

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	Ind.
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 26, 2018

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Madam Speaker: Committee reports?

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I rise to today to table the response to the Order Paper question No. 7, as posed by the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher) on April 4th, 2018.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

Would the honourable minister please proceed with his statement.

National Day of Mourning

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): Each year, April 28th is recognized as the Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured on the job. In Manitoba we are observing this important day tomorrow, Friday, April 27th.

Day of Mourning is an opportunity to remember the men and women who did not return home safely from work last year. In 2017, 27 Manitobans lost their lives as a result of work-related incidents and occupational diseases. Many more Manitobans were injured severely enough to be permanently injured or off the job for many days.

We recognize those who have lost their lives were much more than workers. They were our family members, our friends, our co-workers and our neighbours.

I encourage my colleagues and all Manitobans to participate in the annual Day of Mourning Leaders' Walk, organized by SAFE Workers of Tomorrow. This year's Leaders' Walk will commence at the Union Centre, 275 Broadway, at 10.30 a.m. and proceed to Memorial Park for a ground-breaking

ceremony for a workers'—a Manitoba Workers Memorial.

The Manitoba Workers Memorial is a significant monument as it will include the names of all fire fighters and peace officers who put their lives on the line to save others. This memorial will also honour all Manitoba workers who have lost their lives in the pursuit of earning a living to provide for themselves and their families, a sacrifice that no one should ever have to make.

As we look to the future of our province and the safety of our workers, I invite all of us to work together. We all share the vision of making our province stronger and that includes making it safer for all workers.

Madam Speaker, I ask that after the other members have spoken to the statement, if we could observe a moment of silence in the Chamber to honour the memory of men and women of Manitoba who were injured or killed in the workplace this past year.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Tomorrow, in recognition of the National Day of Mourning, Manitobans, Winnipeggers will walk in solidarity, commemorating the lives lost and recommitting to ensuring that every worker has a safe workplace free from illness and injury.

All Manitobans have the right to come home safe and healthy at the end of every shift. It is saddening that, even with the many requirements that we put in place, workplace fatalities still occur.

In 2017 there were 27 workplace fatalities in Manitoba, all of which are preventable. Most recently, in northern Manitoba a man died on the job after being struck in the head while securing a load of steel. One workplace death is one too many.

The importance of workplace health and safety cannot be undervalued. It is our job as MLAs to ensure that legislation is put in place and followed to prevent injury and illness from occurring.

Thanks to the hard work of unions and governments that cared, significant progress has been made over the years to protect workers. Continuous

improvements to workplace health and safety laws are necessary as new issues are identified.

Dismantling the advisory council on workplace health and safety, cutting the workplace health and safety department's budget, reducing the number of workplace inspections does not help address these issues. Rather, it demonstrates a priority of cutting costs ahead of workers' safety. These laws exist because of the blood of Manitoba workers; any reduction in these laws or in inspection—or inspectors who enforce them fails those who've been killed at work and, in fact, all workers.

Tomorrow, across the province, walks and memorials will take place in recognition of the Day of Mourning, advocating for safer workplaces and honouring those who have died or become ill or injured from workplace-related incidents. I would encourage all members to attend in your own community, as I have done for many years and as I will do on April 28th in my own community of Flin Flon.

Mourn for the dead, Madam Speaker, but let's all fight for the living.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I ask for leave to speak in response to the minister's statement.

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

Ms. Lamoureux: Today I rise to remember those who lost their lives doing what we all do every day: by going to work.

To reiterate what I said this morning during the bill brought forward by the member from Tyndall Park, over 300,000 Manitobans have been injured at work since 2008, and 307 have died. No family is prepared to hear that their loved one had an accident at work, and these numbers sadly remind us that we need to do better.

Worker safety is of the utmost importance because it acts as a preventable measure for our Manitobans. It is also healthy for our economy and our communities. And, Madam Speaker, undermining labour organization is a step in the wrong direction. Government needs to listen to these groups in order to understand what labour needs and how we can address these needs.

Tomorrow we will gather with these groups for the ground-breaking of the Manitoba Workers Memorial in Memorial Park. I invite members of this

government to come and hear what labour has to say and make the changes that they have the power to make to ensure that all Manitobans have the opportunity to get home safe to their families and their friends.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Darryl Ferguson and Cheryl Ferguson

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): I rise today to honour two phenomenal individuals who have devoted their lives to helping others through music.

Mr. Darryl Ferguson is a famous trumpet player who has performed with many well-known groups, including the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and the Cambridge Brass Quintet. He currently serves as the band director at Acadia junior high school in Fort Richmond.

Mrs. Cheryl Ferguson is equally renowned for her talents on the French horn, having performed with the Winnipeg Wind Ensemble and Cambridge Brass Quintet. Fort Richmond Collegiate is blessed to call her their own as the director of the band program since 2006.

Madam Speaker, I could fill far more than my two minutes just listing all of their musical and academic accomplishments, but what I would like to do today is honour them for their hearts for the youth.

Darryl's typical day is spent with hundreds of junior high students at the beginning of their musical learning path. He gently builds the students' performance skills with encouragement through the squeaks and blasts of the first attempts at sound. That alone deserves an award for patience. I have yet to meet a student from Acadia who doesn't list Mr. Ferguson as one of their most favourite and trusted teachers.

Cheryl welcomes the young musicians as they enter into the high school program and pushes them to the next level in personal growth. Band is not just another class with Mrs. Ferguson. It is a safe haven and escape from the pressures of the outside world

where her students can express their feelings through music. Mrs. Ferguson is affectionately known as Mama Fergie to many of her students for her ability to push them through—push them towards excellence by building them up one joyful smile at a time.

These amazing teachers spend their spare time helping students and organizing extracurricular functions, all while raising two wonderful and musical sons, Sam and Nate. Together, this dynamic couple has accomplished far more than they could individually, and I want to take this time to thank them personally, in addition to presenting each with a Fort Richmond MLA community hero award.

Please join me in acknowledging Darryl and Cheryl Ferguson for their gifts to our youth.

* (13:40)

Madam Speaker, I ask leave to enter the names of the guests joining us in the gallery today into Hansard.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to include those names in Hansard? [*Agreed*]

Family of Darryl and Cheryl Ferguson: Ed Buettner, Therese Buettner, Nate Ferguson, Sam Ferguson.

Canadian Mennonite University

Hon. Heather Stefanson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I am very pleased to rise in the House today to recognize the latest development at Canadian Mennonite University in my Tuxedo constituency.

I am proud to say that I have a wonderful relationship with CMU over the last 18 years as MLA for Tuxedo. The university truly lives up to its mission to, and I quote, equip women and men for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society. End quote.

It was for this reason that I was so pleased to join my colleague, the Minister of Education and Training (Mr. Wishart), earlier this month for the announcement of nearly \$420,000 investment toward the CMU Centre for Resilience.

The new Centre for Resilience is a 6,500-square-foot space built into the top floor of the former School for the Deaf, a beautiful historic site that is considered an impressive example of Collegiate Gothic architecture.

The centre will bring together multiple disciplines, including environmental studies,

business, and social innovation to inspire students, faculty and others to take on complex challenges such as climate change and social equality.

At the announcement, we were joined by the familiar faces of CMU president, Dr. Cheryl Pauls, and CMU vice-president external, Terry Schellenberg. I was also very pleased to meet James Magnus-Johnston, the visionary director of the centre of resilience.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank both Terry Schellenberg and James Magnus-Johnston for joining us today in the gallery. They have done an incredible job turning what used to be an aging storage space into an incredible, state-of-the-art learning environment.

I wish them, Dr. Pauls and the students of CMU all the best as they foster entrepreneurial leaders who can address the challenges we face as a province today and for future generations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Bruce Smith and Betty Jackson

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize Bruce Smith and Betty Jackson, who are here in the gallery this afternoon.

This hard-working and creative husband-and-wife team have lived in the village of Dunnottar for the past 23 years. During these years they have dedicated a significant amount of time and effort volunteering in their community. Their efforts have certainly had a positive impact on the community, but they are always quick to remind me that they have had great support from friends, family and neighbours.

They were involved in helping establish the Ponemah parade. It all started when five neighbours with convertibles had a Canada Day parade with floats and costumes. The parade has continued for 20 years.

Using a family-owned building, Bruce and Betty established the Ponemah Beach Central Art Centre 15 years ago. The Village of Dunnottar recently purchased the building and the committee now operates the art centre.

They are also instrumental in starting the Dunnottar Station Museum. A 1903 former CPR station was bought and set up adjacent to the art centre as the village museum. New buildings were

put up using original CPR plans. The museum has operated for 12 summers.

Madam Speaker, Bruce and Betty have been dedicated volunteers in their community, and I ask all members to join me in recognizing them and thanking them for their hard work and commitment to their community.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Renters in Manitoba

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, the Pallister government is making life worse, not better, for renters across Manitoba. Rental units are a very important housing option in every neighbourhood in my constituency, and in West Broadway alone, over 90 per cent of the homes are rentals. All tenants in Manitoba are being financially squeezed by the Pallister government in several new ways.

First, rising utility bills: the Pallister government wants hydro rates to go up—[*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altemeyer: —by 70 per cent over the next several years. Their carbon tax will also increase the cost of natural gas used for home heating. We all know these costs are ultimately paid for by tenants.

Secondly, instead of helping Manitobans reduce our bills as utility rates are jacked up, the Pallister government has slammed the breaks on the successful Power Smart programs. Without a single new efficiency program in sight, landlords who may have been interested in fixing up their buildings now have even less opportunity to do so, and tenants are going to be left paying the bills.

Thirdly, cuts to Rent Assist: for the second year in a row, the Pallister government has made a big cut to the Rent Assist program, this year almost \$2 million. There's apparently money in the government's budget to protect 20 per cent salary increases for the Premier and the minister, and they're bringing three pieces of legislation to make sure the descendants get the money, but there's no money for Rent Assist. A single minimum wage worker is now losing over \$1,300 a year and a two-parent family with three kids is losing \$2,000 a year.

The good news is it doesn't have to be this way. I recently introduced changes to The Residential Tenancies Act which would require landlords to reduce utility costs in their buildings before they

could get an above-guideline rent increase. I also called for this government to financially help landlords with these retrofits, such as with no-interest pay-as-you-save loans. The Pallister government blocked my bill entirely, missing out on yet another opportunity to create hundreds of new jobs, reduce our emissions and actually save everyone money.

Madam Speaker, Manitoba's renters deserve better than this. [*interjection*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Children's Special Allowances

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): I wish that the minister could hear the many life stories of the aged-out CFS young adults in our province.

One young child grew up never knowing her identity. After she was taken, her mother fell into a depression. The father kept fighting for his daughter, but was shot down time and time again. He diligently completed all the programs, even though he was not the reason that his daughter was apprehended. Because of this mounting frustration at the system, he was soon labelled as belligerent.

The mother became sick and passed away. The father was despondent and had no recourse; he couldn't even check his daughter's CFS file due to the unjust labelling. Visits were strained because there was always someone in the room watching their interactions.

Let me be clear: she was taken away due to her mother's actions. He was a good father. He, too, ended up passing away before the child turned 18. All the family assets did not go to the rightful heir.

Aged-out CFS kids are being left on the streets of Winnipeg on their 18th birthday. The phrase this minister used with me was: the NDP dump jobs.

We all know that ties to family are severed while many kids do their hard time as a CFS child. These young adults literally have nothing to help them set out in their life. Most end up doing real hard time as an adult.

Minister, we had a discussion about how, in opposition, the PCs fought the NDP to cease this reprehensible act of keeping the Children's Special Allowances as government revenue.

Minister, now this government is rightfully getting sued, and I stand with my people and applaud those leaderships' actions. We need those funds to

help our CFS young adults get the supports they need to be productive members.

Miigwech.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to oral questions, we have some guests in the gallery.

I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today 13 students from the University of Winnipeg High School Enrichment led by Dr. Allan Diduck and Julia Antonyshyn, who are the guests of the Minister of Sustainable Development (Ms. Squires).

And also in the public gallery from Sisler High School we have 13 grade 9 students under the direction of Mingdi Zhao, and this group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Burrows (Ms. Lamoureux).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Concordia and Seven Oaks Hospitals Request to Stop ER Closures

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): Madam Speaker, pressure is mounting on the St. Boniface Hospital's emergency room and the Premier's (Mr. Pallister) cuts to health care are making things worse.

We know that his plans to close Concordia's emergency room and the emergency room at Seven Oaks will only send tens of thousands of more patients to St. Boniface each and every year.

Now, St. Boniface Hospital is already stressed. We know that the overtime—the mandatory overtime—for nurses there is accruing at an unprecedented level. And when the front-line workers look to this government to listen to them, they find a government that can't even sit down to meet with their partners. They see a Premier who's broken his promise, clearly, to protect front-line services.

* (13:50)

So I'd ask the Premier: Will he back off of his misguided plan to close the emergency rooms at Seven Oaks and Concordia?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition doesn't want to say it, but he knows, of course, that there's a record level of investment in Health this year. In fact, there is more than a half a billion dollars more being invested in our health-care system in Manitoba this year than there ever was under the NDP government.

He also doesn't want to say, of course, that there is expansion happening within the system. There's expansion happening at the Grace Hospital, the Grace emergency room that's going to be opening next year. I had the opportunity to tour it—or sorry, next month, Madam Speaker—I had the opportunity to tour that just a few days ago.

There's also expansion happening at the St. Boniface emergency room, which is going to add significant capacity to that ER, something that this member voted against, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Kinew: The government's own experts, the report that they commissioned themselves, says that what they're doing at St. Boniface Hospital will not be adequate to keep up with the influx of patients who will be sent there if they proceed with this mistake, this plan to close emergency rooms at Concordia and Seven Oaks hospitals.

We see what's happened in other parts of the WRHA since they started closing emergency rooms and urgent cares at places like Victoria General and Misericordia. Every month since their plan started, their plan for closures began, wait times have been increasing, Madam Speaker.

We know that the impact on the front-line workers, those who care for our friends and family members, is even worse. Nurses are stressed and they take that stress with them when they go to the bedside.

So again, I would ask the Premier: Will he back off his plan to close emergency rooms at Seven Oaks and Concordia?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, every day the Leader of the Opposition stands in this House and defends record-long wait times. Every day he stands in this House and he demands that Manitobans wait longer and longer when it comes to being in ERs. Every day he stands in the House and he says we shouldn't make any changes, even though we were

last in the country in virtually every category when it comes to health care. He wants us to remain the last in the country, Madam Speaker.

I'm not sure why the Leader of the Opposition is satisfied with last. I'm not sure why he doesn't want Manitobans to get quicker care. I don't know why he doesn't want Manitobans to get the care that they need, when they need it, Madam Speaker, but his priorities are all wrong.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, this government is in such a rush to close emergency rooms and make cuts to health care that they forget that their plan might make things worse.

In fact, it already is. We already see the impact of their misguided plans with the increasing wait times since they started closing emergency rooms, with the mandatory overtime of nurses that's stressing out nurses. They're bringing that to the bedside. It's impacting the quality of care. We know that the nurses just released a report today that said that Manitobans should have more care, not cuts.

And yet this government refuses to listen. They continue to move full steam ahead with the plan to close emergency rooms right here in the city of Winnipeg. Experts are telling them it's not right. Physicians are telling them it's not right. And now the nurses are saying their plan is a mistake as well.

Will the Premier (Mr. Pallister) back off his plan to close emergency rooms at Seven Oaks and Concordia?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, the report that he references is similar to the one that was released in 2014, which the NDP government did nothing to act on. So he says one thing, but they do another.

In fact, when you look generally across the health-care system, we're expanding the Grace emergency room. The funding for that is in this year's budget. That member voted against it. We're expanding the St. Boniface emergency room. The funding's in the budget. He voted against it. We've lowered ambulance fees. The opposition voted against that. We're hiring 60 new paramedics this year. The Leader of the Opposition and all their colleagues voted against that, Madam Speaker.

Over and over, time and time again, we continue to put more investments into the system to make it better, and the Leader of the Opposition votes against

it. He's not on the side of Manitobans when it comes to health care, Madam Speaker.

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

Vale Canada Layoff Notices Jobs Plan for Thompson

Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition): What I vote against, Madam Speaker, is this terrible plan to close emergency rooms. I vote against this government's aggressive austerity and I also voted against a budget that had no plan—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —to keep jobs in the city of Thompson.

Now, we heard the confirmation yesterday of some of this bad news that is going to hit one of our northern cities very hard. We knew that there were going to be layoffs as a result of the smelter and refinery being wound down in Thompson, but, still, it hits hard once those really take effect, once you see the human toll that it's going to have on the city of Thompson. We have raised the issue multiple times with many different Cabinet ministers, with the Premier himself, and still no plan for jobs, no plan to help the city of Thompson, no plan for the long-term future of the North.

So I'd ask the Premier today: Will he bring forward a real plan to keep people working in the city of Thompson?

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Growth, Enterprise and Trade): Madam Speaker, speaking of no plans, the former NDP government knew for years of Vale's plans to close the smelter, and yet they did absolutely nothing. We continue to work with Vale; we continue to work with the city of Thompson. Our economic development will be in Thompson next week and we look forward to having input from the community of Thompson.

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

Mr. Kinew: You know, Madam Speaker, we put together a proposal that would help keep jobs at the Vale operation in Thompson. It was one that we designed in consultation with—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —the steelworkers who work in those operations. It's one that we designed with the mining

industry, they were supportive of. It's one that we shared with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) prior to the design of his budget. It's an idea that we shared with the Premier (Mr. Pallister) himself. None of them were willing to bring this plan forward and actually work to keep jobs in Thompson.

And when we'd go there and we'd speak to the workers who are going to be affected by notices, you know what they tell us? They say not only will the Cabinet ministers and the Premier refuse to engage with them, but even their own MLA has not reached out to talk to the workers who will be affected.

This is not what workers—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —in the North deserve. It's not what people in Thompson expect, Madam Speaker.

When will the Premier bring forward a real plan to keep northern jobs in cities like Thompson?
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, the assertion the Leader of the Opposition made about the current member for Thompson (Mr. Bindle) is completely untrue. No one is working for Thompson harder than the member for Thompson.

Madam Speaker, we are working with our indigenous communities across the North on a new mining protocol that will allow mining development to happen. We have our Look North strategy that we continue to work on, and here is the Leader of the Opposition standing up, talking about mining, when he signed the Leap Manifesto that says all natural resources shall stay in the ground.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, order.

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

Mr. Kinew: Well, you know, Madam Speaker, I'm not surprised that the minister is not well versed on issues like this one. What the Leap actually says is that we should stand up against austerity in all its forms.

Now, what's particularly galling about this government is that they claim to be coming up with a plan, but all they have are words on a page.

Now, when I met with the mining industry—
[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinew: —and shared our idea they said, yes, please, that's exactly what we want. Put together a package that will consider the impact of taxes and hydro and allow us to repay those deferred considerations at a later date when nickel prices rebound. We shared this information with the Minister of Finance. We shared it with the Premier—still no action.

All they want to do is convene press conference after press conference, but never, ever come forward with a real plan for jobs.

So I'd ask the Premier, yet again, bring us a real plan to keep people working in Thompson.

* (14:00)

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Speaker, I'm glad to see the Leader of the Opposition now defends his position on the Leap Manifesto.

His other comment, too, is about, well, we should wait for nickel prices to recover. We don't need to wait for nickel prices to recover. We're working with mining and exploration companies right now. They see Manitoba as terrific future for their companies, and we welcome them, unlike what the former NDP government did.

Nurses Rally for Patient Care Minister's Attendance

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): Madam Speaker, over the lunch hour next Wednesday nurses from every corner of Manitoba and other health-care professionals and others who work in the health-care system will be at the Legislature for a rally for patient care.

Will the Minister of Health be there to listen to what they have to say?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, not only do we listen to front-line workers, we also 'listen'—listen to Manitobans, Manitobans who have been waiting for hundreds of thousands of hours, collectively, in emergency rooms, Manitobans who were waiting for more hours each and every day, each and every year in emergency rooms because the system got worse and worse and worse under the former NDP government over 17 years.

Absolutely, we're always listening to front-line workers. I've had many, many discussions with those workers to hear what their ideas are, but, unfortunately for the member opposite, he never actually listens to patients, and he may not believe it, but we believe that the health-care system is actually about the patients.

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

Mr. Swan: I asked the minister a very specific question, and I think we know the answer is no, he won't be out there to listen to what nurses from across Manitoba have to say.

They released a report on the state of long-term care in Manitoba. They have specific concerns regarding staffing in personal-care homes and they tell us the need for more supports for our seniors is growing, yet those supports are getting smaller and smaller. And this year alone this government is cutting money, \$2.3 million, from long-term care in Manitoba, even when we know that there are challenges in price and volume. This is a real cut being made by this government, and nurses are concerned about the impact it's going to have on patients in long-term-care facilities.

Why won't this minister meet with them next week when they come to this Legislature to let their views be known?

Mr. Goertzen: Well, unlike the member opposite, I don't have to wait for a rally to talk to front-line workers. We're talking to them all the time, Madam Speaker, but not just front-line workers—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Goertzen: —Madam Speaker, not just front-line workers; of course, we're talking to patients, patients who've been waiting for hours to get service. We've heard from members in this House who've waited for hours in an emergency room. We know that the system needed to be fixed.

Now, the great defenders of the status quo, the NDP, want Manitobans to believe that we should've just kept doing the same thing that was happening for 17 years, continue to have wait times grow, continue to have people languish and continue to ensure that people aren't getting the service they need. That was their plan. We're acting on a plan to better the system, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Swan: Unfortunately, this Minister of Health and the members of his caucus aren't listening to what nurses have to say. They ignore what nurses have to say and, as a matter of fact, members of the PC caucus actually mock openly what nurses have to say, whether it's about—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Swan: —whether it's about mandatory overtime, which this Premier (Mr. Pallister) denied occurring, even though nurses told us—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Swan: —that that is at a crisis situation. They ignored what nurses had to say about understaffing of wards and understaffing of units, and even today they continue to think that these issues being raised by nurses are some kind of joke. *[interjection]* This is not a joke. Nurses in Manitoba are doing their best for Manitoba patients. *[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Swan: Will this minister meet with Manitoba nurses and listen to what they have to say about health care in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, with all due respect, it is hard to take seriously those kinds of accusations from a member who couldn't get along with the very people he worked most closely with in his own caucus. This is a government that listens to those who are on the front lines, it listens to those who are affected by the front lines and it listens to those who are getting service.

Ultimately, the health-care system is about the patient. We need to ensure that we have the right staff there to help the patients, Madam Speaker. That is why the system is being properly aligned. Our focus—yes, we're always concerned about front-line workers and the conditions that they're working under, but our focus will always be and should always be on the service that the patients are getting in the health-care system. That is what the health-care system is about: helping patients, Madam Speaker.

Changes to Health-Care Services Impact on Women and Girls

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): It's clear the Premier's cuts to our health-care system are having a disproportionate impact on women in Manitoba, Madam Speaker. The firing of lactation consultants,

the closing of the Mature Women's Centre, the refusal to fully cover the costs of the abortion pill undermines women's health in Manitoba. The Premier (Mr. Pallister) refuses to understand his cuts from within a gendered lens.

Will the Premier reverse his cuts which have a disproportionate impact on Manitoba women and girls?

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): I can assure the members opposite that we not only looked at the increases to our health-care budget under a gender-based lens, we looked at it under a Manitoba lens, and I very much congratulate the Health Minister for increasing the budget for health care.

In regards to some of the other issues that the member opposite raised, nothing could be further from the truth and our government respects a woman's autonomy to her health and well-being, and we are very proud to be enhancing health-care services for women in the province of Manitoba.

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

Ms. Fontaine: The report released by the Manitoba Nurses Union makes clear another aspect to the Premier's cuts, and that is that the vast majority of health-care workers are women, Madam Speaker. When positions are unfilled and when staff are cut, these front-line health-care workers have to work short, as they call it. When sick staff are not replaced, the care these women have to provide is compromised.

Why is the Premier ignoring the impact his cuts are having on women health-care workers in Manitoba?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, the member fails to realize there's more than a half a billion dollars more being invested in health care today than there ever was under the former NDP government, a government that she served under, and that increase of a half a billion dollars serves all Manitobans.

I know that the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Kinew) a couple of days ago tried to bring forward the vacancy rates that exist within the health-care system for nurses. I brought to him yesterday the vacancy rates that existed just before they left government. Madam Speaker, they were

significantly worse. Maybe she wants to have a discussion with the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Ms. Fontaine: We know that women actually tend to live longer than men and require more hospitalization over the course of our lives, often due to pregnancies and birthing our children. So when this Premier cuts supports to personal-care homes, it hits women harder. When the Premier cuts lactation consultants, it hits women harder. We should be investing in front-line health care for women, not cutting it.

So will the Premier reverse his cuts to our health-care system and start investing in health care for Manitoba women and girls?

Ms. Squires: The member comes into the House and she feigns concern for women in Manitoba, but I wonder if she used a gender-based lens when they commissioned that inquiry into the misogynistic past of the NDP and then used that as an opportunity to fundraise for her political campaign and used that as an opportunity to sell memberships to these women.

I only wish that members opposite would be concerned about all women in this province, including those who have been victimized by her party.

* (14:10)

Need for Child-Care Spaces Request for Government Investment

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I only wish the women in this House would stand up for other women in Manitoba.

The 17—there's over 17,000 children born in this province every year. Manitoba needs more investment in child care more than ever to maintain existing spots and to keep up with demand.

The Province's approach to early childhood isn't enough.

Why is this government failing our children?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Investing in early learning and child care is something that we're very proud of. Our government was—recently made announcements, \$47 million, with the federal government in terms of investments in child care. That's going to create thousands of new spaces for Manitoba families.

We think that's important after we know what happened with the NDP in terms of their approach to child care. They took an ideological approach to child care where they were almost forcing home-based providers out of business because of an ideological approach.

We have a balanced approach that's going to mean a difference for Manitoba families.

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

Mrs. Smith: That's \$47 million from the federal government, zero from this province.

The Manitoba Child Care Association has raised concerns about the backlog in child-care spaces which—over 15,000 spaces and just weeks ago—exist—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Order.

Mrs. Smith: The minister's own annual report shows that the number of unfunded spaces has nearly doubled in just one year. Communities are prepared to do the work, but this minister is relying solely on \$47 million from the federal government to meet these needs. It's not enough.

When will this minister start standing up for Manitoba families?

Mr. Fielding: For the opposition to somehow say that we haven't made advancements in terms of unfunded spaces is simply not true. We've funded over 600 new unfunded spaces that were on the list since taking office. That's an important contribution. There's over 63 centres that are benefiting from the investments we're making on unfunded spaces.

That's what I call progress, Madam Speaker.

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

Mrs. Smith: We know that a lot of these spaces are reliant on these schools being built, so those families are waiting and waiting and waiting.

The number of spaces has hardly changed—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Smith: —according to this minister's own report.

The minister's funding for both home-based and centre-based child care are not keeping up. It's clear that this government is considering other options.

So I ask the minister: Is he considering providing additional funding for profit centre home-based daycares?

Mr. Fielding: In Manitoba there's a variety of sources of people—how they take care of their children. There's people that choose to stay home and parent their children as well, and that's a decision that people make.

We have taken a balanced approach in terms of addressing child care. We're not going to take an ideological approach where the NDP tried to run out—the home-based providers out of business here in the province of Manitoba by a reduction of over 29 per cent since they were there.

We're taking a balanced approach. We're making investments. We're creating affordable child-care spaces with the federal government and Manitoba families. We think that's important investments to be made.

North End and Interlake Residents Accessible ORs and ICUs

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Madam Speaker, closing ICUs and ORs in the North End of Winnipeg without having a clear, transparent plan to address the immediate impact is causing patients and front-line staff unnecessary stress.

Will the minister consider keeping open an OR and ICU that will be easily accessible to the residents of Winnipeg north and those of the Interlake-eastern health authority?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Well, Madam Speaker, my friend from Burrows may believe that waiting for hours and hours in an emergency room is an easy accessibility, but it's not. Yes, you might be able to get into the door, but waiting for 10 hours is not the kind of care that you need.

There needed to be transformation within the health-care system. That was confirmed by the NDP's hand-picked consultant, Madam Speaker, that laid out a plan that has been done in other places like Vancouver and Calgary and Edmonton and Hamilton and Ottawa, all of which had better wait times than Manitoba has over the last 20 years.

We've seen an improvement on wait times, which is better access, which is better care, and we look forward to more improvements, Madam Speaker.

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

Intensive Care Units Staff Retention Concerns

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): The impact of ICU consolidation will create immense pressure to our front-line workers. The minister admitted that communication needs to be improved, yet the concern of being left in the dark by this government only continues to grow.

The Manitoba Nurses Union has recently expressed the consequences that this uncertainty has created towards staff morale as well as difficulties retaining staff. The ICU is a highly specialized work environment.

How does this minister plan to address this staff retention issue?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): Madam Speaker, we know that, ultimately, when you build a health-care system that it is more responsive to the patients which is—ultimately is what this is about, it also better the working 'environming' for those who are working in the system.

So when nurses and doctors are working in a system that they can actually meet the demands of the patients and they can meet them in a way that is quick and meet them in the way that they need to be met, Madam Speaker, it is better for everyone working in the system and, of course, for those who need the system as patients.

So bettering the system as we are doing, as we will continue to do with the plan and the consultant's plan from the hand-picked consultant of the NDP, it'll make it better for the patients and for those who are working in the system, who ultimately want to help those that they're there to support.

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

Seven Oaks Hospital Timeline for Closure

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): Nurses and other front-line staff have continued to voice concerns over the lack of transparency that this government has provided in light of their direct cuts to critical health-care services.

I'm thinking specifically about the future of Seven Oaks hospital because that's where the

majority of my constituents go. Last week the minister was non-responsive to my question.

So I would like to ask it again: Can this minister provide a definitive date on phase 2 of the closures to Seven Oaks hospital?

Madam Speaker: Prior to having the minister answer that I would just—again, in the last number of days I have been asking for co-operation of all members in respectfully listening to the questions and answers that are being raised. I don't think heckling somebody in a continuous manner is going to further democracy or provide for anything better in this Chamber.

I would ask for everybody's co-operation, and I would actually ask the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler), as well, to please heed the requests that I have made on numerous occasions.

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): I did respond to this member and other members, last week, in terms of when we expect to hear back from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority on the implementation of phase 2.

When we last heard from the member for Burrows when it comes to her plans for health care in Manitoba, she said we should look to Ontario and what they're doing. So I did that, and I pulled up an article from a week ago from Dr. Kulvinder Gill who's president of concerned doctors Ontario, who said: We are in the midst of the worst health-care crisis in Ontario that we've ever seen. It is the result of years of complete and utter neglect and gross mismanagement of our once-great health-care system under the Liberal government.

Madam Speaker, that's what she wants us to follow. We're on a better path.

Community Development Programs Funding Announcement

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): Our government has been strongly committed to supporting community and non-profit organizations across Manitoba, Madam Speaker. In fact, Budget 2018 includes over \$20 million in support of community development programs.

In the 2018 intake for community development program applications, which started today, can the Minister of Municipal Relations update the House on what types of projects are supported through this funding?

And I just want to note, Madam Speaker, for all members in the House, that unlike the previous government, how they used to operate by taking a political donation or a party membership, that is not what is a prerequisite under this government's plan.

* (14:20)

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations): I was pleased that the Minister responsible for Status of Women joined me at our announcement today. One of our key priorities, Madam Speaker, will focus on supports for vulnerable women.

We also announced that AMM is now involved in the evaluation process to ensure that community benefits are maximized at the local level.

We recently announced no-wrong-door policy for anyone in government to report incidents of workplace harassment. Working—we're working to make workplaces safer to the municipal level, and today's announcement is yet another example of this government—is making a real progress in support of vulnerable women.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Solar Energy Industry Government Position

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I recently had the pleasure of having a phone conversation with a local green entrepreneur—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altemeyer: —someone who came to this province to create green jobs for local Manitobans. I'd like to table one of the comments he shared with me for the House's benefit. He said, quote: In less than a week, Manitoba will go from the best province in Canada for solar energy to the worst. That quote comes from Mr. Riley Unger, spokesperson for Living Skies Solar Inc.

I wonder if this government has any answer to Mr. Unger and the hundreds of other people working in the solar industry right now where this government is about to kill their industry outright.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Crown Services): Just for the member's information, Manitoba Hydro entered into a program regarding solar energy. In fact, that program was quite successful, in fact, oversubscribed by the tune about 700 per cent. So, certainly, a lot of Manitobans are benefiting from

that particular pilot program, and, Madam Speaker, that's exactly what it was, a pilot program.

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

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, only the Pallister government could look at a fantastic success story like that and decide to kill it.

The other very concerning thing about this, Madam Speaker, is the message from this government may not line up with the truth when it comes to the future of solar energy in Manitoba. This minister and others have said repeatedly that Efficiency Manitoba, which does not exist, has no board, has no budget, has no staff, is somehow going to make a decision at some point in time on what to do about solar energy.

Can the minister tell me how many times the word solar appears in the legislation that created Efficiency Manitoba?

Mr. Cullen: I think the member knows we're in transition to Efficiency Manitoba, and hopefully he did read the legislation and that legislation talks about Efficiency Manitoba—in fact, the government of Manitoba consulting with Manitobans. There's legislation around stakeholder involvement. So Efficiency Manitoba and the government of Manitoba will be consulting with stakeholders as it moves forward in developing programs.

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

Mr. Altemeyer: Well, I feel kind of bad about doing this. Here's where the shoe drops for the minister: solar energy—the word solar—is not mentioned even once in the Efficiency Manitoba legislation. How on earth can this minister and this government go around to the solar industry and say there will be a decision made by Efficiency Manitoba about the very future of the great work that you are doing, the great jobs that you are creating, the Manitobans that you are supporting, when there is no mandate for solar energy work under the legislation this government brought in on Efficiency Manitoba?

I brought in an amendment which would have switched that, but the government did not even listen to the amendment. They voted it out of hand. This government is misleading the solar industry and saying they have the mandate to make—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Sustainable Development): Well, Madam Speaker, the members opposite talk a good talk, but we know on environment they failed in every–every–category. They failed to bring out a–any meaningful plan to reduce carbon emissions and convert to a low-carbon future during the 17 years that they were in government, and they continue to do so with the delaying of our bill.

And I would really like some consistency coming from members opposite, but that's probably too much to ask. They have petitioned for no carbon price, they have petitioned for \$50 price on carbon and now they're petitioning for a \$300 price on carbon.

Unlike the members opposite, the one thing that they are consistent on is saying that they will take all of that money, a hundred per cent of the money. I'd like to table Hansard from last–few weeks ago when the members opposite said, let us control all the money.

Well, that didn't work out so well for Manitobans in the past, Madam Speaker.

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

Order.

Concordia Hospital ER Timeline for Closure

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Residents of Concordia are watching as their health-care system is taken apart piece by piece. The wait times task force was clear that the–with Concordia closed, other hospitals like St. Boniface don't have the capacity to accommodate the increased number of patients.

Patients are raising their concerns. Workers are telling me that they're concerned with all the uncertainty.

And the minister has had multiple opportunities in this question period alone to just tell the public: When is the hospital at–the emergency room at Concordia Hospital going to close?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living): The member opposite refers to the wait times task force, which was looking for expanding capacity at St. Boniface emergency room. We're delivering on that. There was a tender that went out. The tender was awarded and you'll soon see construction at the St. Boniface emergency room as we expand the capacity, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, residents of Concordia are deeply concerned. The wait times task force was clear that closing Concordia is going to put massive stress on other hospitals like St. Boniface. In fact, it was the Premier (Mr. Pallister) himself who said that, quote: The report that was just done evaluating some of the challenges in terms of changes that have been occurring should not be ignored.

But instead of withdrawing his order, the minister is carrying on, and, worse yet, he's playing games with the timeline and not telling the public and creating more confusion by not telling them when the hospital ER at Concordia will close.

So I'm just asking the minister: Will he tell my constituents, will he tell the people of northeast Winnipeg, will he tell Manitobans when will he close the Concordia Hospital ER?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, in fact, the wait times task force was listened to and that is why we're expanding capacity at the St. Boniface Hospital. That work will begin soon and in about a month we're going to open the new expanded Grace emergency room.

There's expansion happening in emergency rooms all over Manitoba, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Wiebe: Madam Speaker, workers at Concordia tell me that they have concerns about the closure of that ER. They tell me that the government's plan has caused chaos and confusion in the health-care system. Worse yet, even they are not being given the information from this government about when the emergency room will close, something that the Premier acknowledged in Estimates was a major problem.

So I ask the minister again if he could give us a timeline, if he could give us a date, if he could just tell those front-line workers who are trying to provide good care to the people of Manitoba: When will the Concordia Hospital emergency room close?

Mr. Goertzen: Madam Speaker, confusion in a system is caused when people have to wait hours and hours in an emergency room. It was the NDP's hand-picked consultant who recognized it needed to be changed and we're acting on that change.

Budget 2018 Progress Update

Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson): During the last election, just over two years ago, we went to the doors of Manitobans. We promised Manitobans that a PC government would fix the finances of this province. We promised Manitobans that a PC government would repair the services of this province and rebuild the economy of this province. The rest is history. Manitobans elected a PC government with a historic majority unseen in generations.

Now, we know that Manitobans are behind us. We know that they're behind our legislative agenda—*[interjection]*—and, in fact, even the NDP, as they laugh, seem to be on board since just—was it last night? They passed two thirds—the night before they passed two thirds of our legislation without even opposing it.

So can the Minister of Finance remind us all of the progress that we have made to date and how our PC government is keeping and fulfilling our promises—

* (14:30)

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Hon. Cameron Friesen (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for Radisson. Finally, a budget question.

It's been six weeks and my critic has still yet to ask a budget question, so I assume he's still experiencing turbulence, and the seat belt is on. But in any case, Madam Speaker, what's not to like about Budget 2018: record tax cuts; record investments in health care, education; five new schools; a conservation trust.

Madam Speaker, we are keeping our promises. We are making progress on behalf of all Manitobans. We are only getting started, and together we will make Manitoba Canada's most improved province.

Madam Speaker: The time for oral questions has expired.

PETITIONS

Tina Fontaine—Public Inquiry

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

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Smith: These are the reasons for this petition.

(1) Tina Fontaine was murdered at the age of 15 years, and her body was found in the Red River on August 17, 2014.

(2) Tina Fontaine was robbed of her loving family and the Anishinabe community of Sagkeeng First Nation.

(3) Tina was failed by multiple systems which did not protect her as they intervened in her life.

(4) Tina Fontaine was further failed by systems meant to seek and pursue justice for her murder.

(5) Tina Fontaine's murder galvanized Canada on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, MMIWG, as she quickly became our collective daughter and the symbol of MMIG across Canada.

(6) Manitoba has failed to fully implement the recommendations of numerous reports and recommendations meant to improve and protect the lives of indigenous peoples and children, including the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Royal Commission on Aboriginal People and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Justice to immediately call a public inquiry into the systems that had a role in the life and death of Tina Fontaine, as well as the function of administration of justice after her death.

(2) To urge that the terms of reference of a public inquiry be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agent appointed by them.

Signed by Kelly Dennison, Rick McDougall, Darryl Ramkissoon and many other Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: The petition was not read as printed. Is there leave to accept the petition as printed? *[Agreed]*

TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA:

These are the reasons for this petition.

1. Tina Fontaine was murdered at the age of 15 years and her body was found in the Red River on August 17, 2014.

2. *Tina Fontaine was robbed of her loving family and the Anishinaabe community of Sagkeeng First Nation.*

3. *Tina Fontaine was failed by multiple systems which did not protect her as they intervened in her life.*

4. *Tina Fontaine was further failed by systems meant to seek and pursue justice for her murder.*

5. *Tina Fontaine's murder galvanized Canada on the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) as she quickly became our collective daughter and the symbol of MMIWG across Canada.*

6. *Manitoba has failed to fully implement the recommendations of numerous reports and recommendations meant to improve and protect the lives of Indigenous Peoples and children including the: Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People; and the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry.*

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

1. *To urge the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Justice to immediately call a Public Inquiry into the systems that had a role in the life and death of Tina Fontaine as well as the function of the administration of justice after her death.*

2. *To urge that the terms of reference of a Public Inquiry be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agent appointed by them.*

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

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

These are the reasons for this petition.

(1) Tina Fontaine was murdered at the age of 15 years, and her body was found in the Red River on August 17, 2014.

(2) Tina Fontaine was robbed of her loving family and the Anishinabe community of Sagkeeng First Nation.

(3) Tina Fontaine was failed by multiple systems which did not protect her as they intervened in her life.

(4) Tina Fontaine was further failed by systems meant to seek and pursue justice for her murder.

(5) Tina Fontaine's murder galvanized Canada on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, MMIWG, as she quickly became our collective daughter and the symbol of MMIWG across Canada.

(6) Manitoba has failed to fully implement the recommendations of numerous reports and recommendations meant to improve and protect the lives of indigenous peoples and children, including the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the Premier of Manitoba and the Minister of Justice to immediately call a public inquiry into the systems that had a role in the life and death of Tina Fontaine, as well as the function of the administration of justice after her death.

(2) To urge that the terms of reference of a public inquiry be developed jointly with the caregivers of Tina Fontaine and/or the agent appointed by them.

Signed by Dorothy Fontaine, Angie Hutchinson and Mia Sally Correia and many, many more Manitobans.

Twinning Leila Avenue

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the follow petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The background to this petition is as follows:

(1) The residents of The Maples community have diverse needs, such as the issue of twinning Leila Avenue, which was raised with the previous minister responsible for Municipal Relations.

(2) The residents of The Maples appreciate that Leila Avenue is a City of Winnipeg, city, responsibility, but the new Minister of Municipal Relations has not complied with requests to ask the City to make twinning this city—this road a priority, even though the provincial government provides the City with its share for funding such projects.

(3) Leila Avenue is the main road to approach the Seven Oaks hospital and one extra lane would

ease the traffic that has been created by a corresponding increase in population in the area.

(4) The Maples residents are frustrated because both the City and the provincial government do not treat infrastructure developments in the north Winnipeg equally with those in the south.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to request that the City twin Leila Avenue to reduce traffic and commute time for the residents of The Maples and surrounding areas, enabling the accessing of timely health services, which will contribute to both the economy and society.

Signed by many Manitobans.

Madam Speaker: Grievances?

ORDERS OF THE DAY

(Continued)

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: I have a statement for the House.

I'm advising the House that I've received a letter from the member for Assiniboia (Mr. Fletcher) indicating that he has identified Bill 208, The Conflict of Interest Act, as his one selected bill for this session.

As a reminder to the House, subrule 24(2) allows each independent member to select one private member's bill per session to proceed to a second reading vote and, despite rule 69(1), an independent member will not require a seconder to move the second reading motion for their selected private member's bill.

The member for Assiniboia has therefore advised that the question will be put on second reading of Bill 208 on Thursday May 17th, 2018 at 10:55 a.m.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Government House Leader): On House business, I would like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Monday, May 7th, 2018 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 3, the Canadian Free Trade Agreement implementation act, Labour Mobility Act and regulated health professionals act amended; Bill 10, The

Boards, Committees, Councils and Commissions Streamlining Act (Various Acts Amended or Repealed); and Bill 15, The Film and Video Classification and Distribution Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Monday, May 7th, 2018 at 6 p.m. to consider the following: Bill 3, the Canadian Free Trade Agreement implementation act, Labour Mobility Act and Regulated Health Professions Act amendment—amended; Bill 10, The Boards, Committees, Councils and Commissions Streamlining Act (Various Acts Amended or Repealed); Bill 15, The Film and Video Classification and Distribution Act.

* (14:40)

And, just for the information of members of the House, we are looking into the—what has happened with the lighting in the House. And we have been advised that all lights and power are being affected in the building and that for the current time a remedy is beyond someone's control. So it is not just the Chamber. So, if we can continue on, we'll do our best.

Mr. Cullen: Further House business, Madam Speaker. I would like to announce the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Tuesday, May 8th, 2018, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 4, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act (Member Changing Parties); Bill 11, The Safe and Responsible Retailing of Cannabis Act (Liquor and Gaming Control Act and Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Act Amended); and Bill 25, The Non-Smokers Health Protection and Vapour Products Amendment Act (Prohibiting Cannabis Consumption in Outdoor Public Places); and Bill 26, The Impaired Driving Offences Act (Various Acts Amended).

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Justice will meet on Tuesday, May 8th, 2018, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 4, The Legislative Assembly Amendment Act (Member Changing Parties); Bill 11, The Safe and Responsible Retailing of Cannabis Act (Liquor and Gaming Control Act and Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Act Amended); Bill 25, The Non-Smokers Health Protection and Vapour Products Amendment Act (Prohibiting Cannabis Consumption in Outdoor Public Places); and Bill 26, The Impaired Driving Offences Act (Various Acts Amended).

Mr. Cullen: On further House business, Madam Speaker, I'd like to announce the Standing Committee on Human Resources will meet on Tuesday, May 8th, 2018, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 5, The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act; Bill 6, The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act; Bill 20, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (2); and Bill 23, The Commodity Futures Amendment and Securities Amendment Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Human Resources will meet on Tuesday, May 8th, 2018, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 5, The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act; Bill 6, The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Amendment Act; Bill 20, The Employment Standards Code Amendment Act (2); and Bill 23, The Commodity Futures Amendment and Securities Amendment Act.

Mr. Cullen: Additional House business, Madam Speaker, I'd like to announce that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Wednesday, May 9th, 2018, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 7, The Sustainable Watersheds Act (Various Acts Amended); Bill 9, The Community Child Care Standards Amendment Act (Enhanced Powers Respecting Governance and Accountability); Bill 14, The Traffic and Transportation Modernization Act; Bill 17, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment and Highway Traffic Amendment Act; Bill 18, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Taking Care of Our Children); and Bill 22, The Queen's Counsel Act.

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet on Wednesday, May 9th, 2018, at 6 p.m., to consider the following: Bill 7, The Sustainable Watersheds Act (Various Acts Amended); Bill 9, The Community Child Care Standards Amendment Act (Enhanced Powers Respecting Governance and Accountability); Bill 14, The Traffic and Transportation Modernization Act; Bill 17, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment and Highway Traffic Amendment Act; Bill 18, The Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Taking Care of Our Children); and Bill 22, The Queen's Counsel Act.

Mr. Cullen: I'd also like to announce that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet on Wednesday, May 9th, 2018, at 6 p.m., to consider Bill 19, The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning).

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Mr. Cullen: Madam Speaker, would you call Committee of Supply?

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider Estimates this afternoon.

The House will now resolve itself in the Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

FINANCE

* (14:50)

Madam Chairperson (Sarah Guillemard): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance, including Crown Services. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Crown Services): I do.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable minister.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you, Madam Chair, honourable colleagues, procedural authorities from the Clerk's office. I am pleased to be here today to present the 2018-2019 Estimates for the Department of Crown Services.

I will be introducing staff in a few minutes when they come to the table, but I do want to commend them for their hard work and dedication in support of Crown Services here in Manitoba.

As you know, there've been many changes to government operations since April 2016, when our government achieved success. In fact, the Department of Crown Services, bringing all Crown corporations under the jurisdiction of just one office, is a new department altogether.

The minister's office of Crown Services includes a total of seven full-time equivalents and \$54,000 in operating expenses, including the minister and deputy minister. This includes one vacancy that is being actively managed. All FTEs and accompanying staffing dollars were transferred from other departments as part of the government's reorganization.

On the topic of reorganization, I'd like to take a moment to thank those of the Crown Services Secretariat. The purpose of the new secretariat is to develop and implement policy and provide regulatory oversight for Manitoba's Crown corporations and to advise the Minister of Crown Services regarding the position of Manitoba's Crown corporations in relation to the government's own stated goals, objectives and performance measures.

The essential changes are: dissolving the council means a board is no longer necessary, as the former functions of the council are brought in-house to government. By dissolving the council and creating the secretariat, there is a net savings to both budget and salary expenditures going forward. The secretariat's budget is annualized as part of the annual Estimates process, and offsetting revenue is annualized from the Crown corporations. The secretariat is also responsible for creating and providing training programs for members appointed to government-affiliated boards.

* (15:00)

The total budget for the secretariat is now five FTEs with \$527,000 in salaries and benefits and \$180,000 in other requirements.

As indicated in our speeches from the throne and budget speeches, this government is committed to getting Manitoba back on a responsible fiscal track and to protecting front-line services.

As part of our commitment to fiscal responsibility, we introduced legislation to repeal the crown corporation public review and accountability act. This old legislation was antiquated, lacked clarity, and did not adequately reflect my mandate as the Minister of Crown Services. A lack of a clear governance framework left the Crowns vulnerable to

political interference, which unduly influenced the work of the board and the Crown in pursuit of their 'fiduciary' and commercial responsibilities.

In fact, we find ourselves today in many inherited messes created by the former government due to the inadequacies of the former legislation and misdirection by legislators.

The Crown Corporations Governance and Accountability Act (1) established a governance model based on a defined accountability system and clear accountability relationships, (2) established a board accountability requirements, (3) introduces minister-the mandate letters to the Crown corporations, (4) dissolved the Crown Corporations Council and implemented a secretariat model within government, and (5) provides for policy directives to be issued by the minister and the department.

As outlined in my mandate letter, our government also made a decision to create new arm's-length entity tasked with promoting energy efficiency and energy conservation in Manitoba. The Efficiency Manitoba Act successfully accomplishes this task by creating Efficiency Manitoba, whose mandate is to reduce the impact of future rate increases, defer the need for expensive new energy supplies, create new employment and business opportunities, and improve the competitiveness of Manitoba businesses.

Ironically, the NDP promised to create energy-efficiency entity themselves but failed to do so. Sadly, this is very similar to the NDP government missing every one of their self-imposed efficiency reduction targets.

As the Minister of Crown Services, I will continue to ensure that Crown corporations are accountable to the people of Manitoba and the high quality of service Manitoba-Manitobans expect is delivered.

We have lots to be proud of and have achieved many successes in many short months, and I'm proud of the dedicated work of our government, civil servants, and Crown corporations.

We have ushered in a successful new regime of ride sharing in Manitoba, as promised in our election platform. We are well underway to formally establish Efficiency Manitoba, and we have engaged and empowered our Crown corporations to reduce expenditures while improving the customer service experience.

Although there is much more work to be done and many more achievements to realize, I'm pleased to present and review the Department of Crown Services 2018-2019 Estimates of Expenditure.

With this, I wish to conclude my opening statement, and I look forward to the questions regarding these estimates.

Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister.

Does the critic have an opening statement?

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Just a very brief opening statement just to tell the minister that we look forward to having a fulsome discussion and getting, really, the information that Manitobans need out there.

Some of the things that he's talked about in his opening statement, I'm sure we'll delve into in more detail to try and flush out so that we all have a good understanding of everything under this minister's purview as the Crown Services Minister.

So, without further ado, that's it.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic.

The floor is now open for questions—oh, sorry.

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

Mr. Cullen: Joining me today is Grant Doak, deputy minister of the department; Rob Marrese, executive director; Inga Rannard, senior financial officer, and David Safruk, special assistant, Crown Services.

Madam Chairperson: The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Lindsey: Let me first take this opportunity to welcome the minister's staff, and I look forward to you providing him the information that will allow us all to move on, and I'm sure you will endeavour to do your best to make the minister look good; could be a challenge.

So, just in your opening statement, you talked about your department having seven FTEs, one vacancy and a certain budget, and then, further on, you talked about the secretariat having five FTEs and a different budget number. So you could you just kind of go over exactly what groups you were referring to there when you were talking in your opening statement?

Mr. Cullen: Sure, I'll try to walk the member through the organization here, if I can. So, in my office, in the minister's office, there is four staff. And in the deputy's office, there's the deputy and one staff. And then in the secretariat itself there's five staff.

Mr. Lindsey: So if the minister could perhaps just go back to his opening statement, where he talked about one part having seven FTEs, did that include the five in the secretariat, or were those two completely separate entities?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, that includes the five in the secretariat.

Mr. Lindsey: So the secretariat budget—and is this just for salaries, the \$520,000?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, that's salaries and operating dollars. Salaries and operating dollars.

Mr. Lindsey: So then, when you talked about the overall budget of \$540,000, that includes that \$520,000?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, for the member's information, the secretariat, the line item for salaries is \$527,000. And the operating line is \$180,000.

* (15:10)

Mr. Lindsey: So that's for the secretariat. So then overall, you talked about—in your opening statement—of a budget of 540,000.

Mr. Cullen: So to clarify, then, the operating expenses in the minister's office and the deputy minister's office is \$54,000.

Mr. Lindsey: So, in your opening statement where you talked about it—was \$54,000, not \$540,000. I was—

Mr. Cullen: That's correct. It should be \$54,000 for operating expenses in the minister and deputy minister's office. Maybe I misspoke earlier.

Mr. Lindsey: I may have misheard. As long as we clear it up, that's the important thing.

Okay, so we'll move on from that.

So can you give us a better update on the implementation of The Crown Corporations and Governance Accountability Act? I know you touched on it in your opening statement, but perhaps some more detail on that.

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the question, the chance to talk about a relatively new piece of legislation here in Manitoba.

So what the act does—it's really a framework piece of legislation. So it establishes the governance model based on a defined accountability system and clear accountability relationships. It establishes board accountability requirements, and we also have ministerial mandate letters, and this is new to Crown corporations. As part of that legislation, the—as I mentioned earlier, the Crown Corporations Council was dissolved, and we brought forward the new secretariat model within government. And the legislation also provides for policy directives to be issued by the minister and the department.

So I will say this is an ongoing work that the Crown Services does and the secretariat does in working with the Crown corporations. I know there was an initial mandate letter provided to the Crown corporations by the previous minister. We're also, at this point in time, considering the option of providing new mandate letters to the Crown corporations. So we're having discussions with the Crown corporations as we move forward in that regard.

We're also discussing roles and responsibilities, both as the minister, the secretariat and the Crown corporations. How those relationships will go forward, who's responsible for what and which—each position, what role they have and their respective responsibilities as well. So there's the roles and responsibilities component that's, you know, ongoing as well.

This legislation, as I mention, does provide the opportunity for the minister and department to provide directives to the Crown corporations relative to specific programs or situations as well. So it's an ongoing dialogue that we have with the Crown corporations in this regard. Obviously, we're working within the new framework that we've developed under this legislation. Ultimately, this framework provides some structure, provides an oversight mechanism as well, and I think as we work through the process, I think we're finding it works pretty well.

I think it's also, I may say, we certainly try to meet with the Crown corporations on a regular basis, certainly, me as minister, with the board chairs and the deputy primarily with the CEOs of the respective boards. And obviously, the secretariat has quite a bit of interaction with management—various management levels within the corporations as well.

Mr. Lindsey: So just very briefly, perhaps the minister could explain to me the difference between what this new secretariat is and does and what the previous council did?

Mr. Cullen: Sure. So the previous council was, I guess, primarily responsible for training, assisting training of board members. There was, you know, very little what I would call oversight with the council, and no direct reporting mechanism to the minister.

So under the secretariat model, it's still responsible for training of the board members, but it's our intent to step up that training for board members to make sure that they're adequately trained and ready for the responsibilities that they are giving—given.

And I think the secretariat as well, in terms of the oversight and interaction with the Crowns, I think we've increased that ability to have that communication. And then, obviously, the secretariat has a direct reporting mechanism right to the deputy and the minister. So a little better, I would say, oversight in that regard.

* (15:20)

Mr. Lindsey: So basically, two different entities but the same duties and performance. You talked about the council was there to train board members, but you felt there was some kind of lack of oversight or reporting back to the minister. The new secretariat trains board members and has some kind of oversight and direct report to the minister. So really and truly they're both basically the same thing.

So, if you could explain why the change, what did it accomplish, because it appears to be merely a change in name.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I think the new secretariat actually is more streamlined. In fact, going this way, we've reduced the budget by about \$180,000 a year.

I think probably less political interference under the new system as well. I think—and the intent is to provide sort of the oversight to the Crown corporations as well. We think this new format provides that better oversight. Obviously the, you know, the legislation—that's the heart of the legislation was to make sure there was the accountability component so that everyone knew what—knows what their roles and responsibilities are.

And I think this is a direct avenue for the Crown corporations to deal directly with the minister as well.

Mr. Lindsey: So, if the minister could perhaps explain how many people were involved with the council that was in place versus how many people, how many FTEs, that type of nature, are involved now with this secretariat.

Mr. Cullen: Right. So for the member's information, under the old system, there was five members in the council, but there was also four directors associated with the respective department who had oversight for those Crowns. So, if you look at it that way, nine positions associated with the previous council, and as we stated before, we're down to five positions now.

Mr. Lindsey: So then, really, this was about reducing the number of people that were involved in that aspect because based on your earlier comments, the two entities do basically the same thing, just with less people now. Is that correct?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, if you look at it, it was kind of a cumbersome system. You know, we had the council over here, but we also had the four directors within the department who were responsible for Crown corps as well.

So I think by sort of reducing the numbers and then streamlining them into one secretariat, it streamlines the process. And there's the accountability piece, obviously; the timeliness in terms of reporting. So I think there—it's a positive step forward.

Mr. Lindsey: So people that were there on the council that was five, how did they get appointed to those positions as opposed to people on the secretariat? Is it a different process, that?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, so the council was actually an agency or Crown on it—of its own. So having its own hiring and firing practices. So there was no real government oversight per se.

So, by bringing the secretariat under the government, we now have government oversight in terms of the secretariat and more of a direct relationship between the Crowns and government, and, you know, I think that provides better clarity around that. And obviously the—in conjunction with mandate letters, roles and responsibilities, I think that clarifies the relationship between the government and Crowns.

Mr. Lindsey: So, previously, the council was more of a separate entity that really precluded any kind of government interference because the government couldn't appoint the members to it, they didn't really have control over it, whereas now, with the secretariat, the government has control in the fact that, through the hiring process, you get kind of a say in—the minister or the department gets kind of a say in who's in those roles.

Mr. Cullen: I think it's important to spell out the accountability process that we have in place. I think this is very important. So we've established a structure where, you know, the minister will deal with the chair of the board, deputy ministers will deal with the CEOs of the corporations. So there's a structure there. We have laid out our roles and responsibilities that each of us as—in each position are responsible for. We can also provide mandate letters in terms of general mandate and we can also provide directives, more—around specific programs and so forth.

Under the previous government, it left it open for political interference and direct political staff going to CEOs or board members. So there was no real governance model in place. So it really left it dead open for political interference in Crowns.

Mr. Lindsey: I guess I'm not quite grasping how it leads to less political interference, when the previous council was really an entity unto itself, that now the minister or the government has the ability to hire or appoint who they want to the secretariat, and then, through the use of mandate letters and directives, to really tell those people what they want from them and how they expect them to achieve it. So I'm not sure how the minister is able to say that this leads to less interference. To me, it appears that it would lead to more potential for interference, not that I would suggest that the minister would unduly try to influence any of his Crown boards.

Mr. Cullen: So what the legislation does, it provides a framework and it provides a process, and this way there is a process. There's guidelines to follow, and there's—and a process in terms of the discussions with the respective players. Previously, there was very little oversight in terms of the Crowns; you know, the minister or the minister's political staff could have a direct—or provide direction, quite frankly, to the Crown corporations.

* (15:30)

I think it's important to remind the members that, you know, the mandate letters, the directives, are all public as well. So that certainly speaks to the transparency in regard to this legislation. I think it's very, very important.

So, like under the old model, there was political staff associated with the government for each corporation. So, clearly, direction could be given directly from the minister to political staff, right down to management of the organization.

Mr. Lindsey: Is that not still a possibility when the government appoints new members of the caucus to sit on boards to Crown corporations? Or are they there merely to report back to the minister, or do they take orders from the minister to deliver to the boards?

Mr. Cullen: It's been a long-standing practice of governments to allow MLAs to sit on some Crown corporation boards. And that's a long-standing practice. I can't speak for other ministers, but I know myself. I do not provide direction to members that are sitting on those boards.

Mr. Lindsey: I sense the minister wasn't done with his answer, so I would look forward to hearing the rest of it.

Mr. Cullen: I think that pretty well spells it out.

I mean, the legislation provides the framework that we as government, as minister and deputy minister, and secretariat work towards. It outlines the relationships that we have. It outlines, you know, who's going to be talking to who and it clearly identifies an opportunity for us to make sure that we understand fully written roles and responsibilities. And those roles and responsibilities are open to the public scrutiny, mandate letters are open to public scrutiny. Directives are available to the public as well.

So we're trying to design a open and transparent process as much as possible so that everyone's aware of the discussions and communication between government and Crown corporations.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister's talked quite a bit about mandate letters and directives. Are all the mandate letters that are required now in place? Have they been communicated to everybody that the minister believes they should be? Is it a work in progress? Perhaps maybe the minister could just update us on that.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, the legislation allows for mandate letters to be issued by government.

This is, in my knowledge, the first time mandate letters have been provided to the Crown agencies. So the mandate letters really outline what the priorities are for government. All the Crowns have been issued the initial mandate letters, but it is obviously a work in progress, as you say.

You know, priorities can change. So there's ongoing discussion—which—each of the Crown corporations, in terms of what the best path forward could be.

So, as we evolve and as we have those conversations, provides us an opportunity to revisit those mandate letters. So, as you say, that it really is a work in progress.

Mr. Lindsey: So does every entity or CEO or down the chain that requires a mandate letter, are they all in place yet?

Mr. Cullen: The—all the Crowns that I deal with have been issued the initial mandate letters. It is the prerogative of government to issue additional mandate letters if the government so desires. But the communication with Crowns is very important, and through that communication, then we can decide as a government whether or not we would like to issue additional mandate letters to the respective corporations.

Mr. Lindsey: Okay. So what about the directives as opposed to the mandate letters? Is that something that changes constantly? Have there been directives issued to all the Crowns?

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the question and opportunity to make sure we fully understand the process that we've developed and the legislation.

So the mandate letters really talk more about the high-level priorities, sort of the strategy going forward. The directives are designed to be more specific, relative to maybe a program or a certain program or something that the government may feel is important for the Crown to carry out.

I think it would be safe to say it's not the government's intent to be issuing a lot of directives to Crown corporations. In fact, we've only issued one directive, that to Manitoba Hydro, at this point in time.

Mr. Lindsey: I guess I have to ask what that one directive is and what does it say.

Mr. Cullen: Again, these—with these directives and the mandates, they're all available for public consumption. That specific directive to Manitoba Hydro was in regard to the proposal that had been developed between Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation in terms of a payment scheme. And the directive was to say to Manitoba Hydro to not enter into that agreement at this time.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister, on the one hand, says he doesn't want to interfere, and yet the one and only directive that's been issued to date could be seen as a pretty big interference in that Crown corporation.

* (15:40)

Is that the minister's plan for these directives, is to try and really control what the Crown does or agrees to, or that once they've come to some kind of agreement on—I mean, in this case, it was a pretty important agreement that they'd reached with the Manitoba Metis Federation that the government then issued a directive that said, stop, don't do that. Is that the whole point of these directives is to really prevent the Crown corporations from doing that which they think is best for the Crown and the government in the process, then, that really the minister, or, I guess, the Premier (Mr. Pallister) in this case, would be having their fingers all over everything that the Crown does, then, that if the Crown corporation knows that with a moment's notice, the government will issue a directive telling them to stop, isn't that the ultimate interference?

Mr. Cullen: I appreciate the question. You know, clearly, as the minister responsible for Crown agencies, we want to make sure the Crowns have the same policies and same priorities as government. So if we see a Crown stepping out of line with what we feel—view as being our policies or priorities, that would be an opportunity to issue a directive. And, again, these directives and these mandates are all approved by Cabinet. So to say that a minister could go off and issue a directive today on something, the reality is it can't happen; it has to be through government.

So I think it's important to recognize that this is a real public and transparent process. There's no behind-the-scenes deals going on between government and the Crown agencies, which certainly appeared to happen in the past.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, we weren't really going to go down that rabbit hole just yet, but what the heck, let's go.

So how many times has the minister—or, I guess, on what occasions has the minister met in person with the chair of the board of Manitoba Hydro since this particular minister became the Minister responsible for Crown Services?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, don't necessarily want to get into specifics with the member on this, but I will say that certainly had a number of meetings with the previous chair of Manitoba Hydro. Also met face to face with the new chair of Manitoba Hydro, and I continue to meet with the chairs of the other Crown corporations as well.

So I think it's very important that we continue to have those face-to-face conversations and to make sure that we are apprised of where the corporation wants to go. Clearly, we're not interested in the day-to-day operations on many Crown corporations. We just want to make sure that they are aligned with the policies and the priorities that our government has, moving forward. So those communications with the chairs are very important.

Mr. Lindsey: I guess I kind of would like to get a little more into the specifics than what, perhaps, the minister would like to do, but prior to the directive telling the Crown corporation Manitoba Hydro to stop with the agreement that they had with the Manitoba Metis Federation, how many times had the minister met with the CEO?

Mr. Cullen: I can assure the member opposite that I have had numerous conversations with the previous chair, a number of conversations with the new chair, and I continue to have discussions with all the chairs.

And I think to—just to make it clear, the directive was around a proposal. There was no agreement between Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Metis Federation. It was a proposal. In fact, the document itself refers to it as a term sheet so there was no agreement in place. So the directive was to not to proceed to the next phase, which would have been an agreement.

Mr. Lindsey: So, at any of the meetings that the minister says he's had with the chair prior to the directive being issued, was there ever any discussion of an ongoing process involving Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation?

Mr. Cullen: If I understand the member's question, certainly, the government was aware of discussions between Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation going forward, and clearly, I, as minister, had a discussion with the chair of the board about

those—about that proposal and certainly, we did meet on a number of occasions about that specific proposal.

Mr. Lindsey: So would it be fair to say, then, if the minister says he's had any number of discussions, meetings with the chair around the proposal that the minister had a pretty good idea, then, of where the discussions were going?

Mr. Cullen: Well, obviously, we value all the stakeholders and all the partners we have across the province, and to undertake any project, whether it be a hydroelectric dam or a transmission line, there's an involved process with a lot of different stakeholders and we value those relationships and we appreciate the consultation that has to be done.

Government is responsible for consultation with the indigenous and Metis communities and we take that role very seriously, and obviously, we allow Manitoba Hydro to enter into specific agreements, and certainly, we were aware of this particular proposal going forward, and obviously, the proposal is certainly not a one-off proposal. There was a lot of details in this proposal and really about the future, and that was—the concern government had was the—this proposal would take away the rights of future Manitobans to make decisions on future projects and that was the decision the government took and that's why the directive was issued.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister had any number of discussions. He hasn't really told us how many, whether it's two or 10 or 50 or—about things with Manitoba Hydro, with the chair of the board. So I'm—guess I'm going to have to assume, and maybe I'm wrong—maybe the minister will straighten me out and say no, no, that's not what happened—I'm going to assume, then, that the chair of the board would have kept the minister, if not completely in the loop, at least informed as to what the discussion was with the Manitoba Metis Federation and where they were going with that discussion.

*(15:50)

I'm going to again assume—and, again, the minister can straighten me out if I'm wrong—that it didn't come to a surprise one morning when he got up over his morning coffee and realized that the agreement, proposal, whatever the minister wishes to characterize it as, was at the stage it was at. Is that a safe assumption on my part?

Mr. Cullen: Clearly, you know, communication is important, and we recognize that. And we knew

there was ongoing discussion around a number of projects. When the board finally put this proposal together in conjunction with the Manitoba Metis Federation, I think the reference would be a term sheet, once they did have the details around the term sheet proposal together, the board actually asked us to review it.

And I think it's the responsible thing to do as a government is to see if—check the legalities of the document and see if the proposal was actually in line with the priorities and the policies of the Manitoba government.

Mr. Lindsey: So does the minister believe that the Crown is bound by the Turning the Page Agreement signed on November 26, 2014, signed between the Manitoba Metis Federation, Manitoba Hydro and the Province of Manitoba?

Mr. Cullen: Certainly, we are still honouring the provisions of the Turning the Page Agreement.

You know, we have a difference of opinion, clearly, with the Manitoba Metis Federation over the nature of the proposal, and we will probably continue to disagree on that until proven otherwise. But within the Turning the Page Agreement there is a dispute mechanism which allows the parties to come together to fully frame what the dispute is. And I know we're going through that process right now, so the three parties under the tripartite steering committee will be getting together to frame the current dispute. So it is our intent to honour the terms of that particular agreement.

Mr. Lindsey: So, stemming from the Turning the Page Agreement, Manitoba Hydro engaged in broad negotiations with the Manitoba Metis Federation in regard to a range of past and future developments. Now, that work has been ongoing for several years, to my understanding.

So was the minister informed last year that these negotiations were ongoing?

Mr. Cullen: Just to clarify, too, the Turning the Page Agreement really, in my view, is a framework for discussion. So, you know, as a result of that framework for discussion, that allows Manitoba Hydro and whatever entity to enter into discussions and potentially reach agreements with those various entities.

You know, the Turning the Page Agreement doesn't compel Manitoba Hydro to sign any agreements. In this particular case, once a proposal

was put together with the Manitoba Metis Federation and Manitoba Hydro, the board asked the government of Manitoba to review it, to make sure that it was in line with our priorities and policies. And that's where the government took a different view than the approach that was undertaken under that proposal.

Mr. Lindsey: So at what point in time did the minister become aware that these discussions were ongoing?

Mr. Cullen: Sorry, could the member repeat the question?

Mr. Lindsey: At what point in time did the minister become aware that these discussions were ongoing? Recognizing that he hasn't been the minister for Crowns for that long.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, I'm not exactly—I can't give you a specific date when I was—became aware of the—this specific proposal. Certainly was some time ago. I don't know exactly when the date was when the board asked the government to review the documentation as well.

I do know there was some—quite a bit of legal work, background work done reviewing the document to make sure that we fully appreciated what the proposal would mean to government and what it would mean to Metis people into the future as well. So, certainly, when government became aware of the—was presented the proposal, there was certainly a lot of work done behind the scenes to make sure that we fully appreciated all the clauses that were contained in that proposal.

Mr. Lindsey: So then, would it be fair to say that the minister became aware of this ongoing negotiation pretty much as soon as he became appointed the Minister of Crown Services?

Mr. Cullen: Well, you know, there's ongoing negotiations with a lot of stakeholders around the province, and those negotiations continue. They're ongoing. You know, Manitoba Hydro is looking at other developments across the province.

We haven't fully resolved some of the outstanding issues relative to Bipole III either, in terms of land owners and compensation. So there's a myriad of discussions with key stakeholders and individual stakeholders that go on and continue to go on. And they will for a long time to come, because Manitoba Hydro is in the business to sell electricity,

and to sell electricity, we need infrastructure to do that.

So there's a lot of work ahead of us yet, and certainly, in the Manitoba-Minnesota transmission line. We've gone through the Clean Environment Commission process. There's still consultation that has to be done, subject to section 35. So that's the government responsibility, and the government will continue those discussions in consultations with those key stakeholders as we move forward.

We're also involved now in the federal process, through the National Energy Board, and unfortunately, we're going through the longer, more delayed process that the federal government has prescribed for us. So, you know, we're optimistic we can get that project off the ground, hopefully, in the near future.

* (16:00)

I know the US component of the line is being built as we speak, and we certainly want to make sure that we're in a position to sell our customers to the south in the very near future. And it's—obviously once Keeyask is complete, we're going to have 'surplush'—surplus capacity of electricity, and we're—we need some markets to—find some markets to sell that excess capacity. So there'll be a lot of work ahead in terms of developing transmission projects here in Manitoba.

Mr. Lindsey: I have no doubt there will. And certainly when one looks at the need to reduce carbon, Manitoba Hydro should be poised to be a supplier of choice for a lot of jurisdictions, be they north, south, east or west.

But I guess just to get back to this particular aspect of this agreement that—the minister's alluded to—there was a lot of work going on behind the scenes, checking the legalities. And so I'm assuming all of this work was taking place with the minister's full knowledge once he became the minister and that there was no—or at least there should have been no great surprise where this particular agreement was headed.

So, at some point in time during the negotiation prior to it coming to the point where it was, did the government ever suggest to Manitoba Hydro, to the chair, that they were headed in the wrong direction with this particular agreement?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, as I'd indicated before, you know, we—and myself—had a number of discussions with the

chair of the board. We were apprised of where they were headed, and once we had the, you know, the full proposal in front of us, it really gave us an—then, the opportunity to fully evaluate what the repercussions of that proposal would be.

And you know, that's the time that was—you know, it's incumbent upon government to make sure that Manitoba Hydro and all Crown corporations, quite frankly, are acting in the best interests of rate payers, and quite frankly, the shareholders of Manitoba Hydro or whatever Crown corporation it is.

So we, on behalf of the taxpayers, made sure that we had a thorough review of the proposal and what it would mean to future Manitobans and in this—and particular what it would mean to Manitoba Metis people down the road.

And what—it was our view that this proposal would take away opportunities for Metis people to have a—enter into a discussion about future projects and future-proposed projects. So we don't think that's keeping in the best interests of Manitobans, and that was the undertaking once we did see the specific details of this proposal.

Mr. Lindsey: So, from comments made by the former chair of the Hydro board, Sandy Riley, the negotiations on this matter were pretty far advanced, and the two sides to the agreement had come to a spot in the negotiations where they in fact were in agreement.

So the Manitoba Metis Federation, chair of the board of Manitoba Hydro, were at a point where they were in agreement. The minister has said that he had knowledge of the negotiation process, that the legalities were being followed up on throughout the process, that this really shouldn't have come as a big surprise to the minister where they were at if he's as informed as he's led us to believe he was.

So can the minister confirm when exactly the negotiation came to this advanced stage where the two parties involved, the—Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation, were in agreement with the proposal?

What date did that happen?

Mr. Cullen: I don't know when—obviously, there was—been discussions for quite some time, in fact, probably going back years between Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation in terms of, you know, what a proposal would look like. And,

obviously, this particular proposal brought a lot of different transmission lines into play and even future projects that haven't—aren't really online, so to speak.

So I don't know when, you know, they formally came to this agreement. I'm—you know, it was probably years in the making. I don't know when that transpired. Obviously, when we had the final proposal before us, that was our opportunity to have a look at the proposal and see how it would impact both government, how it would impact Manitoba Metis and their rights into the future. That's—once we received that particular document, that's when our legal people got involved in it to make sure they had a wholesome review of the proposal, to make sure we understood the implications going forward. And under that particular proposal, there's 'implications' over the next 50 years.

So it's a very significant proposal. And that's why we, as government, wanted to make sure that we were doing our diligence in regard to reviewing that particular proposal. And because it's going to affect Metis rights for up to 50 years down the road and what basically takes away Metis—the next generation or two generations of Metis people to object to transmission proposals that may be developed here in Manitoba. So it's a very significant proposal, and that's why we wanted to make sure that we did our diligence and we took the time to get it right to understand the implications around that particular proposal.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister has made a couple of statements now that seem, perhaps, at least in my mind, somewhat contradictory. You earlier said that the government lawyers were involved all along or throughout the process, making sure the legalities of this negotiation process were acceptable. You've said that, as the minister, although you've been there a relatively short period of time, you had any number of meetings, although you're not sure how many, with the chair of the board and discussed this issue, that you're aware of, kind of, where they were going with it. And yet all of a sudden, then, when the two sides had come to what they both termed an agreement, and take it to the government, all of a sudden now you've said that lawyers had to get involved to check the legalities. And yet, previously, you said that that had been going on all along.

So, I guess, either you were informed and knew what was going on and lawyers were looking at it, or they weren't looking at it. I don't understand how you can have your cake and eat it too in this process that—

so, could you perhaps explain that in greater detail for me, please?

Mr. Cullen: I'd be more than happy to clarify for the member. We knew there has been discussions between Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation. We, as a government, were not involved in those discussions. We did not have government lawyers involved in those discussions. Our government lawyers did not get involved until after the board of Manitoba Hydro provided us with the proposal.

* (16:10)

So during the discussions—and I'm assuming this goes back probably a couple of years—I think it would be safe to say that legal people acting on behalf of Manitoba Hydro, legal people acting on behalf of the Manitoba Metis Federation, were involved in those discussions and ultimately in drafting the proposal that eventually—by the board recommending it to us for a review.

That's when government lawyers got involved in reviewing the proposal in question.

Mr. Lindsey: Well, I thank the minister for clearing that up, because it certainly appears to be something different than what he'd at least given me the impression he'd said previously.

So Manitoba Hydro has their lawyers involved in the discussions all the way along, this negotiation is years in the making, Manitoba Metis Federation has their lawyers involved with this process years in the making.

When did the proposal come to the government? What date?

Mr. Cullen: I can't give the member the exact date when the proposal came to government. I will say though, that acting on behalf of ratepayers and as the shareholder of Manitoba Hydro, we wanted to make sure we took the time to do our diligence and review the document, review all aspects of the document, what it would mean to government, what it would mean to Manitoba Hydro, and just as important, what it would mean to the Manitoba Metis Federation, their individual members and also Metis people that are not members of the Manitoba Metis Federation as well.

So certainly there was—there's a lot of clauses in there and impacts that would extend over a 50-year period. So we wanted to make sure we fully understood exactly what those implications would

be, you know, as well as the cost to Manitoba ratepayers—would be significant costs as well.

But I think just as importantly is the implications for the next generations of Metis people and their opportunity to be involved in discussions around—whether it be transmission lines into the future or whether it be hydroelectric dam development into the future. It could take their rights off the table for a period of the next 50 years. So it's a very substantial proposal that was brought to government. And government certainly, in my view, did its due diligence and reviewed all of the legal implications around this particular proposal.

And I think that the board at Manitoba Hydro recognized that this particular proposal would have implications to many Manitobans and for many years down the road, and that's why they sought input and guidance from the government of Manitoba.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister doesn't know when the proposal the two sides had agreed on—he doesn't know when that actually came to the government. Is that correct?

Can the minister find that information out?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, so, I thank the member for the question. From my understanding, government received the proposal—or the term sheet in—last August, I believe it was.

Mr. Lindsey: So the first the government received was August 2016 or 2017? Twenty seventeen. So Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation have been negotiating for years. The minister, and I'm assuming the previous minister, met with the chair of the board on numerous occasions. This negotiation wasn't a secret negotiation from the minister. So he was well aware of where the parties were going, if he maybe didn't have all the infinite details.

I'm going to ask the minister, was he aware of, prior to—or was the previous minister, and I understand it's hard for this minister to necessarily answer for that minister, but surely, one of the ministers must have been aware of the very broad strokes of the agreement and where Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation were headed with this agreement, although they didn't have the fine detail. Is that correct?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, and I certainly can't speak to the previous minister, his knowledge of this particular proposal, but this particular proposal, I think it's—we

have to clarify that it's a unique proposal. It's unique in the fact that it encompasses future projects.

I think this is a completely new concept for Manitoba Hydro because in previous arrangements and agreements that Manitoba Hydro have reached with—whether it be Manitoba Metis Federation or individual First Nations communities, I think they were pretty well always based on one project, whether it be a transmission line or whether it be a bipole line or whether it be around a hydroelectric development dam. Those agreements were always in regard to that one specific project, and obviously, the intent for Manitoba Hydro is to mitigate any damages that the communities could face. So that's the nature of agreements up 'til this point in time.

So this proposal is very unique in that it contemplates a number of projects, numerous projects, and quite frankly, some projects that aren't even being considered at this point in time. So it's a very unique proposal and, I think, because of its uniqueness and its far-reaching consequences for many Manitobans for up to a 50-year period, the board at Manitoba Hydro sought the direction and the guidance of the government of Manitoba. So I think that's very important. So it's very important to clear out: this is a very unique proposal before the board of Manitoba Hydro and, quite frankly, before the government of Manitoba.

Mr. Lindsey: So Mr. Riley had alleged that he had tried to meet the Premier (Mr. Pallister) on multiple occasions and had never been successful in meeting with the Premier. So I'm assuming that one of the things he would have liked to have discussed with the Premier was this specific agreement, particularly as they got to the point where the two sides were really in what they termed as in agreement on this proposal. I'm going to assume, again, that—well, we don't have to assume. We know that those meetings never happened, but the minister has said that he met with the board.

So how many times has this minister broached the subject with the Premier about where this agreement was going so that it didn't come as a big surprise to the Premier when they came to the point where those two sides said they were in agreement?

* (16:20)

Mr. Cullen: So I'd indicated that we received the document some time ago; obviously we didn't know the details of the proposal until such time. So, once we did receive the document, receive the proposal,

that was an opportunity, you know, for us to review the details of the proposal, and the far-reaching details of that particular proposal.

So I don't know the conversations between the Premier and Mr. Riley, but clearly once we received the document, and the Premier was aware of the details of that proposal, some members of Cabinet would probably be aware of the details of the document as well.

We undertook, as government, to make sure we did a wholesome review of that particular document so that we would understand what the ramifications would be for both government and Manitoba Hydro—and the Manitoba Metis Federation, and all Metis people.

So we think as government it was the prudent thing to do—so make sure we undertook a thorough review of the proposal to make sure we understood the consequences of signing such a proposal.

Mr. Lindsey: So Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation have been in negotiations for a number of years on this particular proposal. They've—back and forth, they've had their lawyers. The government, the minister has been kept in the loop if you will as to where those discussions were going. The minister said he's had any number of discussions with the chair of the board. Chair of the board says he was unable to meet with the Premier, at least that's based on what I read in the paper.

So now the minister is saying that in August 2017 they got the proposal to the government.

So now they've got the real deal in front of them. They should have been aware up to that point even what was coming. It shouldn't come as a surprise to the government or to the minister that this deal was close to being what those two parties termed as being an agreement that they were in agreement with the proposal as put forward.

So, then, if this proposal came in August 2017, and—when did Cabinet, I guess, start talking about whether they were in agreement or not in agreement?

Mr. Cullen: Well, I think I should just indicate that once we as a government did receive the proposal, there's obviously lots of legal ramifications to this particular proposal. So the government took it upon itself to make sure that we as government did our due diligence in respect of this proposal.

So that work was undertaken I think fairly quickly once we did have our hands on the proposal. Obviously extensive review was undertaken, it was just not that long ago the actual directive came out of Cabinet. And I'm not going to get into the details around other discussions in terms of this agreement in Cabinet.

Mr. Lindsey: When did the minister become the Minister of Crown Services?

Mr. Cullen: August 2017.

Mr. Lindsey: Strange coincidence to say the least then.

So, in August 2017, I'm assuming then that the minister got fully briefed on his particular portfolio and became aware that this negotiation was in progress. So did the minister request to meet with the chair of the board specifically to talk about where this particular agreement was headed?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, as I indicated earlier, I had a number of discussions with the chair of the board around this proposal and a lot of issues around operations at Manitoba Hydro. So, certainly, we did have discussions about this particular proposal, and, you know, at the same time, government undertook a review of the document to fully appreciate what the intent of the document was and what the ramifications would be, again, for Manitoba Hydro, Government of Manitoba, Manitoba Metis Federation and individual Manitobans going forward. As I said, it's a very all-encompassing document.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

It speaks to a number of transmission projects, some that are being reviewed right now, some projects that aren't even on Manitoba Hydro books. So it's a very encompassing proposal that will impact many Manitobans up to 50 years into the future. So that's why we wanted to make sure we fully understood what was involved in this document and the ramifications moving forward.

Mr. Lindsey: So, then, it would be fair to say that the minister became knowledgeable of this agreement. At any point, did the minister or the Premier (Mr. Pallister) say that, wait a minute; we should be doing something different with this agreement?

And maybe it's a question that this minister can't answer, but perhaps people in his department can supply the answer for him. At any point, was

there any direction, even prior to August 2017, given to the board of Manitoba Hydro that, wait a minute; you're going completely off track here with this agreement; unheard of to have agreements that go long into the future and you should not pursue this agreement? Were they just left to continue negotiating, in good faith, supposedly, with Manitoba Metis Federation, also in good faith in their part in the negotiation? Was there ever any direction given from anyone in the government that you shouldn't negotiate, you shouldn't continue to negotiate where this agreement appears to be headed?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, to my knowledge, there was no direction provided from government prior to government receiving the proposal in August. Clearly, there's ongoing negotiations. It's—I don't know the details behind the negotiations between Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation. I—as I say, I assume they've been going on for quite some time. You know, they may have originally started when the Manitoba-Minnesota line was being contemplated. I'm just surmising this maybe have been how this proposal came to be. There were—obviously, Manitoba Hydro has other transmission projects they're looking at. And maybe at that point in time, at some point in time, the two groups maybe decided there would—opportunity to roll a few projects into one—one proposal.

* (16:30)

So I'm assuming it probably grew from there and then, all of a sudden now, the proposal actually contemplates future developments that aren't even being proposed by Manitoba Hydro, which has impact up to 50 years down the road. So a significant change in policy and direction coming from Manitoba Hydro in this regard. And, I think, that is why the board at Manitoba Hydro felt it was the responsible thing to do to provide the proposal and the term sheet to the government of Manitoba for its review. And once the government did receive that proposal, there was a substantial—undertaken of that particular document, to see what the implications were going to be for the government, for Manitoba Hydro, for the Manitoba Metis Federation and, quite frankly, individual Metis people who would, in essence, lose their right, or their voice in future Manitoba Hydro development projects over the course of the next 50 years.

So this agreement was—is quite unique to Manitoba—certainly to Manitoba Hydro and the

government of Manitoba—in the fact that it actually contemplates projects over a 50-year time period. So that certainly was the concern from the government of Manitoba. And, in fact, ultimately, at the end of the day, March 21st, that's the date the directive was issued by Cabinet, to indicate to Manitoba Hydro to not to enter into that agreement at this point in time.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister would have us believe, then, that nobody in government was aware that the negotiation process was taking place, was going to be a long-term agreement that was going to stretch 50 years, or maybe at one point they talked longer, maybe at one point they talked shorter. So the minister would have us believe that no one was aware of that until Manitoba Hydro plops the document on the table and then all of a sudden its, oh aye? Look at this, a long-term agreement, we can't have that. Is that what the minister would like me to believe?

Mr. Cullen: Well, I certainly can speak for myself. I can't speak for everyone across government, but clearly this is a unique arrangement that Manitoba Hydro has put together. It's unique. It's the first of its kind. I don't think government would be expecting something different from Manitoba Hydro. Manitoba Hydro has been doing business, sort of, as per usual and I will say, as per usual being one-off agreements with communities, associations, over the years on specific projects, that they've—being developed. So I think it would safe assume government would be thinking the same sort of a agreement would be coming forward. But again, I can't speak for everyone across government, but to our knowledge there was no government direction provided otherwise.

Mr. Lindsey: So, there was no government direction offered to Manitoba Hydro board, that pursuing a new type of long-term agreement was the wrong strategy?

Mr. Cullen: To my knowledge, that's correct.

Mr. Lindsey: So Manitoba Hydro negotiates in good faith, tries to meet the Premier (Mr. Pallister) to discuss what's going on; can't. They do have meetings with this Minister of Crown Services (Mr. Cullen); assume they had meetings with the previous minister of Crown Services. The minister has said that he was aware, not of all the infinite detail, but of the broad strokes of this. So can the minister explain to me now, how—whether it's Manitoba Hydro or any other Crown agency—how they propose to conduct negotiations in good faith

and how the other party, whoever it is, will enter into some sort of proposal in good faith with one of these Crown Services, knowing full well that the government, the Premier, will at the end of the day say, yes, thanks for all your hard work; we're not doing that.

Mr. Cullen: It's certainly not our government's intent to get into the day-to-day operations of any Crown agency, Crown corporation.

Clearly, when there's new policies come forward from a Crown corporation, I think that's maybe when it's incumbent upon government to get involved. Obviously, we're trying to create a framework whereby the roles and responsibilities of the various Crown agencies, and the people within those agencies and government have a framework in terms of how we can have that discussion.

And I think, you know, we're certainly moving down that road in terms of providing those general mandate letters. We've sort of rolled out the roles and responsibilities of individuals and the Crowns, and I think we're making some headway there.

Clearly, communication is going to be important as we move forward, but we certainly don't want to get into the day-to-day operations of it. But, at the same time, we want to make sure as a government that the Crown corporations are operating within the same policies, with the same priorities, as the government of Manitoba.

Clearly this proposal that came forward to government is unique, and I think the board did the right thing by asking Manitoba Hydro to get involved and having a look at what the clauses in this particular agreement would mean to Manitobans, both today and into the future.

Mr. Lindsey: So does the minister agree with the Premier's statements in the press that this agreement was merely about hush money?

Mr. Cullen: Well, I will say that this is a very unique agreement.

You know, clearly, I would be—interesting to go back to day one and see how the discussion went with Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoba Metis Federation. I'm assuming it was probably based on original discussions about the Manitoba-Minnesota line, which obviously is a very important line for Manitoba Hydro in terms of us selling our power into Minnesota.

I would assume that's how the discussion got started. Obviously, then, from there, other transmission lines came into play as well. We're optimistic we can sell some power into Saskatchewan, and clearly those particular transmission lines are raised in the proposal, in the term sheet. And the term sheet goes even further than that and contemplates other projects that aren't even being contemplated at this time by Manitoba Hydro.

So, certainly, a very unique perspective going forward and I—the government's concern is, what are the implications for the next generation—or, generations of Metis people who by this agreement would have their rights and their opportunities to have a voice about future transmission projects taken away?

So it's a very significant—has very significant implications for many Metis around the province. And I think—just seeing the numbers the other day, I think there's about 75,000 Metis in the province of Manitoba. So to take away the rights of 75,000 Metis in Manitoba is a very substantial change in policy, and that's why the board asked the government of Manitoba their interpretation of what this document would mean if it actually did come to fruition, an agreement was actually signed.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister surely isn't suggesting that the Manitoba Metis Federation is incapable of negotiating for the people they represent, that the government is the only one that's capable of negotiating on behalf of the Metis people. Surely the minister isn't suggesting that.

Mr. Cullen: Well, obviously, the Manitoba Metis Federation were, I think, negotiating in good faith. I don't have any reason to think otherwise.

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But I think it's—the other issue you have to bear in mind, that the Manitoba Metis Federation does not necessarily represent each and every Metis person in Manitoba. So I think when we analyze this particular document, this particular proposal going forward, I think there would be a lot of Metis people around the province who would not like their right or their opportunity to either voice objection to or agree with any proposal—transmission proposal going forward into the future.

By allowing the association to take away their opportunity and their voice for 50 years is very substantial because the Manitoba Metis Federation does not represent each and every one of those

75,000 Metis across the province. So I'm sure their rights stand as much as those Metis people that actually belong to the Manitoba Metis Federation as well.

Mr. Lindsey: So, to follow along with that line of reasoning, then, is the government going to enter into a negotiation with each and every Metis person in the province?

Mr. Cullen: Well, quite frankly, right now, as it is, whether we have a development project, a transmission development project in southern Manitoba or whether we're having a project develop to drain Lake Manitoba, we are engaging all Manitobans, and a lot of individual Manitobans, each and every one of them, have the opportunity to come to the table and talk about the impacts that it may have to their livelihood, the impacts it may have to their community, and there may be financial implications to their livelihood and to their personal lives as well.

So, to categorically take away that individual's right to have a say at the table is a huge policy change for us here in Manitoba, and I think that's exactly the thing that you have to be cognizant of. That's what this proposal aims to do. So that is a very significant change in policy direction here in Manitoba.

Mr. Lindsey: Has Manitoba Hydro ever entered into any other long-term agreements with various groups in the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, clearly, Manitoba Hydro have entered into long-term agreements with various communities around the province. Those agreements in the past have been based on specific projects, one-off projects, if you will, not contemplating multiple projects or projects that aren't even in the foreseeable future. That's what make this particular project so unique.

So, the past agreements that are in play now are specific to each and individual project, and they're specific to impacts around that particular project. So the impacts around that specific project have been evaluated so that individuals—individual impacts are known for those particular projects and the compensation package can be developed to that specific project and for those specific arrangements. So, thereby, this particular agreement, it makes it so unique, is that it actually contemplates projects that are not even envisioned at this point in time.

And the other issue around this one, which makes it so unique, is it takes away future voices for Manitobans, and that's really what makes this particular project so unique, this particular document so unique and this particular proposal so unique.

So, clearly, it's a complete new policy direction for Manitoba Hydro in terms of agreements in the past and for this one as a new agreement going forward. It's a complete policy change for Manitoba Hydro.

Mr. Lindsey: Certainly, Manitoba Hydro has a long history of entering into agreements that affect people for generations to come. So the minister's trying to suggest that, well, because this one would affect generations of Metis people to come that haven't even been born yet, so therefore, we shouldn't proceed on that basis. Every flood agreement that's ever been signed for Manitoba Hydro has affected generations of people to come and continues to affect those people. So how does the minister square those previous agreements that affected generations and generations of people, sometimes with the outcomes known, sometimes with the outcomes not fully understood or known, how does he square that with this when he says that they shouldn't have negotiated an agreement that's going to affect Metis people for generations to come?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, just for clarification, you know, the previous agreements that are signed, they're signed because of specific projects. So specific projects you can quantify and define what the impacts are going to be on a given region. And it's fairly—well, I shouldn't say easy, but it's certainly doable to quantify what the impacts are going to be on—with—given a development, whether it be a hydroelectric dam or whether it be a transmission line. We can usually come to an agreement with the people in the area, the people that will be impacted, and there's mechanisms in place to try to determine what the impact will be and what the impact will be for the future period because we know the scope of that particular project.

This proposal speaks to projects that aren't even designed, are not even on the books yet. So how could we quantify and define what a payment should be for a project that hasn't even been considered at this point in time?

And the other side of it is, then you're taking away Manitobans' ability to voice a concern about a project that hasn't been contemplated over the next 50 years. It doesn't seem like a—you know, the right

approach to take for me because—and it's quite a different—it's a variation in the approach because all of the agreements that have been signed to date are on specific projects with a defined period of years and the impact can be defined for that course of time as well. So, a completely different take in policy and a complete new direction in terms of a proposed agreement.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister's suggesting, then, that this government will not negotiate agreements that are any different than past agreements? They won't try and take a bold step into the future as it appears Manitoba Metis Federation and Manitoba Hydro attempted to do when they came to what they called an agreement? Manitoba government is going to say, no, no, wait a minute. We're not doing that. We're only going to agree to that which we've agreed to previously. How does the minister feel that that's going to work going forward?

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Mr. Cullen: You know, as a government, we're always interested in new ways and, hopefully, better ways to do things. I think we try to bring some innovation to government and across government, and we're always looking for new opportunities and fresh ideas. And clearly, this was a bold step by Manitoba Hydro to put this particular proposal together, and it's something they haven't considered in the past.

Clearly, we've got a difference of opinion with the Manitoba Metis Federation. You know, as part of that Turning the Page Agreement, there is a clause, a dispute clause in there. And I wouldn't call it a dispute resolution clause; I would just say it would be a mechanism to have a discussion about disputes. And it's an opportunity for the three parties to get together to define what the dispute is, and then, potentially, once the dispute is defined, then we can have the conversation about how do we resolve that particular dispute.

So we're certainly looking forward to having that tripartite steering committee meet, and it will be their mandate to showcase or to define what the particular dispute is, and, potentially, maybe a path forward. You know, in my conversations with President Chartrand just of late, we obviously have—agree to disagree on this particular proposal. But, at the same time, we are optimistic there may be a path forward in terms of reaching agreement. It certainly will be a matter of, to use the term going back to the drawing board, but we're certainly optimistic that we can

find a path forward and come to some kind of a negotiated resolution as we go forward.

The challenge for us as government is throwing into an agreement projects that aren't being contemplated right now, and the fact that it would—could take away rights of Manitobans up to 50 years into the future. And that's something that, I think, we have to be very cognizant of when we look at putting another agreement together.

So those are the kinds of situations that we're trying to deal with. I'm optimistic—I guess we have to be an optimist, if you're going to be in politics—but I'm optimistic that we, through negotiations with the Manitoba Metis Federation and Manitoba Hydro, that we can come to some kind of an arrangement over these transmission lines.

Clearly, for us as Manitobans and shareholders of Manitoba Hydro, we want to make sure that we can get the Manitoba-Minnesota line developed in the very near future. You know, we have entered into an arrangement with Minnesota Power and, certainly, they are developing their transmission on their side of the border. We're optimistic we can get our line built on our side of the border. We've gone through the Clean Environment Commission process.

As I mentioned, we do have consultation to do with the Manitoba Metis Federation, under section 35, and we look forward to continuing that consultation with the Manitoba Metis Federation in the future. There certainly has been consultation to date on that particular project, but more is certainly required.

And we also are subject to the National Energy Board review—I guess we could call it a review—and unfortunately, the federal government have decided to use the longer certificate process which will drag out that review for, you know, up to a year, possibly more than a year.

So all of that certainly has implications to Manitoba Hydro, and it has implications to our customers down south as well. So we have to be cognizant, moving forward in terms of getting agreements with not only the Manitoba Metis Federation but also a lot of landowners along that particular, very important transmission route.

Mr. Lindsey: So the minister talked briefly about the tripartite negotiation process that's going to take place now, to try and not come to an agreement but

to try and resolve how to come to an agreement, if I understood what he said correctly.

So who from the government now is involved in that negotiation process?

Mr. Cullen: Appreciate that question too. So the tripartite steering committee, as spoken about under the Turning the Page Agreement, will be meeting in the very near future, I think in the course of the next couple of weeks, and apparently have already entered into discussions prior to meeting. So the tripartite steering committee, we have representatives from Crown Services on there. We have representatives from Manitoba Hydro and representatives from the Manitoba Metis Federation.

So the Turning the Page Agreement talks about defining what the dispute is. So it would be this committee's responsibility to ascertain what the dispute is. Then there hopefully will be an opportunity to see if there is a way to resolve that particular dispute. The committee may make a recommendation in that regard.

I expect once that committee meets they will, you know, provide some guidance to the three parties. I think what will eventually have to happen and—eventually, but actually in the near future, it will have to happen—there will have to be a meeting between the government of Manitoba, the Manitoba Metis Federation, and senior staff at Manitoba Hydro to see if we can find a path forward to the respective projects that are before us.

And I think the primary project right now, in my mind, is the Manitoba-Minnesota line, which clearly will have consequences if we don't get that particular line, you know, built in a timely fashion. So I'm optimistic we can find a path forward on that particular line. I know there's interest in transmission into the—Saskatchewan as well. So we certainly want to get that issue resolved and obviously we'll take consultation with a lot of the key stakeholders on that side of the province as well.

So there is a lot of work to do to get together to find a path forward. I think the—playing by the rules of the Turning the Page Agreement, is—this next step, is the tripartite steering committee getting together to talk about the disputes and frame the context around that particular dispute and then see if we can find a path forward so that all parties can come to a reasonable and a negotiated agreement at the end of the day.

Mr. Lindsey: I'm sure we'll explore this whole issue much further and in much greater detail as we proceed through Estimates. I see it's almost that time of the day, so I don't want to ask a question at this point in time that would involve the minister having to come up with a very brief answer because I would certainly appreciate the answer being fully thought out and appropriate.

I guess I would leave today, potentially, with the question of the tripartite steering committee is going to figure out what the dispute is when the two parties apparently don't know what the dispute is. I think they do. I think it's the government that perhaps didn't fully grasp the concept of what was going on.

So how will this committee—

The Acting Chairperson (Greg Nesbitt): Order.

The hour being 5 o'clock p.m., committee rise.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (14:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Reg Helwer): 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 Executive Council.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I would ask to recess Executive Council, please. See if there's leave to recess Executive Council.

The Acting Chairperson (Reg Helwer): Is there leave to recess this section for the afternoon? *[Agreed]*

This section is now recessed for the afternoon.

HEALTH, SENIORS AND ACTIVE LIVING

* (14:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply is now considering the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living. We have now one item of business left in this department.

Resolution 21.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$12,025,000 for Health, Seniors and Active Living,

Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2019.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Health, Seniors and Active Living.

Mr. Chairperson: The next set of Estimates will be considered for the section of the Committee of Supply for the Department of Education and Training.

Shall we brief recess to allow the minister and the critics to—opportunities to prepare for commencement and for the next department? *[Agreed]*

And so we'll—we're in recess for—we're just in recess.

The committee recessed at 2:51 p.m.

The committee resumed at 2:57 p.m.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr. Chairperson (Doyle Piwniuk): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates for the Department of Education and Training.

I understand that there will—is an agreement to be focused on immigration and training today. Is that agreed? Agreed? By both parties? *[Agreed]*

Does the honourable minister have any opening statements?

Hon. Ian Wishart (Minister of Education and Training): I'm pleased to bring forward our 2018-2019 Estimates for Manitoba Education and Training for consideration. And I do have an opening statement, and, after that, when we bring staff in, I'll be more than happy to introduce them.

Budget 2018 invests in programs that will yield better results for Manitoba and repair and expand the services that they have come to depend on. I would like to focus my comments initially on, of course, Education and Training. Government has shown a commitment to evidence-based decision making in education on all fronts. We know that most rich—developmentally rich time in a child's life is at zero to five years, which is why our government has

committed in the throne 'strecth' to an 'eerly'-early-years strategy focused on early learning initiatives aimed at achieving better educational outcomes. Our department is working with the Department of Families in order to achieve better outcomes for young children.

Our government has made record investments in the K-to-12 system. In 2017, we increased the budget by \$36 million, and this year by a further 13.7. We continue to allow school divisions the flexibility to utilize the Early Years Enhancement Grant, as they need, in order to improve student outcomes. We know that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't yield the best results in the education system, and we are committed to being a partner and improve educational outcomes for children.

Our government is full of Manitoba firsts. In January this year, Manitoba Education and Training held a literacy and numeracy summit, the first one that had ever been held here in Manitoba. We engaged stakeholders across the education continuum to co-create a strategy to improve literacy and 'numery'-numeracy outcomes for Manitoba's children. We know that the feedback on this has been very positive, and it will help create a strong, skilled workforce that is essential to our economic growth and prosperity in the future, and that literacy and numeracy are foundational for all of these programs.

Demands for literacy and numeracy are evolving and accelerating within the changing economy. Workplace literacy and numeracy needs are becoming much more complex and are increasingly important to both the employers and the employees. However, for too long we have been lagging behind top-performing provinces and countries in literacy and numeracy of youth and has—we have demonstrated our serious commitment to improving this.

*(15:00)

Mr. Chair, I would want to take a moment to reflect on the previous government's performance when it came to Manitoba children. The previous government administered 17 years of declining results for Manitoba's children, a trend that is very alarming. Our education system failed them—to evaluate what was working, we've—and what wasn't, to come up with better options.

Where they failed, we will succeed. Mr. Chair, the children of Manitoba are the future of our province. The previous government failed our

children and continued to fail them without regard to what kind of future they were leaving them. This government and this department are committed to creating a brighter future for our children.

Good educational results, of course, require good schools. Last year, we announced that we would explore building schools using a P3 model. We learned from the experience of other jurisdictions and after careful review of all of the information, we decided to build these schools by enhancing our conventional school-construction approach. As a result of this exercise, we have identified approximately \$18 million in savings over conventional costs and are able to fund the construction of one more school than was initially planned.

Our Budget 2018, we announced that over the course of the next two years we would build the following schools: the Brandon School Division's Southeast Brandon, a K to 8, which we had the pleasure of attending the other day; Seven Oaks School Division, Precinct E, a K-to-5 school; Winnipeg School Division, Waterford Green, that'll be a K-to-8 school; Pembina Trails School Division, Waverley West, a K to 8; and also in Pembina Trails at Waverley West a 9 to 12 in addition to the schools that are already underway at Winkler and Niverville. These important capital investments are part of our government's commitment to catch up with the need for new schools which was ignored by the previous government. We're also just catching up with critical maintenance in our schools, something the previous government had ignored.

Ignoring things that matter became the way in which the previous government operated, as a review of the college system, which was supposed to happen every five years, had not happened for more than 10 years. It was our government who undertook this review, and, luckily for Manitobans, the review indicated the system is functional but more by accident than by design. Our government has committed to intentionally ensuring that our post-secondary system is aligned and co-ordinated in order to meet the labour market needs of this province now and in the future. To ensure prosperity, we need young people who are very well trained and well positioned to enter the workforce. We look forward to working with our colleges in order to improve this system and ensure its sustainability for years to come, and I know the response from the colleges has been extremely positive and they look forward to entering into this whole process.

In order to support our students entering post-secondary, we have made significant improvements to the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative. I am very pleased to say that our post-second institutions and corporate sponsors have met the fundraising targets and this government has successfully made the \$20 million in scholarship and bursary funding available to post-secondary students in Manitoba.

We are making significant changes to Student Aid program as well and it—so it focuses on students who are most in need. Enhancements include \$1 million for low-income indigenous students and \$1.7 million additional to expand eligibility to students studying in private religious institutions in Manitoba as well as institutions within Canada but outside Manitoba. This government has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring accessibility to post-secondary education by making it much easier to access funding.

This government is committed to making Manitoba the most improved province in Canada. I'm sure the members have heard that, but I'm happy to share with the committee that we are contributing. Recently pleased to issue a call for proposals to strengthen our sector council program as it—of industry needs. We are revamping the program to be more client centered and accessible, efficient, innovative and performance driven. The program will be better positioned to meet training and development needs and make Manitoba business and industry more productive and competitive for years to come.

Speaking of major improvements, I'd like to highlight the significant improvements we have made to the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. We have successfully eliminated the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program backlog, a promise that was made and a promise kept. We have introduced our innovative new stream for international students that will fast-track nominations for graduates who are employed in in-demand occupations.

We've completely revamped the MPNP business stream in order to ensure that every business nominee establishes a value-added business that will create jobs for Manitobans. We believe that this is a significant improvement over the previous government's program, which had not been successful in that regard.

So I'm pleased to introduce those remarks at start of the program to kind of cover some of the things

that we have done as a government so far in the Department of Education. And I look forward to the opportunity to discuss with the members all of the positive things we are doing in Department of Education.

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

Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Logan): I thank the minister for his opening comments. Our Education critic would have his opening comments at another time. I'm just filling in and would like to ask the minister some immigration-related questions.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, I want to thank the critic for the—for those remarks.

Okay, well under the Manitoba practice, the debate for the minister's salary is the last item considered for the department for the—of the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we now shall defer the consideration for the item 16.1.(a) contained in the resolution 16.1.

At this time, we invite the ministerial and opposition staff to enter the Chamber.

I guess as the staff is settling in, I'll get the minister to go ahead and introduce his staff.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the opportunity to introduce our hard-working staff.

I have on my left here our Deputy Minister Jamie Wilson; also have Deputy Minister Ben Rempel; and ADM Colleen Kachulak—I got it right this time—and, of course, ADM, and responsible for finance, Carlos Matias. So thank you very much.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Minister.

Now, I'll get the member for the—for Logan to introduce her staff.

Ms. Marcelino: Very delighted to be joined by Chris Sanderson from our caucus office.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed with an Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion? *[interjection]*

Global? Is it agreed by both sides? *[Agreed]*

Okay. Thank you. We'll go with a global—thank you for this and agree then the question of the department will proceed in a global manner with all

the resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Marcelino: Would like to ask the minister, in the past, the cap on Provincial Nominee Program is 5,000. Has that still been the case over the last few years? And, if there is difference, can the minister provide what those figures are by year?

Mr. Wishart: In 2017, there was a total of 5,008 nominations. But we have been notified that we are getting an increase from the federal government for the coming year to a total of 5,700 and that that would be a beginning of a process to increase the numbers as we move forward.

*(15:10)

Ms. Marcelino: Clarification, Mr. Chair. I would like to ask the minister: When will the 5,700 new cap commence?

Mr. Wishart: We've received notification, and it will be starting immediately.

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you to the minister.

Also, can the minister also provide me with how many provincial nominees actually came to Manitoba in the years 2016 and present?

Mr. Wishart: For the year 2016, total number of PNPs landed was ninety-nine hundred—or it's 9,960. And in 2017, it was 9,425.

And just a few more comments related to the increased quota that we have received from the federal government, that was the end of a very long negotiation process where we worked with the federal government very co-operatively. I enjoyed during that period of time the opportunity to be co-chair with the federal government on the immigration committee, and I certainly worked very constructively with the new federal minister to make sure that we were able to get an increase, the first one in many, many years. I'm not sure exactly how far back going, but first increase under the PNP for Manitoba in—for many, many years.

Ms. Marcelino: I thank the minister for that answer and appreciate the hard work done to negotiate the increased cap. Looking forward to more hard work to increase the number.

Does the—Mr. Chair, I'd like, through you, ask, does the minister have the latest information he has on the number of people who have applied to the

PNP program, and if he had that for the last few years, it would be even better, say from 2016, '17 at least.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

I hope she appreciates this is a constantly evolving number, the way we do it. We have expressions of interest that come in all the time. They stay in the system and then they're reviewed after six months to see if they're still current or not. So the—as of April 26, we currently have 16,254 expressions of interest in the system, which is a—numbers have been increasing.

Ms. Marcelino: Further clarification: would like to ask the minister through you, Mr. Chair, 16,200, is that since the year 2016?

Mr. Wishart: Actually, what that means—those are within the last six months, so those are the current ones. So would not include even that whole period you're talking about. Those are the current and live. We do not—in our constantly reviewing process that we have in place, we do not actually track old ones that don't reapply. So those are actual live applications, if you want to look at it that way; they expressed interest in coming to Manitoba, should we be able to make the right connections under the Provincial Nominee Program to positions that they are qualified for.

Ms. Marcelino: I thank the minister.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister, how much did his government—how much funding did his government provide 'manitoba'—the program Manitoba Start, years—in the years 2016-2017 and presently?

Mr. Wishart: The funding for the Manitoba Start program that year was \$3 million.

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you to the minister.

Also would like, through you, Mr. Chair, ask the minister to break out for us how many francophone immigrants have come to Manitoba in the last three years?

Mr. Wishart: We're working to get you an up-to-date number, but I did want to mention that we have been working very constructively with the francophone ministers on immigration. There's a subcommittee, actually, of immigration in Canada, that it's representing the francophone 'promises', which we are one, and I know they've been pushing very hard to increase francophone immigration. We

work with Quebec, and as the member probably knows, because of constitutional anomalies, or differences, I guess, more than anything, Quebec is responsible for its own immigration program, separate from the rest of Canada, and, of course, has been very focused on the francophone content from their point of view. But they have been working with, particularly in New Brunswick and ourselves and Ontario, to make sure that we are in a position to do as well as we can in terms of francophone immigration. We have a nominal target of approximately 5 per cent. Where it gets difficult, frankly, is defining what is a francophone. Is it your first language? Is it your second language? Are you fluent in it? In—you know, where do we count you in that whole process? I know that last year we were—there we go, oh yes—that we were just under our 5 per cent target, and so we're certainly working very hard to improve that.

*(15:20)

We do expect to do better in the coming years, not the least of which was driven by the arrival in Manitoba of a French-based company, Roquette, which will be—has a presence already in St. Boniface, has their head office located there.

And we have been working with them, in terms of their training requirements, and it is one of the areas where I think we're going to see some training done in French, so that we have people that meet their qualifications and are fluently bilingual, is what we're looking for. And we hope to have a number for you in a moment here.

Ms. Marcelino: Just a follow-up question: You mentioned, in 2016, there were 9,960 arrivals through the program—2017: 900–9,425. Do you know the reason why—at least, it's 500 less the following year than 2016?

Mr. Wishart: Before we leave that other issue, we have a number for you, in terms of francophone immigrants: it was 4,740.

There's a slight downward variation in terms of the number, because, in that year, we had received most of the Syrians, actually, sort of in the middle and the start of the year, so through the remainder of that particular fiscal year, the number was actually down a little because the number of Syrian refugees was actually—there was less of them arriving during that particular period.

So we certainly dealt with—during that time, we were dealing with a large number of Syrian refugees,

which, as I'm sure the member appreciates, require a lot of time and attention in the immigration system and in the school system. But the number was actually down just slightly because we didn't have the actual bodies arrive during that particular period.

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, I would like to ask the minister: The changes to the nominee program were meant to make processing more efficient and hopefully process more applicants. However, in 2016, we have this—in '17 we have reducing figures here, whereas, to my recollection, prior to 2016, we're getting over 10,000, at least, arrivals each year.

Would the minister have the figures prior to 2016, the number of applicants that have been processed and have arrived in Manitoba?

Mr. Wishart: PNP landed—landings have decreased slightly, and most of the reason for that isn't because of our processing or because of restrictions but actually because we had a federal backlog in that particular period of time, and so they were not processing them as quickly. And so, therefore, until they had processed them, we couldn't process them.

So there was a period of time during which we were waiting, really, on the federal government. They were taking up to 16 months to process some of these applications, and some of that, actually, I think was also, in their defence—and I know that's not my job—but, in their defence, was driven by the fact that they were dealing with the influx of Syrian refugees as well.

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chair, through you, I would like to ask the minister: There has been a reduction of staff support for immigration services. We saw both management and professional technical positions have been cut. Can the minister explain what positions were eliminated?

We understand that the demands for the services are still high, so just wondering why the minister has cut these services.

Mr. Wishart: And I would like to correct something before we get into the number of staff. When we gave you number 4,700, that was in error. That's something different.

In 2017, we had francophone nominations. We had 120 principal applicants. In 2016, we had 197 principal applicants—sorry—and in 2015, it

was 157. So I hope that doesn't confuse the issue too much.

And, as for staff positions, we have actually added three processing staff, but we have combined all of the MPNP streams that existed before—which included the student, and the traditional one, and the investor one into one branch so we have created a number of processing efficiencies as in response to that.

Ms. Marcelino: Thank you, Minister.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister: On page 125 of our Estimates booklet there was—or there is a \$30,000 figure removed from Other Operating. Can the minister explain this reduction?

Mr. Wishart: Thank you for the question. That was some operational efficiencies that we have found actually in the process of amalgamating the two streams that existed before. So we did save a few dollars as part of that process.

*(15:30)

Ms. Marcelino: I would like to have asked the minister this question the other day, but a variation of the question I ask the minister: In the Estimates book on page 124, one of the expected outcomes this year is improved and accessible website information for newcomers, including international students.

I checked the website for international education. It does appear that there's some information—misleading information regarding the availability of health insurance for international students. I thank the minister and his staff, for when I checked today, it's already gone.

However, my concern regarding promoting Manitoba remains. It appears that there is now no promotional material or website that promotes Manitoba as a great place to come and study. I'm wondering when that material might be ready and what steps the minister is taking to ensure our international education remains strong.

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question. I'd also like to thank her for drawing our attention to the—that one spot where the information had been incorrect, although the page you tabled with me the other day actually came out of Health, and they, too, had a page with incorrect information, which we have also had corrected. But we've made sure that all our information is up to date.

We are working closely with the Manitoba council on international education, and they are putting in place through their system—and, of course, their membership, which involves all of the institutions that do international education—programs to make sure that whoever comes for education here in Manitoba from an international destination is aware of the need to get private insurance and that they, in fact, can help connect them to that, and as working together, and in particular with the University of Manitoba, which has, of course, the vast majority of international students there, that they're able to get a much better rate as a joined—it's not really a single group because, of course, there are a number of different institutions involved. But because of—they can work together to acquire that, their—the price on getting coverage for health insurance is much reduced because of that. And they have not yet got to a final number on that, but we expect them to be coming back to us shortly with that information, and we will be able to put that on our website, and I know that they're planning on doing that as well.

Ms. Marcelino: On this side of the House, we believe that international students, besides contributing to our economy, are future ambassadors of Manitoba to the world. And, therefore, making international education accessible in this sense or making international students come to Manitoba than any other place would do our province good many times over. And so we were hoping that the minister would reconsider the elimination of health insurance for international students.

I have another question, Mr. Chair. The rate of growth in international immigration has fallen in Manitoba, and that's according to the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics. We're wondering what steps the minister is taking to change this.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's concern. Part of that, as I answered the other day in the House, is driven by a high year which contains most of the Syrian refugee landings. So that we actually had a—one would call it, perhaps, a bubble in the number. But, if you look back, actually, further than the last two years, you'll see that those are the two highest years in the last eight. So it is still continuing to be very high. I think if we were to take out the actual number of Syrian refugees that came during that period, it would be more of a straight line.

But we're still working very constructively with the federal government. The number was the same

for PNP, but during that period, as I answered to one of the previous questions, we did have some delays on PNP because of the federal government processing time, which grew to more than 16 months during that period of time. And, as I said earlier, it is possible, in their defence, that they too were struggling to deal with the large numbers that had come under the Syrian refugee program.

Ms. Marcelino: Mr. Chair, back to the health insurance for international students. We'd like to ask, through you, if the minister has some estimates on the cost of private insurance.

We recall the Premier (Mr. Pallister) previously gave an estimate on the cost of insurance for international students, but—wondering if the minister has the information, if he has worked out how much, prior to—how much is the cost, prior to this policy of eliminating insurance for international—health insurance for international students.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's concern, and we, as I said earlier, we are working very constructively with the Manitoba Council for International Education, who we see as the lead in this particular process. And they have, certainly, been keen to do that and they're working with their members to make sure that we get the best rate, that.

Here, in Manitoba, it looks like, for individual students, it'll be roughly in the \$400 range. And we have not got a final figure from them. As I said, working together, they were hoping to get improved rates. I know that there is the—always the issue of family members, and that has to be part of their discussion with them to make sure that they get adequate coverage for family members as well, because our goal is to make sure that there is no one here that is un-covered in the process. We certainly don't want to have that risk out there.

And one of the other complicating factors, I know, that was part of their discussion is people that come with prior existing conditions, which are always—which is always an issue.

* (15:40)

Ms. Marcelino: Mr. Chair, would like to ask the minister, through you, who were consulted prior to coming up with this decision to eliminate health insurance for international students.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question. We certainly had had some discussions with—not only with the Manitoba Council for International

Education, but also with a number of the institutions, on what they viewed the impact would be to moving to this particular formula. I think, as the member appreciates, as the government and as a province, we're facing some challenges, particularly with the health costs. I think—and I know the member follows what's in the press, and we had the national—what was it—federally—Attorney General comments the other day about the long-term sustainability of Manitoba's health-care funding initiatives. That certainly sort of seconds or backs up our opinion that we have challenges in that area, and we are making moves to try and develop a sustainable program not only for international students, but also for members of the province of Manitoba. Long term, we have to have a sustainable funding formula, and I think the member will appreciate that.

Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park): My question is more about the numbers that might be available through your office or through the office of the Provincial Nominee Program. I'll deal with the retention rate, year over year, that I was told you were tracking last year. So, is—are there any numbers available now?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question. Can't give the man—sorry—the member a hard number for each year, but we do track the percentage based on looking backwards, and it's been in the 89 to 90 per cent. It sometimes varies a little bit from year to year, but there has been no definite trend in any direction. The retention rate is running 89 to 90 per cent, which, compared to other provinces, I am told, is an extremely good retention rate.

Mr. Marcelino: So, from that answer, can the numbers to substantiate the rates be provided to this committee, or is that something that's so difficult to do?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question.

This government is—or—sorry—this information is actually generated by the federal data that is collected. They give us a percentage, so getting actual numbers would be in—a request that you would have to forward to the federal government, and if you're really keen to see that, I think you could probably do freedom of information on those specific numbers with the federal government.

But it is not—we don't have the raw data; we have the finished data, which is percentages.

Mr. Marcelino: Thank you to the minister for that answer.

Does that mean that the 89 per cent number that was mentioned during the previous answer is not based on anything except what the feds are providing? Or is that something from thin air?

Mr. Wishart: Well, and I thank the member for the question. This is federal government data, as I indicated, and way they do it—and it's not single years; it's over a three-year period—but they compare landings in a given year with the tax filing data for the next three years. So I suspect that that is probably very good data, in terms of quality. As I said, if you want the raw data, you would have to file that request with the federal government. Particularly with CRA, and good luck with that.

But, you know, they do share data that is not confidential in nature. And the number of filings for any particular province should not be confidential data.

Mr. Marcelino: I'll go to another matter.

Of those who have applied for the provincial nominee program in whatever stream it might be, do—would the minister have any raw data about the refusal rate, the rate of refusal? So those who have applied minus those who have been assigned a provincial nominee number equals the number of those who have been refused. Do we have any of those numbers?

Mr. Wishart: And we do have quite good data in regards to this. Skilled workers in Manitoba—the approval rate is 98 per cent. For skilled workers from overseas, the approval rate is 69 per cent. And, for the business stream, the approval rate is 70 per cent. And I can certainly give you the raw numbers for—to substantiate those, if you wish that level of information. Okay, applications received in skilled workers of Manitoba is 2,817; applications nominated is 2,351. So that's applications refused is 54. So applications processed is 2,405.

And skilled workers overseas: applications received, 720; applications nominated, 2,389; so applications refused is 1,081; so, then, the amount of applications processed is 3,470. That's the 69 per cent rate—approval rate. And, on the business side of things: applications received, 210; applications nominated, 268; and applications refused, 115; applications processed, 383. And that gives us a 70 per cent approval rate.

* (15:50)

Mr. Marcelino: I thank the minister for those figures.

So in what government publication or website are these numbers available?

Mr. Wishart: Those informations will be available in approximately one month or so on the website.

Mr. Marcelino: The wait times for an application in the skilled worker stream, do you have data as to how long one has to wait before they are told that they are refused or assigned a number?

Mr. Wishart: In regards to applications for skilled workers, we are processing in less than six months. We do have one file that is taking longer than that because the applicant has not responded in that period of time. Other than that, they're all getting processed in less than six months. Specific data would be confidential in each case.

Mr. Marcelino: I am worried about the programs that have been started before that were helping out new immigrants to our province. More specifically, Manitoba Start—has that been discontinued?

Mr. Wishart: We're in the last year of a three-year contract with Manitoba Start, and we certainly intend to evaluate the success of the program, which has, I know, been very good, and look for any improvements we can make and continue forward. But predicting a contract in the next fiscal year is too risky a business.

Mr. Marcelino: Yes, one last question. Do we have a nation—from nation to nation, meaning, do we have any numbers that will show our source nations in our Provincial Nominee Program? Has there been any change from before, and what are those changes?

Mr. Wishart: I thank the member for the question.

We do have quite a lot of information on—2017 is the most recent information we have. India was responsible for a little over 32 per cent of our nominations; Philippines, about 18 per cent of our nominations; China, 11 and a half; Nigeria, 6.8; Korea—South Korea, obviously—3.7 per cent; Ukraine, about 2.9 per cent; Brazil, about 2.9 per cent; Pakistan, 2.2 per cent; Israel, 2 per cent; Germany, 1 per cent; and I think that covers most of them. Down to 1 per cent, they're pretty small.

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): And I have a—first of all I want to ask: expression of interest, does it expire after six months, or—it used to be one year, so I'm not quite clear. If somebody puts an

application or expression of interest, and after six months he or she have to renew it? Or after one year he or she have to renew it?

Mr. Wishart: And I thank the member for the question. We review them, all EI-EOI applications based on the needs from the labour market, every two or three weeks so that there's more or less constant evaluation going on. If a person hasn't been invited in a period of 12 months, then they are contacted and dropped from the list if they don't respond. We don't want an accumulation of old information, but they also can take advantage of that opportunity to reapply again if they so wish.

Mr. Saran: I thank the minister for that answer.

And there's one old question even—I asked last time. There is a different way of preparing priests in the Sikh religion, I'm—Hindu religion, as compared to other religions, the Christian religion. And in the Sikh religion the priest won't go to school. They will be prepared within the church or Gurdwara for so many years. And in that case, they may not know that—English as well, and in that way the Sikh religion becomes kind of put at risk of being discriminated. And, therefore, is there any change has been made in the Provincial Nominee Program to adjust those requirements?

And also I want to ask, is that IELTS still required by the priest from the Sikh religion or the Hindu religion?

And maybe I can add the other question: if somebody's M.A. in English and—does he or she have to write IELTS, or they can be considered competent in their trade or in their—even somebody first did an M.A. and then became a priest, and they are competent in that way without writing IELTS?

* (16:00)

Mr. Wishart: Well—and thank the member for the question, you know, by—I have discussed this before, and I in fact had a chance to discuss this at the national immigration with the federal minister, and it is a problem in more provinces than ours, as of course, the Provincial Nominee Program is an economic immigration program, and specific to that, so we have some limitations placed on us.

One of which is, of course, the IELTS program, as the member has mentioned, applies to anyone who would come as a religious educator whose training is not officially recognized, which is the basis of the problem. So that they must have a level 4 to apply

under the Provincial Nominee Program here in Manitoba.

However, there is opportunity for those individuals to come to Manitoba under a visitor or a tourist visa, and while they're here, they are eligible for any provincially funded English-language programs, so that there's opportunity to come here and get some training in the English language so that they could qualify to stay here in Manitoba.

Mr. Saran: Okay, there is another. My understanding is that priests are exempt from writing IELTS because they are staying in—within the gurdwara and their other—only their native language is spoken there, so Punjabi. And therefore they really don't need English in that way.

And I—although, sure, they will have to improve some, what—when they come over here, but my understanding is that—because otherwise, for these gurdwaras, churches, Sikh churches will be—have a difficult time to recruit those people and to bring over here if English is the major obstacle. And therefore, something—to bring the religion at the same level the other religions, something needs to be done.

And there's some—one solution, but I will ask the other question. I think—we have Manitoba Start, but Manitoba Start, in my opinion, it's not really helped that much the amount that should be helped. People—some people come and they get jobs in their trades, their professions, but other people are not able to get jobs in their trades or professions.

And, most probably, they need some kind of help from the government: placement work. Like, they should be directly, for say for three months or four months, under—so that the government pays the wages, maybe minimum wages, and that way those people have some experience, say for three months. Then they will be employable over here.

Or there is other ways of—to helping to—them. They can go and work as a volunteer whatever time they need, but they are not covered under compensation, under the compensation board.

So, this—I have experience with the power engineers. They used to go to Red River College, and they will register them and they are part of the practicum. So in that way, they will be eligible on compensation, and employers won't be hesitant to hire them under that system.

And what about if those people who have different trades, different professions, they go to university, register there—could be covered under compensation. Or they go to college. Say electricians come, they can go to the electrical department in Red River College, they register over there, so they could be covered under that. And that way, that will—those people will be helped more, as compared to going simple—simply to Manitoba Start. We are—many people who won't go, but even if they go over there, they will—won't get real help which they really need to be put under the—to get real experience.

So I suggested that. What minister think about that?

Mr. Wishart: Well, thank the member for the question—thank you, Mr. Chair. And I will attempt—there were several questions in there, so I will attempt to do that.

In terms of talking about exemptions, there is no specific exemption for those with religious background in the area of priests. But we have, as I've said, offered the ability for them to take some training here so that they can meet the requirements which, I think, provides them with a way forward if they're—you know, have the skill levels to do that. And I believe that we will see some people actually follow that route. I think it provides some with options—with an option that they can achieve.

Mr. Dennis Smook, Deputy Chairperson, in the Chair

Now, under Manitoba Start, we have created some special programs, some of which was originally designed in response to the Syrian refugee issue, but we have continued because we found that they are good programs and that a number of other people that come either through PNP or come as attached to someone that is qualifying under PNP. And that one, in particular, is the REDI program that we are doing—refugee economic development initiative is what that acronym stands for.

We've done a number of these programs already. I'll give a little more detail on them here. In particular, we've done some in the food services-hospitality industry. We've also done some in terms of painting and crack-filling.

And we do these a little differently, because they're half days of training and half a day in the workplace. And we do this in conjunction with companies that have expressed an interest in hiring these types of individuals so that you're training, not just going out at the end of the day with no

connection to the industry; you're actually training and working in the workplace. So you're connected right through to a job.

And so the success rate, as I'm sure the member appreciates, of individuals under this program has been quite substantially a lot higher than other training programs. It is a model that I think we're going to apply in some other circumstances as a very useful model. And we've done that. And we also did a program around agricultural workers, and there was fourth one—what was it? Was it health care?

I believe the fourth one was in the field of health care. It was at entry level, a nurse's aide situation. So we're trying to provide that.

And I know the member also touched on the issue of people that come with qualifications that are not necessarily recognized in our workplace. And I know that that is a challenge. We do have the office of fairness, which is attached to our department, whose role it is to provide as a liaison and work with all of the different colleges of professionalism that we have in the province. Each one of those is—has their own set of rules when it comes to recognizing different qualifications from overseas. We try and facilitate for an individual, making sure that what experience, or what documentation they have from their country that can be used here is recognized here.

* (16:10)

I know that doesn't always work out, and the member and I have discussed before what happens when they come with something that is a fairly high level in their own country but is not recognized here, and then what happens: Do they move down in terms of a step process, and what level are they recognized here, if it's recognized at all? And that is an ongoing challenge, and I know that that's something that the office of fairness is often in discussion with different professional colleges about.

So I hope that that has answered some of the member's question.

Mr. Saran: I'm not sure whether we can ask a question—minister have staff from the Education Department or not. In case, does minister have staff from the Education Department so I can ask a question on the local education?

Mr. Wishart: Well, I have my deputy here and financial adviser. If it's not too in-depth, we probably

can make a stab at it, and, if not, we will prepare that answer for another day when we have the right staff in play.

Mr. Saran: Okay. I thank the minister for trying to figure out what I am going into.

And, okay, I raise this question—even I put resolution that, for example, in India, we had three languages. We had to study, first, the local language, that was Punjabi in the Punjab. Then we have to study Hindi, second language. Then we must—have to study English from grade 6.

And, over here, we have two official languages: French and English. But, because we—as a parent I would like to—my children learn my language and also understand my culture. And—but my children would not go voluntarily to take that language. My suggestion is, and I read this question before, my suggestion is there should be a third language, which should be optional—I mean, a kid can take Ukrainian, they can take Tagalog, they can take Punjabi, Hindi, whatever they want—but it should be compulsory. They should not graduate before they have a third language.

I understand the resources are needed, but those resources can be put in such a way: you can have one teacher who knows that language, as well the teacher, he can go to the other school or the students come from the other schools over there.

So this is very important for the immigrant community, and I hope something can be done in that field.

Mr. Wishart: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I thank the member for the question. And I know he feels very strongly that being able to communicate in a number of different cultures is a very valuable item to have in these days, especially in the global market place that we are part of. And I appreciate that he has that personal experience that makes his ability to move into different cultures much better.

We do have a number of school divisions that are offering a wide variety of additional languages: Tagalog, Ukrainian and German, for sure, and, of course, we always have French—full French and French immersion, French through DSFM.

The challenge, of course, to offer it very widely is to find good educators in those languages. Frankly, if the member knew how much difficulty both ourselves and the number of school divisions have in

getting good French immersion teachers, he might have some sympathy for our challenge, because it is an ongoing difficulty for all school divisions, particularly as we've seen quite a lot of growth in some of those areas.

But school divisions have gone a long ways to try and accommodate particular ethnic groups in terms of maintaining their culture and language. We are a very open and accepting province. We don't require, as you see in some jurisdictions, particularly in the US where everything is a melting pot—we certainly honour various cultures and recognize them, and I know that there's value in having people that have multiple languages like that.

You know, I certainly would encourage the member to talk to the associations that may approach individual school divisions. I know that that's what's going on in Seven Oaks right now with the Filipino community approaching the school division there looking for courses in 'tagaley'—yes, I'm sorry, I often get that wrong—and that they are actually taking registrations for the next fall on that. So they obviously found someone that's—they're comfortable with having teach that. So there is potential to move in that direction, and I think that would be the best way forward at this point in time.

We do have also a very large number of First Nations languages being taught these days: Cree and Ojibwe and Dakota. I'm not sure whether 'mischif' is any—in any of the schools, but I know that there's a move to try and preserve that language which is at risk of being lost. And Dene as well is in some of the northern communities.

So it's a very multicultural challenge out there for the school divisions to try and find the people that they need to teach in all of these languages, so.

Mr. Saran: I thank the minister for that answer.

Still, I think, when you talk about indigenous languages, those are compulsory. They have to take those languages. But Tagalog and Punjabi, those are not compulsory. And the kids in that situation would opt out; they won't take those languages. And as parents it's, for us, it's important that they take that language. Why they will take those languages? Because they are compelled to take it, and they have to pass grade 12. Otherwise, they won't pass grade 12.

So, my—I think those people—teachers are available. That is not the problem. The problem is the—how to use those teachers in different schools,

how to bring a student from a different school to that particular place. That will be a challenge. But I think that challenge will be worth, because that's very important for the immigrant communities. Their children learn their language, learn their culture. They will know where they come from, they will appreciate and they will be more helpful when they grow up to go back to those countries, have businesses, and it will help the Canadian economy.

So that's my suggestion, and I will keep bugging in—continuously on that matter. Thank you.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate that the member feels very strongly about this. I'm not arguing with his premise. I believe that having multiple languages is an advantage, not only here in Manitoba and in Canada, but it gives you quite an advantage in the international global marketplace.

We do teach indigenous languages in many, many schools, but it is not a 'compulsory' course. It is optional for those that wish to take it. What is included as part of our compulsory education is the history, so that all Manitobans understand the history of the indigenous community and their role and their place in regards to that, so that there is a connection there and that everyone needs to be aware of what has happened here in Manitoba in the past so that we can build a stronger future. So that portion is actually a requirement. Grade 11 history, for instance, is a requirement before you pass.

We're certainly open—and I know a number of school divisions, as I've mentioned, have moved to offer additional courses now and into the future. And I hope that more of this continues.

* (16:20)

As to finding good teachers, I know that it is a challenge for the school divisions to find teachers in—well, we've mentioned a number of languages, including French immersion. But also it is a real challenge to find people that are qualified to teach in indigenous languages as well. And that continues to be one of the limiting factors for a number of schools as to whether they can offer that particular course. So I hope the member appreciates that and, you know, hope that has answered some of his question.

Mr. Saran: Yes, a question came to my mind immediately, but I'm getting old and I forgot that question. So, therefore, I give a chance to member from Riverview—Fort Garry-Riverview.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): I thank my friend from The Maples for conceding the floor to me, and I'm pleased to be able to ask some questions of the minister today.

I'm going to concentrate entirely on training, so that we don't stray too far from the agreed path. I mean, I'd like to ask lots of questions around education, but I'll leave that to our education critic to do that.

I certainly welcome staff, the minister here, one is in particular familiar to me, and so it's good to see him still. Of course, deputy minister, as well, I've had a lot to do with him over the years, so pleased to see him here today as well.

I want to start off just talking about The Certified Occupations Act, and that currently has a number of attributes to it, but I believe that it's going to be repealed.

So I wonder if the minister could just outline the argument for repealing The Certified Occupations Act.

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question. We're certainly trying to be efficient in regards to what we do when it comes to apprenticeship and the apprenticeship board and the certified occupations board.

What we have decided to do is focus on getting the structure and the strength around the apprenticeship board and have their decision-making powers and support be enhanced. So, with consultation with members of certified occupation and also with the industry, we have moved to eliminate that one board to try and get this whole system working better.

I think the member probably appreciates—I know the Auditor General's report on this sector of the economy in terms of apprenticeship, did say, recognize a number of issues when it comes to modernization and moving forward to make this area work better. There's been—I mean, these are very old systems in many ways. The apprenticeship system goes back to the old world and is several hundred years old in terms of its efficiencies, and still works very well over there, so I'm told. But we've never really gotten the kind of strength and buy in here in North America and in Canada, in particular, to support this.

So we're looking for ways to kind of strengthen it as we move forward into a new workplace as it

exists. So we are looking for ways to be more efficient about this and to get better records to be—make it more workable not only for the employer but also for the student employee, as they're often referred to. That is part of the process.

So it's part of what we're doing to try and make this whole sector of our economy more responsive to demand from the workplace. This will actually connect a lot into our sector council as we move forward, and we're also in the process, as the member may be aware, of doing call for proposals on sector councils to modernize them as well.

Mr. Allum: I appreciate the minister's answer, although I have to say that The Certified Occupations Act was largely about modernizations, as he will know. The 'purpose'—the premise of it was to improve training and standards for occupations that don't fall under regular apprenticed trades. One of those, for example, is trucking. His colleague last week, the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler), two weeks ago, was on CTV and talked about the need to strengthen standards around trucking in relation to the Humboldt tragedy, and I think the government even issued—or the Minister of Infrastructure issued a press release on that very thing about tightening standards with regard to training for our truckers. Trucking, as you know, is not an apprenticed trade, and yet the government is out saying we need to strengthen standards and we need to ensure a better level of training in that regard, and that's exactly what The Certified Occupations Act had in mind. So I can't help ask him, why the mixed messages from the government?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question. I know that we're all interested in improving levels of safety in whatever industry but, in particular, trucking. But we did feel that the—under the apprenticeship act and the apprenticeship board where we could still continue with the training with them. We had a lot of discussions, actually, with the trucking industry and those that represent them, a number of sectors. We did not get a uniform read from them as to which way they want to move forward. However, we are looking forward to their application under sector council status, and that'll provide them with access to more training.

We certainly will be entering into discussions with them. As the Minister of Infrastructure made mention the other day that additional training—and we've been hearing this from other provinces as well—additional training for truck drivers is

something I think everybody is interested in getting done. There's more trucks on the road all the time, and in many ways, used to be, people needed a lot of experience to be—before they were really qualified to go out on the highway with an 18-wheel rig. We made those trucks so much easier to drive now that anyone who can pass a driver's test probably can drive one of those, as well. But that doesn't mean that they're qualified to do it in a safe manner. So we have to be much more aware of additional training in regards to that.

* (16:30)

So we already have had some discussions with the trucking industry. I think, if the member follows what happens as part of the proposal—call for proposals we put out on sector council, he will find that there is an emergence of a new sector council coming down the road that will be responsible for working with us and better access to that whole process is the outcome of that.

Mr. Allum: I appreciate that the minister wants to chart off in his own direction here and—but I can't help think, as I listen to him, that he's really just reinventing a wheel that already exists.

The Certified Occupations Act did the very things that he just described. So it doesn't make sense to repeal that, and then go through a whole bunch of process around creating something new, whether it's related to the sector council or something else, when, in fact, the essence of the thing was already contained within The Certified Occupations Act.

To us, it can't help but think that not only are you abandoning on the one hand something that's already there in place for something like trucking, but a variety of other trades or things that would like to be trades, I suppose, certified as trades. This strikes me as, frankly, government red tape. Would he disagree with that?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question. Certainly, we are taking a different approach than the previous government did in a number of these areas. As we touched on earlier, the apprenticeship system, as it existed with the previous government, the Auditor General was more than a little scathing in terms of his evaluation of its efficiency and working.

We're certainly working with the industry to make sure that that is happening, and the training side of things. And we've been able to work with a number of other provinces to get an updated record-keeping system brought in that should be, within a

few months, rolled out here, which I think will improve, at least, some elephant–elements of the recording of hours work and the training that was involved.

As to whether we prefer a sector council or a more regulated approach, I guess that's a difference in perspective from one philosophy to the other. We certainly prefer to work with the industry much more closely, and the Manitoba Trucking Association have been very clear that they're interested in that approach with them. And we are listening to the industry when it comes to this, and moving forward.

I appreciate that the member is concerned for safety; we are as well. And we know what we have to do something, and perhaps, you know, going down the road, we'll be seeing some different suggestions come forward from the industry on how to work within that structure. I do note, though, that there were a number of companies in the trucking industry that did not see a certified occupations approach as a solution. So we certainly listen to them as well.

But we're trying to do what is best in terms of making sure we have well trained drivers on the road, that they have access to the proper training, and that we are able to keep a number of people that we need to have trained, because, as I think the member knows, that there is a seemingly endless demand in the trucking industry for well-trained drivers, and that has been a challenge. It's been a part of our immigration programs as well. There's been demand on that side as well. And that, too, continues to grow.

So we're both looking for the same goal; we may have different approaches as to how we get there. But I guess time will tell as to whether our approach is better than the previous government's approach. I do have to fall back on the Auditor General review of the apprenticeship system. He was very clear that it needed modernizing and improving, as well, and we're making moves in that regard as well. So it's a question of approaches. I think the outcome remains to be seen. We believe we're headed in the right direction.

Mr. Allum: So the—I have to say, just as a point broadly across government, I find it objectionable the way in which this government continues to politicize Auditor General reports—just across the board. It happens every single time. The Auditor General reports on programs and services offered by the government of Manitoba and has the best interest of those programs at heart, and yet they're constantly

used by this government as a stick to beat the head over the last government.

And I just find that—I just want to put that on the floor. I find that objectionable that the minister constantly—this minister did it twice so far in this session. It's been done routinely by the government. And I personally just find that objectionable. The idea is to take the recommendations of the Auditor General seriously, implement them to the very best of our ability. After all, the Auditor General is not a political office. It's a non-political, non-partisan office. And our obligation is to listen to the Auditor General and then to implement the recommendations without using it as a political stick to beat the opposition, in this case, over the head with.

So I would invite him not to go there. He's welcome to point to elements of it to suggest where it could be better or where things could be improved. That's fair game. Not—I don't regard that report as a scathing indictment of the apprenticeship system, and, in fact, I found that there were very good recommendations in there that if the government had embraced them properly, we'd be moving forward and likely with some support from this side of the House. But when they're constantly used as a stick to beat us over the head, I think that that's wrong to use a non-political office and then politicize it. In my view, it's not appropriate.

Now, he says that they've worked with the Manitoba Trucking Association, open to their ideas. We know that when The Certified Occupations Act was approved, Terry Shaw at the time praised the act and said training initiatives for enabling better quality in skills training was welcome, and so we could say the same thing at that time. So I suppose it's fair to say that a government looking to find advocates for their programs can look to relative—to look to relevant industries and get their support. Terry Shaw was, in fact, supportive of our approach as well. So we want to be careful on that.

Now, the minister has said that the new approach to trucking will be down the road, and that is kind of an interesting set of terms that he used there. Could he be clearer, now, for us, when that down the road will be?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's comments regarding Auditor General's report. We certainly look forward to reading them as well, and I guess our interpretation is perhaps different than his. That depends, I guess, on which side of the fence you're sitting on at that particular point in time.

In regards to consultations on the trucking industry, we actually just made an announcement this morning regarding consultations on long-term planning for training in the trucking industry, and just for the member's information, we spent a total of \$1.35 million in training with them this last year, which is a record amount and a record number of people that we worked with.

Mr. Allum: We've been talking about trucking in relation to The Certified Occupations Act, but, of course, the act proposed to raise the bar on certification for other non-apprenticed occupations, and I know from my time in government that there was an appetite, a desire, to lift the standards and lift the training in any variety of occupations that weren't considered to be certified apprentice.

What will happen in the event of those other non-apprenticed occupations?

*(16:40)

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's comments.

Certainly, we're continuing to work forward, but we felt that within the existing system, both apprenticeship and the training process that we do, we were able to meet their needs. And we continue to work with them moving forward and we continue to review their requests as they come forward.

We have certainly put a great emphasis on training in this department and made the connection—making the connections not only with the existing K-to-12 system as it was, but the adult education system, and providing better pathways forward for individuals to get the training and specific sets of skills that we need in a growing marketplace.

Mr. Allum: Some of that language strikes me as quite familiar, if you'll forgive me, having used many of those words myself at one time.

The minister says that the training, apprenticeships is a priority for him and for the department and for the government, and yet the budget for apprenticeships has decreased by several staff. Could he help square that circle?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question.

Certainly, we have found, as we're entering into a new labour market agreement with the federal government, there are a couple of federal programs that have been discontinued. They—what they've done, really, though they have increased the amount of funding that's available through labour market

programs, they focus on a smaller number of programs and offer greater flexibility in how we put those programs into place, which is greatly appreciated, frankly. I know that my colleagues in other provinces, too, have said that they have found an advantage to this. And what we have found, really, is that with better alignment between what the federal government wants to accomplish with their labour market funding and what we were able to do in terms of our programs, that we're able to be more efficient about how we do things and get better results.

I'm sure the member appreciates increasing the number of people getting trained is the goal here, not just staff numbers. But we've been able to accomplish a lot of that and we believe that as we enter into this new labour market agreement with the federal government that we'll be able to do even more of that in the future and increase the number.

One of the reasons, actually, that we are looking for a modernization of the sector councils—and I'm sure, I know the member had an opportunity to work with them as well, as he made reference to several of them earlier—and the modernization process, I think, is important too, because some of these sectors have advanced quite a little bit. Technology moves very quickly in some of these sectors, so that we have seen some of the sectors council kind of age in terms where the area that they were servicing and whether or not they were able to move forward quickly. So we do hope that we're, by doing call for proposals, we're going to get some modernization.

And I'm told that, I know a number of the sector councils are looking at working together, where they worked in separation before. Some of the sector councils, I must admit, are—really been very good and very efficient about their jobs and able to meet the needs; others, a little less so. We're hoping to raise everyone to the higher standard so that we can continue to do so.

Mr. Allum: Well, since the minister—I want to talk about staffing a little bit more, but since the minister raised the Canada-Manitoba Labour Market Development Agreement, can he point us to the line where the funds reside from the recoveries from that agreement?

Mr. Wishart: I appreciate the member's question, and I think probably to be absolutely accurate I would like to get back to you on a hard number in regards to that. I know there's portions of it in the—on page 117, but that is not complete.

Mr. Allum: Yes, of course, any further explanation for that would be more than welcome. So that's appreciated.

I'm going to turn—I have one last question and then I'm going to turn it over to my friend from River Heights for the remainder of the day, but the minister had said earlier that, you know, we're more interested in training folks than staff positions and I suppose some might see a one-to-one relationship between those things.

On page 117, Skills and Employment Partnerships, in your reduction of four FTEs in 2017-2018, can the minister tell us what the title of those positions were, what the scope of work for those deleted positions was and what impact that's likely to have on actually ensuring training for people going forward?

* (16:50)

Mr. Wishart: And I thank the member for the question. And, really, this tracks back to what we talked a little bit about earlier, the decreasing number of programs that the federal government is operating right now. They've gone from four to two. We, of course, gain some efficiencies in that process. And that accounts for the reduction of four FTEs. The full range of training is still available.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I'd like to start off by asking if you've got any current enrolment in French, in French milieu and French immersion, as well as the total number of students in K to 12. And the attention to French is clearly important because the government is cutting back on supports for French education, removing an assistant deputy minister at the time when the enrolment appears to be growing.

Mr. Wishart: Though I certainly appreciate the member's struggle to be heard today, we have made no cuts to French education in Manitoba. And we continue to operate the bureau français as fully staffed to provide the services.

But, as to the member's additional questions, we had made arrangements with the opposition to have immigration and training people available today. We do not have people for the K-to-12 system available today, unfortunately. So, if the member wishes us to try and get those answers, or get those answers and bring them to him another day, we'd be happy to do that. Or you can wait and readdress those questions to us when the right people are in the room.

Mr. Gerrard: If you could get those answers to me for another day when you have the staff there, that would be fine.

Has the minister done an—a cost-benefit analysis of the impact of the health-care cuts to international students?

Mr. Wishart: Well, thank the member for the question. I know he's concerned that this will have an impact on a number of international students that come to Manitoba. We've had discussions with the post-secondary institutions and the Manitoba Council for International Education that represents the schools. Certainly, there is concern that perhaps there would be a change in the number of people that come to Manitoba to get their education. The numbers have been climbing every year, and have certainly risen to a very high level. We know it's a very valuable program in terms of economic benefit to Manitoba and so we certainly want to be sure that that is done.

We've worked very closely with the council to make sure that we are able to get in place a private insurance option that makes sure that there will be no student or student family member here in Manitoba that does not have adequate coverage. We certainly don't want to get in the position where there are folks here in Manitoba that are not covered, in one form or the other, by some form of health insurance. And we've had some analysis done as to the benefits and the costs done, but we believe that this will not have a significant impact in terms of the numbers.

I'm not sure whether the member has been following what's been happening between Canada and the US when it comes to international students, but the number of students—international students in the US has been dropping fairly dramatically. That has put a lot of pressure on Canada, in particular, in terms of international students, and we believe that we will see a very substantial increase in numbers of international students coming to Canada and, hopefully, to Manitoba, as well, for education now and into the future.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: The member for Fort-Garry Riverview—oh, sorry—the member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister has made a strong point of the fact that he's trying to improve the learning of students in Manitoba, and I wonder if his department has undertaken any research which would be helpful

in providing evidence with regard to options in terms of improving learning.

Mr. Wishart: Well, I thank the member for the question, and thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe I think you're talking about post-secondary options in regards to this. I mean, that was certainly one of the key things that we were looking to do with the colleges review that had been—some time there'd been quite a gap in—it was supposed to be done every five years; it was 10 years between—actually, a little more.

We were very interested in trying to look at whether our colleges here in Manitoba were teaching the right types of courses, because they are probably the best connected to industry in terms of they need to be the most responsive. And there's been a lot of change in a 10-year period, as the member, I'm sure, appreciates. The fact that there are some occupations that are being trained for now that probably were only just being thought of 10 years ago, and, as we say occasionally in our department, we're trying to plan to train kids for the jobs of the future that don't even exist yet. So it's an ongoing challenge.

We certainly believe that there is a need to look at additional options. I suspect what the member is getting at is that some experiential learning as part of the process, and, though that is a challenge to do, we are looking at those options.

We're also looking at doing things more remotely. Some of the trades, in particular, have shown a lot of innovation, and, in terms of the construction workplace, they're now able to train people at many sites by using visors and goggles and actually never take them out of the classroom, effectively, but they have all of the experience of actually being on a workplace. And where that particular is an advantage is when it comes to safety. So you don't actually have to take them to the workplace where they're at risk while you're training them; you can train them in the classroom for all of the safety risks that are around the workplace.

I know I had the pleasure of, you know, being demonstrated on on some of those myself, and it was, frankly, like being in the workplace. It was very useful, and, as we have more and more kids that have perhaps less home-ec options in terms of experience this is going to be very useful, I think, so that they can actually have some experience before they go.

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until Monday, May 7th, at 1:30 p.m.

Have a good constituency week, everybody.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 26, 2018

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