

Fifth 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. LXXVII No. 47B - 1:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 25, 2023

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 25, 2023

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Introduction of bills?

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Third Report

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Chairperson): I wish to present the third report of Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Clerk (Ms. Patricia Chaychuk): Your standing Committee on Legislative Affairs—

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

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

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 24, 2023, at 12:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*

Committee Membership

- *MLA FONTAINE*
- *Hon. Mr. GOERTZEN*
- *Hon. Mrs. GUILLEMARD*
- *MLA MARCELINO*
- *Mr. MARTIN*
- *Mr. MICKLEFIELD*

Your Committee elected Mr. MICKLEFIELD as the Chairperson.

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

Motions

Your Committee agreed to the following motion:

THAT the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs defer the comprehensive review of The Advocate for Children and Youth Act, as required by section 40 of that Act, until after the Provincial General Election scheduled for October 3, 2023.

Mr. Micklefield: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable member for Kildonan-River East (Mrs. Cox), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Further committee reports?

Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs Fourth Report

Mr. Ian Wishart (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

Clerk: Your standing Committee on Legislative—

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs presents the following as its Fourth Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on April 24, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration

- *Bill (No. 2) – The Official Time Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur le temps réglementaire*
- *Bill (No. 8) – The Off-Road Trails Safety and Maintenance Act / Loi sur la sécurité et l'entretien des sentiers pour véhicules à caractère non routier*
- *Bill (No. 13) – The Wildlife Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la conservation de la faune*
- *Bill (No. 24) – The Wildfires Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les incendies échappés*

Committee Membership

- *Mr. BRAR*
- *Mr. HELWER*
- *MLA LINDSEY*
- *Hon. Mr. NESBITT*
- *Hon. Mr. SMITH (Lagimodière)*
- *Mr. WISHART*

Your Committee elected Mr. WISHART as the Chairperson.

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

Non-Committee Members Speaking on Record

- Ms. NAYLOR
- Hon. Mr. GERRARD

Public Presentations

Your Committee heard the following presentation on **Bill (No. 2) – The Official Time Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur le temps réglementaire**:

Benjamin McGillivray, Private citizen

Your Committee heard the following two presentations on **Bill (No. 8) – The Off-Road Trails Safety and Maintenance Act / Loi sur la sécurité et l'entretien des sentiers pour véhicules à caractère non routier**:

Jason Wiebe, Snoman (Snowmobilers of Manitoba) Inc.
Gary Hora, All Terrain Vehicle Association of Manitoba

Written Submissions

Your Committee received the following two written submissions on **Bill (No. 13) – The Wildlife Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la conservation de la faune**:

Chris Heald, Manitoba Wildlife Federation
Paul Conchatre, Manitoba Lodges and Outfitters Association

Bills Considered and Reported

- **Bill (No. 2) – The Official Time Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur le temps réglementaire**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 8) – The Off-Road Trails Safety and Maintenance Act / Loi sur la sécurité et l'entretien des sentiers pour véhicules à caractère non routier**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 13) – The Wildlife Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur la conservation de la faune**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

- **Bill (No. 24) – The Wildfires Amendment Act / Loi modifiant la Loi sur les incendies échappés**

Your Committee agreed to report this Bill without amendment.

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

Motion agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Tabling of reports?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Status of Women—and I would indicate that the required 90 minutes' notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 27(2).

Would the honourable minister please proceed with her statement.

Red Hat Society

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): Today, I have the wonderful pleasure of hosting a women's empowerment celebration here at the Manitoba Legislature, with more than 50 remarkable Red Hat ladies from across our great province.

The Red Hat Society began in 1998 between two friends who celebrated their 50th birthdays with the gifting of a red fedora. The red hat soon became a tradition that signified sisterhood and the celebration of aging together.

Easily identifiable with their bold and enthusiastic shades of purple, red and pink, along with the unique red hat that signifies each woman's vibrant personality, this sisterhood has become a symbol for celebrating age in style.

Manitoba's first Red Hat chapter opened in 2000. The Hatters, as they call themselves, pride themselves on being a membership focused on fun, friendship and food, and are committed to helping reshape how mature women are valued in today's culture.

These women have created a community where women are welcomed and accepted as they celebrate this new chapter in their life.

The Hatters also ensure they are helping one another through periods of isolation and loneliness that sometimes and unfortunately comes with aging. They defy any attitude that does not support and celebrate the values and contributions women make at all stages of life, regardless of their age.

Madam Speaker, the work of the Red Hat Society is essential to making women feel heard, and offers unconditional amounts of support and praising one another.

I want to thank these women for their devotion to supporting others and inspiring women to stay true to themselves, and have fun doing it.

Madam Speaker, I ask all my colleagues to help welcome these remarkable women into our gallery today and help me proclaim April 25th as Red Hat Society day.

Madam Speaker: The honourable Minister for Status of Women.

Ms. Squires: Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to have all these ladies' names entered into Hansard.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to allow those names into Hansard? *[Agreed]*

Vlasta Ahizic, Henna Anderson, Ana Anusic, Chrisanne Beisick, Mary Bera, Jan Bissett, Linda Black, Karen Bodnar, Marnie Bolland, Agnes Brydon, Joy Bryson, Joyce Buhr, Mary Butchard, Helen Carroll, Shirley Chaput, Pat Daly, Sylvia De Viaming, Iyla Dumont, Herta Farkas, Lynn Greenley, Gloria Hebert, Neda Hegel, Betty Jeffrey, Mirjana Jokic, Violet Kasunic, Brenda Kinnaird, Loraine Krastel, Bev Kraynyk, Faye Lamboo, Carol Lewicki, Verna McDonald, Beverley Meiueller, Ila Murrell, Katie Paulic, Maria Paulic, Elsie Pounder, Martha Ravensdale, Bea Renalds, Ellen Rourke, Louisa Sawchuk, Josie Scaletta, Rossita Schau, Sandra Seaton, Pat Sharples, Veronica Sichewski, JoAnne Soder, Barb Sokol, Muriel Stiles, Judi Summerville-Jones, Eva Thompson, Nancy Tuek, Myrna Valley, Els VerKuijlen, Pauline Woods, Kimberley Zorget-Shadlock

Madam Speaker: And also I would indicate that I have allowed the member to wear a red hat in the Chamber. She is authorized to do so. And I kind of think it would have been a nice day, too, for the Speaker to change her hat into a red one, jazz it up a little bit.

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): In 1998, Red Hat Society founder Sue Ellen Cooper brought her dear friend a red hat. Sue was inspired by a line in a Jenny Joseph poem that read: When I am an old lady I shall wear purple / With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me. End quote.

From this, friends began wearing and going out in public with purple clothing and red hats. The Red Hat Society was born.

Over the next several decades, the Red Hat Society grew to be a worldwide membership society with the goal of encouraging women to get the most out of life. Today, the Red Hat Society exists in over 20 countries with chapters in every province in Canada. At its peak, Manitoba was home to 165 chapters with over 4,000 members.

Many women put so much time and energy into their family, career and community, but don't take enough time for ourselves to just have fun. And so, the goal of the Red Hat Society is to give women a break from the responsibilities of everyday life for no other purpose than to just have fun with other women and to look good while doing so.

Members of the Red Hat Society can be easily recognized by the bright colours they wear: red hats and purple clothing for members over 50 and pink hats and lavender clothing for members under the age of 50.

This year, the Red Hat Society will celebrate their 25th anniversary. To mark that occasion, the Winnipeg chapter is hosting It's All About The Hat gala on April 29th at the Norwood Hotel. The all-day gala will feature vendors, dinner, prizes and so much fun.

On behalf of our NDP caucus, we say congratulations on the milestone and to many, many more years.

Miigwech.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): 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: While I recognize that I'm not yet 50, it brings me great joy to rise in the House today to recognize the Red Hat Society.

Madam Speaker, the Red Hat Society is a fun group for women who focus on living life to the fullest. The group stands for and celebrates strong, independent women who are unapologetically themselves, embracing life and supporting each other.

The society started in the late '90s and was inspired by a beautiful poem titled Warning, by Jenny Joseph. It is about embracing the joys of being yourself because life is beautiful. The society grew to have 167 chapters at one point and currently has 13 chapters in Winnipeg and seven in rural Manitoba. And today, they celebrate 25 years here in Manitoba.

Now, why is the group called the Red Hat Society? Well, from a single gift of a red hat, it has grown into a symbol for women around the globe as they turn 50 and enter the next fun phase of their lives.

Here in Manitoba, members who have reached the fabulous age of 50 years wear red hats and purple clothing. Women under 50 are pink hat divas and wear pink hats and lavender clothes. We can see this on the beautiful and strong women who are up in our galleries right now.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Red Hat Society in Manitoba for being an inspiration to so many of us and for your outlook on life.

* (13:40)

I will end by reading a fun motto the Red Hat Society in Manitoba lives by: Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in an attractive well-preserved body, but rather to skid in sideways, champagne in hand, strawberries in the other, body thoroughly used up, totally worn out and screaming, woohoo, what a ride.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Helgi Jones

Mr. Rick Wowchuk (Swan River): I rise today to recognize and honour the late Helgi Jones, who many affectionately referred to as the Premier of Hecla Island.

Born in 1916, at an early age of 13, Helgi joined his father in the family fishing operations on Lake Winnipeg. Helgi married Frances Hirst, and they made their home at Hecla Island. Over the years, Helgi accumulated a very impressive resume of working for his community he so loved.

In the 1950s, Helgi was instrumental in securing grant money to build a road across the island, and when finances ran out, he organized volunteers to complete the bush clearing by hand.

Helgi demonstrated his leadership over and over, and when he set out on a mission, it was accomplished. Like when Hecla Island needed hydro, he made a presentation and Hecla got hydro.

In the 1960s, Helgi became chair of the area development board, lobbying for a causeway to Hecla and to name Hecla Island as a provincial park. By the early 1970s, both missions were accomplished.

Later that year, Helgi attended marine school in Thunder Bay, earning his lake captain's papers. This inspired him to design and build the Lady Frances, a fishing vessel which improved living and working conditions on Lake Winnipeg. He was honoured by fishermen for his dedication to the fishing industry, receiving a commemorative medal to honour persons who made a significant contribution to their fellow citizens and the community.

Madam Speaker, Helgi was instrumental in making Hecla Island the place it is today. It was only

fitting, on June 23, 2017, Helgi Jones Parkway was named to honour his legacy.

Pat, Marjorie, Stuart, Allan, Murray and families, you are rightfully extremely proud of Helgi's accomplishments. I welcome Helgi's family here today, and ask for leave to include their names and a list of his many accomplishments into Hansard to honour his legacy.

Colleagues, please join me in welcoming his family to the Legislature today.

Family of Helgi and Frances Jones: Patricia Bjornson, Marjorie Henry, Allan and Betty Jones, Stuart and Mugs Jones, Murray and Margaret Jones, children; Brad and Kristine Jones, Alanna Jones and John Robinson, Lisa Dudko, grandchildren; Armaan Jones, Leah Jones, Nicholas Helgi Jones, Patrick Helgi Bjornson, great-grandchildren.

Madam Speaker: The member did not need leave in that particular instance.

Early Childhood Educator Week

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): This week is Early Childhood Educator Week. I am pleased to have the opportunity today to thank all of Manitoba's dedicated and hard-working early childhood educators and extend a special thank you to the Union Station early childhood educators in our community.

ECEs cannot be overlooked—cannot continue to be overlooked, rather, by this PC government and need to be given the respect they deserve through funding, wages, protections and actions.

Child-care centres in Union Station are doing amazing work to make sure that children are well socialized and well taken care of. They make extraordinary efforts to keep kids safe and enjoy our neighbourhood's parks and amenities, while being a source of important information and relationships for so many families.

Child care should be affordable for all parents regardless of income. However, affordable child care means nothing if there aren't enough staff or centres for all kids. ECEs invest in obtaining their education and training. Their skills, dedication and essential service has not been respected by this government, which is why we're struggling to ensure that affordable child care is available to all Manitobans across our province.

Most ECEs are earning inadequate wages, which makes it harder to attract new workers to the field and

leads to many leaving the field in order to find better paying work. Honouring ECEs is a nice gesture, but nice gestures from this PC government are not a substitute for actual actions taken to retain and recruit ECEs to the field.

This government can and should do much more to support the early childhood educator section–sector in our province by taking bold steps to ensure that child care is fully accessible, truly affordable for all Manitobans and that ECEs are adequately supported, resourced and compensated.

Thank you to all the incredible Union Station early childhood educators. Our NDP caucus stands with you and is committed to real action being taken to support you.

Thank you.

Yeho Estioco

Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Madam Speaker, it is not uncommon for members of this Assembly to invite talented young artists to be recognized in the Chamber. Some have even gone on to become quite famous.

Today is my turn to highlight an amazing young man from Fort Richmond whose musical talents are already reaching international audiences. Yeho Estioco is an impressive pop and R & B singer who writes his own lyrics and music.

Starting at the age of four, Yeho showed advanced skills in his vocal abilities, and with the encouragement from his musical family, he has taken the talent to very new heights. This young musician also plays a number of instruments, including the acoustic guitar, bass guitar, drums, French horn, trumpet, piano and ukulele.

Madam Speaker, I was excited to join Yeho at the launch of his very first album called iHope on February the 18th of this year. The room was full of adoring fans who swooned as soon as Yeho began to croon. His voice has a rich and smooth tone that exudes a calm comfort and upbeat ambiance.

Members of the House who are interested can listen on the—to the iHope album on SoundCloud, or, even better, you can join him at his next concert this Saturday, April 29th, at Raffy's Cafe on Ellice Avenue.

Madam Speaker, this humble yet confident young man has his values strongly rooted in family. The connection was very evident at his album launch where both his mother and his father shared their pride and joy in a son who has continuously shown his gratitude for their sacrifices.

It is truly a gift to be able to highlight and promote the hard work of a young Manitoba youth who will be representing our province in such a positive light because of the person he is.

Yeho Estioco is joined by his family in the gallery today: his father, Danny, his mother, Joanalyn Estioco, and other family and friends.

I ask my colleagues to please join me in saluting this talented young musician as he grows an exciting career in music.

Re Uz It

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize Re Uz It, an environmentally friendly initiative that is meeting the needs of many in Flin Flon. Re Uz It is a used-items store that accepts valuable donations from community members for resale. Proceeds are then distributed to local community groups in need.

Re Uz It was originally founded by avid community volunteer Kathy McCormick to help fund Habitat for Humanity in Flin Flon. The store moved to its present location on Trout Lake Road in 2016 and was registered as a non-profit business in 2018.

So far, Re Uz It has been able to donate \$21,000 back to the community. The store has supported several local groups, including the Flin Flon cadets, Flin Flon Aboriginal music centre—sorry, Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre, McIsaac School Lego club, Flin Flon Guidance Nursery school, Norman Community Services, SPCA, Bust the Winter Blues Festival, Flin Flon Ski Club and curling club, as well as the Flin Flon Arts Council, Community Wellness Collective, library and north star quilting guild.

I'd also like to use this opportunity to acknowledge the citizens of Flin Flon who have supported and continue to support Re Uz It, either through purchases or by donating gently used goods.

Currently, Re Uz It founder Kathy manages store by herself with occasional help from her husband Joe, who is the news reporter with CFAR radio. I appreciate Kathy and Joe for the immense value they continue to add to our Flin Flon community and, by extension, our province, Manitoba. Their commitment

to service has made a huge difference in the lives of community members and community groups.

Thank you.

* (13:50)

Seniors' Concerns in Tyndall Park

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): I've been working closely with seniors living in Tyndall Park in creating a condensed and cohesive list of specific issues that seniors are facing and hoping this government will address immediately.

Madam Speaker, these individuals have shared that they strongly feel there is a creation of a two-tier health-care system happening. Many seniors cannot afford their prescribed medications—some are on fixed incomes, and some plans don't cover their medications. There are also many barriers seniors face with respect to nutrition, dental work and eye exams.

I have also heard from many constituents that the shingles shot is too expensive for seniors and we should consider covering the shingles vaccine as they do in Ontario.

Further to this, it is becoming harder to access a family doctor because Manitoba has the lowest number of family physicians in the entire country. We need over 400 more doctors to even get to the national average.

It is hard to get assistance in health care in a timely fashion and it is becoming incredibly disheartening, not to mention bad for personal morale, that seniors—and everyone—often have to go to health facilities, sometimes for longer periods of time, far away from their own communities and their loved ones.

We are supposed to be striving for community health. Seven Oaks hospital is the closest hospital to Tyndall Park, and as our North End population continues to grow, it stands there underutilized because the provincial government won't put in the necessary investments in public health care and properly staff the facility.

When it comes to home care, seniors want this service to remain public, so there is more accountability and standards. We also need to ensure there is sufficient nurses and health-care aides in all long-term-care facilities.

Seniors need and deserve these changes as they have been ignored for far too long and it is a matter of respect and safety. I table a list of these ideas and I ask

that the minister responsible, if he would consider meeting with some of the seniors in my constituency about these issues.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery that I would like to draw your attention to.

Seated in the public gallery, we have with us today Morgan Shipley and Stacia Franz, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness (Ms. Morley-Lecomte).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health-Care System Management Physician Recommendations

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): For years the PCs have ignored front-line health-care workers. Health-care aides, physicians, allied health professionals, nurses; they've tried to ask for improvements and proposed solutions, and time and again they've been turned away by this Premier and by Brian Pallister before her.

Now, of course, these physicians and other allied health professionals are speaking out, and they're calling attention to the failures of the PC government. Just today, Dr. Dan Roberts wrote, and I quote: There is a clear difference between engaging private companies in an accountable and appropriate fashion versus turning the system into a pork barrel. End quote.

The Premier owes Manitobans a response.

Why has she turned our provincial health-care system into a situation where it's being compared to a pork barrel?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): Contrary to the information the—that the Leader of the Opposition just put on the floor of the Chamber, Madam Speaker, I'll put some facts on the record.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, we are investing record amounts of dollars in our health-care system in the province of Manitoba: almost \$8 billion, \$668 million more than last year. That's a 9.2 per cent increase; that's more, not less.

The Leader of the Opposition continues to put false information on the record in this Chamber. We'll continue to put the facts on the record.

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

Mr. Kinew: For seven years, this Premier helped Brian Pallister implement his agenda of cuts, and then she shows up in an election year and tries to promise different.

Manitobans see through that. Manitobans listen to the physicians, the physicians who have quit their task-force process, the physicians at the Grace, who have been bringing forward proposals, only to be rejected by this government.

Physicians, like the one I referred to, who wrote in the paper today that, I quote: What is lost here is the suffering and anxiety of patients and their families, and the current plight of a dedicated doctor. End quote.

It's really something when physicians and other health professionals speak out like this to condemn a provincial government's failures to fix health care.

Will the Premier admit that her government has failed to listen to the front-line experts like Dr. Dan Roberts?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Madam Speaker, we continue to listen to front-line experts, including doctors in the community—doctors like Dr. Peter MacDonald, who is the head of our Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force; doctors like Ed Buchel, who is also a member of that task force.

These are individuals who are helping us move in the right direction to help eliminate the backlog, the surgical and diagnostic backlogs in the province of Manitoba. And I want to thank them for the incredible work that they're doing.

We'll continue to take their advice, not the advice from the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Kinew: The Premier should start to listen to those on the front lines. And she should pay close attention to the words of Dr. Dan Roberts who told them that their approach was not going to work.

He asked them, instead, to invest in the public system, but what did the Premier do? Well, Dr. Roberts writes, and I quote here: As of this date, no response has been forthcoming. End quote.

That's the record of the Stefanson government. That's the record when it comes to neurology. That's the record when it comes to ignoring those on the front lines of our health-care system.

Will the Premier tell the House and the people of Manitoba why she ignores front-line, local experts like Dr. Dan Roberts?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, we are listening to those on the front line. And I want to thank all of those doctors and health-care professionals who are on our Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, people like Dr. Peter MacDonald, Dr. Ed Buchel, Dr. Chris Christodoulou, Dr. Marco Essig, Dr. Amin Kabani, Dr. Luis Oppenheimer, Dr. David Hochman and others.

We want to thank them. We are listening to them, and they are helping us to ensure that we deplete those surgical and diagnostic backlogs. We will continue to listen to those doctors.

While the Leader of the Opposition wants to make fun of me, I will continue to stand up for all Manitobans.

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

Allied Health Professionals Collective Bargaining Negotiations

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): You'll note who the Premier doesn't thank there: any physician or nurse or front-line health professional who disagrees with this government's cuts.

On this side of the House, we know that it's the vast majority of physicians and nurses who condemned this government's cuts to health care, and we stand with them, just like the allied health-care professionals.

If you want a data point for this: 7,000 allied health-care professionals voted—99 per cent of them—voted against this government and in favour of a potential strike action. We're talking about rural paramedics; we're talking about laboratory technologists who work to keep health facilities open across the province, unlike the PCs who only work, seemingly, to close those sorts of facilities.

Why has the government refused to treat allied health-care workers with respect for the entirety of their time in office?

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Premier): The Leader of the Opposition is entirely disrespectful towards Dr. Peter MacDonald, who is a leading orthopedic surgeon in the province of Manitoba. Madam Speaker, he is disrespectful towards Dr. Ed Buchel, who is the provincial speciality lead of surgery. He is disrespectful towards Dr. Chris Christodoulou, the provincial specialty lead in anaesthesia. The list goes on.

These are individuals who are coming forward to help at the table of solutions, as the Minister of Health (Ms. Gordon) says, to ensure that we deplete that surgical and diagnostic backlog. That's what Manitobans expect from us and we will continue to deliver on their behalf.

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

* (14:00)

Mr. Kinew: While there's a table of two at the so-called table of solutions staffed by the Premier and the minister of the art of the possible, on this side of the House, we stand with the 7,000 allied health-care professionals who condemn this government's failure when it comes to health care.

The situation at the Thompson General Hospital is very dire. There's a 75 per cent vacancy rate there for lab techs. Data shared shows that one of these lab technologists was forced to work up to 47 hours straight—47 hours straight, Madam Speaker. That's the state of health care under the PCs.

Why has this Premier failed to give these allied health-care professionals a fair deal, much less basic signs of respect?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, we continue to meet with front-line health-care professionals, including allied health-care professionals.

In fact, just this morning, I met in my office with one of their members, Madam Speaker, and I listened to some of the challenges and concerns. And one of the things that was very apparent is that there's a lot of fear mongering by the Leader of the Opposition and members opposite. And that's disrespectful.

We know, Madam Speaker, that collective bargaining continues to take place. We will not interfere in that process.

The Leader of the Opposition can fear monger all he wants, Madam Speaker, but we will continue to stand up for all of those allied health-care workers who deserve to, yes, to get a collective agreement in

place, and we encourage Shared Health and the union to get together to ensure that that is done in an expeditious fashion.

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

Mr. Kinew: Madam Speaker, this Premier appoints the board of Shared Health, and she sets Shared Health's mandate. She continuously prioritizes the bureaucracy ahead of those folks who work on the front lines of our health-care system.

In this year's election, you've got a choice: you can stand with the bloated PC health bureaucracy, or you can stand with us who are going to fix the front lines of health care right across the great province of Manitoba.

It's very disingenuous for the Premier to talk about respect when for five years she has frozen the wages of these allied health-care professionals and they have been forced to carry the cost on their credit cards and lines of credit while the PC ministers benefit at the Cabinet table from the financial implications of that wage freeze.

Will the Premier finally admit today that they have frozen those wages for partisan, political purposes and have never prioritized health care in Manitoba?

Mrs. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is saying that we should intervene in the collective bargaining process in this situation. We believe that's wrong and that is disrespectful to all of those 7,000 allied health-care professionals who are working day in, day out to protect Manitobans in our health-care system.

Madam Speaker, even Theresa Oswald, back when she was minister of Health in Manitoba, she said, I'm not—and I quote—I'm not going to presuppose the outcomes of negotiations that are going on between any workforce and its employer.

Theresa Oswald was right. The Leader of the Opposition is wrong.

Thompson General Hospital Lab Technologist Staffing

MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station): The state of health care in this province is truly outrageous, and Manitobans know it's a crisis caused by PC cuts and this Health Minister's many, many failures.

This morning, the Manitoba allied health care—Manitoba association of health professionals, rather,

revealed a critical shortage in laboratory staffing at Thompson General Hospital, which could threaten to shut down emergency room services altogether. Their president, and I quote, said: The lab staff are doing everything they can to keep the hospital running, but they need help and they're not getting it. We are very concerned that the few technologists who are left won't be able to hold out much longer. End quote.

My question for the Health Minister: Is it possible that her government's five-year wage freeze is the reason she can't recruit lab—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health): The smoke-and-mirrors NDP are attempting to cover up their plan for health care here in Manitoba, but I'm going to help Manitobans to connect the dots, Madam Speaker.

In 2019, the Leader of the Opposition said that the Manitoba NDP would allow private home-care contracts to expire if elected. Madam Speaker, right here in Winnipeg, that would mean nearly 190,000 hours less of patient care.

December 28th, 2022—and I'll table it, Madam Speaker—the leader then said he would not reopen Winnipeg emergency departments that were transitioned to urgent care. And just a few weeks ago—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Union Station.
[interjection]

Order.

MLA Asagwara: The staffing situation, Madam Speaker, in Thompson, has steadily worsened in recent years under this PC government.

Since 2020, six medical laboratory technologists have left positions in Thompson. Currently, there are only three technologists out of 12 positions actually filled—that's a 75 per cent vacancy rate.

Workload assessment data obtained by the Manitoba allied health-care professionals show that laboratory technologists in Thompson have been forced to work up to 47 hours straight, including both full shifts and on-call, to keep necessary services open to the public.

Will this Health Minister finally accept responsibility for this staffing shortage in Thompson and her failure to pay competitive salaries, and ensure there's adequate staff for the people who need them?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, the lab techs—not just in Thompson, but across this province—will see more vacancies, according to the Leader of the Opposition, who said in debate recently with the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) during Estimates, nobody can explain the benefits of Shared Health, and vowed to cut their funding.

I've asked several times in the Chamber, will it be the Children's Hospital? Will it be Manitoba's addictions services? The Leader of the Opposition has not replied, Madam Speaker.

Manitobans want to know: Who from the 18,000 Shared Health employees, lab techs and others, would the Leader of the Opposition cut here in Manitoba?

Madam Speaker: The—*[interjection]* Order.

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

MLA Asagwara: Manitobans' No. 1 priority is fixing the problems in health care, but this PC Premier and Health Minister think announcements in an election year after seven years of cuts is going to save their jobs.

Access to services performed by specialized allied health professionals is necessary for rapid diagnosis and treatments of patients in car accidents, heart attacks, pregnancy complications and many other medical procedures and emergencies. We know the risk, as we've already seen emergency rooms in Roblin and Eriksdale that had to close due to lack of available lab services.

When will this PC government do the right thing for recruitment and retention, and provide allied health professionals, including lab technologists, with the stability and certainty of a wage settlement?

Ms. Gordon: Madam Speaker, I know the member for Union Station don't want Manitobans to know about the great work that we are doing here on this side of the House and in government. But I'm going to continue to make Manitobans aware: 80 new physician training seats, including 10 international graduate seats; \$123 million in incentives to attract and retain nurses; extending the coverage of insulin pumps and continuous glucose monitors to Manitobans; adding TRIKAFTA to the provincial drug formulary; nearly \$8 billion total for health-care funding, Madam Speaker; \$812 million for the clinical preventative services plan.

We are responding to the needs of Manitobans. We are not doing it through smoke and mirrors, like the members opposite.

Government Advertising Campaigns Government Spending Priorities

Mr. Adrien Sala (St. James): It's clear the PC government is working for their own self interests, not the interests of Manitobans. Nothing makes this more clear than the over \$1 million they've budgeted for self-promoting advertising this year.

* (14:10)

At the same time, the PCs continue to cut the services Manitobans rely on.

My question for the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) is simple: Why is she spending taxpayer dollars on advertising that should be used to support services Manitobans rely on, like health care and education?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Finance): It's too bad the member opposite couldn't have done his homework before he brought that question to the Chamber.

Madam Speaker, I went back and looked at what the NDP spent in the two previous elections back in 2016, 2011. And I found out—we put those dollars in today's dollars—the NDP has—will have spent 68 per cent more than what we have budgeted this year.

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

Mr. Sala: Sadly, Manitobans cannot trust math done by this PC Finance Minister. Rather than sending much-needed dollars to our health-care or education systems—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sala: —the PCs have instead budgeted over \$1 million for advertising, over \$210,000 has already been spent promoting the PCs' failed budget and \$127,000 for their vote-buying cheques. That's hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars the PCs are spending in a desperate attempt to reverse opinion polls.

Can the Premier explain, why is she wasting taxpayer dollars for her own political gain?

Mr. Cullen: Let's go back to the previous election. This was just after the NDP raised the previous provincial sales tax by up to 8 per cent, Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker.

What did the NDP spend at that point in time; \$16.5 million to tell Manitobans, it's okay, we took more money out of your pockets.

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

Mr. Sala: As the PCs spend over \$1 million on shameless, self-promoting advertising, Manitobans continue to wait for a government that will adequately invest in health care and education and more.

Instead, what they get from this PC government is cuts and more cuts. Manitobans deserve a government that acts in their best interest, and one, I might add, that they can actually trust.

Can the Premier explain to Manitobans why is her PC government more focused on re-election than they are on improving the services Manitobans rely on?

Mr. Cullen: Well, Madam Speaker, let's talk about trust.

Back in 2016, of course, at the time, the premier said, listen, we are not going to raise the provincial sales tax. What did they do? They raised the provincial sales tax. Then, Madam Speaker, they went out and spent \$16 million telling Manitobans it was a good thing.

Madam Speaker, what we did this year, we're giving carbon tax rebates to Manitobans; \$225 for individuals, \$375 for couples; \$200 million in total.

Madam Speaker, we are going to spend \$1 million to make sure that Manitobans get every nickel they deserve.

Senior Staffer to Former Premier Inquiry into Salary Repayment

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): In 2019, Michael Kowalson, a former senior staffer to Brian Pallister, broke the law when he took a paid job on a federal Conservative campaign while he was working in the premier's office. That's double-dipping, Madam Speaker.

Brian Pallister was forced to apologize and told Manitobans that he directed his buddy to pay back those monies to taxpayers. End of story, so we thought.

It turns out that the salary was never paid back, Madam Speaker. Government documents, which I table, show no record of it.

So, can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) say once and for all, did he pay back the money that's owed to taxpayers?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I accept nothing of the premise of which the member is putting forward because that individual has put forward lots of false allegations in this House before that have been proven to be false by the conflict of interest officer; the very conflict of interest officer who this opposition disparages by killing legislation that that conflict of interest officer asked for.

Well, they don't trust the conflict of interest officer, Madam Speaker. I will take the word over the conflict of interest officer over any member of the opposition.

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

MLA Fontaine: Double-dipping is against the law, Madam Speaker.

Kowalson made \$140,000 of salary while he was working in the premier's office, while doing Conservative election work. That is wrong, Madam Speaker.

Brian Pallister told the public that he directed his buddy to pay that new—that money back. The Deputy Premier said it happened, yet official documents, which I table again, can't confirm it.

Will the Premier say how much of that money was paid back to taxpayers?

Mr. Goertzen: The member seems to be walking back her allegation in her second question.

But what can't be walked back is the fact that the opposition killed legislation asked for by the conflict of interest officer. That legislation would have required MLAs to disclose publicly, on the Internet, gifts that they received from individuals over a certain value.

Well, remember when the NDP took free Jets tickets from Crown corporations and then didn't disclose it. Maybe that is why the NDP killed legislation by the conflict of interest officer that would require gifts to be disclosed. How many more free gifts are they planning to take if the public would bring them back into government, which we won't allow to happen.

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

MLA Fontaine: So, what Michael Kowalson did was wrong, and it's against the law. The Deputy Premier agreed when he said, and I quote, it was a mistake, and it shouldn't have happened. End quote.

So, why can't the Premier say how much of his salary was paid back to Manitoba taxpayers? Government documents show that from August 2019 to July 2020 there are no records of him paying back that money to the minister of Finance.

So, will the Premier tell the House how much money did Kowalson [*phonetic*] pay back?

Mr. Goertzen: In October of late last year, that very member who asked this question made allegations about the member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Khan) regarding conflict of interest allegations. She went into the hallway and repeated those allegations.

They were investigated by the conflict of interest officer and found to be bogus, found to be scurrilous, found to be wrong, Madam Speaker.

I would table, with the permission of the member for Fort Whyte, the ruling by the conflict of interest officer, who says that those allegations that were made by the member opposite were wrong.

This is her opportunity to apologize and stop making false allegations, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The—[*interjection*]

Order. Order.

Professional Conduct Requirements for Teachers Consultations with Teachers on Bill 35

Mr. Nello Altomare (Transcona): Yesterday, Manitobans had the opportunity to come to the Manitoba Legislature and share their views on the PC government's legislative proposals, including Bill 35.

We heard from dozens of presenters, many of who were teachers, regarding their concerns with this PC Education Minister and his plans to subject them to a new disciplinary process.

Everyone should have had a voice on how our kids are educated, and we should absolutely be listening to the expertise of teachers in classroom.

* (14:20)

Having listened to the many voices of teachers last night, will the minister now agree that his government needs to work with teachers rather than imposing new processes on—without consultation?

Hon. Wayne Ewasko (Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning): Actually, I was waiting for the member from Transcona to stand up and apologize for misleading Manitobans about the signage that he goes around walking the streets of Winnipeg

wearing, Madam Speaker. But, obviously, we're talking about something else today.

So, Madam Speaker, I am going to take this opportunity to thank all those people that came last night to committee to demonstrate their democratic right right here in Manitoba: to come to committee and be able to share their views and comments to Bill 35, which is a bill that is set up to make sure that we're keeping kids safe. We're talking about teachers' misconduct and also competency.

So, I look forward to hearing many more presenters later tonight and possibly into tomorrow evening.

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

Mr. Altomare: These teachers were indeed passionate last night in advocating for their profession, and they decried the lack of support from this government for the work that they've been doing every single day.

Last night, from among many presenters, we heard several sharing their dismay, Madam Speaker, at the state of education in our province under this PC government. They decried the lack of support, the funding cuts, that they have been subjected to due to this PC government's ongoing and persistent underfunding over these past seven years.

So, my question for the minister is this: Having listened to teachers last night, will he hear their concerns and make amendments to this Bill 35?

Mr. Ewasko: Once again, main focus of Bill 35, Madam Speaker, is student safety; protecting students in this great province of ours.

Again, I actually thought the member from Transcona was going to turn a leaf and maybe take some self-serving comments away from his Leader of the Opposition, who seems to stand in this House on a day-to-day basis, pretending to be some kind of actor. He's no Adam Beach, Madam Speaker.

This—Madam Speaker, last night we had many presenters come forward from various education stakeholders and once again, it's showing that myself and the department are listening to education partners right here—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Transcona, on a final supplementary.

Mr. Altomare: We know this PC government has consistently starved our education system of needed

funding these past seven years. That is without a doubt and on the record.

Teachers are on the front lines of our system, working with kids in the classroom and with families in our communities each and every day. And yet, schools across the province have been grappling with budgetary constraints for years under this PC government, which has forced them to cut and trim vital programs, Madam Speaker.

Giving their failures to engage with educators, including their failed and unsuccessful bill 64, is this minister willing today to amend this bill to address the concerns that he heard last night, and will continue to hear tonight—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Ewasko: Once again, it was a little difficult hearing the member's question, because his own leader was heckling him during his own question, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, so when the member opposite, from Transcona—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ewasko: —talks about funding in this great province of ours, I would like to state that, here in the city of Winnipeg, Louis Riel School Division for this upcoming school division is receiving \$8-million increase. Pembina Trails School Division is receiving a \$10-million increase. River East Transcona School Division—which the member used to teach for—\$11-million increase. St. James-Assiniboia, \$3.7-million increase. Seven Oaks, \$3.3 million—well, that's before, of course, they forgo \$4 million. Winnipeg School Division, \$12.5-million increase.

Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Backlog at Vital Statistics Wait-List Reduction Methods

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): There's a chronic issue in Manitoba where people are being denied health care and other basic services because the government isn't able to process birth certificates or health cards on time.

The government has claimed that the wait-list was 99 per cent solved, with only 43 people in the backlog, but this document, obtained through freedom of information that I tabled, shows that the department just redefined what a late list—wait-list was and put

1,949 birth, death and marriage certificates in a new category: waiting for info.

Can the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) explain the massive discrepancy between what her government was saying and what it is doing?

Hon. James Teitsma (Minister of Consumer Protection and Government Services): Let me begin by saying how grateful I am for the hard work of our civil service, and that includes the folks over at Vital Statistics, and the work that they are doing there to catch up on the backlog of birth, marriage and death certificates that we had coming out of the pandemic.

We have, as indicated by the Premier yesterday, added a significant number of staff there, including a number of staff in the birth registration unit, which is one of the areas of most significant concern. I'm already seeing on weekly reporting that the pace of birth certificate registration has accelerated and I'm holding them accountable to clear the backlog entirely.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Lamont: I was at the Public Accounts committee when these claims were repeated because Vital Statistics has had—been a problem that was so bad the Auditor General did a report on it.

We never got an explanation of how the department went off the rails because there was clearly a time in Manitoba when Vital Statistics was functioning and they were able to get these forms out on time, but it all broke down.

Not only were nearly 2,000 people not being counted as part of a backlog, if they didn't get their application corrected in 30 days, the file was closed and the application was just thrown out.

So, how much of the backlog was reduced by this government just throwing out applications?

Mr. Teitsma: I find the line of questioning that is being taken by the member opposite to be unhelpful, I think, to the overall discussion.

We do ensure and we do our best to improve the process, as we've engaged with also our digital technical services team to find ways to improve the processes. We've directed more and more individuals to use an online form so that we have less errors occurring due to handwriting.

But what the member opposite is trying to bring forward in this House is not helpful.

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

Health-Care Concerns for Seniors in Tyndall Park Request for Meeting with Minister

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park): Earlier today I tabled a list of ideas that come directly from seniors in Tyndall Park.

Now that the minister has had an opportunity to review the ideas, will he agree to meet with a few of my constituents over the next month?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): We appreciate the fact that this particular member often brings forward ideas and questions from her constituents. Sometimes there are students who come here to the gallery and watch her pose those questions.

In this case there are obviously questions from seniors, which she's posed to the Minister of Seniors, who's a great advocate on behalf of seniors, and I'm sure that the Minister of Seniors will respond directly to the member on the questions that she has tabled.

Candace House Funding Announcement

Mr. Josh Guenter (Borderland): Over the last five years, Candace House has been an integral support for families and survivors of violent crime. When people are at their most vulnerable, the staff and volunteers stand with them every step of the way.

Our government supports Candace House and the amazing people that provide these wraparound services, and I understand that the Minister of Justice recently made an announcement of additional supports.

Can he explain to this House exactly how this will further help Manitobans who are impacted by violent crime?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I'd like to thank my friend from Borderland for that question and congratulate him on the new member of the family.

Many Manitobans will remember the tragic story of Candace Derksen and the heroic efforts of Wilma and Cliff Derksen in looking to start up a place where victims' families, could go to outside the courtroom for support.

That resulted in 2018 of the opening of Candace House, close to the courthouse where individuals were

going through a trial process where there was a murder involved could go and get support.

Last week, we provided an additional \$200,000 to Candace House so it can be expanded so the great work can continue to be done and victims can be supported.

Provincial Park Fees Government Intention

MLA Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): The government's approach to Manitoba parks doesn't make any sense. We should be encouraging more Manitobans to get out and use our parks; instead, this government is making them unaffordable for everyday Manitobans.

* (14:30)

We received a FIPPA, which I'll table, which makes clear or at least more clear what the plan for the parks is by this PC government. They want to raise fees.

Can the minister tell us how much he's planning to raise park fees?

Hon. Greg Nesbitt (Minister of Natural Resources and Northern Development): The member across the aisle is just wrong. Our park system is a treasure here in Manitoba. We recently went through a parks reservation system overhaul. Great comments on the reservation system; many more sites booked at Manitoba; no increases planned.

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

MLA Lindsey: The PCs did make their plan quite clear in the FIPPA documents that we've tabled. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

MLA Lindsey: They've contracted out and privatized services. Now they're planning on hiking park fees. They've considered hiking fees for yurts by \$38 a night; camp cabins, \$44; seasonal rentals, a whopping \$1,047. That's just plain wrong.

Will the minister be upfront and tell us just how much he plans to hike park fees going forward?

Mr. Nesbitt: Well, the member across the floor is totally wrong—total fabrication. That doesn't exist.

What does exist is that the NDP's policies failed provincial parks. You know, we know provincial parks are a valued part of Manitoba, and we intend to keep them in the public system, here, in Manitoba. Parks

aren't for sale, as the members always like to talk about.

We will continue to improve parks. Budget 2023 earmarks \$220 million over the next 10 years for parks, and I urge the members on the other side to please stay tuned for a great announcement in May on how we're going to spend that money on parks all across this great province of Manitoba.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: And we do have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce to you.

We have seated in the public gallery from Neelin High School, 30 grade 9 students under the direction of Kerri Malazdrewicz. And this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson).

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

PETITIONS

Punjabi Bilingual Programs in Public Schools

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

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

(1) According to census 2021, Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altomare: —and there are 33,315 people in Manitoba whose native language is Punjabi.

(2) Thousands of Punjabi newcomers are coming to Manitoba as students and as immigrants, looking to call this province home. People of Punjabi origin contribute a great deal to the social and economic development of Canada and Manitoba in fields such as education, science, health, business and politics.

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

(4) Manitoba has many good bilingual programs in public schools for children and teens available in other languages, including French, Ukrainian, Ojibwe, Filipino, Cree, Hebrew and Spanish. Punjabi bilingual

programs for children and teens as well as Punjabi language instruction at a college and university level could similarly teach and maintain Punjabi language and culture.

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

We therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This petition, Madam Speaker, is signed by Prabhjot Kaur, Arshpreet Kaur, Ramanjot Kaur and many other Manitobans.

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

Louise Bridge

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

The background to this petition—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Maloway: —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 112 years.

(2) The current structure will undoubtedly be declared unsafe in a few years, as it's deteriorated extensively and is now functionally obsolete; therefore, it must be subject to more frequent unplanned repairs, cannot be widened to accommodate future traffic capacity.

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

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

(5) City capital and budget plans identified replacement of the Louise Bridge on a site just east of

the bridge and expropriated homes there on the south side of Nairn Avenue in anticipation of a 2015 start.

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 the 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 the new transportation master plan and eastern corridor project. Its recommendations have now identified the location of the new Louise bridge to be placed just to the west of the current bridge, not to the east as originally proposed.

(10) The City expropriation process has begun. The \$6.35-million street upgrade of Nairn Avenue from Watt Street to the 112-year-old bridge is complete.

(11) The new City administration has delayed the decision on the Louise Bridge for a minimum of one year and possibly up to 10 years, unless the Province steps in on behalf of northeast Winnipeg residents and completes this overdue link.

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the 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 the old bridge open for active transportation in the future.

And this petition is signed by many, many Manitobans.

Foot-Care Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The population of those aged 55-plus has grown to approximately 2,500 in the city of Thompson.

* (14:40)

(2) A large percentage of people in this age group require necessary medical foot care and treatment.

(3) A large percentage of those who are elderly and/or diabetic are living on low incomes.

(4) The northern regional health authority previously provided essential medical foot-care services to seniors and those living with diabetes until 2019, then subsequently cut the program after the last two nurses filling those positions retired.

(5) The number of seniors and those with diabetes has only continued to grow in Thompson and surrounding areas.

(6) There is no adequate medical care available in the city and region, whereas the city of Winnipeg has 14 medical foot-care centres.

(7) The implications of inadequate or lack of podiatric care can lead to amputations.

(8) The city of Thompson also serves as a regional health-care service provider, and the need for foot care extends beyond just those served in the capital city of the province.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to provide the services of two nurses to restore essential medical foot-care treatment to the city of Thompson effective April 1st, 2022.

And this has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader): First, on a matter of House business, pursuant to rule 34(7), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of

private members' business will be the one previously put forward by the honourable member for Dauphin (Mr. Michaleski). The title of that resolution is Calling on the Federal Government to Absorb the Cost of Increased RCMP Salaries.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Tuesday of private members' business will be one previously put forward by the honourable member for Dauphin. The title of the resolution is Calling on the Federal Government to Absorb the Cost of Increased RCMP Salaries.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Could you please resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

ROOM 254

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE

* (14:50)

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 and Climate. Questioning for this department will continue in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Just picking up from where we left off yesterday, Minister. We were talking about Sio Silica mine and we were discussing David Filmon, who is the son of Gary Filmon, who's obviously a prominent member of the PC party who has a financial stake in Sio Silica mine.

I'm wondering if the minister can advise that, given the reality that the community is going to be concerned about that connection, they're going to be concerned of undue influence on the minister and the party in making a decision.

I'm wondering if the minister can outline what steps he is prepared to take to give confidence to the community that there will be no political interference at all in relation to your ultimate decision on this

matter and how the community can have confidence that this isn't going to be a situation where, because of these personal relationships and party affiliations, that a fair decision, a neutral decision, will be made.

Hon. Kevin E. Klein (Minister of Environment and Climate): Thank you to my colleague for the question.

As all, you know, residents are aware that taxpayers that watch these proceedings, this is to talk about how we're spending your tax dollars to ensure that our environment is protected. And we did discuss this topic, as my colleague alluded to, quite extensively yesterday, and the answer really hasn't changed.

But I appreciate the fact that the tone seems to have changed from the member opposite who agrees that there should be no political interference. That is something that I said continuous times yesterday; there is no political interference. This decision will be made based on facts and scientific evidence. It does not become, and will not become, a political decision.

And, in fact, I'm a little concerned, and I want to take a moment to apologize to all the staff that work in the climate and environment department because to suggest that civil servants are experts, those that are educated and working for the people of Manitoba and the government of Manitoba, could be influenced by any political angle whatsoever is somewhat insulting to our staff who have dedicated themselves to this profession and have worked or continue to work daily and diligently to ensure the safety of all Manitobans.

This is why our government felt it was necessary, after listening to your concerns as residents, to send this to the Clean Environment Commission, an independent body that we know members opposite in the NDP ignored in 2003 when the clean environment committee said a new North End treatment plant had to be built immediately. That was in 2003, and it would have cost less than \$300,000 at that time.

I'm here to ensure that we are on top of issues like this and that we don't ignore the facts, that we don't ignore the experts of the Clean Environment Commission, and that we allow the educated staff to make the decisions that they're paid to make by your tax dollars.

This is not, and will not, be a political decision.

Mr. Wasyliv: When you threaten the clean water supply of the community, you threaten that community. And there is a lot of concern and unease in

southeastern Manitoba about the safety and future of their water supply.

You now add this element, that a prominent member of the PC Party has a direct financial stake in this project, and the concern that their connection to the minister and his party will unduly influence the decision.

There is obviously great concerns in the community about this project, and they want to know that it truly will be a fair, independent decision which will be absent of politics.

It should, again, be very simple for the minister to answer this question and not avoid it.

What steps is he going to put in place so that the people of Vivian, Manitoba, can be assured that they are going to get an independent decision free of politics from this minister?

* (15:00)

MLA Klein: I'm sure that my colleague across the floor wasn't suggesting that we're threatening the people of Vivian, Manitoba, and he was making, you know—trying to make a—some kind of correlation between what he was asking and the statement he was making.

But listen, it's very important that people understand and that we as elected officials understand: people are tired of misleading and—statements and insinuations. And I've been talking to people on the street and they're telling me that they're tired of that, that they want facts, that they want to know what's being done for them. They pay a lot of money for all of us to sit here. They want the government to be accountable for how we spend our money and how we protect their environment, and I think it's very clear that this government takes the protection of the environment very seriously.

I can speak from my own personal experience as a city councillor where I fought alongside my friend and colleague and, you know, a strong NDP supporter, to reduce the phosphorus coming from the North End treatment plant going into Lake Winnipeg. And he and I worked together on that, which is exactly what taxpayers want from elected officials.

They want to see us take these issues seriously and get work done, and I can assure the people of Vivian, Manitoba, that the fears and insinuations have no basis, that, in fact, the Clean Environment Commission will—has done their part. They will bring back their information. The decision will be based solely on scientific evidence. There's no basis for the

line of insinuations pretending to be in the form of a question.

Another bit of evidence on that is, you know, some of the work that you can count on is what this government has done for orphaned and abandoned mines. Many years ago, when the NDP were the government of the day, they ignored the abandoned mines. They ignored what was happening in much of our province and just left them there to become safety and environmental risks.

Something in this budget that you should be learning about is that we're investing over \$50 million to clean up orphaned and abandoned mines that were left, ignored and untouched by the members opposite, the previous NDP. They ignored that. And we've had to take steps to ensure the safety of Manitobans, which is very important to me and to this government because it's—the environment created around where mines are left is in danger. And when they're ignored as they were, for decades, it created more and more problems for drinking water, for our recreational waters, and for our forests and for people living in the area.

That's why—I'll note again, because this what this is about. Estimates are about the money we're spending. We're investing \$50.7 million and we've already had success by mitigating two major orphaned and abandoned mines that were left by the previous government, that were ignored by the previous government, that no one wanted to pay attention to even though the experts were saying work had to get done.

We've taken those steps. The Ruttan man—mine, sorry—was completed. That was a big project, and that's something that's very important to all of us here in Manitoba.

So, I'm very proud of the work that our staff is doing, and I'm certainly going to ensure that our staff is respected and that we do not insinuate in any way, shape or form that the experts that this government of Manitoba hires, that works for the government of Manitoba, that works for the taxpayers of Manitoba, are simply at the—that will make decisions at the whim of a politician.

This is their decision to make. This is the rule. It's the director's decision; it's not a politician's decision. And it won't be a politician's decision. We will continue to allow our staff, the experts, the civil servants that you pay—we will allow them to do the job that they are the best at doing in this province.

Mr. Wasyliv: The problem—trouble with what the minister just said is that he's the ultimate decision maker and is the one that's held accountable, not his staff. And it will be him announcing the decision, not the staff.

And there's a real perception here that this decision could be influenced by political connections, and this government has a long history of rewarding their political friends at the expense of Manitobans and expense of Manitoba taxpayers. So it's certainly within the character of this government.

So it's hard for Manitobans to trust this government, when they won't even answer simple questions that they will create some guardrails to prevent any sort of political interference for a decision as critical as the safety of people's drinking water.

But I'll ask the minister this: If this silica—Sio Silica mine project goes ahead, is there a plan to protect the local community's aquifer and source of drinking water?

* (15:10)

MLA Klein: You know, on—when we look back at the work that this Department of Environment and Climate has been doing for the Manitobans, I'm very proud of what they've accomplished. And in the past year, the Environment and Climate department has rescinded 15 boil water advisories that were in effect. And that's quite a significant accomplishment. They were in effect for longer than one year, including 10 long-term boil water advisories that were in effect for much, much longer.

Our government, our staff took action because we consider every drop of water in this province to count. Our staff are dedicated to the safety of Manitobans and that will not change. Our staff are experts in the field and they will be involved in all decisions that are made.

In fact, I think this is evident when on November 8th, this government released Manitoba's water strategy. This strategy aimed to meet the diverse water needs of Manitobans and provides high-level strategic direction and guidance on water management. This will be for the coming decades and beyond. Because that's what's important, that we listen to the experts and we have the experts put together a plan.

You may recall that when the members opposite were in power, the NDP, Lake Winnipeg, Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis fisheries were declared the worst managed. Let me repeat that: the

worst-managed in the world. That's not North America, that's not Canada, that's the world, by Seafood Watch. And Lake Winnipeg, one of our most precious, precious bodies of water, under the NDP, was declared the most threatened freshwater lake in the world.

Our management—water management strategy is long overdue, something that the previous governments ignored again, that they didn't take seriously. Throughout the strategy development, hundreds, hundreds of Manitobans were engaged from the community. Organizations were engaged; agencies, businesses. And we all discussed water management challenges, issues, priorities and needs. That's what you want from your government.

The launch of the water management strategy is only the beginning of the work to build Manitoba's water future. It's not an end; it's a beginning. Manitoba is developing its initial water action plan—which I'm very excited about—which will define specific projects, programs and initiatives that will transform the strategy's framework into concrete actions that residents will see, that residents can get updates on, that they can be assured of safety with. And our action plan looks to be released here within the next month.

So, I am very proud of what our government is doing, but more proud of the civil servants who work in environment, climate and strategy—or in environment, climate because of the strategy. And if you dig deeper into the strategy, you'll find that we're supporting resilience in the face of climate change, something that the Auditor General in a Winnipeg Sun article said the NDP failed to do. That they in fact ignored it and failed miserably.

We are working on reconciliation through advancing Indigenous inclusion in water management. We're meeting the growing economic and community needs for water, including priority infrastructure needs. We're maintaining and enhancing competitiveness of our economy while protecting your safety. We're continuing to adopt innovative solutions led by experts and scientists, and we're building on existing and facilitating new collaborations and long-lasting partnerships between governments, industry and water stakeholders.

You'd know, as most people in the city do, about the task force that we announced with my former colleague and friend, Brian Mayes, to address phosphorus and other pollutants that come from the North End treatment plant that should've been changed years

and years ago, but was ignored by members opposite when they had the power.

Mr. Wasyliw: Just would caution the minister that the people of southeastern Manitoba are watching this, and they're looking for answers, and they're looking for responses. And what they've learned this afternoon is that this minister has a friend named Brian Mayes. What they didn't learn is that this government has no plan to protect their water if something goes wrong. So I take it from the minister's non-responsive answer and evasion that there is no plan to protect the water from this development.

Mr. Len Isleifson, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

So I'll ask the minister this question: Is there a plan to manage the potential health risks of breathing in silica dust?

* (15:20)

MLA Klein: Once again, it's disappointing and disrespectful to the people of Vivian, Manitoba, to be fear mongered upon and to hear comments, degrading comments, about friends that I have or—and that I'm working with.

I realize the members opposite did not get along when the NDP held government for such a long time. And I remember being a part of the media when many of their Cabinet 'meners' quit—Cabinet ministers quit because they couldn't get along.

And I think what's important here is what the facts are. And for the people of Vivian, Manitoba, the facts are really important. And it's obvious that the member opposite doesn't understand the Legislature, and I would urge the member to take the time to review the legislation and review the policies that are in place, because they are very clear—very, very clear—that every single potential risk to public health or environment is considered in every environmental review process.

It's important to note that simply trying to make this a political gesture or use for political spin is insulting to the people of Manitoba as well.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Because I believe the people of Manitoba are smarter, and the people of Manitoba know and respect the staff who have been with the Environment and Climate Department for decades, that have done the work to acquire the knowledge and the expertise to work in this field to ensure the safety of Manitobans. And to suggest in any way, shape or form otherwise

that our staff would be politically engaged or directed, is false and unnecessary.

This is an important decision for the people of Vivian, Manitoba, and it will be treated as an important decision. It will be based—no licence—not one licence, no discussion will happen until a full review is done. And that includes section 35 with our Indigenous leaders and communities. We know how important that is, and we know that in the past, members opposite of the NDP didn't engage with Indigenous communities.

And it's very important, as part of this process, that we listen to all individuals, as the Clean Environment Commission did. Hundreds of people appeared, not only opposed, but in support.

Everything will be considered. All reports will be considered, not by a politician, and I'm the first one that will tell you you don't want a politician making this decision. You want the experts making the decision based on evidence, based on scientific fact.

We, on this side of the House, the PC government, believe in the experts. We believe in our civil servants, and we believe that the legislation and the policies in place protect Manitobans. And we will fight to ensure that Manitoba's safety is protected.

And I want to say it again, because this is critical for anyone watching this, because this is what happens, right? I've seen it in the media for years and years and years.

You get a political party that wants to try to put out some kind of a statement; they're looking for a clip. That's why I move my hands, so they can't edit the video sometimes.

So every single potential risk to public health or the environment is considered in every environmental review process done by experts, educated individuals that have your safety top of mind.

At process we did an environmental review 1, and our experts said it has to go to the Clean Environment Commission, so we send it to the Clean Environment Commission.

And now, because of section 35 consultations, which are the right thing, we are going to now consult with Indigenous leaders in Indigenous communities.

I can assure you of one thing: The health and safety, not only of people in Vivian, Manitoba, but all over this province, is a top priority of all of the civil

servants that work in Environment and Climate and of myself.

Mr. Wasyliv: If an environmental licence is granted for the Sio Silica mine, is there any agreement for the company to remediate the mine site after it's abandoned?

* (15:30)

MLA Klein: I just wanted to note that I—that the member opposite seemed to have gotten angry when I said it was a good question, and I meant that: I thought it was a good question, and I don't think there's any reason to get angry or let tempers get the best of us during these meetings. This is for the benefit of all Manitobans, and especially this discussion.

So, the simple answer to the question is yes. In fact, it was because of our government that there are new rules and regulations in place. The reality is that—and I know the—you know, the members opposite are laughing because they don't find this very, you know, serious—but mining companies are required to obtain environmental—Environment Act licences that develop closure plans and provide financial securities, something that never happened before under the previous NDP government.

And we've put those into place, and we talked earlier during these meetings about our orphaned and abandoned mines projects. That's cost taxpayers millions of dollars because that was ignored under the previous NDP government and the members opposite.

So our government, and the Department of Environment and Climate, has taken action—tangible action—to ensure that there are plans in place, and that there are financial securities in place in advance of any project starting. And this is for any mine. So we're not talking specifically about one mine; this is for any mine, and that wasn't there before.

Our department holds all environmental licences and those that hold them to the highest standards possible. It is their job to continuously hold these companies accountable. And they do their job very well. We are out there in the field on a regular basis ensuring that organizations within the province of Manitoba that may be polluting the environment have a potential to or have an environmental licence, that they stay in accordance with their licence.

We do not allow any diversion from that. Our environment staff take this job and your safety very seriously. Unlike—I think the members opposite were laughing while I was trying to explain this—this is a

serious, serious issue, and our department takes it serious. And that's why no licences will be approved until all of the evidence—it is in, and all the facts are in and they can be verified through science. And it will be decided upon by experts, and not politicians.

Mr. Wasyliw: I'm glad to hear that there is some remediation plan. I'm wondering if the minister can tell us how much money has been deposited by Sio Silica for this remediation, and where is it held and how is it held. Is it in trust, is it in the government? So, if he could give some details about that amount and the circumstances.

MLA Klein: I thank the member for the question.

It's a leading question for those watching at home because the member opposite knows very well that what he's asking is: Is there a predetermined outcome? And we have stated on the record several times, and we will continue to give the facts.

There is no predetermined outcome. This is in the application process where it needs to be. And this is in the hands of the experts, which is where Vivian residents want it to be—in the hands of experts. They don't want it to be used on political flyers. They don't want it to send fear among the community. They want facts, and they want experts making decisions on this.

And I can assure the people of Vivian, Manitoba, the taxpayers, that we are taking the safety of their drinking water seriously. It's a No. 1 priority for the staff and the experts and the educated individuals of the climate and environment department.

I understand, during the discussions that we've had here, that part of the plan for the members opposite and the NDP to protect the environment is to simply raise the carbon tax at the first opportunity they get. But I remind residents watching at home of the track record, because that's what's really important here. It's the facts that are irrefutable, and facts that are irrefutable, there's a Winnipeg Sun article that said: The NDP's climate change plan was a disaster.

And I'll go on to remind residents that it went on to say: The former government's climate change plan was fraudulent from the beginning, driven almost entirely by government spin and propaganda. It had no basis in science. And that's again what we're hearing here today. Members opposite believe it's a political decision. We, on the other hand, believe it's a science decision. The article went on to say that it contained no real planning and had no realistic mechanisms.

* (15:40)

So let's understand something, here. The track record of the members opposite is clear. It's politically driven. It's tax-driven. We're science-driven. We're basing all decisions on an environmental review, and it's a process that is led by experts and well-educated individuals who work for the government of Manitoba. They work for the residents of Vivian, Manitoba. They work for all residents of Manitoba, and their No. 1 priority is the safety of all residents in Manitoba.

To suggest, even for a moment otherwise, is very, very disappointing because our staff take their job seriously and they know the importance of making a decision based on evidence and on scientific fact. They will not make this on a political promise, or they won't make it on potential flyer drops; they'll make it on facts. That's what they're doing by listening to the CEC commission—or the Clean Environment Commission—and now, going into section 35 consultations, where we'll listen to Indigenous leaders and we'll listen to Indigenous communities, something that the members opposite didn't do. And they actually didn't even listen to the science. They didn't even ask when it came to the Keeyask project.

We will stick to the facts. We will stick to the science. And as everyone should know, so that they don't get, you know, trapped in a spin, it is the decision of the director, who is an environmental specialist on this. It is not a political decision, and again, to suggest otherwise is unnecessary.

Mr. Wasyliw: It's certainly concerning that the minister is not aware of the act or his ultimate responsibility in it, or his power in the act, that he is the ultimate decision maker for the Sio Silica mine project, and he's hiding behind provincial staff who can't defend themselves by doing so.

You know, Manitobans have a right to clean drinking water, and I was hoping that after the minister's shameful performance yesterday, he would reflect on it and come here and take the whole Sio Silica mine situation seriously. He clearly hasn't.

We're seeing concern from the communities. The people of Dawson Trail and Springfield-Ritchot want answers. If they had listened to the minister yesterday and today, they would have basically been served a buffet of evasion and non-responsive answers. But through that haze of gaslighting, we were able to discern some facts, and here are the facts that the minister likes so much. The minister will not commit

to meeting with concerned residents. The minister will not disclose if a decision will be made prior to the election. The minister, despite knowledge that a prominent PC Party member has a direct financial stake in this project, will not ensure that political interference will have any part of this decision.

The minister has no plan to protect the community's drinking water. The minister has no plan to protect the community from adverse effects of silica dust, and the minister couldn't even confirm that there's sufficient money in trust for cleanup and remediation of this site.

Now, I've asked the minister a number of times that people are scared. People are scared of losing their life savings, that if that water gets contaminated, their life, their property where all their wealth is, can get reduced to zero in value. They are scared that they will not be able to bathe their children in this water. They are scared that they will not be able to cook their family's meal with this water.

This minister has the power today. He has the power to release a statement to the community guaranteeing that no matter what will happen, he will ensure that that community has safe drinking water.

Will he make that commitment today?

MLA Klein: This gives me a really good opportunity to give some evidence to taxpayers in Manitoba on how this game is played.

The member opposite trying to bully his way into having decisions and answers that he would like is not working. The member opposite made six claims, all of which were false and misleading—insinuations, if anything, at best.

However, I understand the member opposite, although trying to criticize me, is an attorney. And I know that his job is to create a shadow of doubt.

So, let me give you the facts, because that's what's most important here. And I'll show you both clips. The reality is this, the process isn't done, so it's premature to 'discuss' these details. I do not want to guess what the Clean Environment Commission will say. I don't want to guess at what is in the report.

And you don't pay elected officials to guess. You don't pay elected officials to play games with words, and try to create a shadow of doubt, to try and pretend like there might be something there, that kids won't be able to bathe. That's really unfortunate.

But let's go to the great—the biggest fact, here, that the member opposite said that I was wrong, that I had the power to make the decision. Please note that I am reading from the legislation.

The Sio Silica mine is a class 2 development, and upon receipt—this is section 11(11)—upon receipt of a proposal for a class 2 development under subsection (1) or (6), the director shall deal with the proposal in accordance with subsections (8), (9) and (10), and shall (a) issue a licence to the proponent with such specific—specifications, limits, terms and conditions or with a requirement for such modifications as the director deems necessary to ensure efficient environmental management; or (b)—and again, this is the false statement that I am correcting; this is from the Legislature: (b) refuse to issue—this is the director—(b) refuse to issue the licence and thereby prohibit the construction, alteration, operation or implementation of the development. That is a fact from the legislation. That is irrefutable.

* (15:50)

We're not playing games with your health, and we won't play games. We're not going to try to create a shadow of doubt and tell you all these scary things that are not real. That is unnecessary. Governments waste enough time playing politics.

This is a decision that I can assure all Manitobans, like every decision that comes forward, will be made by experts. It will be made by those who are educated in the field, that have experience in the field, that take your health and safety as a priority because, obviously, politicians take it very lightly.

It's a game, and it shouldn't be a game. And I respect all of the civil servants, the public servants, that work in the environment and climate department and all departments of government, because they are doing the job that needs to be done, the job that you pay them to do. And thank goodness for these individuals, because if you're watching today you'll see that we just, as politicians, we're just trying to create a false narrative and put fear into everybody, including bathing.

Unnecessary—and, really, the member opposite should apologize to the people of Vivian, Manitoba, and more specifically, to the staff of the public service—public servants, because they are doing their job. They are working for Manitobans. They are protecting Manitobans. And to suggest otherwise, well, it's just a silly game of trying to create a shadow of doubt.

Mr. Wasyliw: The issue isn't whether the civil servants is doing their job. Everybody knows that they are. The issue is whether the minister is, and that's the open question.

Again, the minister could settle the fears of this community in an instant by making a proper statement guaranteeing that southeastern Manitobans, no matter what decision is made, will have the right to clean drinking water.

It is shocking, at this point, that whenever the minister is being asked to commit to that, he refuses to do so. And it now creates further concern in that community of why is this minister refusing to commit to safe drinking water in southeastern Manitoba. Why would he do that? But yet he does. He persists.

So I will change track here and I'll ask a question for the minister that perhaps he will answer: What is the current vacancy rate for the department?

MLA Klein: And thank you for that brief little video clip from the member opposite, trying to, once again, mislead Manitobans when we have read the legislation on the record. But why continue to play that game with them?

So, we're going to let that go. We don't like insinuations or false allegations, and I will continue to defend the department on those.

But if the member opposite could be specific when he says what's the vacancies in a department. I know that this is new, maybe to the members opposite, but a business and the environment and climate department has several departments, so maybe they could be specific on what department they're actually talking about or what they're trying to get information on, because that's how we answer questions.

We need specific questions, not allegations, not insinuations, not misleading statements. We need a question, and we can answer that question, but it can't be a generic question because we certainly don't want to give the taxpayers of Manitoba generalities in our statements because we had that for 17 years under the NDP. Generalities, we won't raise the PST; we raised the PST.

We've heard from the NDP here during these hearings over the last couple of days what you can get from this is (a) the members opposite never opened the budget book for climate, environment because they haven't asked a budget question yet. Number 2, that they—it's obvious they just want to raise the carbon tax because they believe, like the NDP-Liberal

coalition at the federal level, that how we solve the environment problems is by costing Manitobans more and more money every day. Let's continue to raise the price of gas and maybe, just maybe, that will save the environment.

So I would like the member opposite to be very clear on what department they are looking for our vacancy rates in.

Mr. Wasyliw: I really don't believe that this minister is that obtuse. He knows exactly what the question is. He just simply doesn't want to answer it.

So, can the minister provide a breakdown of what is, for the entire department, vacancy rate; what is the percentage; how many FTEs they are; and if he wishes to break it down by subgrouping, oh, that would be lovely.

MLA Klein: Thank you to my colleague for the question.

And again, I think we can be professional when we make our comments. We don't have to get angry or try to make rude comments. I would hope that we could maintain a certain level of professionalism here.

Had the—if I'm not sure if the member has the budget books in front of them, but page 32, 33 and 34 very clearly outline the staff makeup of Environment and Climate.

And, again, that's why these meetings are held, so that we can have a discussion about that and research what's in the budget book and hold the government accountable, which I believe is very important. So, let me provide the facts because, again, I think it's important for Manitobans to get the facts and not spin or innuendo.

We have over 337 staff. Our vacancy rate is quite low, actually, it's under 19 per cent which, when you look at the national average of corporations and other industries—or industries and governments, it's actually quite low.

* (16:00)

But let's talk about where those are because that's what's important. So, our executive support is down by two right now. Our administrative and financial services are down by 16, but that's able to be covered by a whole-of-government approach. Our legislative policy and co-ordination is down by two. Our environmental compliance is down by 11. *[interjection]*

No, it's not a: holey. I mean, they—what's going to happen is the member opposite is going to try to scare

you with that number when we have a large amount of staff there, so 11 is a very small percentage. So don't be 'sued' by, again, some allegations. That's very small. Environmental approvals is very small, under 10 per cent. Environmental programs and remediations, very small. Office of drinking water is only down by 2.

Again, these are small numbers. When you compare them to the reality of what's happening in corporations and in industry across Canada; it's happening in governments, you have governments pilching from other governments trying to get staff because there is a shortage of skilled labour. And we don't have that problem.

I'm very proud of our numbers because it falls below the national average. And that's something very important to keep in mind because the next line of questioning will take you down a different path, and I want to be clear that we're under 19 per cent, which is under the national average and allows us to function quite well, and allows our experts to function within their capacities.

Mr. Wasyliw: If the compliance section was fully staffed, how many positions are there that you say that 11 are vacant?

MLA Klein: This question gives me an opportunity to give a shout-out to our officers in Brandon. During the royal winter fair, I had the real pleasure of spending some time with our officers that are keeping Manitobans safe. A lot of young, energetic individuals that take their job seriously.

We talked about ways to improve how we get things done. We talked about some of their bigger challenges, the fun that they have, what was exciting to them, what isn't exciting. I got to learn a lot about the work that these individuals do.

And I want to give them a shout-out because not a lot of people understand that our field inspection officers get the job done year after year after year. And I want to thank them for that.

And I want to recognize that our government took the time to introduce a day—for environment officers day in June—to recognize the incredible work that our environment officers do on a daily basis. And the individuals that I met in Brandon were shining examples of the great work that's done by our officers, not only in the Westman area, but all across the province.

I'm also very proud of the fact that we're on track for all field inspections, that last couple of years

during COVID—which we know was a major strain on governments and organizations around the globe; this impacted everybody, and to pretend like it didn't happen is just silly—but we were able to complete all field inspections. That's how great the staff at the environment are. That's how serious they take their job. All field inspections were completed during COVID.

And I want to add, why is that such an important fact? Because during COVID we had to call on our field inspectors to help with public safety, and they took on that responsibility while maintaining the requirements of their job that they take very seriously. And that's what I got from every individual that I talked to in the field.

* (16:10)

Now, the question was how many—what percentage does it represent? We're down 7 per cent. That is incredible. That's phenomenal. And why are we only down 7 per cent? Well, because we respect our employees. We respect the work that they do.

We've had employees and officers that have been with the government of Manitoba for over 20 years. Some that I met have been there for over 25 years. That is something that you don't find in a lot of organizations right now. That's the commitment, the dedication of these individuals—experts that take drinking water and our environment seriously. They don't get involved in this political arena. They focus on Manitobans, which is what we want them to do.

So we're proud of the fact that it's 7 per cent vacancy rate and that we're getting the job done because that's key here. What's key here is that the job is getting done and nothing is getting missed, and we have to—we would be remiss if we didn't—we have to recognize the great work and thank all of our field inspectors and the management team.

And I can tell you that it was one of those offices that I never wanted to leave, and I've toured offices for many organizations all across this country, newsrooms, from coast to coast to coast. There was laughter in there. There was seriousness. They could talk about the issues, but they could also have a little bit of fun at work, and I was happy to see that. And I thank them for what they do on a daily basis.

Mr. Wasyliw: I wonder if the minister can tell us what areas, if any, he's looking at as designating as protected.

MLA Klein: I think my colleague has not done the research on this. Protected spaces fall under Natural Resources. That's not the Environment and Climate.

Mr. Wasyliw: Can the minister provide statistics on the number of Manitobans who took part in Efficiency Manitoba programs last year, and was there any sort of internal goals that were set?

* (16:20)

MLA Klein: Excuse me—thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we should start with a little bit of history around Efficiency Manitoba.

As many of my colleagues will recall, and most residents of Manitoba, it used to be called Power Smart, and it fell under Hydro—Manitoba Hydro's jurisdiction, which of course led many to believe that it wasn't transparent, that there was an issue with that. That was under our former colleagues, the NDP.

The Public Utilities Board, of course, suggested, appropriately, that Power Smart was in the wrong location and it needed to be more transparent, which is something that the PC government is working towards in all areas of government, is full transparency and accountability.

The Manitoba—or, Efficiency Manitoba program doesn't hone in on one specific element, and to ask for a number, again, is—well, it's just—it's confusing to those that would be watching, because it's trying to lead down a path. The Efficiency Manitoba is part of a whole approach that we're taking to reduce greenhouse emissions as well. And I'll, you know, refer to a Winnipeg Sun article where the Auditor General, Norm Richard [*phonetic*], confirmed the failures of the NDP in what I—what he called, and I quote: a scathing review released.

The report that was tabled in the legislative by the NDP proved to them that not only did the NDP fail with meeting any of their greenhouse targets that they promised to do, they knew they wouldn't achieve those goals almost, and I quote, almost immediately after it released its plan.

This government, the PC government, is taking action. And Efficiency Manitoba will, as they always do, table an annual report that will provide numbers to the member opposite and to the public. Open and transparent, this is what we want. We want to be open and transparent to all taxpayers, and that report will be tabled as it always is, as I'm sure the member opposite well knows, that the annual reports are always tabled.

And in fact, some of the great things that we've managed to do to reduce greenhouse gases are, you know, at the top of my head: the coal plant that is now gone, that Manitoba Hydro had; the Selkirk natural gas facility, which was closed, ahead of schedule, I might add; our biofuels mandate, which I think is a leader in this country, that other provinces and territories and such are looking at to see how well we've done.

Manitoba efficiency also offers more than one program—[*interjection*] Excuse you.

And it's important for you to know that it's more than one program. They have programs that are for residential. They have programs that are for commercial, they have programs that are for industrial, programs for agriculture. They have programs for First Nations. They have programs for income-qualified individuals.

And that's the benefit of going outside and being more transparent, is that Manitoba efficiency is able to provide facts and figures to all Manitobans.

And, again, as the member knows, the annual report will be tabled by the department. But let's just go over a couple of key issues.

Manitoba—or Efficiency Manitoba has grown to over 40 programs, 40 opportunities, and offers to help improve the energy efficiency of buildings and homes in Manitoba that will ensure that we achieve emission reductions.

And that's something that the NDP promised to do, but as the Auditor General at the time, Norm Richards [*phonetic*], confirmed, the failures were great. And they knew when they said they were going to reduce greenhouse gasses that they couldn't. They went ahead and didn't anyways.

We're being transparent and we will continue to be open and transparent and put programs forward that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Wasyliw: Does the minister think his department is doing enough to combat climate change?

MLA Klein: Yes.

Mr. Wasyliw: On page 20 of the Estimates book, it says that funding for the 2023-2024 will again provide \$1.5 million to promote green technology with made-in-Manitoba innovations.

Does the minister think that that's enough, given the magnitude of climate change and the urgent action that's needed?

* (16:30)

MLA Klein: Yet again, another example of a misleading statement and trying to create a shadow of doubt for election pamphlets—quite disappointing.

The reality is, for—the question was about one project. And let me give you the facts on this that are irrefutable, and I would challenge the member opposite to correct me if I'm wrong, but the previous government under the NDP, for this one project, only budgeted \$300,000.

And when this government took over in 2016, it quickly doubled the investment into this one project, and then it's increased from there. So it went from \$300,000 to \$600,000. Now it's \$1.5 million. And it is just one of multiple projects.

My colleague would like you to believe that that's all we're doing, is \$1.5 million; that's everything; that's our plan. And, really, what that means is that they're trying to lead you down to the path and justify their campaign, which is to increase the carbon tax on Manitobans so that you pay 5 cents more, or maybe even greater than that, on gasoline and other products. So that's what they're trying to lead this to.

But this is one of several products and programs that we have ongoing right now, and of course we will not, and we will fight against, increasing your carbon tax as well as the PST.

We just have to look at what's been done to reduce emissions. Let's look at what the NDP did—nothing. In fact, we know that they put out a statement on reducing your greenhouse gas emissions that was false. And we know from the Auditor General of the time that it was false and that the headline from a newspaper article is, NDP's climate change plan was a disaster.

That's pretty bold words in a newspaper headline, and I can tell you that as a former newspaper executive and somebody who's worked in the media for a long time. That's a bold statement to make in a headline: NDP's climate change plan was a disaster.

So what the member's trying to do is bring out one program when we have multiple programs that's happening. In fact, let's talk about some of those. The Efficient Trucking Program will reduce cumulative greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 121,000 tons by 2030. That's 121,000 tons more than the NDP ever did when they were in government.

Manitoba increased the renewable fuel content by 10 per cent in gasoline and 5 per cent in diesel, reducing emissions by close to 500,000 tons annually.

Let's go back. What did the NDP do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? They put forward a plan they knew was not achievable and did nothing. The headline, again, in a newspaper, after an interview with the Auditor General of the day: NDP's climate change plan was a disaster.

Our climate change saw closing of Manitoba's—Manitoba Hydro's last coal-fired generating unit. And I'm reading from this because I want you to have the facts. And we also closed natural gas units in Selkirk ahead of schedule, and it's resulted in reducing emissions by over 56,000 tons.

So we're almost over 700,000 tons reduced in just three projects. Member opposite wanted to talk about one.

Manitoba is also implementing soil, crops and livestock beneficial management practices along with improved waste diversion activities. Couple that with all the programs—you heard me mention it earlier, and I don't think the member opposite will bring it up—but there's over 40 programs available with Efficiency Manitoba to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the province of Manitoba.

Look, it is no secret that Manitoba is uniquely positioned as the leader in the green transition, that we were a leader in the green economy. Over 99.6 per cent of our energy is clean. We're one of the only people that can say that.

What does the member opposite want to do? Well, they're promising to raise your carbon tax and your PST.

We won't do that.

Mr. Wasyliw: Well, I'll remind the minister that this is, in fact, his carbon tax. This is the PC-Liberal carbon tax that he has the power to impose and change it tomorrow if he wishes.

But he doesn't because he actually likes this. It's his carbon tax. It's the PC-Liberal carbon tax, which goes up every year. So, in fact, it is this minister and this government that is raising the carbon tax on Manitobans. So, you know, when we talk about facts, those are the facts.

But—[*interjection*]-Minister, when we were—the question was whether or not \$1.5 million to promote green technology in Manitoba was enough. And this

minister clearly believes that it is. And he—obviously, from his comments, he thinks that's enough money. But to put some perspective in this, the Province announced up to \$5.5 million to host the Grey Cup, yet this funding to promote green technology with made-in-Manitoba innovations was only \$1.5 million budgeted this year.

This is the biggest threat of a generation to our community, and why does the minister not treat it accordingly? Why does he think \$1.5 million is enough for green technology? *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

MLA Klein: For those watching at home, this is not a reality show. The member opposite, for some reason, is trying to now convince Manitobans that there's a PC-Liberal coalition in Ottawa, and I don't know how in tune with politics on a national level all of us are, but we should be and know that it's actually an NDP-led coalition with the Liberals that have put in the carbon tax. In fact, it was our government that gave a carbon tax rebate, and it is shocking to me that we would think so little of the intelligence of Manitobans to make up such false allegations.

And, once again, to bring up a false and misleading statement of \$1.5 million in green tech—everybody knows there's much more than that. We know that there's \$66.7 million for green initiatives in the province of Manitoba. How much more is that than the NDP government had? Sixty-six point seven million dollars more, because they had nothing because their plan wasn't real. We've seen it. It's in the media. We've seen it from the Auditor General. It was a fake plan, and everything we hear is fake.

The fact that there's a PC-Liberal coalition. Trudeau—can you imagine Trudeau and Poilievre having a coalition on carbon tax? Please. Why is that even being talked about here? That is ridiculous when we're here spending hundreds of thousands of your dollars to review the budget. The initiatives are in place.

Now, I noticed that the—my colleague waited until Obby Khan left the room to bring up the fact that he doesn't like the Grey Cup, that we shouldn't be supporting it—

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order.

When referring to somebody here, they must be referred to by their constituency or their title.

MLA Klein: I will apologize for that. Still learning some of the idiosyncrasies of provincial politics.

But let me talk about some of the great things that are being done. First and foremost, Manitobans should know that you have 99.6 of your energy is clean. I challenge you to go to other provinces that have NDP governments and see if they can match that. They can't.

Manitoba—we've introduced some projects that include Manitoba Organic Alliance incorporated. Nutrient—it's a nutrient budgeting tool to enhance the adoption of 'legeme,' I believe, is how you pronounce that? *[interjection]*

Legume? Is it legume? Sorry. Thank you—fertilizers to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions in agriculture. It was like \$92,000.

* (16:40)

Carbon Lock Technologies, addressing methane emissions and nutrient loading through biosolids. Red River College, drain water heat recovery system for commercial and institutional buildings. We have the Fort Whyte Foundation for the bioswale and electric vehicle charging. We have charging stations happening throughout the province. Let's not forget the electric tundra buggy.

I could go on for hours about all of the programs that we are doing to reduce greenhouse emissions, and the investments that we're making and the work that we're doing in collaboration. And that's the key here. Do you want elected officials that know how to collaborate, and not just make stuff up and take a very authoritative approach? You want your government to collaborate with industry, because industry will lead the green economy. They are the largest emitters, and they need to find ways to reduce their emissions—and they will.

And you want a government that's collaborating with them, not that's simply going to tack more and more and more tax on them. We've heard it here. We've heard that the NDP, like the NDP-Liberal coalition, believes that a carbon tax is the way to fix the environment. And I don't think that anyone believes that. We need action. We need tangible action.

And that action is like the action that we're taking, where the digital twinning of a flood-vulnerable First Nations community to provide visual communication understanding of flood-resilient strategies: that's a project that we did to help our environment through Red River College. Or the Winnipeg Repair Education and Cycling Hub; \$150,000. There's so many more.

This is what's important. The facts that are irrefutable, not creating the shadow of a doubt.

Mr. Wasyliw: I wanted to get back to something bizarre that the minister just said. He said that the carbon tax wouldn't, sort of, assist with climate change.

Yesterday he said that he supported the made-in-Manitoba climate change plan, which is—central focus was a carbon tax, and that he supported the plan and carbon tax.

So, is he now saying that he doesn't support any carbon tax, and he's repudiating the made-in-Manitoba plan of his own government?

MLA Klein: It's impossible to—and childish—to continue to answer false allegations, and I'm not going to do that. Let's give you some more facts; and again, they're irrefutable. That's actually quite disappointing. I thought what—it would be more professional at the provincial level than it was at City Hall. I was wrong.

Our new Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) has been very clear that the NDP-Liberal coalition should pause the carbon tax. And I don't think there's a Manitoban that will stop and say increasing our gas is what they want. Increasing the cost to you is what they want. At no time did we make the statements that the member is alleging.

And again, that's allowed. That's allowed under parliamentary privilege. That's terrible, and that's a waste of your money.

Let's talk about the facts; and the facts are, the member of Fort Garry has been clear: provincial NDP, just like Jagmeet Singh, would raise the carbon tax. We are taking a collaborative approach. We are getting the job done. We announced that we are on track to meet the one megaton reduction in greenhouse gas, when the NDP—the members opposite—put forward numbers they knew were wrong.

Again, let me remind you of the media headline: the NDP's climate change plan—give me a second, I want to make sure that I get it right, because facts matter to some. Not to everybody; they matter to me. NDP's climate change plan was a disaster. Not, it was okay; not, it was bad. A disaster.

And I'll quote from that article, because this is factual. The former government's climate change plan was fraudulent from the very beginning, driven almost entirely by government spin and propaganda. That is what we're hearing today: more government spin from the opposition, more propaganda from the opposition,

all designed to come out with this grandiose plan of increasing the carbon tax that is hurting everyday Manitobans, but not those that have one or two or three jobs.

This is important to us, and it's important to Manitobans. And we will fight to protect the environment of Manitoba and to keep Manitoba affordable.

Mr. Wasyliw: So, the minister of the Environment for the Province of Manitoba has said that a carbon tax will not reduce climate change emissions, and he said that he wants it paused in Manitoba.

So, I'm wondering how he can explain, how is the Province going to meet its greenhouse gas emission reduction targets without any carbon tax, that he clearly thinks doesn't work?

* (16:50)

MLA Klein: Thanks, my colleague, for the question of what we're doing, because we are doing a lot.

And I'll remind my colleague of the Auditor General's report, Norm Richard [*phonetic*], who said the former government's climate change plan was fraudulent and it was fraudulent from the very beginning, driven almost by government spin and propaganda.

So, nothing has changed. The old NDP is the new NDP at—again, we're based this on taxes, not on science. They want to see your carbon tax rates go up, they want to see your groceries go up, they want to see your gas go up, they want to see everything go up because that's how they would deal with things.

But I, again, will quote the Auditor General in the media article that says, and I quote, the government has done nothing to identify and plan for the risk and potential harm caused by climate change.

We have taken action, and I'm proud to say that, as I've said on a number of occasions here, that we are on track to meet our very first carbon—or, greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. It's a real one, not a fake one; not one that the Auditor General said the government knew was unachievable, then they did nothing.

Our target—and here's where the facts really matter. And that's why, when you're electing officials, you want to make sure that they have all of the information around them. Because our targets are set by an independent body. We didn't make them up going into an election. We don't just say we can do something and know that we're not going to.

These targets were set by an independent body of experts, and we are on track to meet the first reduction target of one megaton of greenhouse gas emissions. And we have a new target that was put in place, not by the government, by a panel, an independent body of experts.

And we put programs in place, unlike—and I'll refer back to the facts that are irrefutable, what the Auditor General of the time, said, Norm Richards [*phonetic*], the government—showed the government not only failed to meet its greenhouse targets, this is the Auditor General talking about the members opposite, the NDP. And I quote, it knew it wouldn't achieve its goals almost immediately after it released its plan. There's a fact. It's in black and white, covered by the media, said by the Auditor General, Norm Richard [*phonetic*].

The other fact is our government will achieve its first greenhouse gas emission target of one megaton that was set by an independent body of experts.

So, if the member opposite wants to start talking about, oh, this Climate Minister and, again, playing that game, let's just look at the facts. The former NDP government made up—they simply made up what their greenhouse 'target' reduction would be and they did nothing to achieve it. And they didn't achieve it. Absolutely nothing. And they knew in 2009 that they wouldn't. And the report came out in 2012.

Our government went to independent body. We went to experts, not politicians, not people trying to play the spin and propaganda game. We went to experts and we asked them to set the target and we are on track to surpass that target. And we are now in our next five-year plan because it has to be done in five-year increments. That's what science says. That's what the facts say; five-year increments.

The facts don't say that you just set it by yourself, that you just make an election promise to do something and not do it. And that's what, clearly, this former government has done. Their plan—pardon me—their plan on climate change was, and I quote, fraudulent from the very beginning, driven almost entirely by government spin and propaganda.

The questions that you've heard over the last two days, I would suggest, are government—or, wannabe-government spin and propaganda.

Mr. Wasyliv: No further questions, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions. At this point, we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the questions—there are none on, my understanding is.

Resolution 12.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$21,558,000 for Environment and Climate, Environmental Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,457,000 for Environment and Climate, Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 12.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$19,964,000 for Environment and Climate, Water Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 12.1. At this point, we request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is now open for questions.

No questions?

RESOLVED that—[*interjection*]

Resolution 12.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,568,000 for environmental and climate, Finance and Shared Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department for Environment and Climate.

The hour being 4:58, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

ROOM 255**FAMILIES**

* (15:00)

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.

MLA Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Okay. Perfect.

I think we had left off in respect of—I think we were doing the numbers or the budget, I can't remember. I think I want to move on to birth alerts.

So, obviously, there was a scenario, situation that had happened last week or the week before. And from there, I had several conversations and meetings, blah, blah, blah.

Anyways, one of the things that was obviously abundantly clear was that birth alerts are still going on. I know that the minister had said that they've decreased by 70 per cent. And, as the minister knows, yesterday when we were talking—or, we were asking questions, I was mentioning that I had met with all the southern authority directors.

And one of the things that they had talked about in respect of birth alerts was that, of course, there are still birth alerts that are occurring and that there's not supports, right? So, we have moms who are maybe dealing with some mental health issues or are, perhaps, dealing with addictions and they are pregnant. And so, certainly, I think everybody could agree around the table that there are steps and needs for, you know, intervention. I think we can all agree.

I don't know if we can all agree that birth alerts or, you know, taking away a baby at, you know, less than 24 hours or 48 hours is the best form of action.

But, again, around that table that I was talking about, they all said that there wasn't enough supports. And so, you know, the thing, as everybody knows, right, like, when we—when we're dealing with or we're working with a mom, we've got really, in some respects, give or take, eight months, seven months to hopefully work with a mom to develop a plan of action, right? And so, there is time, but there doesn't seem to be

enough supports. And everybody around that table was saying the same thing.

One of the things that they—that I found really interesting—and I don't think that, you know, when we talk about birth 'lerts', I think that the first marker or reference is people will think, well, it's a young woman. And, you know, to be brutally honest, inevitably, whenever there's a birth alert, inevitably, people will always think, well, it's an Indigenous young woman, right?

But, in fact, what folks are finding is that it is predominantly women from the ages of 25 to 35. So, yes, of course there are young women, but a lot of women are from the ages of 25 to 35 that birth 'alarts' are called on, and that there's no supports.

And so, you know, birth alerts are predicated upon, again, mental health, addictions, lack of housing, lack of safe and adequate housing and then mental health supports.

And so, I'm curious what the department has been doing in respect of supports for moms where's there's the potential for that birth alert rather—right? Instead of right away, well, we're going to put a birth alert on this mom, baby's taken 24, 48 hours, whatever it is, what's the process before that? What are—you know, what's the department encouraging? What are the agencies—or the authorities mandated to do?

So, I kind of want to explore that today.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families): I appreciate the question, and it gives me an opportunity to put on the record that we certainly do agree in the Department of Families, and in our government, that so much more work needs to be done.

And when I think about when I was first brought into this role, I spent some time reviewing some of the history of the department and I reflected on the Honourable Murray Sinclair's words. When he finished his work on the TRC commission in 2018, he told *The Globe and Mail* that the monster that was created in residential schools has taken up a new home, and that new home is the CFS system.

And then, Honourable Sinclair went on to reflect that, had the system that was in place today, the contemporary child-welfare system—if it was in place when he was growing up, he would have likely been a—he would have likely been apprehended based on what seemed like the criteria of the previous few decades for CFS involvement.

And it takes no imagination at all to think about the trajectory of his life and how it would have

differed and how it would have impacted all the initiatives that he did over decades in advocacy and working towards bringing about his vision for a better system for Indigenous people.

So, I always think of his words as guiding words and certainly believe wholeheartedly that more continues to be—needs to be done in this space. Specifically, what we have done and what we'll continue to do is invest in community projects because we also understand that there is definitely a barrier between the system and the people it's intending to serve, based on decades of history, many of—much of which is negative.

And by that, I mean I did meet with several chiefs and councils and matriarchs in my work as minister, and listening to their experiences and what they had to say. And, undoubtedly, each and every one has shared with me a skepticism between the CFS system and their community. And so, that meant services directly unveiled by the department may or may not achieve the same impact that we think services would if they were delivered by community.

And so, we're very fortunate to be having partners like the Mount Carmel Clinic and who are offering the Mothering Project and the Granny's House, which we have doubled their funding so that they can open up a second Granny's House to ensure that they are able to support families.

The Mothering Project, of course, is—helps with new moms and high-risk moms to help them to achieve better outcomes for themselves, their health outcomes for themselves and their babies. And so, we do agree that initiatives and investments in community-led and Indigenous-led programming for supports and prevention are integral to helping us achieve the results that we want to achieve.

And so, those are two initiatives that we've enhanced our investment with.

And I certainly do agree that there's more work to be done in regards to housing and homelessness. I know that that is a key factor in helping, you know, new moms to be able to parent their children. Housing is a huge part of it, and that is why we did invest the \$126 million in our homelessness strategy. And that homelessness strategy certainly does have outreach mentors.

And earlier—yesterday, I had talked about those youth hubs where we are making sure that there's services available for anybody who would need them. And, specifically, if they're newly pregnant, obviously,

housing's a huge part of it; obviously, getting access to mental health supports is a huge part of it.

So, that is some of the—a few of the investments we've recently made.

MLA Fontaine: So, I think I probably skipped a little bit ahead. So, before we get into that, I actually want to kind of explore the numbers.

And so, I imagine if I'm asking what the numbers for birth alerts, it would be based on the 2022 numbers? Is that correct, or do we have numbers for birth alerts for 2023?

Ms. Squires: So, to clarify, we don't—we have—the number is zero because there are no birth alerts. There are—there's a difference between that birth alert, that notification, and an apprehension. So, I do have the numbers for apprehensions, which I'd be able to read into the record for the member.

An Honourable Member: Specifically for babies.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for St. Johns (MLA Fontaine)?

The honourable Minister of Families.

Ms. Squires: So, newborn baby means—is defined as a baby who is between zero and three days of age.

So the numbers for—this is the fiscal year, April 1st to March 31st. So, for the year '13-14, there were 246 newborn apprehensions; that's newborns between the ages of zero and three days old. For '14-15, that number was 289. For '15-16, that number is 276. For '16 and '17, that number is 286. For '17-18, 287; '18-19, that number is 289; '19-20, 186; '20-21, that is the year in which the birth alerts were discontinued, 101 newborn apprehensions; for '21-22, 84. And last year is not complete, but we do have the number to February—end of February of 2023. So, from April of 2022 to February of 2023, 72.

* (15:10)

So, these are newborn apprehensions. These are not the number of birth alerts that had been issued in those years. But the number for birth alerts that would have been issued in 2021 from July of '20 until currently is zero.

The number of birth alerts for those previous years, I don't—I have to get clarification whether or not we have those numbers for the number of birth alerts that had been issued.

MLA Fontaine: Okay, so I get that the minister is saying, like, zero for birth alerts.

So, then, can you explain then what's the difference between, then, a birth alert and a baby being apprehended between zero and three? Because, then—do you see what I'm saying? Like, there's birth alerts, and then there's still apprehensions from zero to three.

So, what's the definition? What's that process look like? Yes, what's the difference between them?

Ms. Squires: So, a birth alert was simply a notification system that would have been put on a person's file where the CFS agency would have alerted any of the birthing centres and hospitals in the province that if a certain person presented in hospital and delivered their baby, to notify the agency and they would arrive and carry on from there. So, that was the pre-notification birth alert. That doesn't happen right now.

What does happen is there still is a duty to report for any professional care provider attendant at the hospital. If they have safety concerns about the baby upon the baby's birth, they will phone it in as per their duty to report.

And then a lot of expectant moms who are currently working with the agency will come into a plan with the agency—a prenatal plan. And if there are concerns that the plan is not executed properly or there's just not enough supports, that also may result in an apprehension.

MLA Fontaine: Yes, I mean, I know what—I guess I should have been more clear in my question—I know what birth alerts were or—were. And I—because I'm just wondering how—and you're saying that it's a duty to report now. And so, I'm just wondering if it's merely semantics that—but, in some respects, this kind of still exists.

But, I do recognize that the numbers have gone down. And I would say that that is also a consequence of agencies trying to do more planning with mom and with baby.

So, yes, I was trying to figure out if it was still—you know, still kind of occurring that there's still baby alerts or there's still baby apprehensions that are taking place.

One of the things that folks were saying was that—and I want to kind of go back to the Mothering Project and Granny's House. And so, you know, folks were saying around the table the other day that it would be—because, even when there are cases where babies are apprehended, so babies apprehended, you know, zero to three days, whatever it is—that there would be, like, a 24-7 house. So, almost like Villa Rosa, but not for

school, right, like—because, again, in many respects, we're talking about older moms, 25 to 35, whatever it may be. But that there would be a 24-7 safe space that, you know, mom is discharged from hospital and is able to go into a place that has those supports, you know, 24-7 one-on-one, maybe there's more.

* (15:20)

You know, those of us that have chosen to have babies can reflect back when you brought your first baby back, right, when you brought your first baby home. And even with not dealing with mental health or addictions or housing, it's overwhelming when you bring your first baby home. Or your second, or your third baby home. And it does require a lot of support and guidance and wisdom of those folks that did that journey before you.

And so, you know, I'm wondering if there's any plans on the part of the government to maybe start looking at, you know, more of a holistic 24-7 model in respect of having a place, a safe place, a caring place, a place that has those supports for addictions. A place that, you know, again, that new moms or moms can get that support and that care and that compassion and those teachings on what to do with this new life that you just created and birthed into the world.

Ms. Squires: So, each year, the Villa Rosa has a graduation ceremony, and I've had the great pleasure of attending some of the ceremonies there and their annual general meetings to meet with some of the moms and their infants who live there. And so, just to clarify, Villa Rosa does accept expectant moms, and they can stay there for up to a year and receive parenting skills while they're living there, and mentoring from others.

A few of the other initiatives include reunification foster homes organized and managed, operated, by Blue Thunderbird. And what this is is that a whole family can live together and receive supports in a Blue Thunderbird-operated home and then be receiving those wraparound supports while they're there living with their children as opposed to, you know, having the children go elsewhere while the family is receiving those supports.

So, that is a relatively new initiative that we're seeing some good success with. And, of course, this would be available to new moms.

And then, of course, I do want to highlight the family group conferencing through Ma Mawi Chi Itata and they'd recently unveiled—in December of this

past year they unveiled their new—or their evaluation of their first few years—the first session of family group conference and the findings from that. And they are seeing a tremendous success rate in helping keep families together.

And because of the great work that we know that family group conferencing is doing through Ma Mawi Chi Itata, we tripled the investment to \$2.7 million—no, pardon me—\$2.5 million in 2017.

And the report—if you look at the evaluation report, it is showing how there's significant families—significant number of families who have been kept together because of the work that they—the preventative work that occurred during the family group conferencing.

And also, the group in their evaluation had quantified the savings to government. Obviously, when we are apprehending fewer children, when fewer children are not coming into the system and are being supported to live with their families, not only is there enormous social benefits, there are also fiscal benefits to the Province. And I believe that Diane Redsky had cited it as being a \$5-million savings through the diversion that they were able to achieve through their pilot project.

So, we're very pleased to support, on an ongoing basis, the family group conferencing.

MLA Fontaine: Again—miigwech for that. Again, I know what Villa Rosa is. I meant that you would have homes that weren't attached to schooling and stuff like that, that it would just be—so, just to clarify on that.

I appreciate the information in respect of Blue Thunderbird. And I notice that there's two homes, from what I understand. I'm wondering if those are up and running—I know you said that it was a new initiative—so two short-term reunification homes. And how many women can that accommodate? So, in those Baby Blue Reunification Homes, how many can that—how many families can that accommodate?

And then there's the Edison Reunification Home, which is supported short-term foster home with a focus on parenting and reunification for Indigenous families. So, I'm curious how many families that can support.

* (15:30)

And then, Granny's House—and actually, the dollar amounts for each of those. And I know you said it was 2.5, but I don't know if that was for all of that

or what the dollars are for those pieces. And then, again, Granny's House, what are the dollars for those? And are those all up and running?

And, whether or not—I mean, and, you know, again, it's good that there's resources in the city but, as the minister is well aware, we've got a whole province, and I think that that was some of the concerns that were brought forward about, you know, that infrastructure to be able to do that across the province.

Ms. Squires: Thank you for your patience.

There was a lot of—there was a lot in the last question, so there's quite a bit in this next answer that I will provide.

First of all, when it comes to the Granny's House, our first site is an annual investment of \$400,000, and then we opened up our second site, and that is a \$410,000 annual investment.

And just some statistics: in 2022-23 reporting from Granny's House, it shows that they supported 96 unique families with 338 unique children that came through their doors. And then, of the 203 referrals for families and children that had CFS involvement at the entry into this program, only one had CFS involvement during the support, and none reported CFS involvement at the end of the support. So, we certainly recognize the contributions that Granny's House is making.

When it comes to another initiative that we haven't chatted about yet, but it's the community helpers, and we provide \$500,000 for this and—for this annual investment to community helpers, which is a consortium that is led by Wabnung, and the partners include Blue Thunderbird, Andrews Street Family Centre, Mount Carmel Clinic and the Winnipeg Boldness Project.

And their primary goal is to keep families together, delivering 24-7 culturally relevant programming. And out of the families that they've supported, they have 60 families and 192 children since the program's inception in 2019, and Wabnung has been able to close 19 of those files permanently due to the families no longer needing support, which, of course, is creating capacity in the system for supporting new families.

* (15:40)

Some other initiatives that we're doing is a \$1.5-million investment in the—for every family first initiative, which is dollars that goes to our family resource centres that offer daily programming to families who come into their centres. That is \$1.5 million over three years.

We also with—in regards to the Blue Thunderbird, the Edison home is—receives an annual investment of \$450,000 and they can support up to five and six—five or six children at a time. And for the Blue Thunderbird baby blue homes, they have two homes that are staffed with two staff on call, or in the home 24-7. And they take children under the age of 12 and—including infants, and there's three beds in each home and that's an investment of \$1.2 million a year from the Province.

And then, lastly, we recognize that many CFS agencies throughout the province have specialized staffed homes for infants and their new parents. So, they are working in a preventative fashion, working with new moms and their babies in these special staffed homes.

I don't have the list of all the agencies that have developed this proactive, preventative work. And—but we know that it certainly was quite the undertaking, and really pleased to see some CFS agencies working in this regard.

And we'll continue to support that as we go forward because I'm hearing that there's tremendous success with the ones that are offering that service.

MLA Fontaine: Miigwech, that's quite helpful.

That's—the minister noted the community helpers program. And that came up in the conversation as well alongside the support worker program. And wondering what—if there's been any engagement or movement or direction to partner more with like the urban training centre and Red River College in supporting more training or more for these—support worker program and community helper programs.

And, more specifically, to get more Indigenous peoples trained in those positions, right? Because I would suggest that—I would hope that everybody around the table would support and understand that it's important for our people to do this work. Right?

Like when we look at—you know, when we look at the history that is Canada, the colonial history that is Canada, it is settlers doing work that has not necessarily been for the best. And so, there is, for many, many years, you know, a movement. You know, Ma Ma Wi, Ka Ni Kanichihk, like, all of these programs that you know—that are, you know, firm in the belief and understanding and conviction that it should be our people that are doing these work, right?

So, again, that training, but also, again, supporting Indigenous peoples. And what are the level of

supports for Indigenous people to be able to get that training in those two programs?

* (15:50)

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the member's question, and I'm pleased to report to the committee that our government just gave \$872,000 in one-time funding to enhance cultural supports and capacity at specific organizations. This money literally just was provided in the last two weeks or since we started this new fiscal year—or ended last fiscal year.

And so, what we—where we've distributed that money is cultural capacity funding of \$265,000; 175 of that went to Blue Thunderbird for this Grandmothers Council that will employ a circle of respected grandmothers to provide guidance, support and teachings to the staff, children and families. And we know that the Grandmothers Council is an essential part of the cultural programming, and funding will provide the resources and support needed to guide the organization through a matriarchal lens and honouring the traditional ways of knowing, being and doing.

We provided \$90,000 to Ndinawe for cultural programming to ensure that there are culturally appropriate programs and teachings for their clients that they're serving.

And then we've also, with that allocation, there will be some supports for beds at each of those centres. So, that is a new initiative, one-time funding that we had just provided for them to enhance some of their work.

Other things that we've done in this space, so, we are—we just recently started a micro-credential training program with Red River College that is providing training for 30 individuals who are expressing an interest to work in the shelter systems, whether that is working in one of our shelters run by, like, Main Street Project or Siloam or N'Dinawemak, or in one of our domestic violence—our family violence shelters.

We know that the sector in that—in those areas needed to be enhanced. And oftentimes people are hired and they are getting on-the-job training, and that's at great expense to the organization. So we developed this micro-credential program, and right now we've got 30 students enrolled, they started in January.

And we are in conversations with Red River College, and specifically, Jamie Wilson at the college—or polytechnic, pardon me—to explore additional training initiatives that would ensure that there are opportunities for cultural trainings, but also to ensure that

we have Indigenous people being offered that training so that they could work in sectors that are predominantly serving Indigenous individuals.

And then I did just want to highlight one other initiative that my department, the Status of Women, together with the department of economic development and training, we provide \$453,000 to the Manitoba Construction Sector Council. And they partner with the Clan Mothers Healing Village to deliver a 37-week carpentry training initiative for 20 Indigenous women.

And these are Indigenous women who live in northern Manitoba. I want to say Pinaymootang is one of the communities that—of women that were receiving the training, and the other group of women, I'm not certain of the First Nation that they belong to, but I know that they are northern Manitoba residents who are experiencing this training.

I had the pleasure of meeting some of the individuals in the training program, and they're excited, they're building houses and building—experiencing the trades. And what's really neat about that is then, with the skills that they're developing in this program, they can help build homes in their communities where, obviously, there's much-needed labour; there's labour shortages as well as a shortage of homes.

So, it's certainly a very well-received program and one that we're very pleased with the early outcomes that we're seeing.

MLA Fontaine: I want to move on because we don't have a lot of time, but I'd like to kind of start to explore group homes.

And so, if the minister could provide—you know, I know there's group 2 resources and there's emergency placements and if the minister could provide a synopsis of all of the—what the department and the agencies are—the department and the authorities would consider group homes. So, what that looks like.

And at one point, and I don't know if the minister has it, I would like to request a list of all of the group homes in Manitoba.

Ms. Squires: Clarification: are you talking about the emergency placement homes?

MLA Fontaine: Yes, I'm kind of grouping them all together, but the—I know that there's emergency placements, I know there's group 2 resources. So, just all of them: what does that infrastructure look like?

And then some point, again, I don't know if you'd be able to get it today, I would like a list of all of those.

Ms. Squires: So, in the—with time being a bit of a constraint, I wanted to use this moment while my staff are trying to get the numbers for the—together for group care for—in the CFS system, I did want to answer your—the member's question from last week about the number of individuals supported by CLDS as well as the licensed facility by type and region.

And we are officially tabling this through the regular channels, but I would also just be able to provide this document to the member once I read into the record the figures that the member was looking for.

* (16:00)

So, as of January 31st—now, this is CLDS—the number of clients was 7,902. And of those clients, 5,375 were in receipt of residential services.

The member had asked me what—how many were living in agency care versus home share versus supported living and—versus those receiving agency supports in their family home. And these are, of course, from last year, March 31st of 2022. We do not have the 2023 figures yet. But those receiving agency care—or, in an agency-care facility—it was 2,283. Home share was 1,108. Supported independent living was 2,047, and those receiving agency supports in family home was 550.

And then, lastly, the member wanted to know the regional breakdown about the shift staff—like, the regional breakdown for shift-staffed homes, agency-supported homes, private home shares and the breakdown of where those facilities and beds were.

So, shift-staffed homes: Winnipeg, 385; in eastern Manitoba, 128; in northern Manitoba, 58 and in western Manitoba, 111, for a total of 682 shift-staffed homes.

Agency-supported home shares: in Winnipeg, we have 294 facilities, 53 facilities in eastern Manitoba, 14 in northern Manitoba and five in western Manitoba for a total of 366 agency-supported home shares.

And private home shares: we have 167 facilities in Winnipeg, 132 in eastern Manitoba, 60 in northern Manitoba and 42 in western Manitoba for a total of 401.

And I am pleased to provide this sheet to the member, if I may table it. There we go.

And I will answer the question about the number of group homes for CFS momentarily.

MLA Fontaine: I'm just reiterating the question.

Ms. Squires: Okay. If I understand the member correctly, she's asking for the three levels of group care, and then the number of facilities licensed in this group care.

So, we do have three categories. There's emergency placement in CFS, which accommodates short-term stays. Then we have group care, which is group homes for the adolescents age 10 to 17, and those are full-time, 24-7 homes. And then the third category is third-party foster care.

So, when it comes to the group care, that is where the bulk of the beds are funded. And in December of 2022, we had 27 service providers and five CFS agencies operating 143 facilities, for a total of 573 beds. And I will read who these licensed group-care operators are and the number of facilities they have and the number of beds that they have.

* (16:10)

So, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba has one facility, and they are licensed for 14 beds; Blue Thunderbird has three facilities and are licensed for nine beds; CFS of Western Manitoba, two facilities, eight beds; Crosswinds Connections, four facilities, eight beds; Direct Action in Support of Community Homes, known by the acronym DASCH, six facilities with 16 beds; Jessie Home, two facilities, seven beds; Knowles Centre, seven beds—no, seven facilities, pardon me, 32 beds; Life's Journey, two facilities, four beds; Lynn Lake Friendship Centre, one facility, four beds; Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, five facilities, 36 beds; Marymount, 14 facilities, 47 beds; Metis child and family and community services, one facility, four beds; Michif CFS, three facilities, nine beds; Ndinawemang [*phonetic*], two facilities, 28 beds—I could spell that if that is helpful; Neecheewam, seven facilities, 31 beds; New Directions for Children, Youth, Adults & Families, 14 facilities and 40 beds; Nisichawayasihk, 11 facilities and 46 beds; Poplar River First Nation, one facility, 10 beds; Reach Youth Services, one facility, three beds; Roots Youth Care, four facilities, 10 beds; SBS supports, three facilities, five beds; Spirit Rising House, one facility and two beds; The Link, formerly the Macdonald youth centre—Macdonald Youth Services, pardon me—12 facilities, 52 beds; Turning Leaf Support Services, one facility, three beds; Villa Rosa, one facility, 25 beds; Whiskey Jack Treatment Centre, one facility, 20 beds; Winnipeg CFS, 33 facilities, 100 beds.

That's a total of 143 facilities and 573 beds in that category. And I'd like to table this into record.

MLA Fontaine: So, those were, like, group 2 care homes; those are licensed group care—that did not include the emergency placements? It did—no, okay. So, okay.

So, in respect of emergency placements, do you have that list as well?

Ms. Squires: So, now I'll endeavour to elaborate on the emergency placement services. These are licensed directly by the province and there are 32 shelters or homes that are providing this service. And out of those 32 homes, two offer six-bed homes for a total of 12 beds; 28 offer three-bed homes for 84 beds; and two of these homes offer two beds for four beds in total.

So, the number of beds in the EPR system is a hundred, in our 32 homes. In addition to that capacity, some EPRs also license foster homes and they have 23 emergency foster homes in Winnipeg.

So, that is emergency—the EPR capacity.

When it comes to the third-party foster care, these are licensed directly by the CFS agency. And there are six community-care providers that operate 344 beds. And the six community-care providers are Marymount, New Directions, Ma Ma Wi, Blue Thunderbird, The Link and Knowles family centre.

I do not have, for the record, the number of beds each of these provide under the third-party foster care agreements licensed by—directly by CFS agencies.

MLA Fontaine: So little time here. Okay, thank you for that. If possible, I wouldn't mind a list, if possible, in respect of—and I don't know if there's security concerns there or—yes, okay.

Okay, so in respect of community-care providers or homes, how does the province ensure that they're fully staffed? How does the province ensure that each of the homes are complying with standards? What is the process by which there is some accountability in respect of these homes?

Sorry, hold on, I'm kind of doing a couple of close questions here. Yes, I'm wondering what that process or that system looks like, so that each of these, the province is assured that there are—the services are safe, that they're culturally appropriate, particularly for Indigenous children that are using those services.

* (16:20)

And what is the level of accountability or transparency that these community-care providers must provide to the province?

Ms. Squires: So, in regards to the accountability and the oversight, first of all, in regulation, it spells out all the requirements for any of our licensed care providers, which outlines the building requirements, the fire code compliance, as well as the staffing levels. That sort of thing is outlined in the regulation.

And then we have licensing standards, which are more detailed for each facility, and that spells out the requirements under record-keeping. That spells out their process for handling complaints for the visitation requirements and expectations, and in that licensing standard, it's more like all the operations of the facility are outlined in there.

Then we have the service purchase agreement, which is specifically around the funding accountability and reporting on outcomes. And next to that, we have licensing staff who do unexpected as well as planned visits with all of the agencies to ensure compliance and to oversee operations. And then they have the ability to issue compliance orders when there are any of our facilities that are outside of compliance.

MLA Fontaine: Just as a little FYI, the reason why I'm kind of like—I have so many questions and I haven't even gotten on to housing or anything, but just to give folks a heads-up so maybe that can help in respect of timing, to try and answer the questions.

I am going to be closing off Families in just a little bit, because I want to be able to give my colleagues an opportunity to have time with their ministers. So that's why I'm trying to get to as many questions, so if we can all kind of work together so we can get through as many questions as possible, I appreciate that.

Again, the reason why I had raised that question was because there were some concerns from directors that—from directors' perspective, that there seems to be—and again, you know, using the language that they shared—that there's little accountability in respect of group 2 homes.

And so, I'm trying to figure out again, you know, what that process was like—or is, I mean. And then, you know, for the folks that do the licensing or compliance are in that department, are there vacancies for those staff positions, and if so, how long have they been vacant?

And the salary range for group-home staff, but also the dollars per child. And for instance—and I know

of course there's different levels, I'm fully aware, but I suppose a range on that.

But interestingly enough, as I shared, the director for Sagkeeng Child & Family Services was there and he was sharing that—you know, one of our girls from Sagkeeng, according to him—was saying that that Sagkeeng citizen is in a non-Indigenous group 2 group home, and that group home is paid \$1,800 a day just for that little girl.

So, you know, so what are those dollar amounts, including staff? And then I will try to get to some of the other questions as well after.

* (16:30)

Ms. Squires: So, when it comes to the youth-care practitioners—their wages—we just invested \$4.9 million in additional monies to support the front-line youth-care practitioners, which allowed each of the agencies to increase the funding by \$3 an hour to the salaries and—however, these grants are provided to agencies with some level of flexibility for the agencies to determine how best to respond to those critical staffing pressures.

In regards to the number of licensed—licensing professionals in the department, we have 14 FTEs, and four of them are currently vacant, and we are actively hiring. And in regards to the funding, as the member had mentioned, some clients may require additional funding. We don't have a ceiling on the funding that each client receives. So their—the range is based on their assessed need.

Some of the youth and children that are receiving these supports are requiring higher staffing ratios or other supports such as treatment. If there's complexities with their medical condition, that might require additional monies, so I don't have a dollar figure in which we'll allot for each kid in group care. It does vary, based on the assessed need of the client.

MLA Fontaine: So, the dollars that go for children that are in the group home, do those dollars flow to the authorities and then to the group homes? Or are those—do those dollars flow directly from the department? And if they flow directly from the department, then the minister would have some type of budget for those children; a range budget, I would imagine.

* (16:40)

Ms. Squires: So, the group-care providers do receive money directly from the Province; it doesn't go through the authorities. We pay directly for that service through our service purchase agreements.

The global budget for group care is \$65 million. Of that, \$53.9 million is in those per diems for the kids, and they range between \$260; that is a typical per diem for someone that may not have complex needs. On the high end, we've seen per diems as high as \$1,528. And the average is somewhere in the middle where it's not untypical to see per diems of \$928 per child, given the complexity of their needs.

And so, \$53.9 million goes towards the per diems, and \$11.8 million goes for the infrastructure costs of running the facility.

MLA Fontaine: Okay, I appreciate that.

So, just—I don't know when that was, last week maybe or the week before, we had a private member's resolution—last week, I believe—that was brought forward by one of the independent Liberal colleagues in respect of foster care—foster parent day, acknowledging foster parents.

And so, I'm pretty sure that the minister is aware that there has been—and, you know, again, everybody in the House got up and thanked foster parents for their—for stepping up and giving care and all of that.

But at the same time, I'm pretty sure that everybody in the department and the minister has also heard legitimate concerns in respect of the per diems or the supports that are offered—I guess per diems is not the right word; perhaps it is, I'm not sure—but the dollars that are offered to foster parents per day for children, some of which—and I appreciate you breaking down the \$53.9 million for per diems, because on the low end, \$260 per day; on the high end, whatever it is, \$1,500, whatever it may be.

But foster parents are taking in children, and I think some of their rates are like \$27 a day, and those rates have been frozen for many years. In some—in—I'm hearing, you know, 10 years, I'm hearing like eight years, the rates have been frozen for foster parents. And so, what ends up happening is that foster parents—some foster parents—don't feel that they have the right financial support to be able to take children into their homes.

And so, I'm kind of trying to assess, like, why these group 2 care providers get \$53.9 million per year, but we're—but foster parents haven't seen a raise in the dollars that they—that they're given for children that they bring into their home.

Ms. Squires: So, I do want to clarify that group care is specifically for those kids who are harder—that have higher needs and might be harder to place in the foster

system. And that is why they are in group care, managed by one of these group-care providers at this level.

And when it comes to the actual—the foster system and the foster providers outside of the group care, that is a direct—they have a direct funding and reporting relationship to the authorities.

We did, as I'd explained yesterday, enhance their funding by \$13.9 million to the authorities for them to allocate according to their priorities, which, of course, some of that could be—if the authority decides that they want to increase the rates and the per diems to the foster providers, they certainly can.

They can also distribute those additional dollars for prevention work or kinship agreements, and—in recognition that the system is, for all intents and purposes, moving away from that stranger care and moving towards enhanced kinship care and preventative work.

So, the agencies—or, the authorities now have the discretion to invest these extra dollars in whatever way they see best serves their families, but they also recognize that we have legislation that now sets out priority placement for children in care, which has, as its first guiding principle, family reunification.

The second principle is kinship arrangements and ensuring that the child remains connected to community. And then stranger care is the fourth priority placement for children in the system.

And so, we do recognize that this system is in transformation, and the authorities really do have the discretion to make the investments where they see fit.

MLA Fontaine: So, I get that the dollars for foster-care homes comes from the authorities. I understand that.

But—and I appreciate you reminding me about the \$13.9 million that was given to—the additional \$13.9 million to the authorities for prevention, or they can choose to give foster parents or foster care a raise.

* (16:50)

But I wonder if the minister appreciates that if we look at the community-care providers, right, we're looking at 573 beds. I'm assuming—I could be wrong—but I'm assuming the 573 beds means 573 children, right? And, again, recognizing that there's kinship care, there's in home—I—we get all of that. Right now, we're looking at the numbers from 2022. Give or take,

let's say there are ninety-one—I would still add the additional children that have been taken out, but let's just say there's 9,100.

So, 573 children in this community-care provider, they get \$53.9 million. And then if you minus the 573 from the 9,100, that still leaves a significant amount of children.

And I get that each of the agencies, you know, they get their dollars, but something is amiss here. Something is amiss that, you know, we want people—we want Manitobans to compassionately and caringly open up their homes, right? We—there was a campaign many years ago: become a foster parent, like, you know, children need your help and, you know, all of these things.

But something's amiss that, you know, these community-care providers get \$53 million for per diems for children, but it doesn't seem that there's enough dollars that are flowing to the agencies from the department, from the government, to be able to support foster parents who, again, are stepping up, opening their home, in many cases loving the children, providing a safe home, providing care, all of that. And some of those foster families are getting \$27 a day. There's a disconnect there.

And so, I would hope that for the—whatever it is, for the 9,000 other children—and, again, give or take, because of course—but, so I just want to put that on the record because I do want to leave time to close off, but I do want to put it on the record that it's one thing to get up in the House and say that we, you know, appreciate foster parents, and they're doing—you know, everybody knows I'm not a religious person, but they're doing God's work, like—they're doing important work.

But then it's an entirely different thing to not fairly compensate them so that we don't lose the cohort of foster parents that we do have and that the children, more importantly, are given—are—have the ability—the parents—the foster parents have the ability to give the children what they need.

So, I just want to put that on the record. There's certainly a lot a lot more to discuss in the department, but like I said, I want to be—I want to ensure this is our last session, and we've got to close up everything. So, I want to ensure that my colleagues get their opportunities. So I will close it off.

I do have a motion at some point that Katerina will let me know when to say that. But that will be it for today.

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the member's questions and the opportunity to take questions from other members.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, and question and answer period is over.

We will move on to resolutions.

Resolution 9.2: RESOLVED that be—there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,487,988,000 for Families, Community Service Delivery, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$70,959,000 for Families, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, twenty-twenty—sorry, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$519,128,000 for Families, Child and Youth Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$162,104,000 for Families, Housing, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,988,000 for Families, Technology and Transformation, for the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,000,000 for Families, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 9.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$67,000,000 for Families, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 9.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 9.1.

And at this point we request the minister's staff to leave the table for the consideration of the last item.

The floor is now open for questions.

MLA Fontaine: So, I move that line item 9.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Families' salary be reduced to \$21,000.

Motion presented.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is in order.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Seeing none, is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

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

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

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

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

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

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Well, so there, we'll for—we'll move on to the last.

Resolution 9.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,946,000 for Families, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Families.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. Shall we briefly recess, to allow—[interjection]

The hour—a change of gears, here—the hour being 4:59, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

CHAMBER

ADVANCED EDUCATION AND TRAINING

* (14:40)

The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter): Good afternoon. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. We are resuming consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Training.

When we last met, we had just started the process of putting the question on resolutions. From what I understand, the minister will not be having her staff enter the Chamber, nor will the official opposition have their staff enter the Chamber, so we shall now resume with consideration of the resolutions.

Resolution 44.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$77,581,000 for Advanced Education and Training, Student Access and Success, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 44.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$80,000,000 for Advanced Education and Training, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 44.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$35,995,000 for Advanced Education and Training, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 44.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 44.1.

The floor is open for questions.

No questions.

Resolution 44.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to His Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,163,000 for Advanced Education and Training, Administration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2024.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Training.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply will be for the Department of Justice.

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

Okay, we are in recess.

The committee recessed at 2:51 p.m.

The committee resumed at 2:53 p.m.

JUSTICE

The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter): 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 Justice.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I do have an opening statement. I want to begin by again thanking all the staff in the Department of Justice. And I did that, actually, even when I was the critic of—for Justice for a long time in opposition. I'm sure that my friend from Concordia would echo thanks for the departmental staff, who, of course, are above and beyond the political fray that we often get into.

I want to also make mention that today—this morning, I had the opportunity to speak to the national police leadership conference that is beginning in Winnipeg this morning, and I think is taking place over a couple of days. So, chiefs of police and other law enforcement leadership from across the country and a few from the United States, I understand, as well, have gathered in Winnipeg.

And just maybe to echo some of the comments that I made this morning to that group, you know, it's a challenging time in society, generally, I would say, but in policing in particular.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Lots of discussion, of course, about an increase of violent crime that we've seen in Canada and North America, and it might be across, you know, in the world, too. I haven't done sort of an international look other than into the United States, but lots of concern about that from the public, and, of course, that reflects on the work of police officers and the challenges that they have.

The member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) has made mention, along with others in the House, about the police officer deaths that we've seen, more dramatically in Canada, in the last few months than we've seen in many, many years and the concern about the violence that police are facing, as well, over the last while. And I shared those comments at the national police leadership conference this morning, but also then expressed that it's my belief that the vast majority of Canadians, you know, stand with our law enforcement officials, women and men in law enforcement, knowing that they're doing a difficult job.

I know that sometimes the critics' voices—and I'm not referring to the member for Concordia, I'm talking about critics, more generally, of policing—often their voices are heard more strongly, but I really believe that the majority of Canadians support the work and understand the difficulty of policing.

And that's not just from a perspective of those officers who've lost their lives, although, of course, it is from that perspective as well, but also remembering that, you know, the mental health toll that it takes on officers and the PTSD that I think many officers face from the kinds of things that they see almost on a daily basis—in some ways, that they take home to their families, as well. We need to remember that because that's not—it's not an invisible thing, but it isn't as visible for many. We have to recognize that many officers, you know, suffer the weight of that, as well.

So I wanted to, you know, simply start with that and recognize the conference that's happening this morning and over the next couple of days and the officers who are there.

I'd also want to acknowledge, you know, the fact that Manitoba, I think, has taken a leadership role on a lot of different parts of the Justice file. I'd cite in particular the need for bail reform, which Manitoba started to, you know, advocate for last summer—so, more than a year ago—and to talk about it, not just in the broader context of bail reform, but more specifically, with the challenges that are happening in our province as it relates to violent acts that use bladed weapons, edged weapons and bear spray, which isn't foreign to provinces like Saskatchewan. Provinces like Saskatchewan would also say that they have challenges with the use of bear spray. But it's not common in every province, and so we wanted to make sure that when we were talking to the federal government about potential criminal code changes, that we spoke about the Manitoba context. Even though every province is

dealing with an increase in violence, it doesn't manifest itself the same way in every province.

So we were pleased coming out of a discussion that we had with other attorneys general and the federal Minister of Justice and the federal Minister of Public Safety, Mr. Lametti and Mr. Mendicino, respectively, to be able to get a commitment for another meeting. So this happened in Halifax in fall of last year, and then the follow-up meeting was March 10th in Ottawa of this year. And we did get a commitment for significant bail reform.

Now, I hasten to add that we haven't actually seen those changes. We haven't seen the text or the bill that would change the Criminal Code, which resulted, I believe, in a meeting between the premiers across the country and chiefs of police who are advocating for that bail reform and a renewed call to see that bail reform brought to the House of Commons so that it can be voted upon and, hopefully, enacted in relatively short order because it's no small thing in terms of the number of individuals that we are seeing who are being released on bail who shouldn't be released, I would say, but then also who, ultimately, are found to be involved in another criminal act.

* (15:00)

And I think that all members, including my friend from Concordia, would acknowledge the frustration that victims would have. I mean, it's frustrating in and of itself to have—to be a victim of crime, but I think it's particularly frustrating when you find out that the individual who's accused of that crime was out on bail, accused of another crime. And so we need to ensure that maybe the unintended consequences of changes to federal legislation in 2019 are changed again.

Now, I know that not every member of the House feels the same way. My friend from Concordia, his friend, the member for Fort Garry (Mr. Wasyliv) has publicly said that he feels differently. He doesn't feel that there needs to be bail reform. He's spoken out against the chiefs of police call in Canada. He's spoken out against other premiers in Canada, including the NDP Premier in British Columbia, who has asked for bail reform.

And so, we know that it's not a uniform position about bail reform, that not everybody in the NDP feels that that is important. And maybe not even the majority of their members feel that it's important. But I think the member for Fort Garry sometimes says publicly what other NDP members just think privately.

So, you know, we'll have that debate, I suppose, over the several days or weeks or however long we're going to be in Estimates with my friend from Concordia. And I think it's a healthy debate to have because it's top of mind and people are concerned. Clearly, something has changed over the last couple of years.

I'm sure that the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) will try to paint this as a Manitoba problem, but he'll know, and I think Manitobans know that, you know, this has become at least a North America concern and maybe a global concern, probably, in terms of the increase of crime coming out of the last couple of years. And then we'll talk, I'm sure, about strategies to address that.

One of the strategies I hope that we are able to talk about is the more-than-50-million-dollar commitment to a violent crime strategy in the province of Manitoba, which is part of this Estimates process and part of the budgetary process. And that involves a number of different initiatives, many of which have been announced already and others which will be announced in time.

And I want to thank, in particular, the Winnipeg Police Service and Chief Danny Smyth, and the RCMP in Manitoba and Commissioner Rob Hill for their co-operation and their ideas in terms of, you know, the things that we can do to address these concerns that are happening across the province.

And you've seen the outcome of that in terms of integrated units that have been announced. And the integration of those units is important because we know that criminals aren't operating in—on boundaries. They're not necessarily bound by the city of Winnipeg or bound by rural communities, that they are moving freely, not only between borders within our province, but moving freely within borders—or between borders throughout our country.

And so, the co-operation between the Winnipeg Police Service and the RCMP and, you know, the Brandon Police Service and other municipal forces has really been heartening because it's something that I know that the previous ministers of Justice in this role, my predecessors, have talked about but have also—have actioned through things like the MCIC, the Manitoba Criminal Intelligence Centre, which the member may want to query about as we go through this process.

And so, we very much look forward to the Estimates over the next days and weeks, and having the opportunity to speak about the good work that's happening in Manitoba Justice, but also the challenges that exist within the province and the country. There's not a magic solution, but we all do better when we work towards a solution—

Mr. Chairperson (Andrew Micklefield): The honourable minister's time has expired.

We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

An Honourable Member: Did you not see my hand?

Mr. Chairperson: No, I didn't, actually. Sorry, that's—I was—the clerk was—yes, the honourable member for Concordia, please go ahead.

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Appreciate your indulgence and—in your role as Chair of this committee hearing.

This is an important committee hearing and this is an important opportunity for us to get some answers and get some more information from the minister with regards to the department and delve a little bit deeper into some of the statements that he made in his opening comments as well as other commitments that the government has made. So we look forward to a productive process here this afternoon.

But it's also an important process because we are spending some time talking about public safety, and public safety is an absolutely foundational part of our healthy communities, of a healthy city, healthy communities across our province and of a healthy province.

You know, I did spend some time doing some community organizing before I was elected and—just in my own neighbourhood, a community that often was painted with a broad brush and people would talk about the community of Elmwood, in this case, as being an unsafe neighbourhood.

And what we found was that that was the feeling amongst residents, that they didn't feel safe in their community, that they didn't feel that they were able to live freely in their community. And that really impacted almost every other aspect of the organizing and ways we were trying to make our community better.

And I know this from my own personal life because, you know, I've got kids, my parents live in the neighbourhood and, of course, as the MLA for Concordia, we hear this all the time, that people are

concerned about crime and safety in their community. And, again, if you don't feel safe, you're not going to be able to be a productive and good community, as good a community as you'd like.

This is also an important topic because, of course, we ask law enforcement to go out every day and serve and protect us, and that is no easy task. Again, I'm speaking from some personal experience. I have a close family member who is a member of the Winnipeg Police Service and tells me on a regular basis about the some of the difficult calls that he has to attend to. And I know some have made it into the media; in fact, his picture was just in the paper the other day as part of an investigation that many people in the province would recognize, and a difficult one. And when he tells me these stories, when he gives me some of the context and some insight into his day to day, it gives me an appreciation—a further appreciation—for the work that law enforcement does across our province.

And I believe that it is incumbent on us as legislators to have their backs, to have our law enforcement's backs when they're out there risking their lives for us, that we're going to take their work seriously and that we're going to stay away from the political rhetoric, that we're going to get down to the important work that we can do to support them. And I think that's part of what this process here this afternoon can do, so I'm looking forward to getting into that.

I also think it's important because we are, of course, in an election year. And, as I mentioned, that political rhetoric is certainly ramping up. You know, we, in fact, had a budget this year that many would argue is simply a political document. Very few realities or facts or figures or—certainly no acknowledgement by the government of the harms that they have perpetrated over the last seven years that have led to our current situation.

And it is very concerning to me, because, you know, as I've said many times in this House and publicly, the cuts that this PC government has brought across the board, whether it be health, education, housing, poverty, the list goes on and on and on—addictions and mental health supports. Those cuts have consequences. And one of the consequences of those cuts is that we are now facing some of the worst outcomes in public safety and crime across our province.

It's not just in the city of Winnipeg, although, certainly, I know we've heard a lot from people in the suburbs of Winnipeg, downtown. It's also other cities; it's cities across our province. And, you know, sadly,

it's actually small communities, it's towns and it's a lot of places in our province who are saying this government has failed us. They've failed us fundamentally when it comes to, as I said, health, education, poverty reductions, addictions. They have failed us and they've failed our citizens and now we are suffering the consequences. Now we, as small communities, or the city of Winnipeg, are dealing with this government's cuts and the consequences of those cuts.

* (15:10)

So I think it's important to put in context the overall picture and, I guess, the posture that we see from this government in an election year, where they're saying, oh, well, you know, just forget about everything we've done over the last seven years. Forget about Brian Pallister's cuts; forget about this current Premier's (Mrs. Stefanson) cuts, you know, as well, as Justice minister, certainly, and we can get into some of those cuts, but as Health minister and now as Premier. Just forget about all those cuts for seven years, all the impacts that those cuts have had in our communities and trust this new version of us that we're going to present that has no resemblance of who we've been.

And, you know, Manitobans are smarter than that. They really are. And so I hope that we can stay out of that kind of rhetoric. We can stay out of that kind of, you know, political election year, you know, grandiose statements, and we can stick to the facts. Because what we're seeing here, what we have in terms of the Estimates before us, is a clear indication of this government's priorities, and they certainly aren't the priorities that promote public safety and promote justice broadly in our province.

So, I think that, you know, I do hope that we'll—I do have a number of questions, just to kind of set that out at the outset. I know the minister can sometimes, you know, not be the most concise. I also know that—I can I just say that I also know that the minister can be incredibly concise, because we've also seen that version of the minister in the past. So I do hope that we see the latter rather than the former, because I do have a number of questions that I'd like to get through today.

I do hope we get some factual answers and that we, you know, ultimately answer the question to Manitobans, that, you know, how can we get out of this mess that the PC government has put us in? And I hope that the minister will lay out his vision and his plan and then say, just trust us.

Mr. Josh Guenter, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

And I look forward to, you know, getting some answers so that we can present the kind of plan that Manitobans want to hear: one of hope and one of positive solutions that has been sorely lacking from a government that has simply cut at every turn and made things worse in so many ways, but in this case, in crime and safety.

So I look forward to the conversation here this afternoon, and with that, I'll turn it back over to the minister.

The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter): We thank the critic from the official opposition for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 4.1(a), contained in resolution 4.1.

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.

So, if the minister could introduce his staff, we'll go into questions after.

Mr. Goertzen: It's my pleasure and honour to introduce the three staff members who've joined me here in the Chamber.

To my immediate left is the assistant deputy minister of Justice Maria Campos, who is an incredibly diligent individual in providing information. I'm sure she'll be incredibly supportive in this process. Immediately in front of me is Mardi McNicholl, who is the special assistant chief of staff, one of the most talented staff people I've had the opportunity to work with over 20 years. And then to my right, he's a rookie, maybe, in terms of the deputy minister of Justice, but not to this building, having served in a number of different roles, and is already proving himself to be of incredible value to the department, Deputy Minister Jerry [*phonetic*] Akerstream.

The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter): Thank you, Minister.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you to staff for joining us here today.

I should also potentially mention we do have a virtual staff member—I guess that doesn't matter; it's who's in the Chamber. But I'll put his name on the record anyway because as he's keeping me abreast of things on his end, Nathan Laser is doing his best to assist me here, even though he's not physically in the Chamber.

And just before we begin, I just wanted to put on the record for the minister's benefit, and I haven't had a chance to talk with him off the record before this, but just to—so that it's on the record, I do want to flag to the minister that I do intend tomorrow in Estimates to spend some time on MPI. And I know that that would probably be a different set of staff that would be in attendance for that, and there may be some more technical questions that it would be appropriate to have those staff come forward for. And so, just giving him a heads up with regards to, you know, page 39 of this year's supplement to the Estimates of expenditure for the Manitoba Justice Department. We are going to be asking some questions with regards to MPI.

And, you know, I will, you know, maybe delve into some more details at that point. But I just thought I'd give the minister an opportunity, if he wanted to put anything on the record with regards to that part of the process, and we look forward to digging into MPI a little bit more tomorrow.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, yes, and I thank the critic for that heads-up. I know in the past when I was in his position as critic, I would often indicate to the minister of Justice of the day where we'd be going on Estimates the next day so we could align staff, so that's helpful.

However, I'd give him the same caution that former ministers of Justice gave me when I was in his role in that MPI would—normally, the questions would come through a Crown Corporations committee, any detailed questions. If there's maybe some very high-level questions, we might be able to entertain it, but they don't form, you know, the normal process of this Estimates process. Crown corporations, whether it's Hydro or Liquor or MPI, are generally questioned at Crown Corporations committee, which I know the member opposite would be—probably retort that he'd love to see a committee called, and I'm sure it will be called in the normal course, but that would be where the questions are.

So I'm not trying to dampen his enthusiasm or give him any sense that it might not be a good process

tomorrow, but he might not get all the details that he's looking for because it doesn't form a normal part of this Estimates process.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, and I mean, it sounds like we're—the minister and I are in agreement right off the start, so that's a good thing. I do think that the Crown corporations meeting would be a great place for some of these questions to be asked, and so I would encourage the minister, if he'd like to put on the record right now that he's willing to call that Crown corporations meeting immediately, and let's get to those answers, and then I would certainly be happy to defer those questions to that body.

That being said, I expect, you know, and I caught the minister's, you know, little political technique there to wiggle his way out of calling that committee by indicating, you know, under the normal course of the Crown corporations schedule. And, of course, he knows that much has changed with MPI since December of 2022. He knows that since December of 2022, new information has come to light with regards to MPI that, you know, certainly shocked Manitobans but I would imagine has given the minister some heartburn as well, so to speak, because he's now saying there needs to be a further process with regards to a ministerial inquiry and he needs to immediately step in and take control of the boondoggle that's happening over there.

* (15:20)

So I do think that the minister has some, you know, some leeway here in making sure that he's accountable. This is the process, him as minister—as I said, on page 39, it does indicate that there is departmental money going to MPI. That is clearly within the purview of this committee and this Estimates process.

So I would hope that the minister wouldn't hide behind this other process that he, of course, isn't willing to engage at this point, when Manitobans are asking for it most, with regards to a public Crown corporations meeting—that he would just commit here, today, to actually answering some of those questions to make sure that we get those answers that Manitobans are certainly very, very concerned about.

Mr. Goertzen: First of all, I appreciate the member being concerned about my health. You know, I will admit to having heartburn long before MPI. Nexium is a good solution to that, or other things that a doctor can prescribe for him; if he wants to go for a prescription,

I can suggest to him a couple of doctors who can provide that.

But when it comes to Crown corporations committees, he'll remember—and know, I think, from when he was in government—there was a time it was almost impossible to get the former NDP government to call a Crown corporations committee. In fact, I think, although I couldn't be tested on this, that we had to change the rules to make it an annual sort of thing, otherwise, you know, we could go for, you know, one, two, three years before the former government would actually call a Crown corporations committee.

Some of that was maybe because of things that would be revealed. I remember one in particular where, I think it was Andrew Swan who was the minister of Justice and also was responsible for MPI at the time, where there was a question about a contract, a \$50,000 contract that was provided to—I think it was Marilyn McLaren, if the name, I don't have notes in front of me, but I think it was Marilyn McLaren—we asked what the purpose of the contract was, and the head of MPI was nice enough to be clear to say that there was no purpose, that there wasn't expected to be any work provided for that \$50,000, it was just to ensure that that person would answer the phone if they ever needed to call, which, at that point, they never did.

And I remember then-former minister Swan turning different colours of white, I think, and maybe he had heartburn at the time, because he quickly left the room. So it was sometimes difficult to get the former NDP government to call Crown corporations committees, and maybe that was one of the reasons.

I don't think that the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) was ever one of the NDP MLAs appointed to MPI; he'll—I don't believe he was appointed there. But he'll remember those committees and the challenging time we had getting them called.

But when they were called, they were enlightening. That particular contract, the \$50,000-a-year contract for nothing was interesting. You know, we learned a lot about executive pay under the NDP at that time, and the different things that the Crown corporation spent money on. And maybe that was why we had a difficult time getting those meetings.

But because the member will remember those particular Crown corporations committees, he'll also know that there's a purpose for them, and that is because the executive and others who are there to answer questions about, not just MPI, but the other

Crowns when they're called, have the expertise to provide that.

So, again, I'm not suggesting the member can't answer some questions, I'm just trying to—I'm not even trying to damper his enthusiasm or to try to quell his optimism, I'm just saying that the process by which these questions are normally asked and answered are through Crown corporations committees, and that's probably where he should put most of his hope in terms of asking some of the questions that he might have.

I don't think it's quite as dramatic as he lays out, in terms of some of the challenges at MPI, but I also don't want to suggest that there aren't challenges. There are challenges all the time in Crown corporations, some of which have been 17 years in the making.

But I can assure him, as Government House Leader—and I don't know how long I'll hold that position, but I've held it for 15 years, so it doesn't seem to be leaving me very quickly—or, the House leader position, I haven't been Government House Leader for 15 years—that I will call the Crown corporations committee in the statutory requirement that is required. So that will be prior to the end of this year.

Mr. Wiebe: The glorious time of Andrew Micklefield as House leader is quickly forgotten. My apologies to the Clerk and to the committee, but I do take the member's point.

And I'm again—once again in agreement; it sounds like the minister understands the value of getting answers about Crown corporations. It sounds like he seemed to feel there were some frustrations when he was in opposition, in getting answers. So I'm sure he will undertake to get those answers for the committee.

And one place I would disagree with the minister, when he says he's—continues to downplay an over-200-million-dollar budget overage, and he says that's not dramatic. Well, I think most Manitobans would consider \$200 million of their money being wasted by the PC government as being quite dramatic; at least I certainly do.

Maybe just to close off this section, because I do have questions with regards to Justice, I just want to get on the record, if the minister could be quite clear about this, is he, then, committing to bring his MPI staff to this committee tomorrow so that we can get some factual answers to the questions that we have with regards to MPI?

Mr. Goertzen: So, I have to take some umbrage with the member's characterization of, you know, how I feel about, you know, cost overruns, whether that's specifically to MPI's Project Nova, which is what he's referring to, or to other things.

I take no satisfaction in that. It's not the first time that there's been overruns in technology programs—I can list some under the former NDP government—but, you know, very clearly I said, when asked about it, is that it's problematic; it's a concern. We've indicated to MPI that there won't be any additional government support provided. They've given me assurance that both (a) that project is on time and (b) that they are not expecting there to be any additional costs for the project.

But I'd reiterate to the member again, because he always leaves this part out, I understand the cost concerns. I, you know, we want to ensure that MPI provides good service for Manitobans at the best price possible. So anything that deals with cost, whether it's the contracts that the NDP used to provide for no work being expected, or corporate compensation or executive compensation that the NDP used to authorize that was concerning or a cost overrun on a computer program, those are concerning.

But the member leaves off the part about the importance of the program and why it is that there needs to be such a significant technical overhaul at MPI, and to remember that, you know, that we're talking about, you know, new systems that are going into brokerages across the province because a lot of these services are still developed across the province. We're talking about online services that haven't been available but the customers expect, I believe, in this particular time, when it comes to Manitoba Public Insurance.

So, we—you know, it's a significant undertaking that, yes, will come with a significant cost; there's no question about that. But it's an undertaking that was never undertaken by the NDP in the 16 or 17 years that they were in government. And we see the costs of that. I mean, the member will know, you know, the cost of the fact that they didn't upgrade the emergency system for our first responders and others, you know, so that if you were responding to a fire in Vita, you know, you were working on a system that was so old that they had to get parts on eBay to keep it running. And that, I think, was about a billion dollars attached when it came to the cost of fixing that when we came into government and realized it was falling apart.

It's a significant amount of money, but what are the options? Not having communications between people who are dealing with emergencies? And in this particular situation with MPI, not upgrading the computer system, well, the member knows what that would result in if there was no computer system. I'm not sure if he's expecting courier pigeons to be, you know, moving around different claims and different filings between different parts of Manitoba.

Of course, we need to have a modern computer system. But I'm also not dismissive of the issue of costs. I've never been dismissive of the issue of costs, and I've said that publicly. It is my expectation that MPI will deliver solid customer service, what Manitobans would expect, at the best possible price.

Now, in terms of MPI officials here, that would be a very unusual process to bring MPI or other Crown corporation officials into a budget—a provincial budget Estimates procedure. I'm not aware of times that that's been done in the past because there is a specific process for that. The specific process is called Crown Corporations committee, and the Crown corporations committee, which the member will remember from when he was in government, that they were reluctant to call, is one where the CEO of the corporation, whether that's Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries, or cannabis, as it's called now, or MPI or Manitoba Hydro, where those individuals come in for hours at a time, answer questions.

* (15:30)

In fact, the MPI—I don't have it in front of me—but I believe that the MPI committee was in December of last year, so December of 2022, where the member opposite or his counterparts—I don't remember who was asking the questions—would have had plenty of opportunity to ask questions.

Now, maybe he's dissatisfied with the questions that he asked at that time, but that's not my responsibility; he's the critic. And I played that role for a long time, and if you're unhappy with the questions that you asked or you're unhappy with the questions that your counterparts asked in your caucus, that's an internal process that you need to work out among yourselves in terms of getting better questions when it comes to Crown corporations committee.

But that is the place that MPI or other Crown corporation officials attend, not the Estimates process of the budget.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I mean I'm kind of confused, because the minister, on one hand, is saying that he

agrees that there should be a Crown corporations meeting. And yet I haven't heard him say that he is willing to call that Crown corporations meeting, so that's very concerning.

And so, you know, I think that this venue, as I said, I do see within the Estimates book that this is part of the Estimates of this department that's being considered here today.

There is a line item that, you know, I understand we're going to be dealing with these issues in a global manner, so this certainly is within the purview of this committee.

And, I mean, I just questioned how the minister expects to be able to answer technical questions about expenditures without the proper departmental staff available, so I would encourage him that he would have some kind of technical staff that would be able to answer the questions, that would be able to assist him.

I know for a fact that he doesn't have all those numbers and facts and figures in his head, so if we're going to get some factual answers, I think that would be an appropriate path forward.

That being said, I do think that the minister does have some staff here that do want to answer some questions with regards to Justice. So, as I said, we're going to spend some time on MPI tomorrow, so I encourage the minister to get the proper staff available so that he can get those answers when they're asked here in committee.

Today, I'd like to ask some questions about the department that the staff that are here should be able to help him answer, and we'll start with, can the minister undertake to give a list of all technical appointments in his department, including names and titles?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, and just to clarify the point that the member started off on. You know, he referred—I believe he goes to page 39 of the supplemental estimates—supplement of the Estimates or expenditures book—and there's a footnote on there.

Maybe he didn't cast his eyes to the bottom of the page, but if he looks at the footnote, it says—it's an explanation in terms of the money from MPI. There's, you know, \$76 million that the MPI is self-financed. It's not financed by the Government of Manitoba, so this is just—it's basically a flow-through, and it's not coming from the Department of Justice because, as is noted in the point, that Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation is self-financed.

And that is why the Crown corporation committee process was established. You know, it's actually kind of ironic in some ways because the opposition often talks about how they, you know, feel that Crown corporations are being interfered with. That's like on a Monday, and then on Tuesday, they'll come into the question period and say why don't you interfere with the Crown corporation and do something? And then on Wednesday, they go, oh you shouldn't have done something; now you're interfering with the Crown corporation.

And, like, I understand the rule of opposition. I understand there's an accountability of process to it, but I also think it's helpful for opposition to be consistent, if not all the time, then at least within the same week. You know sometimes, even within the same question period, you know, members will stand up and say why are you interfering and then other members will stand up and say don't interfere, or please interfere.

And so that becomes, you know, a bit of a challenge for opposition to try to at least be consistent. So now he's coming to the Department of Justice and wanting to have Justice officials answer questions that would be impossible to answer because we're not interfering in the Crown corporation on a day-to-day operational level. We don't provide day-to-day operational advice.

Now, do we provide, you know, oversight through things such as directives, which is allowed under one of the acts in our—in Manitoba. It allows us to provide directives—public directives—that get published, to Crown corporations.

So, the member will know that I recently issued—relatively recently—issued two directives. One was on the issue of untendered contracts. And the member will also know that the NDP had many untendered contracts of high value that were issued by MPI when the NDP was in government. So, I issued a directive to MPI that no untendered contract should be issued that's over \$50,000.

And then, more recently, there was a directive on an organizational review that was issued. Not specific to Project Nova, because I know the member sometimes wants to make it that way, but to a number of different issues to ensure that, you know, Manitobans, again, are getting the best service possible at the best possible price when it comes to Manitoba Public Insurance. I think that Manitobans would expect that.

If the member opposite thinks that I'm, you know, interfering too much by issuing those directives, he

can indicate that. But he also sometimes seems to be indicating that I'm not interfering enough. So, I mean, I—you know, there were some concerns raised; I think that this government took the appropriate action. If the member doesn't believe we should have done anything, then he can state that for the record.

But in terms of, you know, technical questions when it comes to the operation of MPI or Manitoba Public Insurance, or the liquor and lotteries cannabis corporation, or the centennial corporation, which I think also gets called before the Crown corporations, those are technical questions that get called to that particular committee because the officials of that committee are there.

To start hauling in Crown corporation officials into the Estimates process of a department, which doesn't have direct, you know, operational authority, well, I think that, you know, probably the more seasoned members of the opposition such as the member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) would say, well, that's not right, you know. That's—you know, when he's not talking about the Louise Bridge or catalytic converters—well, he doesn't talk about catalytic converters anymore.

But, you know, he'd say that that's not the right thing to do, that there—that's why we have Crown corporations. He'll remember that. He'll remember that it was impossible to get his former government to call a Crown corporations committee.

But I'm not like that. I'm not like the member for Elmwood. I like the member for Elmwood, but I'm not like the member for Elmwood, and I will ensure that a Crown corporation committee is called in the statutory requirement.

Mr. Wiebe: Can the minister give a list of all current vacancies in the department by program area?

Mr. Goertzen: I think I'm actually one question behind. I think the last question he answered before this question, which I didn't hear, was about providing a list of technical officers, and we'll—we will provide that.

Mr. Wiebe: And I think I remember the minister's style with regards to Estimates is that he tends to be one question behind.

And so, what I'm going to do, just for the department staff and for the minister's benefit—and maybe those watching at home, I hope that we have many viewers here this afternoon—I'm going to continue to ask my questions, and if the minister's always one

question behind in terms of his answer, that's just fine. We will get the information as is appropriate then.

So, I do want to ask questions about vacancies for Crown attorneys specifically. How many vacancies province-wide with regards to Crown attorneys?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, one could argue that I am behind the times and that's fine, I can live with that argument.

I will get the—endeavour to get the information for the member.

Mr. Wiebe: How many vacancies are in the Thompson office with regards to Crown attorneys?

Mr. Goertzen: We'll undertake to provide that for the member as well.

Mr. Wiebe: And just to update the committee here, I've been informed that there are currently 20 people watching on YouTube right now. So it's not a bad audience, if I do say so myself. So I'm—like to welcome all of our viewers here this afternoon.

How many vacancies are in The Pas office?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I'd like to also welcome the 120 viewers. I hope they keep watching.

* (15:40)

I remember sometimes Gary Doer, when he was actually sitting in this seat, would, as a way of criticizing the opposition's questions, be motioning that people were using their remote control to turn away from question period because our questions weren't very good. So, I won't do that to the member opposite, it was just one of my fonder memories of Mr. Doer.

We will look to find the vacancy rates for Crown prosecutions in The Pas and report back to the member.

Mr. Wiebe: I'll ask the minister to check Hansard. I, in fact, said 20 viewers. However, we can all just dream that it was 120 and that we're that popular.

How many vacancies are in the Dauphin office?

Mr. Goertzen: I want to say how disappointed I am, I was really excited by the fact that there might have been 120 viewers. So, 20, okay, so if we minus the staff on their side and minus the staff on our side, I'm not sure how many actual viewers that we have. But, I mean, to the three or four actual Manitobans, then, who are watching this, we welcome them.

We'll endeavour to get that, as well, for the member.

Mr. Wiebe: How many vacancies in the Brandon office?

Mr. Goertzen: I'll provide that information to the member when I receive it.

Mr. Wiebe: How many vacancies in the Portage la Prairie office.

Mr. Goertzen: So, maybe in the expediency of this process, we'll endeavour to get all of the vacancies in all the different offices for the member.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, there's only one more, so I just want to make sure that I get that on the record with regards to how many vacancies are in the Winnipeg office.

Can the minister endeavour to get that back as soon as possible? I'm not sure what—is this—is there a reason why the minister can't provide these—this information? Like, is this something he's going to get back within the next hour and 20 minutes?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I can't provide it because I don't have it right here, but we'll get it as soon as possible. I mean, in the next hour, it's not a McDonald's drive-through, right? We'll try to get it as quickly as possible and provide it to the member.

Mr. Wiebe: Well—and, again, I mean, you know, you'd figure after 13 years, I would understand this process a little bit better, but I'm not sure what—is the minister—like, are we able to delve into some of the details with regards to the department? And I know that his staff are currently working very hard to get that information.

So, I'm just trying to get a sense of can we continue down this line of questioning today, or is this something that he's going to get to me, like, in writing? Or, like, what is the process here? Because we kind of want to go through these questions and start getting some answers so that we can ask further questions building on those answers.

Mr. Goertzen: The member can go down any path he wants, that's his prerogative as the critic. He's sort of the bus driver in this and the rest of us are passengers. But, you know, we'll provide the answers to him in writing when we get the answers.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, well, I mean the bus driver is trying to figure out the best ways to keep the passengers productive and happy here in the committee. I think my analogy might have fallen apart there.

But I will say that I think this is obviously a major area of concern. We know that one of the largest

groups of employees within the minister's department are the lawyers that serve as Crown attorneys and prosecutors. As with all sectors under this PC government, we're starting to hear some serious concerns and some major concerns that are being expressed about the lack of sufficient resources to meet the demands that are being placed on those employees.

And we know that the work that they do is incredibly important. So, I think that it's very important that we get this information as quickly as possible so, again, that we can get some more details and we can continue to, again, get some details.

Like, I do give the minister some credit there to say that I understand he's not always, you know—and that's—I think it's a good way, to be perfectly honest, to answer questions in the Estimates process, it takes some time for staff to pull together the information. So, we want to give them the time to do it. Being one question behind makes some sense.

So, maybe I'll just go back to the provincial—the province-wide vacancy rate. Can the minister—it's now been, I guess that's five questions back, six questions back. Can we get to the provincial-wide numbers? And then we can have a discussion about that.

Mr. Goertzen: I think I've already committed to providing this answer as soon as we can provide it. I don't know why the member won't take, you know, my word for that, that we'll provide him the information. I don't think he should be overly suspicious.

Although, I do remember, in 2003 when I was elected in this process, I asked the then—I was critic, actually, for Conservation at the time, and I asked the then-Conservation minister, who I think was Stan Struthers, for a report on parks that the department had commissioned, and he promised to get it to me in 30 days. And that was 20 years ago and I haven't received it yet.

So, I'm not proposing to be in that particular league. I said that I would get the answers as soon as we could and I would provide it to the member, likely in writing, but if I can provide it to him tomorrow verbally then I'll do that.

But I will agree with the member on one point, because he made it early on, about the value of our Crown prosecutors—very, very much in agreement on that. Our Crown prosecutors, I believe, are among the best, if not the best, in Canada. They do excellent work in the Crown prosecutions office in difficult circumstances; not easy work.

And I know that, you know, even this year they've suffered some loss, a personal loss, in the department as a whole—or the Crown prosecutions office as a whole. I know it was difficult for them.

So, it's been a difficult year on a number of different fronts, and I don't want to underestimate that or diminish that because they do very, very significant work. But I also want to say, for context, the member opposite said, I think erroneously, that there are significant vacancies in all parts of government because of actions by the government.

I think he might want to acknowledge, at least somewhat, you know, just because I think Manitobans are fair people, that we're dealing with, not just in Manitoba, but across North America, a general labour shortage.

And not to draw a moral equivalency but, you know, he could go and speak to, I think, any industry, and their No. 1 concern would be labour shortage. Whether that is the restaurant industry or the industrial industry or the professionals, you know, and lawyers.

I mean, I talk to folks who are graduating from law school this year, I just had an opportunity to speak to some just a couple weeks ago, and they really are in high demand. Which is good if you're graduating from Robson Hall or other law schools around the country, but is a recognition that this is a—certainly a North America problem, probably a global problem when it comes to shortage of labour across the board, which impacts government, of course, but not because of any particular action of the government.

So, I know the member opposite is a fair-minded individual and he'd want to recognize that as well, that there is general global labour shortage in a number of different areas and attorneys are not untouched by that.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I mean, I would dispute much of what the minister has just put on the record. But the reality of that is that, at this point, it would simply be my words and his words, and if people wanted to get more of that they could tune into question period any day of the week.

What we're in right now is the Estimates process, and so I'm not sure why the minister is just not—you know, again, like, I think maybe he's busy working right now, trying to get some of these answers, and that'd be fine. He could just say that, that he's getting these answers and then we can continue to talk.

But when he, you know, he's saying, well, this is just—don't worry, this is a problem everywhere and it's the same problem that every industry is having. You know, again, I'd like to dispute that, but I'd like to dispute that based on the facts, and the facts of the vacancy rate, currently, province-wide.

But then maybe as a further question, again, once we had that data in front of us, we could talk about, is this a trend? What has the trend been over the past five years? Has it been increasing? You know, what kind of information can the minister give us that would give some indication about what's actually happening in his department?

Again, I know he doesn't have these answers, but what are we—why do we have staff and experts in the department if the minister's not going to even spend one minute asking them and getting some answers? Like, he criticizes the Estimates process that he experienced under—as an official opposition member for many years, you know, and wants to dig up names from the past and say how terrible they were. I don't think he'd want us to do the same about him.

So, like, this is the argument that, you know, you tell your kids don't—not to make. So, anyway, I'm not suggesting any way—in any way that the minister is making those kind of arguments. What I'm saying is, is that just—I would give him some time, like a few minutes, consult with staff, and then maybe just let me know. Is this, like, is this so far out of the range of what he thought we would be talking about today that there's just no way he could possibly ever answer it? Or it's like, yes, it—just, do—you know, somebody needs to be texted and then the information will be here. Like, just tell us. What's going on?

* (15:50)

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I think I did tell the member several times now that we're going to get the information and provide it to him. In terms of, you know, him worrying that, or me worrying that he's going to dredge up my name negatively in a few years, he doesn't seem to be even waiting for a few years. I mean, that seems to happen on a daily basis, so I'm not particularly concerned or losing sleep or getting heartburn over that particular issue. I've indicated to the member we'll provide him the information, and we will.

Now I do, though, have to dispute, a little bit. The member seemed to dismiss the fact that there's a global work shortage. He said that's not really the issue. Well, it is the issue, and if he attended the

Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce or the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, any of the events, the many events that they have, he would find, I think, that the No. 1 issue that employers talk about and that they have, is a labour shortage. That is the reality coming out of the last two years.

And, you know, I hear this all the time. The member might also hear it and just doesn't want to acknowledge it, but I hear it all the time from people who say, where did all the workers go? Like, where is everybody?

Because, you know, you're talking about, you know, different restaurants and otherwise that are advertising. I've gone to restaurants where they've had to close down because they didn't have employees, and there's a ripple effect that goes right through the economy in different sectors where there's a shortage.

And yet the member opposite who's—you know, he's a bright individual, says that there are no—there really aren't any labour shortages; that's not the problem. That is the problem. And it is a global problem. And so, I would encourage the member to take some time, meet with Chuck Davidson, Loren Remillard, others who are involved in employment, and—to understand that it's a significant issue.

In terms of, you know, where individuals are at or where they've gone, I mean, I know that—and we've seen this even in Justice, and I think in government writ large—that coming out of the pandemic, that there were people who, for a variety of different reasons, chose to go a different path.

And I think that some folks who maybe were a couple of years from what they might have planned to be their retirement age, said, you know what? Like, you know, it's caused me the last couple of years to rethink things and to maybe look at things a little bit differently and decide that they wanted to go to an earlier retirement. And then that, of course, drew people up into those positions as they became vacant, and we saw greater vacancies throughout government.

So, you know, I think that the member's a little bit dismissive, and he may have just said that, you know, without much thought, so I'm not going to continue to raise this issue. But I do think it's important that he acknowledges that the labour shortage that is being experienced in Manitoba is being experienced in Saskatchewan, it's being experienced in Alberta and British Columbia, in Ontario, in Quebec, in Newfoundland, in New Brunswick, in Nova Scotia, in PEI and in the Territories, in every part of Canada—

and I won't start listing through all the states, but I'm sure it'll be true in all the United States as well. There is a global labour shortage.

It's one of the reasons why inflation has been difficult for the Bank of Canada—although things are certainly getting better, but while there's—why there's—are still cautious, because they talk about the fact that there is a significant shortage of labour, and that's driving some of the economic activity and driving the cost of labour, which drives the costs of goods, which drives inflation.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

And so, they're concerned about that part of the market because there is a shortage of labour. So, I didn't want to leave the member's comments unrefuted, but, again, he's—we've given him an undertaking, and we will provide the information.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, it—so it sounds like there's a significant issue that the minister has in his department with regards to vacancies. Like, it sounds like it's really, really bad, and—but again, I'm just taking the minister's word for it rather than actually having the numbers in front of me that we can actually work with, which is frustrating, and I think it's, you know, hampers the conversation that we can have here today about this important issue that the minister seems quite concerned about, and the failures that have happened within his department. So I think we need to spend some time talking more about that.

Maybe I'll just put some more questions on the record that the minister, I don't know, will, you know, take 13 years to respond to in writing, is what I'm getting the sense of here.

How many resignations in the Winnipeg office have occurred within the last 12 months? And if the minister could also give me the information about how many resignations within the past 24 months.

Mr. Goertzen: So, I want to thank the staff who are both here and who are probably making up part of the 20 who are listening, who are diligently working to provide some numbers.

I can provide to the member now that the vacancy rate for Crown attorneys in 2021, December of 20—*[interjection]*—oh, sorry, for all of Justice was—boy, this is a big, you know, it's a larger ask that we're delivering on now. So, the vacancy rate at the end of 2021 in all of Justice was 13.6 per cent, and the vacancy rate for all of Justice in December 31st of

2022 was 8.7 per cent. So, not quite half, but a significant improvement.

And I want to commend the staff in Justice who are tasked with working and filling those vacancies for that significant improvement in what is a very difficult employment environment.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank the minister for actually giving some data to the committee, actually answering a question. It's a good start.

We know that demographic changes, many—sorry, with demographic changes many employees are choosing to retire. And we also know that many are choosing to retire earlier than they had, perhaps, originally planned to. And part of that is because, of course, of the increased workloads, you know, with regards to the higher vacancy rates.

We also know that when those senior employees leave, they take with them a lot of experience and a lot of institutional knowledge that can be incredibly important to a department, especially a department like Justice.

Can the minister quantify what kind of experience, or maybe he could quantify it in the sense of years of experience, that have been lost with the resignations that have been—taken place within the Winnipeg office within the last 12 months and, again, within the last 24 months?

Mr. Goertzen: So, the member wants to talk in terms of quantity, but he framed his question more as a qualitative question.

Although, I would say that I think that we've made progress. He'll—he feels that it's a victory that there was some data brought forward, and I'm glad that he's taking that as a victory.

I take it as a victory that he has now acknowledged two questions after indicating that there wasn't really a labour shortage that there actually is, and—because people are actually deciding to retire early in some cases.

Now, if he gave a qualitative framework to that, saying that people might be retiring because of high workloads—and I'm not suggesting that, in some cases, that isn't the case; I mean, I'm sure people decide to retire for a lot of different reasons.

But I've also indicated in a question—or, in an answer, two answers ago, that, I think, coming out of the pandemic people made a lot of different life decisions. We had people who decided to go back to

school who weren't planning to go back to school, but, you know, the unexpected nature of the pandemic caused them to rethink some of their goals.

We had individuals who decided, you know what, I enjoyed working at home, and I don't want to necessarily go back to in-office environment—even though in many cases that, you know, that's an important part of the job—and so they decided not to come back to work and to take an early retirement.

There are folks, I think, who—you know, I don't want to be too euphemistic about this—but I think they rediscovered their families during those two years, and suddenly, you know, they were spending lots of time with their grandkids, maybe, which they hadn't been before, and said, you know what, like, I'm not willing to give that up.

And so, those are more qualitative decisions and life decisions that people make and that people have the right to make.

Again, not that there might not be some individuals who, you know, in different fields, who decide to leave because of workload. Workload driven, because there's a labour shortage, which the member previously denied as being an issue, but now seems to be acknowledging that a labour shortage drives—or, can drive—workload in certain fields when there is a labour shortage and there's not enough people coming in.

* (16:00)

But I want to go back to the point, because the member sort of framed this as being a problem that isn't being solved or that doesn't have a solution. And I'm not suggesting that there's a mission-accomplished sign being hung up, but the statistics that I provided in the previous answer showed that the vacancy rate in the Department of Justice was almost cut in half. And in an environment where there is a shortage of labour, that's a really, really significant accomplishment. It's not the ultimate outcome, but it is a significant accomplishment.

So, I think we're making great progress, actually, during this Estimates process because the member's getting data. I'm able to convince him that there's actually a labour shortage in the world and that our government is—or this department, at least—has been able to make significant advancements on reducing the shortage or reducing the vacancies.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, no, I do think that this is information that the minister should be tracking, and so

I hope that he is. I think this information about years of experience that have been lost with these resignations is important and it is a number that he could certainly give to the committee. And if he's not tracking it, it may be something that could be worked up fairly quickly.

I think it's important that we understand not just the number of folks that we've lost, but the years of experience that we've lost and the impact that that's going to have on our justice system and the confidence that people can have in it. So, I hope that the minister will endeavour to get that information back to the committee.

Mr. Goertzen: I—you know, I don't dismiss the—what the member is saying. I mean, when you lose people with seniority in an organization, it has an impact, and I don't think anybody would dismiss that.

I mean, that's true in the Department of Justice and might be true in a political party, right, when there's turnover with members who've been a long time. You know what? It has an impact in terms of institutional knowledge.

But it also can sometimes have a bit of a benefit in that it can bring new ideas and fresh ideas to any organization, whether that's Justice or to a department or to any other sort of political organization or any other organization. When you have a turnover of people who've been there for a long time, you are sorry for the loss of that institutional or historical knowledge, but you also welcome the new ideas, the sometimes energy that comes in with the new individuals who come into the organization.

I've experienced that in departments long before a pandemic, where I've, you know, lost folks who decided to retire at senior levels who were instrumental to the departments. And, of course, I'm always—I'm glad for them because they often are retiring and being able to spend more time with their family.

I think of folks like Grant Doak, who used to be my deputy minister in the Department of Education, just a wonderful individual who I still maintain contact with, a long-time deputy minister in government. There's no question that him leaving was a loss and that I personally missed him, but I think the, you know, the department missed him, but then Dana Rudy, who's the current deputy minister, came in not long after he left and brought in just a wonderful array of skills and new ideas that were really helpful at looking at things.

I think of the Department of Health now, where Karen Herd, I think the longest serving Deputy Minister of Health in Canada, recently announced her retirement. And I had the opportunity to work with Karen for a number of years and just really, really valued her input. But, you know, her ability to manage complex and a multitude number of files was really, really impressive.

But I'm also happy for her because now she gets to spend more time with her husband, who's been retired for a number of years, I think they just were travelling. And so, I'm happy for her personally, even though there was a loss. But we—now we have Scott Sinclair, I think, who's come into that role as Deputy Minister of Health, who will bring a—his own sort of, you know, new and fresh perspectives to a very, very difficult and complex file.

Think of the Department of Justice where former deputy minister Dave Wright recently retired. Now, the member opposite might think that there's some problem with me that all of my deputy ministers leave. But Dave Wright retired after having been in this building for a long time. He was—did legislative drafting for a long time, so the member opposite might have worked with him in terms of drafting bills.

And I had great respect for Dave, and, you know, he just chose to spend more time with his wife and his family, and I'm glad—I was glad for him personally, but, of course, I was sorry to see him go but very happy to see Jeremy Akerstream, fill the position. And Jeremy has brought forward, you know, many new ideas and perspectives that have also been helpful.

So, you know, that may be a long way to answer the member's question in that, yes, you do lose something when individuals with long-term experience leave any organization, but you often gain things as well, and that's new perspectives and new energy, and that's how I try to look at it, not simply as a loss, but also as the opportunity to bring—have new ideas and new perspectives.

Mr. Wiebe: I think that's what the kids nowadays call shower thoughts. Minister, hopefully, will be able to get that information of the committee.

Going back to each of the regional offices, how many competitions in those offices, let's say in the past year, has—I mean preferably 2023, but up 'til this current date in 2023, but 2022 would be acceptable—how many of those competitions within those regional offices has been unsuccessful in filling a vacancy?

Mr. Goertzen: So, I'm sort of reluctant to respond to the shower-comments comment by the minister, because I'm not quite sure—or member—because I'm not quite sure what that meant. And I see other people who are whimsical in the Chamber about it, or questioning about it, but maybe that's just a reflection of our age—or my age, for sure.

So, it was an odd comment that I'll just, I guess, leave as sitting as an odd comment.

But I do want to say, though, that I was quite serious about the folks that I mentioned by name who I truly enjoyed working with, and there's a longer list than that that I could provide. I've been—I feel that I've been very blessed with the individuals I've been able to work with in government at senior levels, the deputy minister's levels. I've just been very, very lucky.

They've not only been very skilled individuals, but I personally got along quite well with them, and so, sometimes I think, not from us, but I think that there are people maybe of the 20 people who are watching, you know, people might say—might not always know what senior civil servants do or maybe don't always appreciate the work that they do, but I've really grown to appreciate that, you know, more in the last seven years than I would have in the previous 13 years, although I had a strong appreciation then too.

What I can say to the member in terms of data, because I know he's looking for data, is that the department had 16 new hires in the year 2021-2022, and 19 in the year 2022-2023, and that there are currently, in the Department of Justice, 124 individuals who have 10 years or more of experience, so, you know, obviously significant experience. We value experience. We also value fresh ideas and people who come from different places and bring insight and wisdom with them when they're coming from other places.

* (16:10)

But I was also reminded that many of the questions the member is asking when it comes to, you know, advertising for positions and how many people apply, those are run by the civil service commission, not generally by Justice directly. So, I'm not sure where the civil service commission is on the order of Estimates, maybe it's already happened. And if that's the case, then the member could hold his questions 'til next year or he could I suppose file a FIPPA or something like that.

But, you know, questions on who's—you know, how many people have replied to a advertisement for a job, those are run through the civil service commission.

But again, just to restate—because I want to ensure that he knows I'm delivering him hard data on issues—16 new hires in 2021-22, 19 in 2022-2023 and there are 124 individuals that have 10 years of experience or more, which probably doesn't include me, even though I've been here for 20 years, so.

Mr. Wiebe: Just to confirm, that information is with regards to the Crown attorneys, 122 individuals with 10 years of experience or more.

Also ask—I'd like to ask the minister what the average level of experience is of new hires into the Crown's office. Are they coming, for instance, straight out of law school or articling? Or, you know, maybe he could give us some perspective exactly where these new hires are coming from.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I—we don't have any stats on that here at the—I'm not sure what kind of data we could provide. But I—the member's asked lots of questions about vacancies, and, you know, we'll ensure that we fulfil our commitment on the issue of vacancies.

But, again, I'd restate that the issue of hiring Crown attorneys is a challenge, as it is a challenge in every province, as it is a challenge in many different departments, in many different fields. Some of it is a newer challenge, most of it is not. I mean, there's been an aging demographic—long before the pandemic shook up the work environment, we had an aging demographic that was causing challenges in a variety of places of government and the workplace more generally. And so there's no question that it's difficult.

But we do have, you know, we have articling students that come into prosecutions. I think it's just short of 10, so maybe about nine articling students who come in. And you know, we always hope that those individuals will stay in prosecutions and find it a rewarding career. And you know, that's maybe something we'll look at doing more of.

But I can tell you that, you know, there's always active recruitment that's happening when it comes to prosecutions, whether it's those coming right out of law school, those who've had longer experience in their legal practice or those from other jurisdictions. But it's a challenge, as it is in every province. I don't want to diminish that or say that it's not difficult.

Mr. Wiebe: So, what I'm hearing from the minister now is he's admitting that there is an active recruitment process. Because what we're—what we heard first was, well, you know, how could we ever know this, this is passive—this is a passive process; it's the civil service commission who's involved in that part of it. But now he's saying there is some sort of active process that his department is undertaking to deal with the vacancies.

So, I want to understand better who those—where that recruitment effort is being undertaken. Are—is the minister specifically—are they going after experienced lawyers, for instance, from the defense bar? Are they going to other provinces? Does the minister feel that the—what's on offer here in Manitoba is competitive and would attract those sorts of people? Who is applying and where are we getting these additional people that are so needed, obviously, the minister admits—where are we getting them from?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, just for clarity sake. So, the member hits on a good point. Civil service commission, you know, is responsible for the—through their human resource function, is responsible for the advertising of positions that would be, I think, you know, largely the case in most places in government. Core government, although I suppose the regional health authorities would be involved in some of their own specific recruitment because they would be, you know, recording entities outside of government.

But the department itself is certainly, you know, involved and invested in recruitment strategies and ways in which we can recruit Crown attorneys either fresh out of law school, or from other provinces or from—or another means. Other way is to track individuals.

So, the advertising, I think, specifically, is a function of the Public Service Commission, but there's no question the Department of Justice would be involved with recruitment strategies.

Mr. Wiebe: Is the minister aware that provinces like BC are paying an incentive to Crowns to recruit people away from provinces like Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: Yes. I mean, I'm aware that there is—you know, when it comes to Crowns or other positions within government, there's a variety of different strategies that happen around Canada. This speaks to my point.

I know that the member opposite earlier dismissed the fact and didn't—and indicated there wasn't, you know, a labour shortage in Canada. Now

he seems to be countering that point by pointing out that, in many jurisdictions, you know, that there is aggressive recruitment that's happening.

We see that, of course, in the health-care field, and the member will know about a \$200-million investment, as an example, in terms of trying to recruit individuals into the health-care field. We obviously work to try to recruit people into Crown attorneys' division.

Other jurisdictions are doing the same because there is a global labour shortage, or certainly one in North America. Again, I didn't—haven't researched every other country in the world, but certainly in North America there's a significant labour shortage that is causing a number of different challenges in a number of different places, some of which is driven by the pandemic, some of which I think is driven by demographics that existed before.

So, yes, I'm glad that the member has come to this realization, after an hour and a half, that there's a significant shortage of individuals in a number of different fields. And that includes Crown attorneys, which we're not either dismissive about or un-understanding about.

I mean, we know the important work that they do and the important link they are within the justice system. We value the Crown attorneys in Manitoba and the good work that they do and the good people who are in that department, and we know that there's a shortage of them, certainly in Canada and probably in North America and maybe globally.

Mr. Wiebe: Is the minister aware of the current and recently updated salary structure for Crowns and prosecutors in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Goertzen: You know, I have some tertiary knowledge of some of the different pay scales when it comes to Crown attorneys in different jurisdictions.

You know, I do want to say, before we head too far down this road, I'm not suggesting the member's going here, although sometimes the flavour in question period from some of his colleagues about trying to negotiate contracts off of the floor of the Legislature or off of the desk of the minister.

I'm not suggesting that the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) is moving now in that direction, but I want to ensure that he knows that, you know, when it comes to negotiations or labour or contracts, and most of those are negotiated through a different department, you know, I'm going to be very cautious

what I say when he knows full well that there is currently an active negotiation with Crown attorneys.

But yes, in a broad sense, I have some tertiary knowledge of pay scales in other provinces.

* (16:20)

Mr. Wiebe: Is the minister concerned at all that he's not offering job opportunities that potentially would be seen as attractive here in this province, considering there is a significant issue in terms of recruitment and issue with regards to vacancy rates?

Does he—is he not concerned that the offer that's being put out here in the province of Manitoba is not competitive with other provinces, including the one right next door to us?

Mr. Goertzen: Again, the member seems to be drifting into the lane of trying to draw me into active negotiations that are currently, you know, vested in the Department of Labour and into negotiations that are happening with Crown attorneys. And while he might be tempting me to go into that lane, I won't agree to do that.

But he did speak about, you know, my concern that it's not attractive to be a Crown attorney. And, you know, I don't want to start, you know, putting qualitative comments on that other than to say I believe that our Crown attorneys are skilled, are professional, are highly motivated, are a strong team, and we value them.

Now, contract negotiations are contract negotiations; they shouldn't be done off the desk of the minister. They should be done in a proper collective bargaining process, and we'll respect the proper collective bargaining process. But I would hope that the member opposite was not suggesting that it's not good work or not valuable work to be a Crown attorney because I believe that it is, both in Manitoba and it's valuable work in other places, too.

But I'm not dismissive of the challenge it is to recruit Crown attorneys. I'm not dismissive of the challenge it is to recruit nurses or doctors or technicians or paramedics or people in a variety of different industries. You can come to my community and we can talk to different corporations or companies who can't get welders, who can't get electricians, who can't get tradespeople, not because of a lack of pay but because it is a highly competitive market for all of these different areas.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair; appreciate it. It's quite remarkable that the minister is, you

know, taking it upon himself to get into bargaining on the floor of the Estimates process with regards to Crown prosecutors, but I'm simply talking about a current contract and comparing that with, of course, our neighbours in Saskatchewan and jurisdictions like BC, who are being quite aggressive with regards to their recruitment within our province and others.

And so, it's quite telling, actually, that the minister would automatically go there, but it—what I'm doing here is I'm giving him an opportunity. This should be like a—the—what do they call this, a softball right over the plate? And it's really just the minister's opportunity to sort of go off about this amazing recruitment project that they've developed within their department, talk about all the incentives and all of the quality of life stuff that they're working on, the techniques that they're using to reach out to, as I said, experienced prosecutors, to look out across jurisdictions, pull them into Manitoba.

I mean, there should be, you would hope, a lot there, but I'm quite concerned that we're now, I think, four questions into this line of questioning and the minister hasn't giving us—given us anything. He says there's a problem. We know they created—the PC government created a problem. We all agree on that. That's the starting point. Now we need to understand what the answer and what the solution is.

And I'm surprised—given these, as I said, lobs over the plate—that the minister isn't willing to take a swing at them and tell us—tell the people of Manitoba if he really thinks that there's a recruitment and retention problem in the Crowns department.

Certainly, we've seen that in the media. We know the challenges that we've had across the province. If there—he's acknowledging there's a problem; he knows that other jurisdictions are doing a lot to fix the problem.

What is this minister doing to fix the problem, and how is he going to restore, you know, the people's confidence in the justice system, if he himself doesn't seem to have an answer for this?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, there's a lot there that would probably take more than five minutes, so maybe the member will give me leave to go a little further, because he delved, at the end, into the confidence of the justice system, and I would love to speak a bit about that, because I think it's a broader question and a broader issue that he was tying to one particular area but I think is—it's further than that.

But he did start his question by saying that there was a common agreement that this was a problem created by the government. So, I mean, I'm—you know, it's almost like the lob question. And he knows I'm not going to let that stand on the record, because there is not common agreement on that.

I think where there is common agreement is that we have a labour shortage in North America. That—this was not created by the government of Manitoba, it wasn't created by the government of Saskatchewan; I'll even say it wasn't created by the government in British Columbia, the New Democratic government in British Columbia. It wasn't created by any particular provincial government. These are global factors that were probably—they were there before the pandemic, as we were dealing with an aging population. That was well acknowledged. It was acknowledged by previous NDP governments in this province, that there was, you know, labour shortages.

I could remind the member opposite, I suppose, that this isn't even new when it comes to Crown attorneys in particular, that there were challenges under the former NDP government when it came to recruiting and retaining Crown attorneys at some points in their administration.

But what we have right now in particular and specifically is a labour environment that the member now, sort of, seems to agree is a problem, but we don't—can't seem to agree on why it became a problem. He seems to think it's purely a Manitoba problem. But since he has obviously gone onto Google and looked at other provinces, he might also want to then continue his Google search and look at every jurisdiction that is dealing with labour issues. In health care, in justice, in industry, in the retail sector, every jurisdiction is struggling when it comes to recruiting employees. Some of that are pre-existing factors; some of that is specifically because of what happened during the pandemic and people making decisions that maybe were different than might have happened had the pandemic not occurred.

And so, you know, the member opposite feels that we've reached some sort of common ground or common accord on the reason for a global labour shortage; he seems to feel that the global labour shortage is a result of actions in Manitoba. And, clearly, that is—well, I don't want to say ludicrous, because that would be insulting—but it's clearly not right, and that there are a lot of difficult factors.

So, yes, the Department of Justice is well aware of the different places where, you know, they're

working on recruitment. I think I indicated to the member several questions ago that there has been a significant reduction in the vacancy rate in Justice globally, overall, and that is because there has been significant work when it comes to recruitment.

Now, the member seems to dismiss that, or forgotten that, that even in an environment where there's a real challenge in getting employees in every sector, in every province in Canada and throughout North America, the department has been able to reduce—and I give credit to officials on this—they've been able to reduce the vacancy rate in the department from—I think it was around 13 and a half per cent to around 8 and a half per cent. Not saying that, you know, we don't want it to be less and that there's not more work happening, but I've yet to hear the member acknowledge that that's significant and to, you know, give credit where credit is due, to the officials in the department who are working to ensure that there is significant recruitment.

So, to answer his question, where he seemed to be dismissive of the fact that there's been a significant reduction in the vacancy rate in the Department of Justice, I hope he'll acknowledge that even in a very difficult and tight labour market, there has been a significant reduction in the vacancy rate.

* (16:30)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, another swing and a miss, Mr. Chair. And, you know, and particularly transparent, too, in—and you know, I mean, dismissive of these important questions because the minister was able—somehow—to pull out two numbers that he thought were favourable to him. Out of the entire myriad of figures that are available to him, those are the two that he pulls out.

But he refuses to answer our questions here this afternoon with regards to how many vacancies within the Crown attorney's department or section in particular, and with regards to those particular offices that we asked about. So, you know, again, I'm going to give the minister the benefit of the doubt that we've got half an hour left and it only took an hour to get that other piece of data, so maybe he can get—I don't know, maybe he can get this one, too. Let's hope so, but I—maybe I shouldn't hold my breath.

I do want to switch gears slightly, talk to the minister a little bit more about—a little bit about corrections; ask specifically about vacancies within the corrections department. Can we get the percentage and the number of vacancies versus

the number of filled positions within corrections, or E-F-Ts, whatever the minister has handy? Can the minister get that information to the committee?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, I mean, the member will know I'm not easily offended at this stage of my career. It would take a lot for me to go home and lose sleep over some of the comments for the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), though I quite like him individually.

You know, but he started off his comments about, you know, swing and a miss, which seemed kind of dismissive to the efforts, I think, of those who are really, you know, working on a difficult file.

You know, I mentioned to him earlier about, you know, articling students; those who are, you know, fresh out of law school—and I know that—I'm not trying to draw an equivalency between senior Crown attorney or an articling student. I recognize that, you know, on either side of that stream, it's important to ensure that there's strong efforts. But I don't want to be dismissive of it either, right?

I mean you—when you can get new lawyers, or those who are articling and ready to be called to the bar, into prosecutions, I think there is a significant opportunity to show them, you know, why it's good work, why it's valued work, why it's important work, the strength of that team that exists within prosecutions.

So I mentioned before that there were nine articling students in the city of Winnipeg. There are 13 overall in the province of Manitoba, which is an increase from what it was, I believe, when the NDP were in government. So that would be an increase, not a decrease.

I can't speak to why there were fewer when the NDP were in government; maybe if they were more aggressive, having articling students at that time, of course, that might have been helpful in terms of the number of Crown attorneys that we'd have in the department right now. But, you know, he may want to go back and speak to some of his former friends, Dave Chomiak or Gord Mackintosh, or others who served—James Allum, others who served in the role in terms of why they didn't increase the number of articling students. But I'm glad that we have, because we recognize that that's important.

That's one aspect, that's one part of the stream. I'm not trying to suggest that that is the only part of the recruitment strategy. There's a lot of other things that are involved, but it's not insignificant.

And the member started his question by kind of dismissing it and saying well, you know, swing and a miss, it's not that important. It is important, actually. And I think dismissive comments don't serve the member well and they don't serve the process well. So, you know, I hope that he'll reflect upon that and recognize and realize that there's good work and hard work being done in a difficult environment when it comes to the labour shortage and that there's no shortage of efforts to deal with that.

But, again, I'm not going to get into specifics about any sort of ongoing, you know, contract discussions or that process. And I know the member said he's not trying to draw me into that, but he seems to be flying pretty close to the sun in a lot of different ways.

So, you know, I'm hopeful that he's not looking to continue that line of questioning, but maybe he wants to repeat the question that he had in the area of corrections.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the minister continues to prove to the committee that he can bring forward facts and information. I appreciate that he's—continues, though, you know, rather than just giving us the information that I've been asking for, he's just cherry-picking numbers, which isn't helpful.

Again, in question period, I think, you know, I—there's very limited ability for us to get into the details. I—you know—the minister doesn't have staff sitting in front of him in the question period. So, you know, I mean, I would suggest that it would make more sense at those—during those times to say, take the question on notice.

But in this case, the minister does have that information at his fingertips, so to speak. So, he gets the information, but he only gives the pieces that's, you know, he thinks make him look, you know, good. But it's very transparent. Manitobans see through this stuff. So, like, let's get the information we're asking for.

Can the minister indicate the number of positions, both vacant and filled, and the vacancy rate at the Brandon Correctional Centre?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm advised that the positions in Brandon are all filled.

Mr. Wiebe: Then, can the minister give me the number of positions at Brandon Correctional Centre as well as the vacancy rate and number of positions at Headingley Correctional Centre, Milner Ridge

Correctional Centre, the correctional centre in The Pas, the Winnipeg Remand Centre, the Women's Correctional Centre and the Manitoba Youth Centre?

Mr. Goertzen: So, rather than, you know, us collecting that over the next 10 or 15 minutes, I don't want to burn the member's time because I know that he has valuable questions, so we'll endeavour to get the information and report back to him tomorrow at the beginning of the Estimates process.

Mr. Wiebe: No, we have time. This is—I would like the minister to answer these so that we can answer follow-up questions to these questions that have been posed.

And I appreciate that the minister has that information in front of him because he was able to answer the Brandon Correctional Centre question quite quickly. In fact, I think that took, like, less than 10 seconds. So let's just go through the list and get those answers on the record now.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm more than happy, then, to—it's not going to be less than 10 seconds. We'll take the time. If the member wants to spend 10 or 15 minutes talking to his colleagues, we will endeavour to get some information for him.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, let's get those answers on the record.

Can the minister also, then, indicate with a breakdown from the complement of those corrections officers, how many are men—identify as men, how many as women, how many are Indigenous and any other factors that the department—information that the department collects?

Mr. Goertzen: Rather than stacking up questions like planes trying to get on a runway, I'm going to endeavour to get the information of the first question that the member asked, which I said is going to take some time, but which he was quite fine with, and then he can repose the question that he just asked.

* (16:40)

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think we're actually—if we're talking about stacked questions, I think we're at about 14 that are unanswered, that the minister has said he's going to get back to me. So I don't see why that's going to change anything.

Let's continue to stack those questions, and as the answers come in, the minister can give them to me in a straightforward way, we can just continue on. That's the process that we're in right now; it's called Estimates, that's what we're doing here. So I'd prefer

that the minister just collect these questions, answer them as the answers come in.

Can the minister indicate how many beds are currently in our correctional institutions, and whether that number has increased or decreased since 2016?

Mr. Goertzen: So, the member, I think two questions ago, asked a question and said he had lots of time to wait for the answer. And then he started to fire off a bunch of other questions. So I'm still back in the process of waiting to get the information for that first question.

So he can continue to fire off questions if he chooses, but I'm going to get him the information on the first question, which he said he was going to patiently wait for and now seems to have lost his patience for, and once I get him that information, then he can restart the other questions that he is now not seeming to want to wait for.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, like I said Mr. Chair, that's 19 questions now, I think, that are outstanding. So, I mean, this has been the entire process, here. I'm not sure why the minister thinks it's now somehow different.

I was understanding that he was still trying to get me questions on vacancies with regards to the Winnipeg office, the office in The Pas, with regards to Crown prosecutors. So that's still outstanding; those are what he's calling stacked questions, great. Let's keep going, and let's keep getting the answers, here.

Like, as they come in, just give them to the committee, give them to Manitobans, tell them what's going on and then we'll just keep moving on. Like, I don't think—I don't know what the minister thinks this is.

Okay. So we're looking for, of course, the total with regards to how many beds; but, in particular, we want to know in the Brandon Correctional Centre, the Headingley Correctional Centre, Milner Ridge, The Pas, the Winnipeg Remand Centre and the Women's Correctional Centre as well, along with the youth centre.

Can the minister indicate how many beds are in those institutions, and whether that—they have increased or decreased since 2016?

Mr. Goertzen: Nope, I have not committed to providing any of the information on the last three questions. What I said to the member is on that first question, it was going to take some time to get the information. Staff are compiling the information now; I said to him

it could be 10 to 15 minutes and he said, oh, he's got lots of time.

And I don't know what happened, if he all of a sudden got a text from somebody and says he doesn't got lots of time, or what the issue is. But I gave him fair warning that it was going to take some time to get that initial question answered, and then he could go back into this line of questioning and I'm happy to provide that information.

But he's the individual who offered up to take the 10 or—I offered to take the question, actually, as notice, and to provide the information back first thing tomorrow. He dismissed that and says that he didn't want that, he wanted to take 10 or 15 minutes to get the information, and then decided to fire off a bunch of questions after that and not wait the 10 or 15 minutes.

So, no, there's not been an undertaking on any of the other questions that he's asked except for the initial one, where we told him it would take 10 or 15 minutes. And I see that folks are diligently working, here.

Now, I mean, again, I mean, he seems to be caught in a web of his own making, but he said he would be happy to wait for the answers, and the answer to that original question is coming.

Mr. Wiebe: So we're onto, like, almost two hours, and the minister has been asked, I think, 23, 24 questions by now. He's saying, no, I'm not going to answer any of them. Throw them all out the window, because he's having some trouble keeping up, writing them down?

I mean, he was spending a lot of time talking about past glories and his time in other departments, and he was—I mean, this went on, and on, and on, and this was a whole dog-and-pony show. And then, all of a sudden, he says, no, any questions that I said I would answer, no, now I'm not going to answer them.

I mean, what an abdication of duty and responsibility as a minister. This is embarrassing. This is disgusting, that the minister would even suggest that he wouldn't answer questions coming from the official opposition in the House of the Legislature when, you know, the Estimates process is specifically set up for him to be accountable for the questions that are asked and the decisions made in his government. Unbelievable that he would even put that on the record, that he wouldn't answer the questions that have been asked in this process here in committee.

And I guess, just for the record and so that the minister can be incredibly clear about the questions that have been asked, I'm going to just go through those questions again so that he has them on the record.

And the—you know, he said at the beginning of this process, well, there's no possible way I can get those answers. Then he started picking and choosing which ones he wanted to answer and which pieces of data that he wanted to bring forward. And now he says any of those questions aren't actually questions.

So, I hear a call for a—some questions, and I think we can get through this. I asked, can the minister undertake to give a list of all technical appointments in their department, including names and titles. I asked the minister, give a list of all current vacancies in the department per program area.

I asked about recruitment of Crown attorneys, regional offices. How many competitions in those offices, let's say in the past year or in '23-'22-23, have been successful? How many weren't able to fill a vacancy in the Thompson office, the Dauphin office, The Pas, Brandon, Portage and Winnipeg.

I asked the average level of experience of new hires in the Crown's office. Are they coming straight out of law school? Are they articling? Has he attracted any lawyers from the defense bar? Has he found any Crowns from other provinces? Has the minister—what are the vacancies province-wide with regards to the Crown's office—the Crown attorneys' office?

How many vacancies are in the Thompson office? How many are in The Pas office? How many are in Dauphin? How many are in Brandon? How many are in the Portage la Prairie office?

I asked about how many resignations have happened in the Winnipeg office in the last 12 months. I asked how many resignations have happened in the Winnipeg office in the last 24 months. I asked about demographic changes and how many are retiring earlier than they planned to. How many years of experience have been lost through that process? Is there a reason why the minister doesn't track that information more carefully?

I asked the minister about his awareness of the BC programs incentivising Crown prosecutors to come from provinces like Manitoba. I asked the minister about the current and updated salary structure for Crowns and prosecutors in Saskatchewan. I asked him if he was concerned about this and if he could give us any kind of recruitment or retention strategy.

And he couldn't, of course, but you know, that was a question that we asked.

I asked how many beds were in our corrections institutions, whether they've increased or decreased. I asked for a breakdown by Brandon, Headingley, Milner Ridge, The Pas, Winnipeg, the Women's Correctional Centre and the Manitoba Youth Centre.

I asked how many corrections officers are currently vacant and what the vacancy rate is amongst them. I asked what the percentage was and I asked the number of vacancies versus the number of filled positions. I asked the minister if he could indicate the number of positions both filled and vacant and the vacancy rate at the Brandon Correctional Centre, the Headingley Correctional Centre, the Milner Ridge, The Pas, Winnipeg, Women's Correctional Centre and the Manitoba Youth Centre. And asked the minister if he could indicate, with a breakdown of those complement of corrections officers, how many are women, how many are Indigenous, how many are men.

I still have more. And the minister now, because I didn't see him writing these down furiously, I guess, is counting on maybe those 20 people who are watching on YouTube to give him an answer. Or maybe he could check Hansard.

But regardless, it's his duty to answer these questions. Like, I don't know what else he thinks this process is for. He can just say, well, no, I'm not going to answer any of these questions. Yes. Yes, the minister has to answer these questions, and if he doesn't, that's an indication of his failure as a minister, but more importantly, their failure as a government.

Mr. Chairperson: The member's time has expired.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the member repeat the question? I'm kidding about that. I was tempted to ask the member to repeat the question.

So, the questions that he asked—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, you know, I'm disappointed, because now the member is heckling in the House. And I actually sort of thought he was serious, and then I just saw that little demonstration where he's yelling at people in the loge and getting—*[interjection]*—well, now he's just laughing out—*[interjection]*—well, I'll wait for the member to bring himself to order.

* (16:50)

I actually thought he was serious but, clearly, he's not serious. This is some sort of demonstrative politics for—some sort of demonstrative politics for him. But I was serious when I indicated to him that, you know, if he would wait for just a little bit of time, we could get him the answers on the questions that he had regarding positions at the different institutions.

And true to my word, I said it would probably take about 10 to 15 minutes, and it was—*[interjection]*—yes, see, exactly right, about 10 to 15 minutes later, we actually have the answer. So I—you know, the member, of course, had he just taken my advice—not that I'm really here to give him advice—but had he just taken my advice and let us answer this first thing tomorrow, then he could have fired off a bunch of other questions and gotten a bunch more answers.

But he doesn't actually seem to be interested in answers, he seems to be interested in ragging the puck on his own Estimates process, which is an interesting strategy. I mean, I was critic for a long time and, you know, I certainly—you know, listen, I did see ministers sometimes who I thought gave extended answers that were just intended to delay. I never, as a critic, tried to delay my own Estimates process, which the critic seems to be interested in doing, which is a fascinating strategy, to wait for a year to get into an Estimates process and then decide to waste time on your own Estimates process. So, if that's the strategy he wants to employ, I suspect he has some reason for it. I can't figure it out. Maybe some day he'll explain it to me, about why he's not actually interested in getting answers to questions, and he can enlighten me about why that's a good critic strategy.

But, because I committed to get him some answers, I can indicate to him that all the posts are always filled in our correctional institutions, and that is because we have a pool of part-time staff, corrections officers, that fill all vacancies so that no posts remain vacant.

So, if the member is concerned—which might be a rightful concern—that there are positions that are not being filled, I can indicate to him that, because of that pool of part-time staff, all of the—who are corrections officers—all of the posts are always filled in our correctional institutions.

And that would include, as the member asked, the Headingley Correctional Centre, the Manitoba Youth Centre, the Remand Centre, the Brandon Correctional Centre, Milner Ridge Correctional Centre, The Pas and the Women's Correctional Centre. So yes, while

there are sometimes posted vacancies—which is not an unusual thing to have posted vacancies at, well, any correctional institution or frankly any institution—because we have the pool of part-time staff—those women and men who serve very ably in corrections—all the posts are always filled.

Now, if the member opposite, having gotten the answer to the question that I would have provided to him first thing tomorrow, but who he said was quite patient in wanting to wait for 10 or 15 minutes for the answer and then went on a critic tirade to try to filibuster his own Estimates process for reasons that still escape me. If the member opposite wants to go back to the question that he had prior to the tirade and after the question that he asked, which I've now just given him the answer to, I'm happy to try to endeavour to get him the information.

However, if he wants to filibuster the rest of his Estimates process, I'm happy to hear him filibuster the rest of the Estimates process. I don't know why he would do that. Probably in the fullness of time, he will explain that to me; it'll all become clear. But, having served in opposition longer than anybody should serve in opposition for the 16 years that I was in his seat, it is absolutely mystifying to me that a member comes as a critic and asks questions that he doesn't actually want answers to.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, we do want answers to the questions. That's why I had to ask them a second time, because the minister said he wasn't going to answer them. And I mean it's very surprising that he would consider that ragging the puck. Asking questions. Like, what does he think Estimates is? I'm asking questions. I had to ask them twice. If he thought that that was unnecessary, maybe he shouldn't have said on the record here in this committee that he wasn't going to answer the questions that were asked of him in this committee.

And, once again, we, you know, have a situation where he didn't even answer the question that would take 10, 15 minutes. It's been 10, 15 minutes, and he's not answering the question. He's saying—talking about unfilled shifts. We're talking about positions. The minister obviously has access to that information, right. He comes up with these pieces of little nuggets of information but refuses to answer the questions. So, he's indicated that he's going to answer all of the questions here; he's taking them on notice, he's going

to answer them tomorrow in written form, I guess. That's what he said originally. So maybe that's when we're going to get it because we're at the end of the day.

We're at the end of the day and the minister has spent the entire day, you know, talking around all of these questions rather than just—like, these are straightforward questions. I can understand the minister wants to make, like, a political point at the end. But the data is just the data, so give it to the people of Manitoba and then, you know, we can have the political debate. That's what we're trying to do here.

So, again, can the minister give us a—broken down by individual correctional centre—we're talking about the number of positions that have been—that are unfilled, not the shifts in corrections. So, I do want to know what the turnover rate has been and if the minister could give those specific numbers and the vacancy rates.

Mr. Goertzen: So, of course, you know, the member was incorrect. I've not indicated that I would not answer questions, but they have to be staged in a way that we can actually understand what the member is asking as opposed to him saying that he's waiting for an answer and then shooting off five other questions in the midst of waiting for an answer.

So, I provided him the answer that indicates that, you know, the positions are all filled within the individual corrections institutions, which I think is important information. Maybe the member doesn't feel that's important. And, yes, at the beginning of this process there were several things which we indicated that we would provide him a written response. I don't think I said tomorrow, but obviously we always do our best in terms of getting the response and—

* (17:00)

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Andrew Micklefield): The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

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