Mr. Teitsma: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield), that the report of the committee be received.

Madam Speaker: The member may have to repeat that, please.

Mr. Teitsma: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Rossmere, that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Acting Government House Leader): I'm happy to table the revised sequence for the departmental Estimates for Committee of Supply.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care—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.

Seniors' and Elders' Month

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I am pleased to rise in the House

today to recognize the month of October as Seniors' and Elders' Month in our province.

Seniors' and Elders' Month offers us an opportunity to celebrate the past, present and ongoing contributions of older Manitobans throughout our province. It allows us time to applaud Manitoba's seniors and elders for their continued leadership and guidance.

Older Manitobans are among the fastest growing segments of our society and represent a population rich with active, connected members, demonstrating to all of us the benefits of healthy living.

Our seniors and elders share their extensive knowledge, wisdom and skills through their work, volunteering and caregiving. Their valued contribution to our province's rich history and economy is an inspiration to all generations of Manitobans.

I would like to take this time to welcome Erin Crawford from the Alzheimer's Society of Manitoba, as well as Connie Newman from the Manitoba association of senior communities, who have joined us here in the gallery today.

I would like to recognize them, as well as the many seniors volunteers from across the province, for their hard work and dedication supporting Manitoban seniors and elders.

Madam Speaker, I ask all members to join me in recognizing October as Seniors' and Elders' Month in our great province.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): In October we recognize Seniors' and Elders' Month. Older adults are a vital part of our communities and they make invaluable contributions to the cultural, social and economic fabric of our province. A long life brings much experience, opportunities, and we can all benefit from the knowledge, skills and wisdom that older adults have to share.

Having given so much to their communities and families throughout their lives, seniors and elders deserve to experience their later years with comfort, dignity and joy.

Unfortunately, we know that care for seniors and elders is lacking and many are struggling as a result. This government cut funding for personal-care homes despite rising costs and almost 200 beds in personal-care homes having been lost.

Accessible health-care services have also been cut, and older Manitobans are being forced to travel further to access the care that they need.

And for those who continue living at home, accessing home-care services has reached a crisis point. The PCs have cut funding for home care and have contributed to high vacancy rates by underpaying home-care workers.

For example, we've heard from home-care workers that it's common for clients to go days without services and some folks even sitting in soiled undergarments for three days at a time due to lack of services. Seniors and elders deserve better than this.

We call on this government today and every day to establish a seniors advocate and we demand this government to make immediate investments into improving home-care services for all Manitobans who need it—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

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

Ms. Lamoureux: Today we are recognizing Seniors' and Elders' Month.

Madam Speaker, prior to entering politics, I worked for the Long Term & Continuing Care Association for three years and, through this job, I gained a stronger understanding of some of the issues that seniors face here in Manitoba.

Now, issues change over the years, but some of the consistent issues under the NDP and under the PC government include the ability to afford health-care prescriptions and dental work on a fixed income.

It includes the lack of resources put towards home repairs to ensure seniors can remain in their communities if they wish to, and it includes in-long-issues in long-term home care, in personal-care homes, Madam Speaker. It's not just personal-care homes, it's also supportive housing homes, it's retirement-plus homes.

There are issues within transportation, affordable day programs, and we need to have more respect for our seniors here in the province because they've dedicated so much of their time to Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, in 2016, we started calling on this government for an independent seniors advocate; a non-partisan person that would act similarly to the children's advocate, to be here to advocate for seniors, no matter who is in government. British Columbia and parts of Atlantic Canada already have such jobs.

* (13:40)

And I want to sincerely thank the NDP for getting on board and supporting our call, as well.

But, Madam Speaker—

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

The member's going to be allowed 10 more seconds to complete her statement.

Ms. Lamoureux: As you can see, there are many, many issues that seniors are still facing in our province. It's a pattern that started under the NDP, continues under the PCs, and we need to make a real change, and implement an independent office—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable Minister of Families (Ms. Squires), for another ministerial statement—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with rule 26(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Disability Employment Awareness Month

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for Accessibility): As Minister of Families, and Minister responsible for Accessibility, I am pleased to proclaim October as Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Since 2010, October has been proclaimed National Disability Employment Awareness Month in Canada. And two years later, in October of 2012, Disability Employment Awareness Month, otherwise known as DEAM, was established in Manitoba and acknowledged every year since.

DEAM raises awareness of disability employment issues and celebrates the contributions of people with disabilities to Manitoba's workforce and to our economy.

DEAM also recognizes the non-profit associations, employment organizations, employers and businesses that have gone that extra mile to promote the

hiring of people with disabilities and strengthen available employment opportunities.

With the passage of the Accessibility Standard for Employment under The Accessibility for Manitobans Act in 2019, it is important to raise awareness and prevent and remove barriers affecting Manitoba's labour force.

All Manitobans benefit from the positive outcomes of hiring more persons with disabilities. And I know myself and many others in this Chamber have had the honour of visiting workplaces and employees who demonstrate the benefits and goodness that comes from having diverse workplaces.

This year, our Province will be marking DEAM with an awareness initiative on accessible employment during Small Business Week of October 16th to the 22nd. Ads will run in the daily, weekly and community papers across Manitoba and on social media.

The Public Service Commission, in collaboration with the Civil Servants with Abilities Network and the New Professionals Network, are hosting two events highlighting the abilities of employees with disabilities and the importance of breaking down barriers to employment.

The Manitoba Legislature will be lit up on October 20th to celebrate and promote National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This is aimed at recognizing how people experiencing disabilities contribute to the business and their communities, helping companies to become successful and competitive.

It is through initiatives such as these that we can make Manitoba a more accessible province to live and work.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): More than 200,000 Manitobans are living with a disability of some kind, including my mother, who is a double amputee. Over 35,000 of these Manitobans with disabilities are unemployed or either underemployed.

Disability Employment Awareness Month is an opportunity for us to promote employment inclusion, celebrate the unique contributions of members of our community who were born or living with disabilities. This month also helps us increase awareness of those positive outcomes of hiring people with disabilities.

People with disabilities make great employees. They bring diversity to the workplace.

Disability Employment Awareness Month also affords us the occasion to have the necessary conversations around breaking down barriers, preventing stigma, rewriting narratives relating to people with disabilities, and promoting opportunities for those people living with disabilities in Manitoba.

While Disability Employment Awareness Month opens an opportunity for conversation around employment for people with disabilities, more work needs to be done to create equal employment opportunity here in Manitoba.

All hands must be on deck to achieve employment equity in this regard. Employers, employees alike should be willing to create and accommodate those people living with disabilities.

I encourage all Manitoba employers, workplaces, businesses, industries, organizations and groups to use disability awareness month—employment awareness month to discuss, explore and collaborate, to come up with solutions to increase employment for people living with disabilities.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): I seek leave to respond to the minister's statement.

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

Mr. Lamont: It's a pleasure to speak to Disability Employment Awareness Month. I think when we talk about people with disabilities, the first thing we need to remember, of course, is that they're human beings first. We're all human beings first, and everything else comes after that and we don't want to ever think of people as being less than.

And there was—Mahadeo Sukhai is a—works for the CNIB foundation of the—asked about barriers that people with disabilities face. And he said, you know, I could name employer attitudes, transportation, workplace safety or access to technology, but fundamentally, the problem is the system; that our designed and built environments, our institutions exclude people with disabilities, and we need to find ways to open them up and make sure that they are included.

There are places like L'Arche Café—I had the opportunity to visit in Transcona, who hire people with disabilities. It's an incredible—it's actually one of the best greasy spoons I've ever had a breakfast at, so I

can recommend it on that basis. But aside from that, they do amazing work supporting people with disabilities.

But the other is that when we talk about access in the built environment, I've met people with disabilities in St. Boniface who've talked about how they can't get over a curb, they can't out—get down a sidewalk, and in winter, sometimes I'll see people—when I'm driving home, I'll see somebody driving their wheelchair down the middle of Osborne. So, clearly, we have a ways to go when it comes to improving those things.

The other is that when it comes to EIA, EIA entraps lots of people in poverty, especially people with disabilities who need assistance and help.

We need accommodation. People want to work. They can work. When they do work they're fantastic employees. And we just need to recognize that no Manitoban is less than, and if we do that we'll be able to move forward and include everyone.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Kieran Ebanks

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Mental health challenges affect many Manitobans, including a number who live in my riding of Fort Richmond. I rise today to pay tribute to a fallen officer, Kieran Ebanks, the late husband to former government staff member and my friend, Stacia Franz.

Having just marked World Mental Health Day, I stand here to help Stac in her commitment to destigmatize mental health issues and remind each other to check on the strong ones.

Kieran Ebanks was a superintendent with the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, for 10 years. He was a decorated officer, a volunteer firefighter, a volunteer with St. John Ambulance and a lead member of CBSA's diversity inclusion unit. He chose to end his life this past April.

Stac has just one message and wish: check on the strong ones.

Kieran was a strong one. He was everyone's rock. He never hesitated to help, lend a hand, love and be everyone's support. But he was suffering, silently, without the necessary help offered to him.

So, today, I share Stac's words verbatim as follows:

He was so strong for so long that we all forgot how he was just like us, with his own insecurities and his own vulnerabilities. I think he didn't reach out because he didn't want to let us down by seeming weak or broken.

Today I want to remind all of you, no matter your political stripe, no one is broken or weak. You're all perfect, just as you are.

Not everyone is ready to ask for help or to speak up for themselves. So today, talk to everyone, not just those you anticipate may need help, but everyone. Ask more than once, because asking for help can be hard for those who are strong.

Too often, those that need help will hide their pain behind a laugh or change the topic once too often. They will just keep going and going until they can go no further.

I want you to check in on the strong ones, the ones who smile, the ones who make others laugh, the ones who carry the burdens, the ones who are unshakeable.

Lend a listening ear. Encourage them to access supports through work or find someone, anyone, they can talk to. Because until they let someone know, we can't help them as they have helped us.

* (13:50)

We can and must do better. I am just one widow, telling you Kieran's story and I will spend the rest of my life working to honour his memory. I will work to provide help and supports to those who need it most. I will work so that no one else is a widow at 36 years old. And I will work so Kieran's heart, soul and love is never forgotten.

All my love to each and every one of you.

Events Held at the Maples Community Centre

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): As we have carefully emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, so have our local summer festivals. I can say that it feels so good to attend events like these once again.

On August 20th and 21st, Shaheed Udham Singh sports and culture club Winnipeg returned with their annual tournament at the Maples Community Centre. This event showcases local athletes and was a welcome return after having away for so long. Thank you to Parmjit Gill, Joda Dhaliwal, Kuljit Ghuman, Hoshir Gill, Manjinder Grewal, Bhagwant Dhaliwal and all the organizers of the amazing event.

On August twentieth–28th, the 13th Winnipeg Kabaddi Cup was held by the Winnipeg Kabaddi Cup–Kabaddi Association. This event was attended by thousands of people and most of the players were international players, something which had not been possible until recently. Thank you to Mithu Brar, Gurpreet Khaira, Charna Gill, Jugdeep Gill, Sheera Johal, Hardeep Brar and many other organizers.

On September 10th, the United Brothers Kabaddi Club organized another Kabaddi Cup and Teeyan Da Mela in memory of Sidhu Moosewala, Deep Sidhu and Nangal Ambian. This Kabaddi Cup was attended by the largest crowd in Winnipeg history. Following the Kabaddi Cup, a concert performance was held by many well-known singers from Punjab. Thank you to Ravi Chahal, Jass Dhillon, Billa Raikoti, Jassa Dhindsa, Harde Gill and all the other organizers.

These events and many others have been held at the Maples Community Centre. I would like to thank the president of the MCC, Vickey Chahal, for making these events possible.

Finally, I would like to thank many volunteers. Our community cannot thank you all enough for dedicating so much time and hard work. Thank you, sincerely, your efforts which have allowed us to celebrate sports and culture as we could not for far too long.

Thank you, Mr.–Madam Speaker, sorry.

Community of Miami, Manitoba

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): The community of Miami in Midland constituency is a shining example of Manitoba's volunteerism.

The Miami Railway Station Museum recently held their summer windup thanking the community for their support over the summer.

This past summer, the railway station museum welcomed over 1,300 visitors. This museum is a national historic site, complete with the original stationhouse, a caboose, motorcar, 200 feet of rail, freight shed and is full of original furniture, decorations and period clothing.

The rail museum is just one stop in Miami. The Miami heritage museum, harness racing, high school rodeo, golf course, Don Alexander park and a full-service campground are just a few of the other attractions the community has to offer.

In June of this year, the Miami community was preparing for the ribbon cutting and grand opening of

the new 5,700-square-foot active living centre, built at a cost of \$1.25 million. However, three days before the grand opening, a fire destroyed the building.

The building was fully insured, so despite this terrible setback, the site was cleared of the debris and the rebuilding is taking place as I speak. Once again, we look forward to the opening of the active living centre which will provide services for area seniors and the community at large.

I encourage members of the Assembly and all Manitobans to take in the scenic Pembina Valley and enjoy the many amenities and hospitality the community of Miami can showcase.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Louise Bridge Replacement

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): As northeast Winnipeg commuters know, the \$6.35-million street upgrade of Nairn Avenue from Watt Street to the 111-year-old Louise Bridge is almost complete. This summer's upgrade construction is a welcome improvement to this vital link between the northeast quadrant and the downtown and beyond.

It's one of Winnipeg's 200 street construction projects this year.

The street renewal program helps address just one of the City's massive infrastructure deficits, which includes sidewalks, water treatment, separating our water and sewer system, removing underground lead pipes from the city water main line to your house, bike paths and, of course, old bridges—including the 111-year-old, functionally obsolete ones built the same year as the gunfight at the OK Corral.

Elmwood residents know the Louise Bridge needs to be replaced.

The City was originally scheduled to make final decisions on the overall master plan and eastern corridor project this fall and deal with the Louise Bridge replacement issue.

With time running out on the bridge, and a new City administration incoming, we call upon the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) and the provincial government to take a leadership role on the Louise Bridge replacement to help the City get it built.

The recommended three-lane bridge in each direction will maintain and enhance the link for everyone in northeast Winnipeg and Transcona, and importantly, meet the future needs of our quadrant. With the expropriation process begun, City planners have

done their part by signaling to the City administration that they need to act quickly.

A key element to the entire project will be to keep the old bridge open during the entire construction period. The clock is ticking. And the Province needs to take a leadership position on getting the Louise Bridge finally built.

Selkirk Volunteer Fire Department 125th Anniversary

Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): It is truly fitting as we celebrate Fire Prevention Week, we highlight some of our province's most dedicated firefighters.

Like many pioneer settlements across the country, firefighting in Selkirk started as a bucket brigade, where whichever community member was available would attend to help put out the fire.

In the period between 1894 to 1896, the community lost more than 20 buildings. This highlighted the need for a more organized firefighting plan and department. With this, the Selkirk volunteer fire department was officially born.

This is—was truly a community effort, where donations of funds and buckets came from local residents and merchants.

Today, I stand before the House in celebration of Selkirk's 125th anniversary of its volunteer fire department. It is one of the oldest—if not the oldest—consecutive-operating volunteer fire department in Manitoba.

In the beginning, the department consisted of 12 to 15 volunteers and a horse-drawn chemical engine. The fire alarm in the early days was the church bell of the Christ Church and the fire hall was located on the corner of Eaton and Eveline.

The alarm would sound, available citizens would race to the fire department with their horse and wagon to be the first to hook up to the chemical engine. In 1930, with the growth of the community, the need for modernized equipment arose. This was the same year that two fire trucks would arrive: one, a pumper truck and the other, a hose truck, affectionately known as Maggie and Jiggs. Maggie has been restored and remains within the community to this day as part of Selkirk's history.

Today, Selkirk boasts some of the most highly trained and technically expert firefighters in rural

Manitoba. The Selkirk Fire Department has set high standards for their members to ensure public safety in the community and continues to implement state of the art firefighting technology.

I would like to thank members of the Selkirk Fire Department both past and present for their continued commitment to the citizens of Selkirk.

Joining us today is Fire Chief Dave Milner and Secretary Treasurer Ted Wur. I am tabling the names of Selkirk's other volunteer firefighters.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to please rise and join me in celebrating the 125th anniversary of the volunteer Selkirk Fire Department.

Adam Bowditch, Bill Bowman, Duncan Bowman, Joe Bukoski, Joe Craig, Shaun DeBoer, Ian Fey, Craig Fiebelkorn, Linton Fredborg, Corey Gagne, Cassidy Hebert, Kelly Helgason, Brad Honke, Adam Keye, Mike Krewiak, Glenn Leskiw, Sean Lewis, Russell Michalczuk, David Milner, Jeremy Milner, Andrew Palanuk, Robert Perry, Kyle Portree, Brent Scherza, Doug Scramstad, Ryan Sicinski, Keith Smith, Ian Stewart, Cole Urbanovitch, Sean Wiens, Rick Wur, Ted Wur, Jarred Zamolski

* (14:00)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Grace Hospital Nurse Staffing Levels

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, the residents of west Winnipeg are worried about health care at the Grace Hospital. The ER waits there have gone up month after month under the PCs' watch, and since this past summer, they've lost some 13 intensive-care-unit nurses from the front lines in that hospital.

We know that the PC government also closed nine beds at the Grace Hospital. People in Kirkfield Park and other constituencies—Kirkfield Park, of course, not having an MLA since that person ditched this government, perhaps over health care—people in this riding are worried.

Just like Brian Pallister, the Stefanson government continues to cut health care. We know we need more supports for the Grace.

Will the PCs stop the cuts and start fixing health care?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, once again, the Leader of the Opposition continues along

his line of his litany of false accusations on the Chamber floor here, Madam Speaker.

But Manitobans know better. They know that the fact of the matter is that there is a challenge with a shortage of health-care workers right across this country. That includes nurses as well.

And we know that that's created some challenges after a worldwide pandemic, Madam Speaker. And, of course, we have taken steps to address that, both in the short, medium and longer term; 400 more nursing seats. We are on track to deliver those—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —in the province of Manitoba. We are also working with the college of nurses to ensure that we get the internationally educated nurses working on the front lines.

Those are the steps that we're taking. Where's the NDP's plan?

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, it's a well-documented fact that nurses started to leave the system when they started to close emergency rooms in Winnipeg. That led to wait times increasing every month following the start of those closures. That's continued right through to the present day.

Now, what have the PCs done? Well, they've advanced these cuts to health care that nobody across the province understands. Why do you keep cutting health care, Madam Speaker, at a time when we can least afford to lose nurses?

Just this summer, another 13 ICU nurses leave the Grace Hospital. Again, what is their response? They cut nine beds from the Grace Hospital. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: That's the facts that we see in the annual report of the health authority.

Will the Premier please stop cutting health care and finally invest in nurses working on the front lines?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, we are investing in more nurses in the province of Manitoba: 400 new nursing seats in our post-secondary institutions. And what did members opposite do? They voted against that.

We're also working with the colleges, Madam Speaker, to ensure that we can get internationally

educated nurses trained and put onto the front line and dealing with that. Those are the steps we're doing to ensure that we make a—improvements to our health-care system.

Now, we recognize there's been a worldwide pandemic right across the world, Madam Speaker. We recognize that it's created more challenges when it comes to human resources with respect to the health-care system.

But we are taking action, unlike members opposite, who have no plan whatsoever for the future of health care in our province.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, the No. 1 problem we have with health human resources in this province is we've got a PC government that continues to cut health care. Nurses are leaving the profession because they feel—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —disrespected. They see themselves mandated to work endless—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —mandatory overtime shifts.

The Grace Hospital, we see again, nine beds closed last year. That was during the pandemic. Again, we see 13 ICU nurses who've left that hospital since this summer. The situation keeps getting worse.

What Manitobans don't seem to understand is, why do the PCs keep cutting health care, even as the situation on the front lines deteriorate?

Will they finally stop the cuts—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —and start to fix health care, including at the Grace Hospital?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I'm glad the member opposite is bringing up the Grace Hospital, because I do remember back in 2015. In fact, June 11th of 2015, the headline was: Winnipeg hospital wait time the worst in Canada. It went on to say: For the second year in a row, wait times at the Winnipeg hospital—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —emergency room are the worst in the country.

Now, as I recall back then, Madam Speaker, there was no worldwide pandemic, yet the NDP government had the worst wait times in the history of our country.

We will take no lessons from members opposite. We will continue to make those investments in health care—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

New Highway Access Road in Brandon Government Involvement in Project

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Under the PCs' watch, ER wait times at that hospital have gotten worse month after month since the date of the article the Premier cites.

Everyone working on the front lines of the health-care system—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —will tell you that the health-care crisis in Manitoba is worse than it has ever been, and it's because of PC cuts and PC interference.

On the topic of PC interference, we know that the Minister of Infrastructure overruled the professional public service.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: They overruled the professional public service who said—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —that Brandon development was going to increase collisions and would violate The Water Rights Act. Now, the minister and the Premier spoke about this topic at length yesterday, yet one thing was conspicuously absent from their commentary: a denial that this was political interference.

So the question remains, why did this government interfere with this Brandon project?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Well, the Leader of the Opposition just stated that month after month after this article was written, things started and continued to get worse in the province of Manitoba. Well, that was in fact under an NDP government, Madam Speaker.

I will table that for the member opposite right now.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, I know the member opposite asked another question about infrastructure and transportation. I'm pretty sure my time is up, so I'm happy to answer that the next time around.

Madam Speaker: Order.

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

Mr. Kinew: It's not the Premier's time that's up; it's the entire PC government whose time is up. And it's because the crisis in health care in Manitoba—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —is worse than it's ever been.

Health care is worse—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —than it's ever been, Madam Speaker, and it's because they keep cutting. They also continue to interfere. In this case, the Minister of Infrastructure overruled the professional public service to advance the interests of a developer in Brandon who donated the maximum allowable to the leadership campaign of the Premier.

Both of them made numerous comments on the subject yesterday. At no point did they ever deny that there was political interference. It certainly seems as though political interference occurred here.

The Premier should clear the air by answering today: Why did her minister overrule the professional public service on this Brandon project?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, the arrogance of this member never ceases to amaze me. It continues on the floor of this Chamber today just in the last question.

He started to talk again about health care in the province of Manitoba. I reminded the member opposite about back in 2015, when we had the worse wait times in the country, Madam Speaker. At that time at the Grace Hospital, that was—there wasn't a worldwide pandemic then, just prior to that.

* (14:10)

So Manitobans know what it would mean to go back to a previous NDP government, Madam Speaker—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Stefanson: —it would mean the worst wait times in the history of our country, because that is their legacy, and there's no pandemic to fall back on, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: So, I'll point out to careful observers, Madam Speaker, again, the Premier refuses to deny that there was political interference on this Brandon project being spearheaded by somebody who donated the maximum allowable to her leadership campaign.

Again, this is two days, multiple questions, multiple conversations, multiple commentary by the PCs. Not once do any of them ever deny that they politically interfered to advance the interests of a big PC donor.

This is a project that will cost the people of Brandon hundreds of dollars each year on their water bills. The public service identified concerns around safety with this project and, yet, the PCs overruled all of these concerns.

Not once has the Premier ever denied that there was political interference. Will she do so today?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, the project that the Leader of the Opposition is referring to was supported by the City of Brandon.

We know that there are conditions that need to be met, the most important of which are safety conditions that need to be met. And if those safety conditions are met—are not met, then that permit would be revoked, Madam Speaker. That's very clear in there.

The Leader of the Opposition can go down every rabbit hole he wants to make, you know, any accusation he wants. They're all false accusations. The fact of the matter is \$2.5 billion committed over the next three years in the province of Manitoba, 1.5 of which, alone—\$500 million a year—are going towards infrastructure projects in our roads to improve the safety right across this province.

That's what Manitobans asked us for, and that's what we're delivering on.

Highway Access Points on PTH 10 Government Intentions

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Madam Speaker, yesterday we informed the House that the minister overruled a decision of his department that pushed through an access point off Highway 10 in Brandon for a party donor.

I'd like to table for the House a recent article regarding a different applicant's request. In it, the minister rejects calls for a highway access point for a business on that same highway.

The only difference between these two cases: one gave thousands of dollars to the PC party and to the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), and the other did not.

Why is the minister only working for his friends, rather than the safety of all Manitobans?

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Madam Speaker, when it came to—when I first became minister, I actually consulted with a lot of municipalities and communities around the province of Manitoba, and one of them was the City of Brandon.

I had met with the city mayor, the council, at the end of March, the opportunity to meet with them. And the thing was, they really wanted this development to happen in the city of Brandon. And the one of the developments was the South End development, which is going—one of the access points. And the City of Brandon, actually, even passed a resolution to make sure that this happens.

So, they're asking for our help to help grow the city of Brandon.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, the minister is calling to close an access point to Highway 10 for Waywayseecappo First Nation that has existed for decades. In a letter, the minister wrote: There are significant safety concerns with access to PTH 10.

Yet, just down the road is where the government's political friends want something done. All of the sudden, the minister is willing to overrule the safety concerns that were outlined by his own department.

The only difference between these two cases: one put thousands of dollars in the pockets of the PCs and the Premier.

Once again, why is the minister and this government only willing to work for their friends and not for the safety of the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Piwniuk: Madam Speaker, you know, I actually had the opportunity to also meet with the chief of Waywayseecappo this July. I met with the Minister of Economic Development and also with the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation. We both met with the chief and we actually had a good conversation to—actually, the opportunity to look at, also, a safety opportunity when it comes to Highway 10 on the north side of the Trans-Canada Highway.

We are working and collaborating with First Nation communities, along with the City of Brandon.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Yesterday, we revealed that the minister was willing to overstep and overrule his department's decisions that an access point on Highway 10—and he—it was called—it would increase collisions.

The minister's response was that he would do it for economic development, and yet, another business on that exact same highway is being told they cannot keep their access point that has existed for decades.

This is as clear as it comes, Madam Speaker: one set of rules for the PCs and their friends and one set of rules for everyone else. The only difference here: one applicant gave thousands of dollars to the PCs and the Premier and the other did not.

Why is the minister prioritizing his friends over the safety of the people of Brandon and all Manitobans?

Mr. Piwniuk: Madam Speaker, when we actually met with both parties, we actually had the opportunity to make sure that we look at the safety and the growth of the city of Brandon.

We're going to be focusing on—my department's going to be focusing: No. 1, safety; but also, No. 2, on economic development in this province.

I'm not quite sure why the Leader of the Opposition is so against economic development. He wanted to keep resources in the ground, Madam Speaker. When it comes to—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Piwniuk: —the member from Concordia, he wants to keep access points on the Trans-Canada Highway where there's more safety needs required. So

he's talking out of both sides of his mouth, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order.

**Manitoba Hydro and Public Utilities Board
Effect of Legislation on Energy Sector**

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): We've heard from dozens of concerned Manitobans at committee and they've universally told us that Bill 36 is a bad bill.

Dale Friesen from Manitoba Industrial Power Users group—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —joined us last night and he explained, quote, Manitoba's much-touted energy advantage is rapidly eroding, end quote, and that the targets this government is setting were not justified.

Why is the minister not listening to important voices, such as the largest industries in Manitoba?

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro): Madam Speaker, we know that the NDP is in a tough place because they have the difficult job of messaging that \$4 billion of overspent amounts on key bipole and Keeyask—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —projects. And, of course, they'll try to yell me down because they don't want to hear this: \$4 billion of overspend on bipole and Keeyask have resulted in \$24 billion that Manitobans have to pay for.

It means higher rates. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: That's why we have brought a bill that protects Manitobans, keeps rates low and puts Manitoba Hydro back on a path to stability, a path that they threatened.

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

Mr. Sala: Madam Speaker, last night we heard from industrial users that the government's approach means more than a doubling of rates by 2040.

I'd like to quote Mr. Friesen, who says—and not this Mr. Friesen—quote: That will drive industry from Manitoba. It will destroy energy-intensive industry in this province. It will destroy jobs. It will destroy—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —active economic activity. It's already happening. End quote.

Mr. Friesen and industrial users are rightly concerned about the effect rate increases will have on jobs in this province.

Why is the minister not listening to these important voices?

Mr. Friesen: I welcome any question from that member on the subject of what threatens Manitobans and what threatens Manitoba Hydro.

We know that there was an expert report on Keeyask and bipole and it said interference, hiding, failure to be transparent, failure to manage contracts properly, but most of all, what was said by the previous government was that these investments—*[interjection]*

* (14:20)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Friesen: —wouldn't cost Manitobans a dime. And instead, now we know we're on the hook.

That's why action is needed to protect Manitoba ratepayers, to protect Hydro and put them on a path to stability in the future. We value their low rates and the growing economy that are possible if there's action taken now.

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

Mr. Sala: Madam Speaker, Bill 36 is a bad bill, and that's what dozens of presenters universally told us over two days of presentations.

Bill 36 restricts a real presentation of Hydro's finances. Instead, this government intends to undermine the Public Utilities Board.

Industrial users say that, quote, higher energy rates can strain industrial investment and ultimately result in plant closures that bring job loss and declining economic activity. End quote. We need a different approach, Madam Speaker, one that listens to the concerns raised by so many Manitobans.

Why is the minister not listening, and will he withdraw Bill 36?

Mr. Friesen: Well, the member for St. James is flip-flopping because he's claiming to have thanked all the presenters, and yet we saw that member for St. James try to, for 45 minutes, block presenters from

presenting at 11 o'clock in the evening, seeking an early adjudication and an end to the committee.

And, finally, after 45 minutes of shameful antics, they relented and presenters that had waited on the line for almost an hour had a chance to speak again.

So, if that member had really welcomed those committee members, he wouldn't have done those things.

We stand for a stable Hydro. We stand for lower rates, and that's what the bill makes clear.

Surgical Wait Times Development of Dashboard

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): Madam Speaker, tens of thousands of Manitobans are waiting in pain for surgeries without an idea of when they're going to be scheduled. That's why a surgical-wait dashboard that tells people how long they'll have to wait for their procedure is so important.

The Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) promised her government would deliver on a surgical-wait dashboard months ago, yet they've missed the two deadlines that they themselves set for Manitobans.

Will the Premier commit to launching a surgical-wait dashboard that provides monthly updates today?

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): I thank the member from Union Station for the question. It gives me an opportunity to talk a little bit about internationally educated nurses, those individuals that could join our health system and assist us with ensuring Manitobans receive the care and the surgeries they need sooner.

Madam Speaker, Ms. Sigua is an internationally educated nurse who received her education in the Philippines. In 2013, under their administration, she applied for registration here in this province. They told her to go to Quebec.

Madam Speaker, I've also heard many times from the member from Notre Dame about similar situations such as Ms. Sigua. I haven't heard from her since I issued the compliance order to register nurses—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, tens of thousands of Manitobans have no idea when they'll be scheduled for surgery. Many of these folks are waiting in pain, and a surgical dashboard would help provide people

with wait times, the number of people waiting for procedures and how many surgeries are being completed each month.

The Premier committed to launching this dashboard in July. She still hasn't delivered.

Will the Premier commit to launching a surgical-wait dashboard today?

Ms. Gordon: More on nurses that would help with our surgical backlog, Madam Speaker.

The member for Union Station likes T-shirts and wearing T-shirts and was seen this fall wearing a T-shirt that says, the NDP stands with workers. In the background was a—in the background, Madam Speaker, was a legislative building. *[interjection]*

In the background was a legislative building and, Madam Speaker, even with my glasses on, I wasn't sure if it was the legislative building in Alberta or Saskatchewan, because that is where they sent our nurses.

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

MLA Asagwara: Madam Speaker, perhaps instead of providing absolutely ridiculous responses, the minister can focus on being transparent—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Asagwara: —and honest with Manitobans who are waiting for surgeries. That's the very least this government can do.

The Premier promised to launch this dashboard in July. She missed that deadline. Then she promised to launch the dashboard in September. She's missed that deadline as well, Madam Speaker.

Manitobans want to know, they need to know how long it will take to get the surgeries that they need.

Will the Premier finally follow through on her commitment and launch a surgical-wait dashboard today?

Ms. Gordon: Where was the commitment and the follow-through to the province that—to the newcomers who came to this province, Madam Speaker, as internationally educated nurses wanting to practise in their profession? During the dark days of—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Ms. Gordon: —the NDP, they were sent packing.

Madam Speaker, it's more fear mongering from the NDP because they don't want to talk about their record or their dark days, but wait times data is available on the government website, including surgeries, diagnostic CancerCare services, and we will release the dashboard when it is ready. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

New Pool Facility in Thompson Construction Timeline and Costs

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): Madam Speaker, the Thompson pool closed under this government and 'sas' sat closed since 2019.

An announcement leading up to the by-election contained no timeline for this project. The news release claimed the project would cost \$15 million, but will, in fact, cost many million dollars more.

When will this project be built, and will this government increase its contributions to ensure that the Thompson Pool gets built?

Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Labour, Consumer Protection and Government Services): Well, I was pleased to be in Thompson for the ICIP 'announcement' with the mayor there and the federal government. Very pleased to make that announcement.

We know that the city is—or, the town of Thompson is—City of Thompson is working on making sure that that project goes through, Madam Speaker. And it is in their hands. They will advise us what happens when they get the RFP back, and we'll work with them to make sure that the pool gets built.

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

Mr. Redhead: The news release from May says the pool would cost \$15 million. That's not true.

I'll table a briefing note that was generated from when this project was announced. It says the project will actually cost about \$20 million. The government has not put forward enough to cover the cost to build the Thompson pool.

Will they increase their contribution and tell us when this project will be built? *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

I'm starting to have difficulty hearing, and I'm hearing certain voices that are out there that keep popping up, and so I'm going to ask everybody for your co-operation, please.

Mr. Helwer: Well, we do work with the proponent on these ICIP projects: a federal-provincial agreement. And we work with the municipality to make sure that these projects will get done.

While I was in Thompson, I was very pleased to be toured by Mayor Smook, so she could show us all the other areas in Thompson in which we were partnering with the City of Thompson. Very pleased with the outcome of those projects, Madam Speaker.

We will make sure the pool gets built.

* (14:30)

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

Mr. Redhead: The Thompson pool has been closed for three years now. This government did not offer any assistance to Thompson until a by-election was called. And what they have offered falls—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Redhead: —millions of dollars of—short to make sure that this project is complete for the city of Thompson. The minister knew the announcement—their announcement fell fall short of what is needed to complete this project.

Will they increase their contributions and ensure that this pool gets built?

Mr. Helwer: Well, the member opposite doesn't seem to take yes for an answer.

I'm kind of at a loss here, Madam Speaker. I'm telling the member opposite several times the pool will get built, unlike the dark days of the NDP, where they had no plan and no concept of what it would take to keep infrastructure running. They left us with an infrastructure deficit that we're still digging our way out of.

The Thompson pool is—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Helwer: —one of those projects that we will get done where they failed.

Individuals Within Labour Organizations Calls for Inquiry into Sex Assault Complaints

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): In April 2021, Manitoba Liberals are asked whether we could investigate issues of sexual assault being covered up in the labour movement in Winnipeg, based on dozens of complaints detailed in an article at rankandfile.ca.

We called for all-party support for an inquiry. While the Minister of Justice did respond, the NDP did not.

We have to ask whether it's because one of the NDP senior advisors, Bob Dewar, would rather keep it quiet that in 2013 he was removed from the MGEU executive because he ignored a restraining order and hired a convicted rapist back into the workplace with the survivor, evidence that I shared with the minister and the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) previously.

That judgment call didn't stop Mr. Dewar from being hired again and again by John Horgan, Jagmeet Singh and the Manitoba NDP.

Will the government consider public hearings for an inquiry to allow victims to speak, or will we have to call for a federal inquiry into the abuse we know has happened?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Acting Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Well, Madam Speaker, there was—there's a lot of information in that question. Certainly, I'll take that information under advisement.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

The honourable member for St. B, on a supplementary question. The honourable member for St. Boniface?

Mr. Lamont: Yes?

Madam Speaker: Oh, your mic just wasn't clicking in, but go ahead.

Mr. Lamont: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That's not the only case.

In February 2019, a CUPE union official, Abe Araya, allegedly sexually assaulted a co-worker who was told to stay silent while he worked provincial and federal campaigns for—to elect NDP politicians. That November, he was elected president of CUPE Manitoba, even though the former NDP candidate for St. Boniface—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lamont: —has often said there isn't a single person in the labour movement, especially CUPE, at all levels, who did not know about this person prior to his election.

They knew. He was elected anyway, and when the victim complained to her union she was called a liar and was fired. But the Brandon police found enough for a criminal charge in January 2021.

These cover-ups have never stopped. Unless this is challenged, it will never stop.

Are we alone in this, or will the government give victims who've been silent for so long a voice by calling an inquiry?

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): Madam Speaker, our government takes very seriously allegations of—and incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace.

We firmly believe that everybody should be able to go to work free of harassment of any kind. That is why we brought in, in 2018, some of the strictest workplace policies in the country that has been a model for our legislatures and other workplaces across the country, in terms of protecting all individuals who work in an assembly and who work for the civil service, including having a no-wrong-door approach.

And so, while we have brought in policies to ensure that everybody has a workplace that is free of harassment, if there's individual incidences that the member would like to have looked at, there's a process for that and it is not the floor of the Legislative Chamber.

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

Adults with Executive Function Impairment Community Living disABILITY Services

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, individuals with executive function disorders often associated with learning difficulties, autism or ADHD have a deficiency in the executive or adaptive function of their brain. They may have a high IQ, yet are unable to plan, to organize their lives or to manage their meals, housing or finances.

Currently, the government, through Community Living disABILITY Services, does not provide support for such individuals after they reach 18 if their IQ is above 75.

When will the Premier's government recognize that such individuals need significant support after they turn 18 in their transition to adulthood, and when will she ensure such support is available through CLDS?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): Our government made a significant investment in Budget 2022 for people with disabilities, which includes an additional \$5 million in the Children's

disABILITY Services diagnosis and treatment of people experiencing disabilities.

We've also made more than \$26 million in new initiatives to support people within the CLDS program, whether that is ensuring that there's a strong, stable workforce by enhancing those wages or providing greater support, such as the bridge program, which is allowing people to receive enhanced respite that they need.

We know that there's a long way to go to support people with disabilities, and I appreciate the member bringing that particular issue to the floor, and it's something that our government is committed to working on.

Supports for Individuals with Alzheimer's Funding for First Link Initiative

Mr. Len Isleifson (Brandon East): Many Manitoba seniors and the caregivers who provide support for them live with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

Can the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care explain how our government is taking the necessary steps to support seniors, their families and the caregivers living with Alzheimer's?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): I wish to thank the member from Brandon East for that excellent question.

I'm—I was pleased to meet with the Alzheimer Society of Manitoba, where they advocated for increased support for individuals living with Alzheimer's and other dementias. From this meeting, our department advocated on behalf of the ASM to get approved funding for increased supports.

And in September, I was pleased to announce our government will be investing \$1.3 million over four years to expand their First Link client support program. This investment will help support over 130,000 Manitobans to assist with them in dealing with this terrible disease.

Home-Care Services Quality of Care Concerns

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, the state of home care in our province is unacceptable. Home-care workers are being stretched thin due to high vacancy rates across the province, and as a result, clients are seeing their non-essential appointments cancelled: non-essential services such as

bathing, laundry, housekeeping and bulk meal preparation.

These are services that people depend on to live with dignity. The government needs to take urgent action to ensure that people are receiving the home-care services they need.

Will the minister do so today?

Hon. Scott Johnston (Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care): As I'd indicated to the House on earlier occasions, this government was very proud to initiate the Stevenson report and recommendations.

We invested over \$15 million to enhance infection prevention controls and also to establishing over 50 infectious control staff, more than 200 full-time housekeeping staff, 44 allied health-keeping staff or health staff and also to improving information and communication technologies.

Those are initiatives that this government has taken to protect seniors. Incidentally, that was something that the NDP voted against.

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

MLA Marcelino: Madam Speaker, the questions are about home care, not personal-care homes, which was what the Stevenson report was referring to.

* (14:40)

The PCs have refused to adequately compensate home-care workers and provide decent working conditions for home-care workers and benefits, and this has contributed to the high vacancy rates across the province. WRHA home workers that I met with last night told me that it's not uncommon for vulnerable elderly clients to be sitting in dirty diapers for three days at a time due to a lack of services. And this is so wrong.

The government should take action to ensure our most vulnerable seniors are receiving the care they need to age in place. Will they do so today?

Mr. Johnston: And I continue to indicate this government's investment to assist seniors, and we will continue to do that.

In regards to the home-care situation, we, too, understand that we need to address the home-care challenges in the province of Manitoba. Therefore, that's why we have initiated a seniors strategy to reach out to stakeholders and seniors in Manitoba to determine the best plan possible.

We'll have a plan. They did not have a plan.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Order, please. Order.

House Business

Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations): Madam Speaker, on House business.

Madam Speaker: On House business.

Mr. Lagimodiere: During my private member's statement, my intent was to include the names of our volunteer firefighters into Hansard, not to table their names.

Madam Speaker: And I appreciate the—those comments from the minister.

PETITIONS

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

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

To the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background is as follows:

(1) The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys has—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: —been served notice by Red River Valley School Division to vacate the premises currently situated in the auditorium of École Héritage school by March 31, 2023.

(2) The auditorium was originally built in the 1960s by renowned Manitoba architect Étienne Gaboury, and 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 of the RM of De Salaberry and St. Pierre Jolys. It is marked as an important modern building that could attain the status of heritage site.

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 Kleefield *[phonetic]*, are provided with free access to the public library and its fourth largest collection of French books in rural Manitoba during the school year.

Therefore, we petition the legislature of Manitoba as follows:

(1) 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 St. Pierre Jolys and the RM of De Salaberry.

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

(4) To request the Minister of Sport, Culture, 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 is signed by many Manitobans.

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

Hearing Aids

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) 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.

(2) 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.

(3) 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.

(4) A global commission on the state of the research for dementia care and prevention released an update 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.

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

(6) 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.

(7) 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.

(8) Manitoba residents under the age of 18 who require a hearing aid, as prescribed by an 'ornanecologist' or audiologist, will receive either an 80 per cent reimbursement from Manitoba Health or a fixed amount for an analog device, up to a maximum of \$500 per ear, or 80 per cent of a fixed income 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.

(9) 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.

(10) The Province of Quebec's hearing device program covers all costs related to hearing aids and assistive living devices—listening devices, including the purchase, repair and replacement.

(11) Alberta offers subsidies to all seniors 65 and over and low-income adults 18 to 64 once every five years.

(12) 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 whom the purchase would cause financial hardship.

(13) Manitobans over the age 18 are only eligible for support for hearing aids if they are 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:

(1) To urge the provincial government to consider hearing loss as a medical treatment under Manitoba Health; and

(2) 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—Manitobans' cognitive, mental and social health and well-being.

This petition has been 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 petition is as follows:

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

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

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

(4) Without repair, Provincial Road 224 will continue to pose a hazard to the many Manitobans who use it on a regular basis; and

* (14:50)

(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.

Ekosani.

Louise Bridge

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

The background to 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 the 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 it cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

(3) As far back as 2008, 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.

(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 bridge to be placed just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed.

(10) The City expropriation process has begun. The \$6.35 million street upgrade of Nairn Avenue from Watt Street to the 111-year-old bridge is complete.

(11) 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:

(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.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

South Perimeter Highway Noise Barrier

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly, and the background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The residents of the River Park South community in Winnipeg are disturbed by the increasing noise levels caused by the 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 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 to the 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 at reducing traffic noise.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

(2) To urge the Minister of Transportation to help address this issue with a noise barrier along-wall along residential portions of the South Perimeter from St. Anne's Road to St. Mary's Road and for River Park South residents.

Petition, Madam Speaker, was signed by many Manitobans.

Drug Overdose Reporting

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background of this petition is as follows:

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

(2) Three hundred and seventy-two Manitobans died of an overdose in 2020; that's over one a day, and 80 per cent—87 per cent higher than in 2019.

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

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to enact Bill 217, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act (Overdose Death Reporting), and to require the Province to publish the number of drug overdose deaths, as well as the type of drug, on a government website in a timely manner.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Home-Care Services

MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Home-care workers in Manitoba provide skilled and compassionate care that helps better the quality of life for thousands of Manitobans.

(2) Robust home-care services are proven to reduce the strain on health services and demand for hospital beds.

(3) Home care reduces the demand for long-term-care beds as it allows people to continue living in their own space.

(4) Studies show that a third of the 200,000 Canadians living in long-term-care homes could stay home with proper home-care support.

(5) Investing in home care saves money, as daily services cost half the price of a long-term-care bed and one-seventh the daily cost of a hospital bed.

(6) The provincial government's cuts to home care in Manitoba has resulted in chronic staffing issues that

caused the WRHA to cancel 27,000 home-care appointments in the month of April 2022 alone.

(7) Many clients in Manitoba only receive home-care services once a day, whereas countries such as Denmark offer up to six visits a day.

(8) Home-care workers in Manitoba are paid poor wages, are offered little benefits, lack sick time and are overworked, resulting in difficulty retaining and attracting workers.

(9) Home-care workers have been without a contract since 2017, due to this provincial government's interference in labour negotiations.

(10) Investing in home care is a proactive approach that would save the Province millions of dollars as well as allow more Manitobans to age in place.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care to immediately increase investment in home-care services so that home-care workers can be paid a fair wage and clients can receive the level of service they require.

* (15:00)

This has been signed by Darylyn Aloza [*phonetic*], A. Dhala and A. Sambrano, and many Manitobans.

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library, JRL, has been served notice by the Red River Valley School Division, RRVSD, to vacate the premises currently situated in the auditorium of École Héritage school, ÉHS, by March 31st, 2023.

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

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

(4) JRL and RRVSD have flourished from a mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding for 54 years.

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

(6) Students that are bused from the neighbouring municipalities that do not have a public library, such as Niverville, Grunthal, 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 1st, 2023.

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

(3) To request the Minister of Education and the Minister of Francophone Affairs to recognize that an MOU between the RRVSD and 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.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Executive Function Disorders Supports

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) Individuals with executive function disorders usually associated with the learning disability ADHD or autism have a specific deficiency in the executive or adaptive function of their brain. Individuals with executive function disorders can have a high IQ and can, in some instances, speak as eloquently as a university professor, but often are unable to plan and

organize their lives, manage their meals, houses or finances.

Some individuals have an executive function disability in which their executive function develops slowly, requiring that they receive help and support for five to seven years after they turn 18 years old.

Many individuals with executive function disorders can do well in life and at work if given adequate supports and the chance to fully develop their executive function capabilities. Without that support, they risk becoming homeless, face inconsistent employment and/or could be the victims or perpetrators of crime.

Manita [*phonetic*] has few limited resources specifically to help those with executive function disorders.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to partner with organizations that provide individual and group supports and online resources for children and adults with executive function disorders and IQs above 75, including:

(a) online videos featuring individuals with executive function disorders raising awareness and explaining a strength-based way to fully develop their executive function capabilities;

(b) a manual listing all resources for those with executive function defects;

(c) learning modules and instructional videos teaching daily tasks that involve executive function; and

(d) a free online webinar series to enable individuals with executive function deficiencies to access government supports.

(2) To urge the provincial government to improve funding for Community Living disABILITY Services, CLDS, and other organizations which can provide support for those with executive function disorders in order to reduce wait times for those who need to access them.

To urge the provincial government to recognize that individuals with executive function disorders with a normal-to-high IQ have great potential to be gainfully employed, provided they have some supports and to set up initiatives to help these individuals get and keep jobs, including a public awareness campaign.

(4) To urge the provincial government to recognize that individuals who are helping those with executive function disorders are essential partners and enable them to accompany the person into a hospital or other situations as necessary, regardless of age.

(5) To urge the provincial government to mandate that all teachers take courses on learning disabilities, including executive function disorders, during their post-secondary education in order to better understand and educate and end the discrimination they often experience in the classroom.

Signed by John Badertscher, Jasmine Prior, India Prior and many, many other Manitobans.

Thank you.

Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): Je désire présenter la pétition suivante à l'Assemblée législative.

Le contexte de cette pétition est le suivant :

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

2) L'auditorium a été construit dans les années 1960 par le célèbre architecte manitobain Étienne Gaboury. 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 à 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) De 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 G-R-L 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 Hanna Bratzke, Heidi Bubenzer and [et] Cole Chubey.

Merci.

Translation

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

(1) The Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library was notified by the Red River Valley School Division to vacate premises currently located in the auditorium of the École Heritage School 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 the RM 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 EHS, as well as the communities of Village de Saint-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 Hanna Bratzke, Heidi Bubenzer and Cole Chubey.

Home-Care Services

Mr. Mintu Sandhu (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background of this petition is as follows:

(1) Home-care workers in Manitoba provide skilled and compassionate care that helps better the quality of life for thousands of Manitobans.

(2) Robust home-care services are proven to be—reduce the strain on health services and demand for hospital beds.

(3) Home care reduces the demand for long-term-care beds, as it allows people to continue living in their own space.

(4) Studies show that a third of the 200,000 Canadians living in long-term-care homes could stay home with proper home-care support.

* (15:10)

(5) Investing in home care saves money, as daily services cost half the price of a long-term-care bed and one-seventh the daily cost of hospital beds.

(6) The provincial government's cuts to home care in Manitoba has resulted in chronic staffing issues that caused the WRHA to cancel 27,000 home-care appointments in the month of April 2022 alone.

(7) Many clients in Manitoba only receive home-care service once a day, where countries such as Denmark offer up to six visits a day.

(8) Home-care workers in Manitoba are paid poor wages, are offered little benefits, lack sick time and overworked, resulting in difficulty retaining and attracting workers.

(9) Home-care workers have been without a contract since 2017, due to this provincial government's interference in labour negotiations.

(10) Investing in home care is a proactive approach that would have saved millions—saved the Province millions of dollars as well as allow more Manitobans to age in place.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health and the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care to immediately increase investment in home-care service that—so that home-care workers can be paid a fair wage and clients can receive the level of service they require.

This petition has been signed by many Manitobans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Acting Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, would you call Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

MENTAL HEALTH AND COMMUNITY WELLNESS

* (15:10)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Mental Health and Community Wellness. Questioning for this department will continue in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): Can the minister—I think the minister last time had answered this question. They had said that there was no vacancy rates in their department, but can they tell us how many current—the number of current vacancies by subappropriation in their department?

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): Yes, so I do have those numbers. So, by subappropriation, the total number of FTEs for the department is 60.2. And so that would be broken down into (1) for minister executive support is nine; division support is 3.5; mental health and recovery branch is 25.8; C-P—*[interjection]*—oh, Chief Provincial Psychiatrist is 2.9; the Mental Health Review Board is three FTEs; health and promotion in wellness is 11 FTEs; tobacco 'censation' is four. So that makes up the 60.2 positions within the department.

So the vacancy rate, which is what the member was asking about—so, obviously, there's no vacancy rate for the minister. The executive support, we have one FTE vacant; in the division support it's 0.5; in the mental health and recovery branch, 7.8; there are no

vacancies in our chief provincial psychiatry; the Mental Health Review Board, we have one vacancy; the health and promotion in wellness, we have three vacancies; and then the tobacco cessation, we have no vacancies.

Mrs. Smith: So of the 60.2 FTEs, 10 of those—or nine, the minister had just indicated—are those for the minister and her executive support—do you think it's a bit top-heavy when a quarter of department is support for the minister?

Mrs. Guillemard: So the numbers that we have within our department are consistent with all departments, and this includes our front office staff. So I have an ATM, or assistant to the minister, who does a lot of my scheduling. I've got the two secretaries up front and then I have two political staff now, one who had just started on Friday—so when I was last up for Estimates, I had one current, who is Jeff Chochinov, and one new political staff who just started last Friday. That is Sarah McLachlan.

And then within my deputy minister's office, so that would include my deputy minister, there's also two positions there—oh, sorry, three positions. One currently is on mat leave, which is the vacancy that I had mentioned earlier.

* (15:20)

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that answer.

What has been the actual funding provided each year to the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba over the last five years?

* (15:30)

Mrs. Guillemard: Okay, so, it's a little bit of research here to find some of these numbers.

So, first of all, AFM is considered an other reporting entity. And in—of April 1st of this year, it is now under Shared Health, not under our department, specifically. But you can get the specific numbers of government investments into AFM on the public documents that are on their website for their annual reports.

But from what we've looked up, we have from 2017-18, \$23.8 million to AFM; from '18-19, \$23.8 million; '19-20, about \$24 million; from '20-21, again, about \$24 million; and '21-22 at the \$24.2-million investment. But the specific amounts in more detail can be looked up online, and the public has access to that.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for those answers.

I'm going to ask a couple questions. Just—if they could clarify whether that \$24.2 million in '21-22 included the \$3 million from the flooding.

But then my next question is—I'm going to move on to overdoses in Manitoba. So can the minister provide us an update on the number of suspected overdoses this year?

Mrs. Guillemard: I'll get to the first question first. It was one of those discussions that I had with the previous member, who was asking questions about, sort of, the difference between summary versus core.

So the numbers that I provided were the core investments in funding through mental health department. There are other funding sources also, in other departments, from the government, that flow into AFM, but I was commenting on the core services.

So when you speak about the flooding—sorry, when the member speaks about the flooding, that would be under summary funding. So any sort of extra revenue or other revenue, whether it's through insurance or whatnot, would not affect the core investments. That would be part of summary budget, not our core investments.

And then I [*inaudible*] you on the follow-up question about overdoses.

Mrs. Smith: While the minister is taking that under advisement and looking for those numbers, can the minister also advise—other jurisdictions, except Manitoba, have databases where they keep accurate, up-to-date numbers, and I know the member has—or the minister knows that community has been advocating for this.

So, just wondering, is that something that's going to be coming in the near future, where we're having accurate numbers on the federal database of how many overdoses are happening in Manitoba and how many currently has happened up to date?

Mrs. Guillemard: I just want to clarify, I actually did not take it under advisement. I'm just going to be speaking with my staff right now so that I can give an accurate, updated answer for the member.

Yes. Okay, so I know that the member and I have had a number of conversations, sidebar conversations, about reporting and the numbers, and talking about the national database and website that is provided.

I will note that the Manitoba numbers are, right now, currently up on the national database for the year 2021 which, when we previously had spoken, they

weren't there. And that's a function of, actually, a delay in terms of our reporting deadlines are different than what the federal reporting deadlines are. And they require that the numbers that are submitted are audited.

So, our reporting deadline for auditing is different from the federal deadlines and their reporting processes. And so, the numbers aren't posted on the website, the national website, until they are actually audited. But we are continually providing the federal government with the numbers from Manitoba, but if they are unaudited, they are not posted online. It's after they are audited and verified that those numbers are then put online for public access.

* (15:40)

Mrs. Smith: Can the minister provide an update on the number of suspected overdoses? And then how many have lost their lives to overdoses this year? An accurate number.

Mrs. Guillemard: Again, I'll reiterate that the numbers that would be preliminary have not been audited and they haven't been confirmed. So those numbers can go up and down, and there's always a three-month delay in terms of toxicology reports and other entities. And other jurisdictions, actually, post their unaudited numbers, and those numbers can change throughout the year because, in the end, once the information is provided through the medical examiner's office, those, you know, cause of death could change depend on what the findings are.

So we, historically, have not revealed these unaudited numbers, which is the only numbers that we have access to, because they have changed. And I would not want to be putting numbers on the record at this point that are not audited. But I know that the member was curious, as well, about, you know, keeping the public up to date on the activities and some of the areas of concern and being transparent, and our department has been consistently working on making sure that we're collecting the data and having it ready for a format that the public can keep on top of what is going on, both the areas of improvement and the areas that need more investments and supports.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that answer.

In July, I actually contacted the medical examiner, and I was able to get a number of 107 deaths here in the province in the first quarter. So I'm wondering why I can call the medical examiner's office, get those numbers and they've done, already, toxicology tests and determined that these were overdose deaths from

opioids. Why we can't accurately report—and I know what the minister's saying, that, you know, they have to be very clear. But the medical examiner, when I called, was very clear that those toxicology reports had been done, that it was a clear indication that the person had died from an opioid overdose. And we're at 107 in the first quarter. Last year was 407 deaths. The year before was an 87 per cent increase. We're on schedule to even, you know, forgo that number and exceed that number.

And I think it's, you know, to educate the community on what drugs are out there, what's actually happening, even going as far as drug testing. We have, you know, Sunshine House that has taken it upon themselves to actually fundraise. They got some funds from the federal government to be able to buy an RV. They have asked the Province to support a drug testing machine that's at the cost of about \$80,000, which would help save lives because people can test their drugs, make an informed decision whether, you know, they're going to take that same drug that they took yesterday but they don't know if it's—has more fentanyl or more whatever in it; they took the same drug but yet they're dying from it.

So I'm wondering if the minister can speak to, you know, whether there's any strategy to reduce the numbers of Manitobans that are dying from overdoses and how are we going to educate and help support the folks that are already doing the work and that are taking it upon themselves to actually do the work? We have a responsibility as a government to ensure that people have access to resources, and, you know, testing drugs is one, but also making sure that there's accurate up-to-date information so people know that people are actually dying from overdoses in this province.

I don't see anything on any social media. I don't see anything on—unless I'm directly connected to them, I don't see anything on media. I don't see anything that comes out from the government. And I think it's not okay for us to, you know, pretend like it's not there. It increases the stigma, actually, and doesn't help people come forward to get the help they need.

So, again I'll ask, why am I able to get those numbers from the medical examiner who has done the toxicology reports, that have actually said that—100 per cent conclusively—that this person died of an overdose from whatever drug it is—and they can tell you what drug they overdosed from.

Why are they able to get those numbers, we're not, and why aren't we reporting them on a database?

And I get that, you know, you've said that, but that's red tape. We need to reduce that. We need to make sure that we're getting people the right information, and that people are making informed decisions and that we're getting people the resources that they need so that we can save lives.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Guillemard: I think that there was a number of questions sort of balled up into one, so trying to unpack some of that.

So, first I also want to clarify that the Chief Medical Examiner falls under the Department of Justice, so his numbers flow through the Department of Justice and then flow through to our department.

I'm not going to be arguing with numbers that are coming from the medical examiner; however, I do trust that he also clarified that those were the unaudited numbers, and as confident as he is in cause of death and what information—and again, I wasn't a part of those conversations—I'm not going to argue about numbers that were provided. I wasn't part of those conversations.

But again, I want to sort of reiterate that those are the unaudited numbers that would've been provided through the Chief Medical Examiner's office. And those ones would sort of be confirmed after the audit is completed.

In terms of the—you know, the focus or not speaking enough or sharing enough on supports for people who are struggling with drug and mental health issues, I would actually argue that we've done a number of initiatives as a government and investments.

And most recently, in August, we announced an additional over half a million dollars into expanding the Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine services in Selkirk. And I know that was very well received by families who have loved ones who are struggling in the area, and really looking for services to help their loved ones get back on their feet, and back on the path of healing and health.

We've made a number of announcements of investments that we are making in terms of psychologist positions, and in terms of youth mental health supports, including opening up the youth huddles throughout Manitoba. And I know that that was also well received by our young generation, who are facing far more pressures when it comes to mental health and

drug pressures than, I think, what the member and I even faced growing up.

So, in terms of keeping this front and centre and the dangers of not having access to services to help us, you know, get back on our feet, we have done a lot as a government. And we will continue to invest more and continue to work on what we know are evidence-based practices to restore the lives and health to Manitobans.

Mrs. Smith: Hundred and seven deaths this year, in the first quarter alone. I would beg to differ that we're not doing enough. We have Manitobans that are dying every day in this province, and they don't have access to the supports that they need.

Five hundred thousand dollars to RAAM in Selkirk is great, but obviously, we need to be investing more money, because the numbers continue to increase and people aren't getting access to the supports they need. So, I'll move on.

Can the minister tell us how many babies were born with congenital syphilis this year, we knew—know last year was 47, and is there an updated number so far for 2022?

Mrs. Guillemard: So, I know that this topic has obviously been raised in the Chamber during question period a number of times, and a number of times we've clarified that this actually falls under the Department of Health.

So sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections—I do agree that there is that need to really look at the whole scope of, you know, intravenous drug use and sexually transmitted diseases and how they, you know, impact over a lifespan people who are facing challenges in life. But at this point, the sexually transmitted and blood-borne illnesses do fall under the Department of Health.

So those numbers are not within my department to provide, and I would suggest that you speak to the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) to have access to those numbers.

Mrs. Smith: It's unfortunate that the minister doesn't have those numbers, because those are a direct result of intravenous drug use, when you talk about syphilis, when you're talking about hepatitis B, when you're talking about HIV.

And not having those numbers, you know, is something that I think that the minister should be looking into and making sure that they have access to and that, you know, the two departments work

together in collaboration, because that's certainly going to help reduce those numbers and making sure that people have the support that they need.

You know, departmentalizing those issues when it's directly related to addictions falls under that portfolio. And, you know, it's great that we have another minister that, you know, is looking at mental health and recovery, but recovery also means looking at what is a direct result of the addictions that are coming from people actually using these drugs.

So—and again, I know the minister had talked about the medical examiner not falling under their purview, as well. I think that, you know, that's harmful in terms of making sure that Manitobans have the support that they need and the information that they need to make informed decisions, as well as the department has those numbers so that they can look at where supports need to be and investments need to be made.

* (16:00)

And, certainly, you know, the rise in all of these areas, whether it's, you know, babies being born with congenital syphilis, being—or contracting HIV. Like, these are life-altering diseases that people have to live for a lifetime with.

So, you know, I certainly think I shouldn't be going to another department to find that out when it's directly related to an addiction and an issue that people are using intravenously.

But, I'll move on.

So, the VIRGO report called for 9 per cent of the Health budget to be focused on mental health and addictions. How much is it now? How many of that 9 per cent is being allocated toward mental health and addictions?

Mrs. Guillemard: Just to respond to the member, you know, I know that the member has a number of suggestions for how they would structure government and different departments. And I'm sure that there are some keen ears listening in, you know, with some of those suggestions about how best to structure and have reporting entities come up through various departments.

So, appreciate the comments that were shared and I assure the member that ministers are not the ones who determine what line of reporting happens in which department. That is done by people with a higher paygrade than myself and much smarter than I am.

So, having said that, I do want to correct the record that VIRGO report, indeed, did not say 9 per cent. The national average aims for 7 to 9 per cent of overall health spending should be on mental health funding. The VIRGO report actually pointed at a 7.2 per cent aim for Manitoba. And just looking at where our government came in, in 2016 and '17, was at a historic low after years of being underfunded.

So under the previous government, we were starting at an all-time low of 5.39 per cent of overall health spending being spent in the mental health area. Since then, we have increased the funding year over year. So 2017-18, we were at 5.2 per cent—or sorry, 5.42 per cent—my apologies; 2018-19 was 5.55 per cent; '19-20 was 5.58 per cent; and then in '21-22, overall was 5.65 per cent.

And that's specific to our mental health funding agreements and investments, but it does not include—oh, sorry, the '22-23 is up to 6.23 per cent. Quite a big jump there, recognizing separating out our department in—to be a stand-alone department, and having separate funding and making large investments in the areas that are needed for Manitoba.

Now, these costs don't—or, these funding amounts are specific to my department. They don't include a number of other areas that are funded, for instance: people who are seeking mental health care through primary care—those costs are covered; emergency rooms; out-of-province travel for mental health patients; and including some of our naloxone programs that we're providing. None of those are included in the numbers that I provided to the member.

So if you were add up those costs that are covered for mental health services in general through other departments, including Justice, we'd be well over the 7.2 per cent that is called for in the VIRGO report.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that answer.

Can the minister tell us how many hours a week RAAM clinics are operating?

* (16:10)

Mrs. Guillemard: I'm just wondering if the member could clarify if she's looking for the walk-in hours or the clinical hours? Or both?

Mrs. Smith: Both. If you want to provide both of those, that would be great.

Mrs. Guillemard: So, when we're looking at the hours for RAAM clinics, on average for the walk-in,

they usually do a block of three hours on any given day, and all of them have different days that they will be open. Some of them are Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays; some of them are Monday and Thursdays. And that's for walk-in hours.

The clinical hours are Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. So, there will be clinical hours where the health-care professionals or the addictions specialists will be working with their clientele and not open for walk-in appointments, but between 8:30 and 4:30 p.m. on every—any given day, there can be appointments made by people looking for services.

And I think that that is—and we did expand hours due to the pressures of COVID, and that was a direct response to the needs that were being expressed by Manitobans.

And, overall, the response to opening RAAM clinics—that I will remind the member didn't exist under the NDP government—has been positive. There has been a very good response to opening these clinics and providing the services that are barrier-free to individuals who are struggling and recognize the need for services and supports in their walk towards healing.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that question.

Again, three hours weekly per clinic, we have, you know, the number going up every month.

I did get a text from someone that had got numbers up to May that indicated that 189 folks had passed away from overdoses in our province.

And I know the City is keeping data in terms, like, if a first responder, paramedic or a police officer responds to an overdose, where those are—the hot spots, whether they were taken to the hospital. So, they're keeping quite up-to-date data.

And, you know, that's something I hope our Province can get to because we are lagging far behind any other province in this country, and, you know, it's resulting in people's deaths, and we need more services.

So, I'm wondering if the minister can tell us, by site, the number of treatment beds are currently operated in Manitoba, and if the minister can include other types of beds, like differentiating between treatment beds or other supportive housing.

* (16:20)

Mrs. Guillemard: Okay, so now we're getting into the treatment beds, and it's broken down to—we have

in-house treatment beds, and the number there is 332. That does not include the private treatment centres. So the numbers of actual beds for treatment is much larger than that, but these are the number that we fund through government.

The supportive housing: previous to our department working on this, there were 130, roughly, beds; there are currently 234. So our government has invested over the last two years at 100 net—new supportive housing units, which doubles the number that had been created under the previous government in 17 years.

So, we're actually quite proud of that number and accomplishment, and celebrate it along with the stakeholders that we did recognize the need for individuals to have the supports as they are healing and returning to health in their life.

Withdrawal management beds: there are a total of 99.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that question.

There is less treatment beds now than there was in 2015. Why is that?

Mr. James Teitsma, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mrs. Guillemard: Yes, in order to answer the member's question about why the change in numbers, Salvation Army, which is an independently run organization, had decided to close down their 32 beds that they were operating. That wasn't a government decision; that was a separate organization who decided to close those beds.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

The funding that was provided for those 32 spots to Salvation Army was then reinvested into the supportive housing and treatment areas, as we recognized there was a large gap in supportive housing that was necessary to keep those who had sought treatment in recovery and supported as they found their way back towards healing and restored their life.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that question.

I—you know, I'm struggling here a little bit, because we have so many people that are struggling with addictions to get into treatment beds but yet, we've taken those 32 beds, putted them—put them into supportive housing, which we should be investing more in anyway and topping up those beds, so that people can get to actual recovery.

I know during the pandemic, for instance, we had less detox beds, and I heard that from a number of folks that were trying to access those services. But I'll leave there.

I want to move on to harm reduction initiatives, and I'd like to ask the minister: What funds are being allocated to harm reduction addition-initiatives, and what are the harm reduction initiatives that are being invested in?

* (16:30)

Mrs. Guillemard: So, first of all, I'm going to take issue a little bit with the member's preamble where there's a suggestion that, you know, there was less supports available for people seeking treatment. And what we based our decisions and funding allocations on are needs-based planning. So there's an assessment done of how people seek treatment and what the needs are.

What we've seen, and I know that the member would be familiar, as well, with this is there are a number people who seek treatment don't necessarily reach success the first round of treatment, and maybe that's based on how long duration that's been provided. Or most frequently what happens is that there's not supportive housing available when they actually have reached that level of ready for the next step of that recovery process. And so what happens is they end up relapsing and then accessing treatment spaces again.

So, indeed, investing in the supportive housing, including additional investments into our treatment beds, means that those same individuals are not going through that revolving door and repeatedly needing to use the treatment. They will have those supports available to them long term to keep them in that healthy recovery.

And I would argue that treatment and the supportive housing is actually the most effective harm-reduction initiative any jurisdiction actually can invest in because it truly does restore lives and helps people to get back to the baseline of health and healing.

But, additionally, our government has invested over one and a half million dollars in harm reduction initiatives and that includes the naloxone take-home program and providing clean needles to individuals who are using injectable drugs.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for that answer, and I don't agree with—or I don't disagree with investing in supportive housing. I absolutely agree with that, but I

think that we should be making extra investments instead of taking the 32 beds that we lost that were for, you know, treatment and investing those into supportive housing. So we need more investments, not less; more beds for detox so people can get to that place of supportive housing.

And I know the minister referenced that, you know, people relapse and, you know, they, kind of, cycle through. And that's great, but when there's no treatment beds to go back to then, you know, that means people are less likely to get back to that supportive housing model. So we need to make sure that those supports are there when people need them and they need to go back into treatment.

I've met so many people who—and we know that addictions is a lifelong struggle; that it's not, you know, I go to treatment and I'm cured; that people every day, you know, have to fight and really make sure that they have a supportive system. So I've heard from folks that, you know, feel like they're in supportive housing but they're going to relapse and they need to go back to treatment, and often, there's not treatment beds there for them.

So that's where I'm coming from, that we need to make more investments in treatment beds to ensure that it's not a revolving door for folks, that they can, you know, truly get on to a track where they're fully supported and it's a holistic model where they're looking at long-term treatment.

Because we know with the drugs that are being used now, with, you know, meth, that it's not a six-month, you know, kind of thing, that people need a lot longer than that for the serotonin to, you know, get back to some normalcy. It's never going to get back to full normalcy, but that we need longer term housing even beyond, you know, the six months or the 30 days in treatment. And I know the minister knows that. So that's what I was getting at.

I want to move on, though, to—and, you know, I'm thankful that there is naloxone. Certainly, that was something that, you know, I heard resounding from families and people on the front lines that was needed. So I thank, you know, the government for investing in that. And, you know, providing needles, that's great, but we also need to go further than that and provide safe consumption sites.

I've visited a number of provinces, and it's evidence-based that it's proven to save lives. Nobody has ever overdosed and died in a safe consumption site. The number of blood-borne diseases are reduced,

and the police have even gone so far as to say that crime has been reduced in the communities that are served by safe consumption sites.

So I know that the minister had spoken about that some time ago to the media, in terms of, you know, that was something that they were looking at. And I hope that that is something that we're going to see in the future invested in because, again, it's been proven to save lives and we need to make sure that people aren't dying of overdoses; they know what drugs they're using; there's someone there that's medically trained to support them if they do go into an overdose and that they can get access to the supports that they need.

Because it's not just about providing a safe space for people to use. It's also providing access to primary-care providers, to housing-support people, to counsellors, to addiction specialists. So it's more than just that. And I think that when people hear the term safe consumption sites, that there's some stigma attached to it.

And I want to assure that, you know, every single—and I've visited about five of them now in different provinces—that every—and I've met with social workers. I've met with primary-care providers. I've met with the police in all of these different provinces.

And they've all said that 80 per cent of the people who access these services either go on to become mentors, 30 per cent go on to never using again and coming back and actually working in these places. And, like I said, nobody has ever overdosed. And, yes, so I hope that's something that this government will look at, in terms of harm reduction.

But I'll move on to tobacco 'censation.' The salaries for those working on tobacco 'censation' declined year-over-year by \$127,000 or 34 per cent. Can the minister explain why the reduction?

* (16:40)

Mrs. Guillemard: So, first I will address some of the comments that were made by the member in terms of harm reduction or specifically safe consumption site. And what I had committed to in the comments that I had made was that I would look at all the evidence that was coming forward from jurisdictions who had sites that were running, and other jurisdictions that were, sort of, newly into that realm versus others that had been running for a number of years.

And although I won't argue too much over some of the details that the member is providing, the

evidence that is coming forward is not the same as what the member is quoting. So, from a Canadian review in 2019, there were actually increased opioid-related calls for emergency medical services in the immediate vicinity following opening of some of these sites, as well as crime that's measured by police for calls for services generally had increased in the immediate vicinity, in contrast to areas that did not have the sites. And also, the needle debris had increased in and around the sites.

And those were a couple of the cautionary notes when considering this particular harm initiative, or harm-reduction initiative idea.

So, I continue to look at the evidence that is coming forward. And really the focus needs to be on the treatment and recovery, and ultimately I've yet to meet a family who wishes for their loved one to continue with the struggles. And if given a choice between a treatment centre that they would have evidence and hope that could lead to recovery, versus having, you know, investments put into more of these areas, which would be considered, you know, the supervised consumption.

I know from personal experience the choice is a very easy one to make, and it doesn't mean that the initiatives or some of the efforts that are put forward by a number of groups who are trying to assist those who are struggling with substance use are not valid and appreciated. But our government's focus has to be on increasing those core services and providing hope to families and those who are struggling to restore their lives.

Sorry, and then to answer the smoking cessation funding. So, the explanation for the amounts being spent in that area going down is because we've had a number of staff retirements, and then the new staff are brought in at a lower salary.

Mrs. Smith: This'll be my last question.

And again, I just—you know, I hear what the minister is saying about opioid use and, you know, all of that. But again, I would ask the minister to look at whether anybody has ever overdosed and died in those sites. Any site that I've visited, no one has ever died, and people are overdosing in the public versus in a space where there's medically trained staff that are saving lives. That's a huge difference.

Needles are riddled all over and they're in a space—for instance, if you go to Hastings, right, there are still people using outside, but within, like, half a

block of the safe consumption site. So, they can get support right there.

And again, it's all about having access to make the right choices and having the supports there to move people along that line, and those spaces have those things attached to them. So, it's not just about someone coming in and using; it's about having access to medically trained staff, to have access to—if I've used every single vein in my body and I have infections all over, that's going to decrease my life expectancy. That's going to decrease my health outcomes.

So, these places and spaces have medically trained staff to help people use safely, to make sure that they're not getting infected, to make sure that they have the supplies that they need to make informed choices.

And it's not all about use; it's about helping move on to that recovery. And most places have people who are working there that have been in that same place. And, you know, we need to start thinking, how do we move people to places where they can get that support? And getting into treatment isn't always a person's choice at the beginning. They have to have someone who believes in them, that gives them hope, and that sometimes is someone who was at one of those sites.

And I've talked to so many of, you know, people who are mentors at those places, that are in those chill rooms when people have used and they're moving on to there, that are supporting and talking to them, helping them to know what supports are there if they need it and when they choose to decide to make that choice, and making sure that those supports are there when they need it.

So, it's not all about, you know—it's about saving lives for me. And you know that—yes, I'm—okay, I'm actually going to close out, because we have to move on to the next area.

So, I will close out mental health and recovery.

Mr. Chairperson: So, the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) has no further questions?

Mrs. Smith: No further questions.

Mr. Chairperson: We will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions.

Resolution 24.2: RESOLVED there be granted to His Majesty a sum—*[interjection]* Yes. RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$31,625,000 for Mental Health and

Community Wellness, Mental Health and Recovery, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

* (16:50)

Resolution 24.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,169,000 for Mental Health and Community Wellness, Wellness, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 24.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$62,875,000 for Mental Health and Community Wellness, Physician Services—Psychiatry, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 24.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$283,337,000 for Mental Health and Community Wellness, Funding to Health Authorities, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 24.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$786,000 for Mental Health and Community Wellness, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 24.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$266,000 for Mental Health and Community Wellness, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 24.8: RESOLVED there be granted to His Majesty—RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,545,000 for Mental Health and Community Wellness, 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 24.1.

The floor is open for questions. No questions?

Resolution 24.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,306,000 for Mental Health and Community Wellness, Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2023.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Mental Health and Community Wellness.

What is the will of the committee?

Mr. Wharton: Call it 5 o'clock.

Some Honourable Members: Committee rise.

Mr. Chairperson: We can recess for the next department.

The committee recessed at 4:55 p.m.

The committee resumed at 4:57 p.m.

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE AND PARKS

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Environment, Climate and Parks. Questioning for this department will continue in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley): I realize that the answer to this question is unlikely to come until tomorrow, but since we were talking about protected areas yesterday, I would like to ask the minister about watershed districts and watershed planning and, if he can, be prepared to talk about what results have been achieved for the money spent, including money spent from The Winnipeg Foundation trust funds. But, specifically, is there a net gain of wetlands in Manitoba?

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Environment, Climate and Parks): Certainly, it's a pleasure to, again, pick up where we left off yesterday and the day before, and certainly pleased to be here to take questions from the critic, the critic from Wolseley.

And when we talk about watershed districts, I'm glad to expand on this answer tomorrow, but certainly we are proud of the investments we are making with our partnerships with municipalities as we continue to grow watershed districts throughout Manitoba.

As a matter of fact, we've added additional watershed districts—

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

ROOM 255

FAMILIES

* (15:20)

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak): It's always an honour to be here today and have the opportunity to ask very important questions for our minister to answer. Obviously, a huge department and, in particular, my interest is within CFS.

My first question is: Can the minister tell me the number of family reunifications that have occurred through CFS in the last three years? So, that would be fiscal years '19-20, '20-21 and '20-22.

Ekosi.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I thank the critic for asking that very important question about, really, the number of children in care and where they're placed and how many reunifications there are. That is what our goal and our transformation is really centered on, is reunification as well as prevention.

And the numbers really bear out that we are working towards preventing more—preventing children from coming into care, having a reduction—a significant reduction in apprehensions and not placing kids in care, in the care of someone who's not known to them, whereby we're trying to keep children, wherever possible, with community and with family.

So, I do want to just provide a little bit of context for the member in regards to the number of kids in care overall. And in the annual report of the Department of Families this year, you'll note that as of March 31st of this year, there were only 9,196 children in care.

I shouldn't have said only 9,196 children in care because that's still—that's a lot of children and families that we're still working with, but everyone in this

room will know that this is a significant reduction in the number of children in care from previous years.

And I do want to point out that 800–8,571 of those children, or 93.2 per cent of them, are placed in home-like settings such as foster homes, with relatives or those with significant connections, and then—or in places of safety. And then 3.8 per cent are placed in group-care resources.

So we also felt that that was a very important strategic shift, in terms of making sure that when children do come into care, they are either in a place of safety or a foster home and significant reduction in the use of those emergency placements and other environments in which the child may not have a community, family or cultural connection.

In terms of the reunifications: in '18-19, there were 2,776 reunifications; in 2019-20 there were 2,406 reunifications; and in 2020-21, which is the latest figures that we have, there were 1,856 reunifications.

Now, the reduction in the number of reunifications is a total reflection of (1) the reduction of kids in care overall, but more significantly, the reduction of kids not being placed without—not being placed in places where they have a connection, whether it be community or family connection in the first place.

Ms. Lathlin: I heard you mention safety within foster homes. As an MLA for The Pas-Kameesak and as a foster parent, foster kids, I receive many complaints about unsafe foster homes and I have sent you several emails to numerous foster—to numerous ministers of Families with concerns.

There's no way you can talk to a warm body when you talk to a CFS agency, such as OCN CFS, to get answers or to make a formal complaint. Mine fell on deaf ears.

What does one do when one gets a complaint about an unsafe foster home and nothing is done 95 per cent of the time? Especially within smaller communities and more remote communities, because there's really nowhere else to put them, right? So, that's what I want to know. How are these serious complaints, allegations dealt with? When I get a generic email telling me talk to the social worker, that doesn't help.

* (15:30)

Ekosi.

Ms. Squires: I do want to get a clarification from the critic when she said that 95 per cent of the time.

Are you referring to 95 per cent of the foster agencies that you're—that you've dealt with are unsafe or are you referring to 95 per cent of the time, your allegations of inappropriate conduct happening in a foster home has not been taken seriously?

Ms. Lathlin: The second part. The second—*[interjection]*

An Honourable Member: So you're saying 95—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister for Families.

Ms. Squires: Just to clarify, so I understand what you're asking—you're saying that 95 per cent of the time, your allegations of misconduct happening in a foster home has not been appropriately addressed.

Ms. Lathlin: Yes, and by others who have made similar complaints such as myself, where my nieces were at unsafe homes. My girl was HIV positive. She was sent home with bald—oral injection, so the measurements weren't even taken seriously. I was accused of allegations, too.

And it—and other foster parents who have come to me as well, and relatives trying to get their relatives back in their home—many times, our phone calls are not answered back. Many times, our emails are not answered back. It's like they don't want to be accountable for what they say. And it's very frustrating 'whend' you feel the agency took your children as hostages and you cannot find out information about them. You cannot—like, even me trying to set up a family visit. They don't call me back. It's been three weeks now and the adoption process I've requested two years ago, it still hasn't started.

So, many foster parents feel that—and parents and family, I should say families—feel that when their children are taken away, they're taken away as hostages because when we try to ask questions about our children, we don't get any answers or a warm body to talk to. So, they come to me sometimes because they hear I'm the critic for Families. They think I could possibly 'reunificate'—you know, get families back together because of my role, but it doesn't work that way.

And it's really frustrating when we advocate on behalf of families, especially for trigger-happy apprehensions; we get no answer, Minister. Nothing. And I'm almost at tears because I'm not the only

family that's going through this, so I think this is a very important setting to let your staff know.

We do not get answers. It's another residential school system.

Ekosi.

Ms. Squires: So, I understand the member's frustration at being the critic for CFS—or, the critic for Child, Youth and Families and not being able to get answers directly from the system.

But I would like to reiterate what happened in 2006 and how the system was reconfigured by the former NDP government that really has removed that provincial oversight layer that the member is seeking right now in her role as a critic.

So, what we have in our devolved system is the CFS agencies are responsible to the authority. So, if they're—the process is: if there is an allegation of—any allegation made against a foster home, they are licensed by the agency. The agency is the one that conducts the Child Abuse Registry check. The agency is the one that issues the licence to the foster home. The agency is the one that has the overarching legislative responsibility for that foster home and the conditions therein.

If there is a challenge with the CFS agency, then that appropriate channel is to take it up with the authority. And the authority is—got that overarching responsibility for the agency. And if the authority—they provide the oversight to the agencies, and the 'authority' is mandated by a board. So, that is the structure that's been in place since 2006 under the devolution that was undertaken at that point.

And so, if your question is asking me specifically or my department officials here specifically, who work for the Department of Families, why they can't go in and directly manage, operate or control the activities that happen at a foster family—at the foster family level or even at the CFS agency level, the answer is found in the legislation that was brought forward in 2006.

Ms. Lathlin: Regardless of 2006, apprehensions with Indigenous families are still pretty high, and the authority is still quite useless.

No disrespect to the people who work there. I would never want to work within an organization like that when it comes to pretty much the business apprehending children. I can see when it's done, when it should be done, but in my eyes, especially with my

family, I—it's—a lot of the moves and decisions are very unnecessary and destroying families.

* (15:40)

So, again, no disrespect to the staff. But, again, the authority—we have went to the authority. Again, fell on deaf ears. We even went to the—people even asked me, what is the role of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, thinking—the parents wanting to use that avenue as a way to help their children.

So, again, no disrespect, but the authority—there was no effectiveness there at all. And I am talking to department staff, and you, as the minister, as the leader. That's who I'm addressing this to.

Ekosi.

Ms. Squires: Well, I can assure the member that no departmental staff actually sits on the board of the authority.

And there's a process for appointing those members to the board, whether it be the northern authority, the southern authority or the Métis authority or the general authority, but I can assure the member that department staff don't sit on that board.

The board is—has its own governance structure, and it's not accountable to the Department of Families.

Ms. Lathlin: My next question is: Can the minister tell us, what is the current average caseload for our CFS workers?

Mr. Chairperson: Before we get the minister's response, I would just like to remind the committee—all committee members that, rather than referring to members of the committee as you, I would ask that you ask or refer to members that—by their ministry or their constituency names. Just a reminder from that.

And I would call on the honourable Minister of Families (Ms. Squires).

Ms. Squires: In regards to the member's question regarding the caseloads that are handled at each agency: of course, the member knows that the agencies are responsible for ensuring that their workforce has attainable and sustainable workplace practices, and are responsible for the case management of each social worker that is employed by the CFS agency. They are employees of that CFS agency and not the Department of Families, in the cases of the agencies under the Indigenous authorities.

What I do want to highlight, though, is that agencies also have the authority to reallocate funding

where they see fit, whether it be in hiring more personnel, working on preventative issues or any other appropriate expenditure that they deem an importance for their region.

And so, to put this into context, in March of 2018, when we moved to single-envelope funding, which allowed the agencies to have that autonomy over their business practices, over their hiring practices and over the management of their workforce, they were given the amount of money based on the number of kids in care at that time. That provincial number was 10,328. Today, that number has decreased to 9,196, and yet the funding envelopes have not been reduced.

So, by and large, most agencies have fewer kids in care, and yet they're receiving the same allocation as when they started receiving it in 2018. There has not been any reduction and therefore, they can reinvest in preventative care, they can—they really have the autonomy as agencies to manage appropriate expenditures.

Ms. Lathlin: Peguis was removed from provincial reporting of the number of children in care. You stated 9,196.

How might the public get an accurate sense of the actual numbers of children in care over time? With Peguis being removed, are those numbers minussed from the actual numbers when, indeed, those children are still in care?

Ekosi.

* (15:50)

Ms. Squires: In regards to the member's question, I want to put on the record it's not our jurisdiction to report on children in care that are not under the provincial jurisdiction. If they're in care under the—under Peguis jurisdiction, that's not—those numbers are not reported under the provincial numbers. They're not children in the care of the provincial system.

And that is really—that speaks to the larger area in which we're going with the transformation of child welfare. We have six other nations that have applied for co-ordination agreements in the province. And the way I—when an Indigenous governing body applies to the Province to draw down jurisdiction and to repatriate their children and assume jurisdiction, our government—the role of the provincial government, as spelled out under the federal act and in collaboration with Indigenous governing bodies, is we certainly do

not—we are facilitating, and we're working collaboratively. We are providing them with the resources or the information that they need.

You'll—you saw in the spring session, we voted in favour of Bill 41, which would allow the Province the ability to provide access to information that the Indigenous governing body needed to deliver service, which we'd never had the authority to do that before. If we didn't pass Bill 41, we would have had to had the Indigenous governing body go to court, receive authority to access information about the children and families in their care, and we didn't want that. We wanted to facilitate the transfer of information, and so that was what Bill 41 had provided. That's just one example of how we are transforming the entire child-welfare system.

I think the last time we spoke about this initiative in last year's Estimates, we were still at the precipice of moving forward on seeing this being implemented in the province of Manitoba. And in the last year, we've had some exciting development that has helped build that framework so that we can conceive of where child welfare is going in the province.

But it's still in development and very nuanced. But we have a robust legislative agenda in front of us in terms of transforming the law to facilitate this, to assist Indigenous governing bodies that want to draw down jurisdiction.

Ms. Lathlin: So, after that explanation, Minister, to get the accurate number of children in care, regardless First Nation or—regardless our own jurisdiction, regarding the general, if you will—are they going to be two sets of numbers shared in regards to children in care?

You know, because to me, overall, we're all Manitobans. So, how is those numbers going to be shared with the public to still portray we still have a problem, you know, of high numbers of children in care. How—are we going to have our own sets of numbers, versus the general? I don't understand.

So and then a second question is, how is the Peguis process going?

Ekosi.

Ms. Squires: So, one thing that we have heard loud and clear is that there will not be the continuity of the child-welfare system, as it exists today, in future years. That is what we've heard loud and clear from Indigenous governing bodies, Indigenous leadership, as well as numerous people who had reported on and

provided testimony to the implementation of what was then C-92, the act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis child and family—child, youth and families.

That Indigenous governing bodies have said loud and clear, we don't want the continuation of the provincial child-welfare system as it exists today. And our role is in facilitating that transformation, which we all agree needs to occur. And so, the Province reporting on children not under our jurisdiction would just not be acceptable. It would not be for us to report on the status of children under the care of an Indigenous governing body that has drawn-down jurisdiction.

So, while we may collaborate and work together with the leadership, we are not—those children are not under provincial care, and therefore it would be highly inappropriate and unacceptable for the Province to be reporting on those children.

In regards to the number of apprehensions that the member had raised in her question, again, that is certainly a by-product of the system that is in place today, where we report on the number of apprehensions, we report on the number of children in care. And what we're seeing happen with Indigenous governing bodies that have drawn-down jurisdiction is a redefinition—redefining of child welfare and moving towards a more customary care, where it may not be focused on reporting the number of apprehensions because there may be alternatives to apprehensions.

* (16:00)

We are really excited to be working and facilitating the—this new era of child welfare.

Ms. Lathlin: The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs brought forward a lawsuit with regards to the child and family system.

What is the minister doing to address the discriminatory practices that result in apprehension of children?

Ms. Squires: So, I can acknowledge that we have received the statement of claim and are in the process of reviewing it but, as the member knows, this matter is before the courts and I won't be making any further comments regarding this case that is currently before the courts.

The member had asked what my—what we were doing in regards to discriminatory practices. Of course, that is the whole process that we're undertaking on our CFS transformation. That is why we're moving towards a new era of child welfare where

we're working collaboratively with Indigenous governing bodies who are drawing down jurisdiction to assume the authority over their own children.

And that is why we are collaborating wherever we can with Peguis, which is already a drawn-down jurisdiction, and the six nations that have applied for a co-ordination agreement, and will continue to work in supporting that work so that Indigenous governing bodies will assume authority over children in care in their community.

But meanwhile, that is why our department has created a separate branch to deal specifically with this CFS transformation work.

Ms. Lathlin: I'd like to ask again about Peguis and how is that transition going? Is it going smoothly? I know it's a transfer of resources and services.

I'm really interested to know how that's going, since Peguis is in my constituency.

Ms. Squires: I thank the member for the question. And we certainly do view Peguis as being a real leader in—not just in Manitoba, but in the country, in terms of their—the way in which they've moved to bring in their own laws and to exercise jurisdiction.

We are very pleased to support them in the role that they're taking and we have tremendous confidence in the leadership at Peguis for being able to, really, not only provide their children and the community the care that is needed, but really to provide a leadership role to other jurisdictions in Manitoba and outside of Manitoba who are in the process of drawing down jurisdiction, providing them with resources, support, information.

And we're really grateful to the leadership at Peguis for playing this role. They were the first in Manitoba and, of course, the first in the nation in terms of drawing down—or, exercising jurisdiction for children that were on reserve and off reserve, which is a tremendous first step for an Indigenous governing body in the country of Canada.

What we have done to facilitate that, of course, I talked earlier about the bill that we had all voted in favour of in the spring session that would allow us to share information, and it would also allow them to access the CFS information system. It allowed us to transfer responsibility of any children that were in Peguis care to—any children in the provincial care that were from Peguis to be transferred and become the responsibility of Peguis.

And we have—they have their law, which is online. I don't have a copy of it here, but the member can go onto the Peguis website and read. They have their law, which is posted on their website, and it is what is governing their implementation of Child and Family Services in their Indigenous governing body.

Ms. Lathlin: I have one last question for you before I hand it over to my colleague here.

What First Nations are next to assert jurisdiction over CFS? I know for a fact that I attended some meetings for OCN. We could have been the first First Nation, but then we had a new chief in council, which is another barrier. Priorities change, you know. And I can say that as a former, you know, councillor with OCN.

And what was part—what was the most interesting part of that process is that they allowed an environment for the children to speak. They allowed a whole day for children who are currently in care or former children in care and shared their experiences, which I firmly believe those voices are missing from this department. They're not listened to. It's ironic, almost like a, you know, child welfare, and that's what I found so powerful about this process that OCN was taking.

And all the stories the children were telling all sounded like residential school apprehensions; talking about the police and/or CFS workers coming in, telling them they only had 10 minutes to pack up. They were described as nuns and priests coming in and doing such a thing.

* (16:10)

So, I just wanted to know how many more First Nations are going to be, you know, eventually taking over their CFS jurisdiction? And again, change of chief of council; I can say that it's going to be problematic, you know. Priorities will change.

So, that's my concern and I'm putting that on record.

Ekosi.

Ms. Squires: So, we have three different groups in which we're working with Indigenous governing bodies that are at separate levels of capacity building and in their own process.

So the ones that are in active negotiation of their own co-ordination agreements and are on the—they're the most ready to assume jurisdiction, are the Manitoba Métis Federation and Island Lakes Tribal

Council. And of course, the member knows about Peguis.

There are three other groups that are—have already gone through the process of building capacity and have already begun the stages of developing their law. And those three groups include First Nations in Treaty 2 territory. It is a bit of an amalgamation of a few different First Nations that have come together and filed under First Nations in Treaty 2 territory.

And then we also have Opaskwayak Cree Nation and Tataskweyak. And then, in the third tranche of Indigenous governing bodies that are just really at the beginning stages where they're working on developing capacity, working on developing their laws and are at the initial stages, those include Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, Fisher River Cree First Nation, Pimicikamak, Misipawistik Cree Nation, Poplar River First Nation and Lake Manitoba First Nation.

Mr. Eric Redhead (Thompson): First of all, I want to start off by saying I'm really grateful to be sitting across from Minister Clarke; we worked together in my previous role. So I want to thank you for being here. *[interjection]* Thank you very much.

So, Minister—or sorry, Mr. Chair, over the last two years, the department has entered into a number of sole-source contracts for legal services, which hasn't happened before, including several contracts with Thompson Dorfman Sweatman LLP, worth about \$165,000.

Can the minister explain what these contracts were for and why they were done through sole source?

* (16:20)

Ms. Squires: First of all, I want to acknowledge my colleague here in the House. It's the first time we've had a chance to interact since your election. I want to say congratulations, and welcome to this committee.

In regards to the work that we do with Thompson Dorfman Sweatman that the member had referenced, I want to put on the record for his information that we've had a 20-plus-year relationship with Thompson Dorfman Sweatman to do work on behalf of the Department of Families. And they are uniquely qualified to handle matters for Winnipeg Child and Family Services particularly, and we recently renewed that contract.

There is a high volume of legal work. There are some suits against the department, as the member referenced in her earlier question, to name one. But we also did seek expertise from TDS in the past year

in regards to the class action from Manitoba Developmental Centre.

Mr. Redhead: Family services provided MNP with a direct award of \$251,000 in June. What was this for?

Ms. Squires: So, I do want to correct the member in that it wasn't a sole-source contract, it was a—we did issue an RFP and MNP was the successful bidder. It was for \$250,000, and this was to do work for us in regards to the new disability income support program.

We needed a new assessment tool. We felt that they were best—according to their response in the RFP, they were best qualified to help us develop that assessment tool, and therefore they were awarded the contract after being the successful bidder of an RFP.

If the member is referring to a different initiative, I'd like him to clarify that.

Mr. Redhead: I was—that was the answer we were seeking, I guess.

Okay, so I'm going to—sorry. Okay? I can continue? Okay.

I'm jumping to the Manitoba Developmental Centre in Portage la Prairie. There are currently 359 positions remaining at MDC.

How many of those positions does the minister anticipate can be transferred to other positions in the department?

Ms. Squires: So, when our government had announced the closure of the MDC, we had made a commitment that as long as there were residents still living at MDC, that they would be receiving the highest quality care, which meant we needed to have work there—an active workforce in place until the last resident left the Manitoba Developmental Centre. Which is—in an earlier committee, I had explained the process for care plans and continuity plans for each of the residents that the member can reference.

* (16:30)

So, while that work is under—is ongoing right now, we are also working with the active workforce. So there are 282 part-time and full-time employees at MDC, and we are actively working with the health authority and the union to ensure that there is a—that there are jobs for each of those individuals when they are finished at MDC.

We have taken many steps to ensure successful transition when they're ready to leave MDC. But, of course, we have also done a lot of initiatives to try to

keep them there until they are no longer needed, because we recognize that caring for the individuals that still call MDC home and will be for another six months to a year—we need to ensure that they've got the care that they need.

And I'm—want to express my appreciation to each of these practitioners and employees who have stayed on and are committed to the residents, to providing them with the care.

In recognition of that—the work that they're doing, and in recognition that they will be transferring on, what we are doing is we're reimbursing all the MDC nurses for their licensing fees. We are also providing them with many training opportunities and initiatives to prepare them for work in the public health sector or wherever they may choose to go.

But, to answer the member's question as how many of the employees at MDC will be—are we working to secure employment with beyond the date of closure of MDC, the answer is all of them.

Mr. Redhead: With regard to the Manitoba Rent Relief Fund, how many loans have been provided, and what is the total value of the loans that have been given? How much money is in the fund available to be loaned, and what is the average loan provided from the fund?

Ms. Squires: I want to start by thanking the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association for working with us on this two-year pilot that we announced, I guess, a year and a few months ago.

As of July of 2022, we have approved 629 loans. That means there were 629 people who were either precariously housed or facing eviction, that were prevented from becoming unsheltered or needing to change housing or whatever the case may be in regards to their housing arrangement; that they were able to access a loan through the Rent Relief program and maintain their housing.

So I also want to highlight that much of the loan applicants have been single-parent households and others who were precariously housed or experienced housing insecurity, who have now been able to achieve security and prevent them from going—experiencing homelessness, because of this program.

This program, when we announced this pilot, was touted as the first-of-its-kind preventative initiative on preventing homelessness. A rent bank had never been established in the province before, and we're certainly looking at the successes of this two-year pilot and

looking to pivot to the future and see what that will be in the months to come.

But right now, we're incredibly grateful to the Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association. I know that it's been a tremendous amount of work receiving—opening up the intake, receiving the applications, assessing them and then, of course, providing these loans.

But they're very committed to the work and very pleased that they've been able to prevent homelessness in many of these cases.

Mr. Redhead: Manitoba Housing spent \$17 million less than the previous year.

My question to the minister is: Why is that, and were there not projects to invest in?

* (16:40)

Ms. Squires: Can the member clarify where he received that number from?

I can put a little bit of context on the record that, last year, the Province did provide MHRC \$128 million, and we did have a \$302-million budget for the operations.

Not certain we are able to determine that figure that he'd cited earlier.

Mr. Redhead: It was posted to Manitoba Housing website—or financial page.

Ms. Squires: If the member could provide a little bit more clarity in terms of where—what this figure was in reference to.

Mr. Redhead: Manitoba Housing annual report in—spent \$17 million less in 2021-2022 versus 2020-2021.

Make sense?

* (16:50)

Ms. Squires: So, the \$17 million that the member is referencing, is in—is the fact that we've spent a lower amount in Waverley West. We've had a sale of land and lower expenditures in Waverley West, which has attributed to that figure.

But while I have the floor, I do want to put a few other figures on the record in regards to Manitoba Housing, which is receiving an 8.5 per cent increase, or a \$10.9-million increase, for '22-23. And overall, it has an approved budget of \$138.7 million for the upcoming '22-23 year—the current '22-23 year, pardon

me, which has an increase of an 8 and a half per cent increase from last year.

Mr. Redhead: How many social housing units does Manitoba currently operate? How many social housing units does Manitoba currently fund but not operate? And how many social housing units are currently vacant?

Ms. Squires: I'm happy to provide this update for the member.

In terms of the direct-managed portfolio, we have 11,520 units. In regards to our sponsor-managed portfolio, we have 4,700 units—those are units that are owned by Manitoba Housing, yet they're run by a sponsor such as the Winnipeg rehab housing corporation or another sponsor management corporation. We have 13,671 units under the nonprofit or co-op agreement. And we also have an additional 3,010 units that receive a rent supplement. Those are rent 'supplements' that are specific to the suite.

And if you want—when it comes to a rent supplement that is specific to an individual and not to the suite, those are individuals under the Rent Assist category, and right now we have 23,500 on Rent Assist. These are benefits topped up for their rent, and it's mobile. It goes with them where they want. And then we have another 6,966 individuals who are not receiving EIA but also receiving the Rent Assist top-up from the Province.

Additionally, I do want to inform the member about the Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit, which is a benefit of \$250 a month for shelter top-up. This is not tied to any suite. It is a mobile rental assistance that is available to any youth aging out of care, any person who is in recovery or experiencing addictions and need help with their rent to recognize that they need long-term housing to sustain their recovery efforts. And this rental top-up benefit is available to them, as well as anybody who is currently unsheltered and who are moving into accommodation. They are eligible for the \$250-a-month Canada-Manitoba Housing Benefit.

So, I haven't added up all the numbers of households in the province that are receiving support from housing, but those are the numbers there.

And in regards to the vacancies, there are currently, as of October 2022, 1,886 vacancies; 69 per cent of those vacant units are in the queue for refurbishment. Or they're either currently being renovated or in the queue to be renovated. The remaining 31 per cent are units that are chronically

under-chronically vacant due to location or other factors. And we are certainly working on addressing those. If they're chronically vacant due to location, of course, we have the rural homeowners program and other initiatives to ensure that we have fewer vacancies.

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): I recognize that we're very short on time. I'm not sure if we wanted to comment on time. So I'm hopeful that the minister can provide a quick response to my question. It's with regards to Lions Place. I know the minister met with Lions Place just last week.

Can the minister advise on the steps that she's taken to address the concerns at Lions Place, and would she take steps to ensure that it's kept social housing for those residents?

Ms. Squires: I was very pleased to meet with the committee from Lions Place and certainly did take their concerns very seriously.

They had one simple request of me at our October 3rd meeting, and that was to form a working group and be part of that working group. They want to have a conversation with other housing partners as well at the table. The federal government, the Province, of course, plays a big role, as well as other—another non-profit housing provider. They want us to all come to the table and meet and talk about initiatives, and the answer was absolutely, and I believe that meeting is tomorrow. An initial meeting is tomorrow of that working group.

MLA Asagwara: I thank the minister for that update.

Is the minister committed to ensuring that those rents remain socially affordable for those residents, predominantly seniors?

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

The hour being 5 p.m. committee rise.

**CHAMBER
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE**

* (15:20)

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Doyle Piwniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure): Yes I do, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister.

Mr. Piwniuk: I'm pleased to present the 2022-2023 Manitoba Transportation Infrastructure Main Estimates Supplement, which provides background information on the department's activities and it complements the Estimates of Expenditure in Budget 2022.

Manitoba Transportation Infrastructure recognizes that the importance of strategic infrastructure investment as Manitoba recovers from COVID-19 pandemic. Investment in our provincial highways, bridges and water control network will help us stimulate economic growth, create jobs and protect Manitobans.

The department's strategic infrastructure budget of 2022-2023 is \$862 million, including \$615 million in capital investments, \$111 million for Manitoba Restart projects, as well as \$136 million for the stewardship activities related to the maintenance—

Mr. Chairperson: Minister—

Mr. Piwniuk:—and preservation—

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, my apologies. I just need to interrupt. Can you just check and see if you have a paper over your mic, or some other such thing?

Mr. Piwniuk:—have my mic in my earphones. Can you hear me now?

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, just speak up then. That's fine.

Okay, go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Piwniuk: I'll go and start with this: department's strategic infrastructure budget covering twenty—*[inaudible]* 2023 is \$862 million, including \$615 million in capital investments, \$111 million in Manitoba Restart projects, as well as \$136 million for stewardship activities related to the maintenance and preservation of highways, bridges and water-related assets.

Budget 2022 introduced, for the first time in Manitoba's history, a three-year capital plan which key priorities to strengthen, invest and build on provincial infrastructure. This plan commits over \$2.4 billion to Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure's strategic infrastructure investments between 2022 and 2024.

This includes our renewed commitment to a \$1.5-billion investment over three years in Manitoba's vast highway network, with a minimum of \$500 million per year. The highways budget reflects the investment categories on infrastructure renewal, economic development, climate 'resilience' and connectivity and innovation.

Each project is 'categorized' in the investment category that best fits the primary reason for capital projects was 'initiated'. Detailed information on Manitoba Transportation Infrastructure's 2022 multi-year highway investment strategy is published on our website, Mr. Speaker.

Our three-year capital plan also includes over \$300 million for the Lake Manitoba-Lake St. Martin outlet channel project, which will be provide much-needed protection to communities surrounding each lake, and impacts of the flooding. That includes \$101 million for the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

We've also made significant progress in advancing through the environmental assessment process and remain committed to fulfilling our obligation and working collaboratively with the 'indigenous' communities and other rightholders. At to this end, we have established the environmental advisory committee that will support these rightholders groups to provide guidance and input over the course of the project.

We will proceed with construction as well as we will receive environment approvals. We expect the outlet channel project to take three to four years to complete. Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure has a vision that, over the next 10 years, Manitoba will be recognized as the national and international transportation hub linking east to west, north to south, to enable strong economic activity within, across our borders.

One of the strategies to support this vision is the Winnipeg One Million Perimeter Freeway Initiative. We have already implemented many immediate safety improvements, with ongoing improvements to the Winnipeg population growth continues to grow.

This investment allows the full-access-control modern freeway to create a safe and more efficient Perimeter Highway for residential, commercial and industrial growth in Winnipeg and the surrounding communities. The project includes construction of a new interchange at the Perimeter Highway and St. Mary's Road, with a design and initial phase of a

second new interchange at the Perimeter and McGillivray Boulevard.

The trade and commerce grid initiative will further advance Manitoba highway network by enabling market access for the international, interprovincial and regional movement of goods to position our province to become the national and international trade hub. Once completed, the grid of strategic routes will represent 36.5 per cent, or 712 kilometres—7,112 kilometres of Manitoba's all-weather provincial road network, with 6,000 kilometres of grid already completed. The three-year strategic route plan includes projects for Provincial Trunk Highway 5, 21, 59 and 83.

Making smart investments in this 'strategic' grid of highways that can support the heaviest load will enable Manitoba's products reach provincial, national, international market efficiently.

Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure will continue its efforts to build strategies and foster innovations to work smarter, deliver services and improve outcomes for Manitobans while ensuring the best value of money for all investments.

And I end my comments and thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the official—we thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I do.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Concordia.

Mr. Wiebe: I do want to just put just a few words on the record and hopefully get to questions fairly quickly.

We are—we do have a number of important concerns to bring forward with regards to staffing in the department. As we know, and as we documented over the past number of Estimates processes that the government has significantly decreased capital construction.

We also know that staffing continues to be an issue. The vacancies that the minister identified last year in contrast to years prior continues to be a concern, so we hope to get some further information there.

The minister won't be surprised that we will talk, as well, about the lack of progress on the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba channels project and, of course, we will also discuss this minister's recent decision to overrule his department and provide a permit to his political friends in Brandon. We know that's a concern to the people of Brandon, but it's also a concern to Manitobans more broadly.

I do have a number of what I would hope are quick, short questions that we'll find some time to get into. I hope the minister will indulge those questions because as he, I'm sure, is no doubt aware, there is a number of projects around the province that a very quick update would be very helpful.

With that, I'll leave my comments there.

* (15:30)

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 15.1(a) contained in resolution 15.1.

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

Minister, would you like to introduce your staff?

An Honourable Member: Yes, I got my staff sitting here. I got—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister. I just need to recognize you, Honourable Minister.

Go ahead.

Mr. Piwniuk: And I should know better; I used to chair this all the time.

I just—Mr. Chair, I just want to let you know that I have my deputy and my four assistant deputies, so I'll introduce each one of them. My deputy minister is Sarah Thiele. And then I have four of my assistant deputies: I've got Blair McTavish, Cynthia Ritchie, Kristine Seier and Russ Andrushuk with me. And I also have my chief of staff, Andrew Clark, and Kyle Reiner [*phonetic*] as my executive assistant.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Would the critic like to introduce their staff?

An Honourable Member: Thank you, very much—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Concordia, please go ahead.

Mr. Wiebe: We'll get a bit of a rhythm here, won't we, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to introduce the institutional knowledge vault that is Chris Sanderson, our researcher in our NDP caucus.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you both for those remarks and introductions.

In accordance with subrule 78, subsection 16, during the consideration of departmental Estimates, questioning for each department shall proceed in a global manner, with questions put on the resolutions once the official opposition critic indicates that questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister tell us the names of his political staff? I'm—didn't catch if he introduced them along with the rest of his departmental staff.

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, just give me a wave when you're ready for me to recognize you, and—go ahead, Honourable Minister.

Mr. Piwniuk: I've got Andrew Clark, who is my special assistant, and Kyle Reenders, who is my executive assistant, with me today.

Mr. Wiebe: How many positions are currently vacant in the department, and what is the vacancy rate in the department as a whole?

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, I just wanted to let the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) know that we have 1,825 FTEs on staff, and right now, when it comes to seasonal, we've hired for the summer over 300 hired seasonal staff for the summer when it comes to road construction and road improvements.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so I guess what I'm asking the minister is what the vacancy rate is as a whole, and then also if the minister can provide us with the vacancy rate by division.

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, right now, when it comes to our staffing right now, we have 1,825 FTEs that are working full-time in the department; we've hired over 300, when it came to seasonal staff, and then we also hired a number of young staff, when it comes to entry level, young people who—given them opportunities when it comes to summer students.

Our department was really recruiting lots to come forward to work in the—with the department. This is a

good way of, basically, having the abilities to see what the department has to offer when it comes to careers in the department. And we're also looking at, you know, when it came to talking to my colleagues across the country, other transportation ministers, it's like any other industry. There's—there is a shortage of staff in every, when it comes to every industry, especially in construction.

When talking to the heavy construction group, they're having issues when it comes to recruiting. Right now we have, in society, we have, when it comes to the baby boomer generation, a lot of retiring's happened right now. And our department has been recruiting continuously for the last couple years, making sure that we stay ahead of the—when it comes to the demand that we have when it comes to working in the—in our industry right now.

So we are right now recruiting. We are going to summer job fairs, just like every other department in government, it's not only provincial, it's also in the federal government. And talking to municipalities and cities throughout the province, they're feeling the same situation when it comes to recruiting of staff. And even with the First Nation communities, they're also having challenges of recruiting staff.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm going to need a little bit of specificity from the minister here, because we do have a number of questions with regards to vacancy rate. And, I mean, I'll just be blunt: it makes me, you know, more suspicious when the minister won't give a straight answer to a fairly basic question like this, that maybe there's something going on here.

* (15:40)

Now, I can appreciate what he's saying. I come to this in a reasonable way to understand that there are challenges, you know, throughout the workforce. That being said, just giving us a baseline number would be appreciated. Just preliminarily, looking at the information in front of us, 1,825 appears to be the appropriation of FTEs within his department. He's now saying that's the number of people that are working full-time.

Is that—is he—he's saying there's 100 per cent—or there's a zero per cent vacancy rate, the 100 per cent participation rate? I don't think that's what he is trying to say.

So, I—again, I'm going to break this down by division within his department, so I do appreciate if he can give us a little bit more information. Again, I'll give him another opportunity to talk about the

vacancy rate within the department as a whole, and then within each division. If he could give us a breakdown, that would be much appreciated.

Mr. Piwniuk: And I just wanted to let the member know—from Concordia—that our vacancy fluctuations fluctuates throughout the year. The thing is, when it comes to seasonal in the summertime, we—you know, we had over 300 seasonal employees that usually move on to, like, if they're students or if they actually have other part-time positions or seasonal positions elsewhere.

They come to work with MTI for that period of time and then they—the thing is, right now, we're experiencing a high vacancy such areas in the north region. Right now, the challenge up North right now is that the mining industry is really ramping up production. Our economic growth that we have that we really—we have big opportunities in northern Manitoba when it comes to mining. Our economic development plan is working and—but the challenges that we have in the North now is that some of our mines are taking local government employees and when—and then actually we're finding that some of the local government employees—government challenge—in our northern communities are taking some of our MTI staff.

So, it's been a challenge. Like, in the industry, like, it seems like we're—no matter where you go with industries certain companies or certain organizations are taking staff from other people. But we are recruiting big time in the North. We have positions available. Currently, we have 83 positions in recruitment and we're going to keep on these positions until they get filled, and we'll continue.

And right now, we're also training 40 additional equipment operators to be trained for the snow clearing. So, again, the fluctuation of vacancies will fluctuate during the year.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I'm getting very concerned here. I do—it's not my first time through the Estimates process. I do recognize that sometimes it takes the staff a few minutes to pull the information together. Some ministers like to, you know, leave the time blank, some like to talk, or maybe even answer a previous question rather than the current question in order to give their staff time.

I have to admit, because I can't see the minister's staff, I can't give any kind of gauge as to whether this work is being done behind the scenes. I don't know if the minister is being intentionally obtuse, or whether

he's actually just trying to get the information. I'm willing to give him that time, but this is now the third time I've asked this question, and so I need some specificity. I need some information; this is the Estimates process. We're talking about specifics within his department with regards to vacancy rates.

He previously said that he had 100 per cent participation rate, that every position was filled in his department. I'm sure he didn't mean that. So I'm giving him the opportunity to converse with his staff, give us the information.

We're asking now, specifically by division, in—what is the vacancy rate in road safety, for instance? Could the minister please indicate, maybe he's gathering that information, I'm willing to give him that time, and I'm willing to move on to further questions in order to allow him to gather that information. But I do need to understand what he's doing right now. Is he trying to get me the information, or is he just trying to waste everyone's time?

Mr. Piwniuk: The amount that we're allocated is 1,825 positions, and right now the member should know that when it comes to this department, that we—when it comes to vacancies, this—numbers do change as the season. We're right in the cusp of a transition from summer employment, when it comes to road grading, road construction season, to when we come into the winter, there's a transition period right now that will actually—when the snow—depending on the—when we actually receive the first snowfall, the first snow clearing, this is where we have our staff, these extra staff that we have right now, to be trained to clear snow, to get ready for the season.

We have continuous seasonal staff that come back regularly to come and work for the department when it comes to snow clearing. And they're the same ones that come back every year. A lot of them actually probably do other things, other occupations during the summer, and then they're here even—a separate seasonal staff, to do snow clearing. And it's much like when it comes to our summer students, to other seasonal workers that have probably other occupations during the winter, that come during our summertime.

So right now we're in—it's very hard to give exact numbers when it comes to vacancies when we're in a transition season.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay. So, I just want to confirm. I think I heard the minister say that there were currently 825 current FTEs that were filled in his department. That would indicate a 45 per cent vacancy rate.

Maybe the minister can just confirm that we all heard that correctly.

What I'd like to know is, with regards to the division of road safety, and then, further, the vacancy rate within policy programs and regulation.

Again, I—you know, I'm trying to understand what the minister's trying to do here. I get that he's saying this is a moving target, so let's make it easy. What was the vacancy rate today, with the caveat that he expects, as he says, 300 additional hires within the next—I think he said within the next few months.

I understand that portion. This isn't a gotcha. This is just trying to understand, within his department, what the current, right now, what today's vacancy rate is in the division of road safety and in policy programs and regulation.

Mr. Piwniuk: Well, again, I just want to tell the member that we have allocation of 1,825 positions and, like I said, in the seasonal, there was 300 that were hired for the summer. They—some of them were summer students; some of them are probably going to stay on as full-time staff as they got trained and they had opportunities to get full—opportunities to get positions as more permanent positions.

We're always actively recruiting and we'll continue recruiting, and especially up in the North. I know we did a bunch of travel. I travelled the North and met with many—when it comes to First Nation communities. And one of the things I've always said to the First Nation communities is that if there's anybody who is interested, in the First Nation community, that wants to have a career in MTI, they have—we have positions for them. And I've been really advocating that we have an opportunity to recruit in the North, and especially with First Nation community members.

And when it comes to—when the member said safety—motor safety division, and he's probably referring to our motor carrier division, and right now we are at vacancy of 17 per cent and we are recruiting actively to look for more carrier positions.

And there's actually—I've noticed there was a graduation then, and some of them actually come from other provinces. And so we've graduated a number of them that come to my office that I get to congratulate, and we're continuing doing recruiting throughout the department and to make sure that we have as many staff as possible to, especially with these challenging times during—when it comes to the construction industry, they're finding it hard to find employees. But

our department continues to do recruiting, and they're doing a very good job of doing that recruiting.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay. I just want to make sure we're on the same page. Now he's giving me a number of 17 per cent. That's helpful. I want to make sure we are talking about the same thing. This is under 3(d) in, I believe, in the Estimates book. It's—the division is called Road Safety.

Likewise, under 1(g), Policy, Programs and Regulation, is another vacancy rate we're looking for, and the vacancy rate, then, in 2(b), Capital Planning. Those are some of the ones that we're looking at. And maybe I'll just—while his staff are maybe pulling these up, the vacancy rate in 3(b), which is regional operations as well, if we could get those numbers, that would be helpful to understand the overall vacancy rate which, again, to confirm, the minister said was about 45 per cent across the department.

* (16:00)

Mr. Pivniuk: I just want to just let the member know that the vacancy rate average around—is around, in our Department of Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure, is averaging around 30 to 35 per cent department-wide. And the thing is, right now, when he asked about policy and program and regulations, we have 19 positions that we—were restructured, and over 10, like, 11 of them have been filled.

And—but when it comes to some, like, because we did some restructuring, we've actually created an infrastructure capital project. It's a new division; it better delivers projects, and we are recruiting a number of people there to making sure that projects like the St. Mary interchange that I had the opportunity with my staff—many of them here today in my office had the opportunity to do the tour and see the exciting things that we are actually doing on the Perimeter Highway.

And we also are—that same department is looking at design for the interchange that we're moving next to, is on McGillivray Boulevard, on the Perimeter Highway, just on the east side of Oak Bluff. And it's exciting times right now. And, right now, currently, we have actually—are recruiting 83 positions just in this period, time period right now, for different divisions that we've created.

Excitement that we're doing and the progress that we're having right now is that, after the restructuring, some people have moved on, but, you know, a lot of them are coming back, because there's a lot of good, exciting projects that our government has now

initiated, especially when now, when we're looking at the future projects of the one million, Winnipeg one million perimeter freeway initiative. We're looking at—I know the member is criticizing the way that we are working with people around the Perimeter Highway to make sure that safety.

I know myself, I—he talks about the situation on the Perimeter Highway, on Sturgeon Road. I can honestly tell you—the member from Concordia—that the days before that left-hand turn was taken out, a truck—I was travelling with traffic during rush-hour traffic, and a truck decided to turn left, and everybody had to slam their brakes on. There was almost a pile-up. And I'm surprised that someone didn't rear-end that truck and push it onto the oncoming traffic that was turning leftward to Sturgeon Road going east-bound.

You know, so, we are looking at the safety of when it comes to the Perimeter Highway, and these are the exciting things that we're going to invest in our highways, and with this new division, headed by my Assistant Deputy Minister Cynthia Ritchie who came—comes from the City of Winnipeg, she is working on these projects and her team are doing wonderful things to move these projects forward. And we're also looking, we've talked about the, dividing, the twinning of the highway on the east side.

Some of these initiatives, projects, could have been done years ago. But I've solved—the statistics are, that was underspent by the previous government by a billion dollars, and we could have had five interchanges or six interchanges around the Perimeter Highway. We could have had the divided highway on the east side of Ontario.

So this is opportunities that—we are building up our department, and we're making things happen. And with this new division, we are recruiting, and we're growing, and we're making sure that the allocation of the 1,825 is that—is our goal, in our department, on a maximum, when it comes to seasonal allocation.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I would suggest the minister shouldn't be quite so excited about having a 40 or 35 per cent vacancy rate within his department, as he appears to be, all of a sudden. And just for the record, I do still expect an answer to my question with regards to those outstanding divisions: policy programs, regulation, capital planning and regional operations. As well as capital projects, I guess—what's the vacancy rate within that new section that the minister was talking about?

I do want to switch gears to talk about the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba Channels project. I'll turn the minister's attention to the annual report on page 31. It includes a performance measure for, quote: progress on outlet channel project, environmental approval, end quote. The report says that three of six steps have been completed. That's 3(b), measure progress on outlet channels three of six.

Can the minister take us through the—what those three—those six steps are and tell us which three have been completed and which three remain in progress?

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, are you asking to speak? You're just gesticulating with your hands?

* (16:10)

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, I just, when it comes to the Lake St. Martin-Lake Manitoba outlet channel, it's an important project, and you know, we want to make sure we do it right. You know, Mr. Chair, when it comes to the history of, you know, 2011 flood, I remember I was on the west side of the province, *[inaudible]* business, and I know the—you know, I had family farm up in the Asessippi-Shellmouth area and, you know, looking at the importance of how much water came that year.

It was a historical flood, and the thing was, the devastation that created on the Assiniboine valley to the Souris River. You know, I was also the new MLA in 2014 when it came to the 2014 flood. You know, we had the situation where the water, when it comes to the Assiniboine River that came from the west side of the province, it was put through the diversion, which was a project that was done back in 1960s, along with three project was the Shellmouth Dam, the Portage Diversion, and the Red River Floodway.

And in this case, when it came to the 2011-2014 flood, abundance of water had been pushed up to—through the diversion into Lake Manitoba channel. And the problem there was that it overflowed the Lake Manitoba, and the impact to Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin. This was a project that, you know, could've been done years ago, probably with the other three projects, but this is a project that needs to be done. And with the previous government, the NDP government, they put an emergency channel that, you know, didn't look at environmental situations.

But in this case, now that we want to look at reconciliation with our First Nation communities, the time that we've been going around, especially my staff, Cynthia Ritchie and Amna Mackin, they've been doing a lot of consultation meetings throughout the

last year. I believe that they've been working with First Nation communities. This is a prerequisite to making sure that the federal environmental assessment gets passed by the federal government. And that's one thing that they really want to see is consultation with the First Nations.

So this is the time that we're using to make sure that we get it done right, to make sure that with anything, when it comes to any projects, if it's road projects or any major changes to infrastructure, we do have to engage with Manitobans. And in this case, Manitobans that live in municipalities, but also Manitobans that live in First Nation communities. We also have a number of communities that have a number of Métis, and Manitoba Métis Federation people that we need to address.

And so we want to make sure that all Manitobans have a participation, and then making sure when we do this project, we—that everybody had their say. We had every opportunity for our First Nations community to be at the table, to be part of the solution and to make sure that if there's any questions when it comes to vegetation disruption, when it comes to their medicine, when it comes to their—the—when it comes to fishery, we've got to make sure that any projects that we move forward have fish, you know, fish—what do they call them—fish ladders, to make sure that when it comes to spawning from different lakes, that we're working with three different lakes here. We're working with Lake Manitoba, Lake St. Martin and we're also—look—Lake Winnipeg.

So, we're—want to making sure that all the communities that are in—along these lakes, are part of the solution. And we want to make sure that—we've sent over a thousand pages of documentation to be part of this—and—federal environmental assessment.

And there was 134 information requests and 1,000 pages of responses that our department has come to and sending to the federal government. And they—and every so often, we think that we have all the documentation done, the federal government comes back for more information. So, we're doing as much as we can.

We are ready to do the tendering. We're ready to put it out there, to start the construction. But we do have to get the assessment done first by making sure that we do consultation with communities throughout the area, the region.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the minister's right about one thing. This certainly—this project certainly could have probably been done by now. But of course, the minister—as he just took five minutes to outline—made mistake after mistake, failed to consult over and over again, and, you know, screwed this project up from the get-go. And, you know, and he's willing to now come out and say, I'm sorry, and that's, I guess, a step in the right direction. But it doesn't get us any closer to getting the channel project done.

So, I asked a very specific question, and I think, you know, we have to sort of figure what we're doing here, Mr. Chair. Are we going to spend five minutes of, you know, of talking around the issue, giving me a history lesson of water management in the province and flood mitigation and then, you know, give me an answer at the end. Okay, I'd accept that—five minutes of nothing and at least I get an answer.

But the minister has to commit to doing something here, either giving me the previous answers to the questions I asked: vacancy rate in policy, programs and regulation, capital planning, regional operations—a number of vacancy rates that the minister has failed to put on the record.

Or answer the current question, which is that there are six steps—this is in his annual report, his department's own annual report—six steps, three of which have been completed, three of which have yet to be completed. Which three have completed, which three have not? This is in the minister's own documentation.

I'm not asking an esoteric question here. I want to know the real specifics about what this report is talking about. Give us the answer.

* (16:20)

Mr. Piwniuk: I just want to say to the member that, you know, when it comes to this project again too, it's—there is a—steps we have taken, three out of the six steps, but at first I want to say that, you know, this summer is one of the consultation steps.

And I just wanted to say that, you know, they—I had such a great opportunity to meet with a number of First Nation communities, even with the acting Grand Chief McLean, who basically represents the chief at Lake Manitoba First Nation community. We had a chance to have the discussion of what has happened in their community during the 2011 flood and the 2014 flood.

And just listening to a lot of these First Nation communities to say how much they really got impacted. And when it came in 2011. And so this is where we—it's about reconciliation, it's about learning, about building a relationship. I've come from a business background that it's all about building relationships and in government, it's no different. And right now, when it comes to the environment, doing the prep work for the federal environment assessment is basic consultations.

And we went to Fisher River; we went to—we had a great visit in Fisher River. They took us on a tour of their community and how they were impacted during that—the flood of this past year. We also went to Peguis this past year, this past summer, because at the same time, their impact even when it comes to the channels, they are part of the group that—making sure that their impact is.

And once this project gets done, we would like to work with the federal government to make sure that we have solutions and opportunities to talk to Peguis First Nations to make sure that—with Chief Hudson, to make sure that what we need to do—and he's told us a number of opportunities to create solutions when it comes to our own infrastructure, when it comes to highway—our highway that goes through Peguis, through Fisher River along the Fisher River itself, the river.

And so, we are, you know, going to these communities and being able to learn more about the impact of the vast number of floods, the 2011, 2014 and now the 2022. And we also went to Pinaymootang First Nation community where there was a record of seven First Nations organizations by the IRTC, Interlake Reserves Tribal Council.

And we had a meeting and it was very—we listened to the concerns, the issues they had and we were able to come up and inform them that we're here to work together, to be—for them to be at the table, to also be part of the community when it comes to moving into building a channel, but also having a voice when it comes to down the road, when it comes to actual—the control structures to making sure they have a say when it comes to this major project that's going to be part of the future when it comes to flood mitigation projects.

And I will tell you this much. When it comes to the environmental impact assessments of the six steps that was part of the enhanced flood protection and public awareness and the performance measures, and

I wanted to outline and that the member also acknowledges that the amount of the success of our department of the beginning the three areas done right now. And the first one was to screen the project and is I-I-A required.

First step is to make sure that the project that we come up with is the project that was required to making sure that flood mitigation is done for Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin.

And then the next thing is—that was No. 1, and No. 2 is scoping what needs to be included. And the scoping of the project would also be, when it comes to making sure that the—when the water comes through the channel—making sure that there's not a lot of silt that comes with the amount of water. So we designed the channels to make sure that the water flows naturally and—as if it was coming from a river.

And then we also was preparing the environmental impact assessment report, and that was all completed.

Those were the three steps that were completed—

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

Mr. Wiebe: I did hear the minister express the three steps that have been completed. Maybe in his next answer he can say which three are—remain in progress.

But I do want to switch gears slightly, and I do hope we come back to the channels projects. I have my colleague here from the constituency of Keewatinook, who I think has a lot to say about those projects and questions to ask.

But I do want to ask the minister, with regards to the decision we recently learned of for him to overrule his department and move forward with an access road on PTH 10 south of Brandon, which just so happens to be for a development being put forward by VBJ Developments.

So I just wanted to start that line of questioning by asking: When did the minister first learn that VBJ were looking for a reconsideration on this matter?

Mr. Piwniuk: Yes, with the member asking about the situation in Brandon, that firstly, I have to say that when I first became minister of the department back in—on January 18th, I was appointed by the current Premier, Heather Stefanson. I was—it was an honour to be part of this role. You know, one thing that I have

a passion for is construction, and when it comes to economic development.

I was basically—when I was in Virden and I participated in community committees, and in the town of Virden, I joined the Chamber of Commerce, which was—and I was put into economic development as a side committee. And then I became president of the economic development of the Wallace—Virden—Wallace CDC.

* (16:30)

And it was always my passion to be—to focus on economic development. And so, when I became the Minister for Transportation and Infrastructure, appointed by the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), one of the mandates that the Premier had given also, being that another role that I have is also—I'm also the—one of the ministers for the committee—economic committee of Cabinet that was also been appointed to, to focus on—because of my role as Transportation Minister is to focus on economic development.

And so, when I became the minister, one of the things that I've always had good rapport with is building relationships. And one of the biggest things—opportunities I had was to talk to municipalities, to cities in the region—the City of Winnipeg, to talk about, you know, initiatives, what—the concerns they had, what kind of—the challenges they had over the years. And the thing is what—like I said, our focus was economic development and growing this province.

I know your previous government was focused on taxation, creating a—more taxes, increasing taxes. I know, I was in the insurance industry; that's probably one of the reasons why I became an MLA, was that you guys started to—a tax on insurance policies, in policies. They created Autopac registration fees, and you—your government had done a lot of that stuff to hold back.

And I remember being—that I was in business, when I was a—like, an insurance agency and a financial planner in Manitoba and seeing that when person—when the oil boom was happening in Virden, no one wanted to incorporate in Manitoba because of your policies. They all incorporated in Saskatchewan, and Moosomin grew by 13 per cent, and Virden barely grew by 2 per cent in that period of time.

This is an oil boom. This was disgusting. And this is the reason why I became an MLA.

And so, when it comes to economic development, we basically were listening to communities to talk

about—and also stakeholders, and one of the meetings that I had was the City of Brandon. I had the opportunity to meet with Mayor Rick Chrest and one of the—a number of councillors and one of the CAOs for the city to talk about the different issues that they were facing in Brandon, some of these frustrations when it comes to restrictions of how they can develop.

And the thing is, one thing that we needed to do was to see how we as the department of Manitoba infrastructure—Transportation—Infrastructure can work together to allow economic development.

And when we look at the, you know, 10th—you know, when it comes to No. 1—ten—No. 10 Highway, when it comes to the bypass, basically, as Brandon's growing southward—and that's where a lot of the residential—and is moving wards is in the west and to the south, there's a hole here. And the thing is, the opportunity for Brandon to continue to grow should be no different than the city of Winnipeg.

When it comes to the growth of Winnipeg, the history of Winnipeg, it grew. We had a Perimeter Highway that was beyond the residential side of Winnipeg. Over time, the arteries like Pembina Highway, Portage Avenue, they were all able to grow towards the Perimeter Highway. So, why isn't Brandon no different when it comes to the growth and the opportunity to extend the 18th Street?

And so, the opportunity that—when I was able to talk to the City of Brandon, they passed a resolution for this development that was going to be on the south side of Brandon to be able to have an access point that both the City of Brandon that passed a resolution through their council. And this was an opportunity for us to work together, for the city—to consult with the City of Brandon, and to say to the developer that we do want growth—

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

And I would just remind all members that they should refer to members of this Chamber by their constituency or title and not use their first or last names.

Minister, you are required to be—have your video on, so I would ask that you put that back on.

Thank you.

Mr. Wiebe: Did the minister or staff in his office, members of his department, meet with representatives of VBJ Developments on this matter? Were they approached by them? Did they have conversations over the phone?

And, if so, when would that have been?

Mr. Piwniuk: To answer the question to the member from Concordia—like, the fact is that, like I said before, I met with the City of Brandon, they came up with this issue about the developer who's the frustrations.

And even after they passed the resolution, I did meet with the developer. And that's my process when it comes to meeting with municipalities or for cities or towns in Manitoba, I meet also with stakeholders. Stakeholders that want to invest in this province. And this was an opportunity to talk with this developer to making sure that there was an opportunity to hear them out, to get the history of what's happening from the department because, again, I was relatively a new minister.

And, like I said, my mandate was to focus on economic development. How to grow the city of Brandon and how to grow every corner of this province by working with infrastructure. And this is the—this is what we actually had been able to do, to listen, to come up with a solution and the solution was working with our department to talk about opportunities to looking at the safety when it comes to doing their plan as a developer. They still haven't done their final development. They do have caveats that we're going to respect.

But then working with the City of Brandon to making sure that they're a hundred per cent on board of all the decisions that are being made, and then with our department to design to reduce speed limits when it comes to—much like the city of Winnipeg, when it comes to Pembina Highway, is to reduce speed limits because this is economic growth.

Anywhere I drove in North America—I've driven lots over the years as my—as, you know, into conferences. I like driving. I love infrastructure. And every single—any state out there or any province, when you get off the interstate or the freeway, when you get into a community, and every community that I've been driving through, as soon as you hit a commercial building, they reduce the speed limit to—from—like, if it's in the States, it goes from 65 to 55. If you go into a—more of a heavier commercial, it goes down to 45. They go into residential, it goes down to 35. And then, eventually, if it's a downtown, which a lot of cities have highways going through, much like, you know, when I went to Wichita, I went through some major—on Highway 75, south of Omaha, there was a number of towns that I had to slow down to 25.

They have done it right in many parts of North America. This should not be any different when it comes to the city of Brandon.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister tell us when he had the meeting with VBJ Developments?

* (16:40)

Mr. Piwniuk: Well, I met with the developer after I met with the city mayor, the city councillor when it comes to Jeff Fawcett—request—but the councillor Jeff Fawcett and a number of staff for the City of Brandon, and after meeting with them and in their—their—the missed opportunity that they say that we were missing here, I had the opportunity to meet with the developer and, along with one of my colleagues, and to talk about when it comes to Brandon the opportunity to invest in our—in the city of Brandon: to create a number of residential housing, to create multiple residential housing, to create box stores, to create retail.

This is what Brandon really wants. Brandon wants more tax revenue. They wanted tax revenue now from increasing taxes, like your government had done in the past. They want to do it for economic development. This is where they get their tax from you from, to pay for infrastructure that the City of Brandon wants to grow and continue growing and making sure that they're doing the same thing that the City of Winnipeg's doing.

They're our second largest city, and I want to make sure that this is economic development. The decision was made, and it's true the—when it comes to the Manitoba transportation act that I have the decision to make sure that if I feel that this is an opportunity to—for growth that the city of Brandon wants, I will make that decision.

And I will make sure that our department works together with the City of Brandon to make sure that we design the—when it comes to 18th Street, like extension of 18th towards the bypass, we're going to work with the City of Brandon to make sure that every single component and every caveat is incorporated in the design.

And it's not going to be anything different than going down south of Pembina Highway to the Perimeter Highway. And we allowed the city of Winnipeg to grow. Why is—are you guys against the city of Brandon and the Westman? And you might not do anything—any favours of—when you guys were in government to the Westman. You guys take—took our oil during the oil boom and you never even put it back

into our highways. And you were in the government at that time, the MLA for Concordia.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister just let us know which colleague joined him in that meeting? And, you know, considering the developer is a major party donor, donated, as we've outlined, to the Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) leadership campaign, did he, at any point, feel it would be appropriate for him to recuse himself from this decision-making process?

Regardless of the meetings that he's had, did he feel that it was appropriate that he sat in and ultimately overruled his department's decisions with regards to safety concerns on Highway 10?

Mr. Piwniuk: I wanted to say to the member from Concordia that, again, when it comes to the decisions that are made with the decision with the City of Brandon for VBJ Developments was that, again, it came to my attention, they give me the information about what the opportunity that the City of Brandon had, and I reviewed it based on their recommendation.

And what they really—as a community that really wants to see economic development, create more jobs, to grow this city of Brandon so that you're not left out, much like the rest of the Red River Valley, they want to be competitive. They want—and again, when Brandon grows, the whole province grows. And that includes the City of Winnipeg.

And the thing is, I basically reviewed it. I looked—you know, when it comes to the Manitoba transportation act, I've—The Transportation Infrastructure Act, I basically made my decision based on what the requirements—what the requests from the City of Brandon wanted. And for future opportunity for growth, for taxation and for—to grow their—for jobs. And that's the important.

That was my mandate that was given by the Premier, to make sure that we look at every single opportunity when it comes to investing in our infrastructure, when it comes to our transportation corridors. That includes the Trans-Canada Highway. It includes Highway 75, the Perimeter Highway, but also our trade and commerce grid. That included all the RTAC—when it comes to weight restriction loading—highways that we're rebuilding.

We're not just painting them like the previous government did before election. And the only time they've actually spent their budget on the transportation was just before election.

And we are rebuilding these highways. We are putting five layers of pavement on these highways—Highway 23, Highway 1. We're making it RTAC, so that it's safety. Safety is our priority. Safety is no different than when—we are going to be working with the department, when it comes to working with the City of Brandon, designing the proper turning lanes, the proper access point.

We are going to be working with our engineers and our department to make sure that all Manitobans, no matter if they're coming to the city of Brandon, are going to be driving in a safe environment much like we have in the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Wiebe: Again, I'll ask, which colleague did the minister—join the minister in the meeting for—with VBJ?

And then just to—I see we're running short on time—to tack on another question, the minister said today in question period that he met with the chief of Waywayseecappo First Nation regarding the access point on Highway 10, which is just north of the city rather than south of the city.

* (16:50)

But, again, you know, the minister wants to talk about economic development. This is an established business that is looking to have better access, and then the minister said, no, we need to close that for safety reasons.

So it just doesn't really jive with his other argument that he's willing to forgo safety issues when economic development is on the line. So it begs the question, why? Why would the minister do that for one group and not for the other? I think I've outlined why I think that's happened. Maybe the minister could shed some light.

But, specifically, I wanted to know, the minister mentioned he met with the chief of Waywayseecappo, and they had previously written a letter with regards to this issue. When he met with the chief, did he discuss this issue and did he say no to the chief's face when he spoke with him in person?

Mr. Piwniuk: Well, you know, when it comes to—with other businesses that are in the Brandon market, too, like, I basically met with a lot of different stakeholders and about a number of them—two of them—in fact, were First Nation communities.

And one thing I was proud to be part of is the Gambler First Nation. They come from my neck of the woods, my old neck of the woods. My mom grew up

in the Binscarth area, which where Gambler First Nation is relocated. I'm very good friends with the chief of Gambler and his wife—Chief Ledoux.

And so, they—when they had a grand opening of their service station in Brandon, they actually asked me to speak on behalf of the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson), to bring greetings. And I felt so honoured that—mind you, I worked with them also on the potash project because one of the ministers—when I wasn't a backbencher, Deputy Speaker, I had the opportunity to work—coming from Russell, I had opportunity to work with the potash project and working with Chief Ledoux, building those relationships.

And I also—coming from that neck of the woods, I'm also—knew—met Chief Murray Clearsky a number of times, at different events. And we have had really good discussions about economic development in, you know, reconciliation, the opportunity to work together with our governments.

And the situation was when we met with this—again, I was relatively a newer minister. I knew there was situations where—in the past, where there was opportunity to work together to—I know where, on Highway 10, there were service roads that were on one side, the east side, and there was a possibility that a service road would be—when the project was first established, was there was going to be a service road that would tie in to a number of businesses, the land that the First Nation Wayway had, and it would've been a very good opportunity to look at the corner of—where the airport was, to create an intersection there to allow, you know, when it comes to a traffic light in the future, to have service roads to go to—on the east side of the businesses on Highway 10 and then on the new development of highway—the west side of Highway 10, on the—when it came to Wayway's property.

And I think the Elphinstone First Nation's also involved with that project too. They have land there, too, that we met with that chief, too, the same time as Chief Clearsky. And I—and, again, I had my two colleagues, the Minister of Economic Development and the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations (Mr. Lagimodiere) at that meeting and to discuss—again, the Minister of Economic Development represents that region. And—but also, it's an economic development opportunity. So when we had the discussion with Murray Clearsky, his concern was that he would like to have better access to his business right from the highway.

And the one thing we—I had staff there, I had my assistant deputy minister—who is here with me today, Blair McTavish—and our regional director, which would be Kelvin—what's Kelvin's last name? *[interjection]* Shuvera.

And so, we—they were at the meeting, and they were able to take that information back to the department to find solutions to work together with Wayway to making sure that the—and working with the City of Brandon and the municipality to making sure that everybody's on the same page, collaborate to make sure that we provide a design—again, number thing—No. 1 commitment to our department is making sure that there's safety on that Highway 10 and making sure that—we probably have to do a design of turning lanes, much like we're going to be doing on the south end of Highway 10.

And we have not closed the access, and we want to make sure that when people go into any business or any development that there are—there's safety that is taking place. And we probably have to do the same thing that we did on the south side as the north side.

And again, we have to consult with the municipality and the City of Brandon and also working with our department to making sure that we come up with the proper solutions.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister indicate, did he have staff in the meeting with—he indicated he had

staff with the meeting with Waywayseecappo, did he have staff with him in the meeting with VBJ Developments? And again, which colleague joined him on that meeting?

Mr. Piwniuk: I just wanted to—you know, with the question that was brought by the honour—the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) was that, when it comes to meet with the—with both situations, these are two different scenarios.

One was basically an active business that our staff met many times with the current gas station bar that Waywayseecapital *[phonetic]* basically had built and operated in the last year. And the agreement was that the—when it came to the access point was going to be removed.

But at the same time, when it came to the VBJ—

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 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, October 12, 2022

CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS			
Committee Reports		Surgical Wait Times	
Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development		Asagwara	3173
Seventh Report		Gordon	3173
Teitsma	3161	New Pool Facility in Thompson	
Tabling of Reports		Redhead	3174
Cullen	3162	Helwer	3174
Ministerial Statements		Individuals Within Labour Organizations	
Seniors' and Elders' Month		Lamont	3174
Johnston	3162	Cullen	3175
Asagwara	3163	Squires	3175
Lamoureux	3163	Adults with Executive Function Impairment	
Disability Employment Awareness Month		Gerrard	3175
Squires	3164	Squires	3175
Redhead	3164	Supports for Individuals with Alzheimer's	
Lamont	3165	Isleifson	3176
Members' Statements		Johnston	3176
Kieran Ebanks		Home-Care Services	
Guillemard	3165	Marcelino	3176
Events Held at the Maples Community Centre		Johnston	3176
Sandhu	3166	Petitions	
Community of Miami, Manitoba		Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library	
Pedersen	3166	Altomare	3177
Louise Bridge Replacement		Hearing Aids	
Maloway	3167	Lamoureux	3177
Selkirk Volunteer Fire Department 125th Anniversary		Provincial Road 224	
Lagimodiere	3167	Lathlin	3178
Oral Questions		Louise Bridge	
Grace Hospital		Maloway	3179
Kinew	3168	South Perimeter Highway Noise Barrier	
Stefanson	3168	Wiebe	3179
New Highway Access Road in Brandon		Drug Overdose Reporting	
Kinew	3169	Fontaine	3180
Stefanson	3169	Home-Care Services	
Highway Access Points on PTH 10		Marcelino	3180
Wiebe	3171	Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library	
Piwniuk	3171	Moses	3181
Manitoba Hydro and Public Utilities Board		Executive Function Disorders Supports	
Sala	3172	Gerrard	3181
Friesen	3172	Bibliothèque Régionale Jolys Regional Library	
		Sala	3182
		Home-Care Services	
		Sandhu	3183

ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Committee of Supply
(Concurrent Sections)

Room 254

Mental Health and Community Wellness

B. Smith	3184
Guillemard	3184

Environment, Climate and Parks

Naylor	3193
Wharton	3193

Room 255

Families

Lathlin	3193
Squires	3193
Redhead	3198
Asagwara	3201

Chamber

Transportation and Infrastructure

Piwniuk	3201
Wiebe	3202

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

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