

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

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Second Legislature**

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

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

*The House met at 1:30 p.m.*

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

### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**Madam Speaker:** Introduction of bills?

Committee reports?

Tabling of reports?

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

**Madam Speaker:** And I would note that the required 90 minutes notice prior to routine proceedings was provided in accordance with our rule 26(2).

Would the honourable Minister of Conservation and Climate please proceed with her statement.

#### Manitoba Wildfire Service

**Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate):** Honourable members of the Legislative Assembly, I rise today to acknowledge the heroic efforts of some very special individuals.

In close partnership with other agencies, communities and local authorities, the Manitoba Wildfire Service protects lives and properties, while ensuring healthy and resilient ecosystems continue to thrive. As part of that important mandate, the Manitoba Wildfire Service is faced with the challenge of managing wildfires throughout the province each summer.

The dedicated women and men of the Manitoba Wildfire Service, as well as the many members of the supporting government departments, agencies and local responders that were assisted in wildfire operations across the province this year deserve respect and praise for their courageous efforts.

The 2021 wildfire season proved to be the most challenging in our province's recent history, second only to the record season of 1989.

The severity of the 2021 season was directly attributed to many factors. One major factor is climate change, and that has caused severe drought conditions and extreme fire behaviour. There were also multiple communities directly threatened with fire activity during this simultaneously across most of the province. These factors challenged provincial resources the entire season.

Manitoba was not alone in our challenges this summer. Similar battles occurred across the country, including BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and northwest Ontario, which stretched national resources to a critical level.

The strength of partnerships and the importance of a whole-of-government approach to wildfire and emergency response to prepare for the increasing effects of climate change truly came to the forefront during the 2021 season, including the many trained and dedicated emergency firefighters from communities across Manitoba who joined the battle.

For this reason, we also want to recognize the efforts of all of the federal, provincial and local responders, the many provincial and territorial wildfire agencies from across Canada, as well as our international partners for their valued assistance this season.

We also cannot forget our international partners from South Africa who travelled across the world to assist, as well as our partners from the state of Michigan in the US. Without the remarkable efforts of these dedicated professionals, the toll on our communities and the citizens of Manitoba would have been far greater. Their tremendous contribution to keeping Manitobans safe while also protecting our communities and vital natural resources is greatly appreciated.

The professionalism, courage and commitment demonstrated by the staff of the Manitoba Wildfire Service and their fellow colleagues has earned a special place in the history of Manitoba and, for that, we will forever be grateful.

On behalf of the government of Manitoba and the citizens of our province, we truly wish to thank all of these dedicated professionals for their service.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** It is a great pleasure to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of the people who came together this summer to battle one of Manitoba's most severe wildfire seasons in recent history. Over 400 of our own Manitoba firefighters were joined by Canadian firefighters from other provinces, military personnel, and a 109-person firefighting unit from

South Africa who were here to protect our communities, forests and wildlife.

I want to send a special shout-out to the firefighters from South Africa, who not only brought their firefighting expertise, but also came to Manitoba with a strong morale and fresh energy. I know many appreciated their practice of dancing and singing in order to build team dynamics and strengthen communication among team members. The heroic efforts of all individuals involved in fighting this summer's wildfires will not be forgotten.

While we're grateful for everyone who worked and risked their lives to bring the nearly 450 wildfires across the province under control, this year's record-setting wildfire season, coupled with an extremely dry summer, should serve as another wake-up call for Manitobans about the dangers of climate change. We lost more than 1.2 million hectares of land to wildfires this year, and over 4,000 Manitobans had to be evacuated from their homes. The majority of these were Indigenous people who could not return to their communities for weeks.

The extreme drought that spurred the wildfires also hit our agriculture sector hard, with some municipalities declaring states of agricultural disaster and others restricting water use for months on end. We cannot afford to fight only the symptoms of climate change. We must do more to fight the root causes.

Today, I call on the government to take more meaningful action in the fight against climate change so that the wildfire and drought season we experienced this summer does not become the norm in our province or in our world. While I commend the firefighters who risked their lives to bring Manitoba's wildfires under control this summer, this government must do its part in preventing more record-setting wildfire and drought seasons in the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

**Mr. Gerrard:** Madam Speaker, I join other members of the Legislature in thanking the firefighters who've done such important and valiant work this summer when there were very dry conditions in our province.

This year, Winnipeg set a record in having the smokiest July in history: 137 hours of smoke. There

were hundreds of wildfires, covering more than a million hectares. Many people, most particularly from Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids, were displaced, and in the case of these communities, for several months. We are seeing the impact of climate change. We will need to develop new, innovative approaches for forest stewardship and for managing fires in the years ahead.

It is important to acknowledge the firefighters who came all the way from South Africa. Several years ago I had the opportunity to visit South Africa. They, like us, are seeing the effects of climate change. When we arrived, Cape Town was in the midst of a very severe drought. It was so severe that there were projections that Cape Town would be the first major city in the world to run out of water. Fortunately, with severe rationing, Cape Town did not run out of water.

In the last two years, South Africa has been hit hard by the COVID pandemic. It has caused problems for their health-care system and for their economy and yet, this year, they were able to send firefighters to help us. Thank you, thank you, thank you to South Africa.

Let us, in the months ahead, not forget about the efforts of firefighters from Manitoba and from elsewhere, including South Africa, who played such an important role in containing the fires and in reducing the smoke. Let us also make sure we're investing in the training so that we will have extra capacity here in Manitoba, and so that when South Africa or other countries are having difficulty with fires, we are to help them as they were there to help us this year.

Thank you, South Africa. Thank you to all the firefighters and others who helped contain the fires in Manitoba. It was an incredible job this year.

Thank you.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Nathaniel Brown

**Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River):** It is an honour to rise today to highlight the incredible work of a young man in my constituency. I wish to recognize Nathaniel Brown and his fundraising for individuals with Crohn's and colitis disease.

At the age of six, Nathaniel demonstrated admirable leadership by selling lemonade and cookies in his neighbourhood as his first fundraising initiative. Now, at the age of 10, Nathaniel participates in the annual Gutsy Walk to raise awareness and funds for Crohn's

and colitis and is one of this year's honorary co-chairs of the Gutsy Walk for Manitoba with his father, Kyle.

\* (13:40)

The Gutsy Walk was held virtually this year due to the pandemic, and the weather the night before had left their street slick from rain, but Nathaniel and his family rose to the occasion. Nathaniel pledged to perform several laps around his cul-de-sac for every level of funds he raised. He raised a total of \$3,080 and completed 50 laps in total on his bike, on his scooter and even backwards on his go-kart.

This year, Nathaniel's younger brother joined in the Gutsy Walk. Nathaniel has a younger sister, who is four, and will soon be joining the family to bring awareness to Crohn's and colitis. As a family, the Browns have raised just under \$10,000. The funds help Crohn's and Colitis Canada raise awareness of the diseases, provide support for parents, families and patients, and drive research for more effective treatments and the discovery of cures. The disease impacts over 270,000 Canadians today.

I am inspired by Nathaniel and his family for their tireless volunteerism and meaningful contributions to the community. Winnipeg is proud to have Nathaniel representing and supporting his fellow Canadians through this important cause.

Thank you.

#### **Mystery Lake School District Support Staff**

**Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson):** Today I rise to commend the 180 educational support staff at the School District of Mystery Lake who stood up for their rights to be treated fairly by this government. These staff are essential, including custodians, maintenance workers, educational assistants, librarian clerks and IT staff. None of them wanted to go on strike shortly before the start of school, but felt it was necessary and had—the only option available to them.

Had—they have been working without a contract and a wage increase since the PC passed Bill 28 in 2017, which would freeze wages for two years while the new agreement was negotiated. Even though bill 28 was never proclaimed into law, it has been—and subject to court challenges, this government acted as if it was in law.

This is simply unacceptable. Support staff are hard-working and indispensable to schools and deserve a fair deal. After four years without a contract, it only took four days of them picketing for the staff to get a satisfactory offer, which was promptly

accepted so they could go back to work as soon as possible supporting our children.

While I want to point out the lack of appreciation and respect by this government shown to educational support staff in Thompson and around the province, I also want to highlight the incredible visible support that they received from the community. That was—teachers, parents, community leaders and community members all came together to support the support staff and how deserving they were.

In the words of the—Matt Winterton, their staff rep, it is concrete actions and solidarity like this that build the social and economic fabrics of our society.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

#### **Isla Pleskach**

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health and Seniors Care):** Madam Speaker, Isla Pleskach is a seven-year-old girl from Sage Creek who has collected over 1.3 million drink tabs to support Tabs for Wheelchairs.

This program was started by Gwen Buccini in 1998 to help purchase motorized wheelchairs for children and youth with physical disabilities. After Isla's neighbour told her about the program, she set the ambitious goal of collecting 100,000 tabs. What started with one mason jar became a vase, then freezer bags, then large containers full of tabs.

Over a year later, Isla continues to collect tabs, and has surpassed her initial goal 13 times over. She has spread the word about her tab drive by creating her own video for social media, and telling friends and family about her important initiative. Isla has also recruited the help of GymKyds Gymnastics Centre in Southdale, where she takes gymnastics classes, to host a tab collection bin. As Isla's tab collection drive has gained momentum, she has received donations from all over Canada, and as far as Hawaii and Melbourne, Australia.

On October 7, all tabs collected this year, including Isla's, were sold for scrap metal and the proceeds put towards a motorized wheelchair. Isla told me that the next recipient of a specialized wheelchair, Catie, is a seven-year-old girl with blonde hair, just like her.

Catie's wheelchair will be the 43rd purchased by Tabs for Wheelchairs, and the 26th funded entirely by tab collection. Currently, Isla joins over 160 schools and 240 companies and organizations in collecting tabs for Catie's wheelchair.

Please join me in congratulating Isla for her charitable efforts in support of Tabs for Wheelchairs.

**Ms. Adams:** I ask for leave to have the names of the educational support staff included into Hansard.

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

*Mystery Lake School District educational support staff: Jamie Abele, Leonora Agustin, Anny, Maximillian Antoszewski, Anu Anuradha, Tammy Ault, Bala, Lisa Beaulieu, Gaylene Beck, Beverly Beherman, Terilynn Hepp Blackmore, Erma Blacksmith, Brock Bodnarchuk, Stuart Botehlo, Ginette Boudreau, Kenneth Boushie, Debbie Bowser, Rachel Brooks, McKenna Brown, Susan Brown, Pauline Bryar, Vera Burt, Rupindar Buttar, Terri Campbell, Jaime Carey, Treena Chaboyer, Rimpi Chawla, Orysa Chychula, Nora Clemons, Priscilla Cohan, Carey-Anne Crate, Jerry Dagondon, Alysha Daly, Kaitlyn Danyluk, Gilles Dauvin, Mary Dawson, Maria Del Calstillo, Lori-Ann Dettanikkeaze, Any Dhawan, Manu Dhawan, Stacy Edwards, Ann-Marga Ellsworth, Lejla Elouafi, Nanette Estabrooks, Brenda Fayant, Shelly Flores, Kelly Fragomeni, Lorna Frank, Holly Fudge, Renee Gallant, Shashi Ghai, Poonam Ghai, Trevor Giesbrecht, Erin Gosselin, Jeff Graham, Vanessa Greenfield, Paul Gulick, Jennifer Haas, Diane Hale, Inger Haukas, Kevin Henderson, Marie Highway, Jenna R. Horvath, Jaime Howitt-Murdy, Carla Hykawy, Twila Hynes, Barry Jackson, Zhenduo Jiao, Shawna Johnson, Maninder Kambo, Kevin Kaspick, Julyda Katchmar, David Kostyk, Paige A. Krentz, Erin Krokosz, Rachelle Ladyka, Sophia Laframboise, Delvene Langan, Kelly Larsen, Esther Latchman, Amber Linklater, Reese Little, Tammy Lucas, Janaina Lucas Pereira, Joanne Lumberio, Therese Lynds, Ann MacDonald, Joseph MacDonald, Poonam Malhotra, Meljorie Marcelino, Larry Markus, Sandy Marofke, Jasvir Masaun, Garry Matienzo, Shannah-Marie McDonald, David McDonald, Stacy McDuff, Rose McKay, Myrna McLellan, Dominic McLeod, Maria McMurdo, Dayle Medwid-Bercier, Sevdije Mehmeti, Melissa Isabelle Melstead, Lori Meuse, Anna Mielczarek, Sheryl Miranda, Marie Miscavitch, Shirley Miscavish, Bill Moniuk, Robert Moniuk, Lisa Monteith, Brittany Moody, Stella M. Moose, Charmaine Morris, Kennedy Murray, Yvonne Nault, Anna Nelson, Valerie Neufeld, Tannis Nychuk, Melissa O'Handley, Ahmed Omer, Nadia Panciw, Daksha Pandya, Todd Paris, Tracy Park, Ethel Pascual, Daksha Patel, Dipesh Patel, Maulik Patel, Rajeshkumar Patel, Ronald Perepeluk, Kenesia Peterkin, Lorraine Peters,*

*Connie Plamondon, Laurie Preston, Louise Pronteau, Gail Randall, Christine Randell, Lisa Reddy, Lydia Remic, Christina Reuther, Michelle Richcoon, Darlene Roberts, Sheri Ryan, Kelly Salamandyk, Nisha K. Saroya, Tiffany Sauve, Giltene Shabani, Leonora Shabani, Alison Shatford, Brenda Sheppard, Sharon Sheppard, Renae Sinclair Spence, Abbey M. Smith, Wendy S. Smith, Iyabo O. Soile, Jennifer Spates, Robyn G. Spates, Diane Spence, Rachel Spence, Kiana Sterzuk-Corbett, Rick Svenkeson, Agnes Szabo, Samita Thapar, Kathryn Thera, H. Joy Thompson, Sandy Thompson, George Thorne, Evangeline Timbang, Alexandra Timmons, Karen Tindall, Tania Tolstosheieva, Tracy Tomchuk, Brenda Turk, Edmund Umacam, Bukuriye Vlahna, Dadhich Vyas, Aaron Watt, Gianna Woods, Miranda Wright, Susan Young, Eva Yurkiw, Xuying Summer Zhang, Min Zhao. Retired and former educational support staff: Mohammed Ali, Maninder Bajwa, Moreen Cox, Laura Duschene, James Fenton, Vicky Fudge, Gloria Jacobs, Devin Millwood, Domanick Pennell, Shirley Sims.*

### **Cystic Fibrosis Drug Approval**

**Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** Today, the government of Manitoba and this Premier (Mr. Goertzen) have the opportunity to save lives.

About one in every 3,600 children born in Canada has cystic fibrosis, a rare genetic disease that causes thick mucus to build up in the lungs, digestive tract and other parts of the body. It is the most common fatal genetic disease affecting Canadian children and young adults. Those diagnosed with the illness have a life expectancy, sadly, of about 46 years.

While there is no cure for cystic fibrosis, the approval of the drug TRIKAFTA by Health Canada this past June marks a turning point for sufferers of CF.

According to Cystic Fibrosis Canada, TRIKAFTA is the single greatest innovation in cystic fibrosis history, and it has the power to transform the lives of thousands of Canadians. Access to TRIKAFTA will mean longer and healthier lives for so many people and the ability to plan for a future that many feared they might not live to see.

The list price of TRIKAFKA [*phonetic*] means that without our Province covering the costs, it is virtually inaccessible for most Manitobans.

Thankfully, the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance announced in September that they had reached a funding agreement that greatly reduces the cost for TRIKAFKA [*phonetic*] for provinces. This means

that provinces now have everything they need to list the drug on provincial formularies. Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario have already done so.

It is critical that TRIKAFTA gets listed on Manitoba's formulary immediately. For cystic fibrosis patients, every day counts, as this drug will not only significantly and immediately transform the quality of life, it will literally save lives.

I call on this government to take action at once to include TRIKAFTA and all CF drugs as part of our formulary. There are no more excuses for waiting—

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

### **Komagata Maru Park**

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** Over the last year, I have been working with a group of my constituents who reside in Waterford Green, through letters and conversations with the Minister of Municipal Relations (Mr. Johnson) and the Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage (Mrs. Cox).

The matter pertains to the problems associated with the construction—or lack thereof—of a nearby outdoor recreation area within Tyndall Park that is currently working towards being officially named the Komagata Maru park.

Madam Speaker, it is important to explain the significance of the Komagata Maru park and understand why the naming of this park is so important.

Back in 1914, the Komagata Maru ship was forcibly turned away from Canada, sending Sikh immigrants back to Calcutta. The naming of this park is one way to pave some positive steps forward towards healing.

Madam Speaker, bringing it back to Tyndall Park, when this area first began being developed in 2016, the initial development plan implied, in the minds of many who have reached out to me, that prospective residents would have a space dedicated to outdoor recreation.

I am tabling a photo of what prospective home buyers were provided with.

Unfortunately, once residents began moving in, they were surprised to discover that there were no plans for a park or outdoor recreation space whatsoever.

Madam Speaker, the purpose of this statement: to gain awareness and to ask for support. My hope is that the City will do their part in contributing to this

conceptual park plan; however, I believe the Province can play a role too because of the cultural significance the park will hold.

As soon as the Building Sustainable Communities program opens up for applications, the residents of Waterford Green will be applying and—in the hopes of receiving some support in the creation of a central place in the community to come together, reflect, play and converse.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

### **ORAL QUESTIONS**

#### **Surgical Backlog Plan to Address**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Madam Speaker, over the past year, thousands of Manitobans have been diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses—illnesses like cancer. Surgeries could save their lives, but they are waiting in vain and in pain for this government to act.

\* (13:50)

This government has done absolutely nothing. They are refusing to invest in public health care that Manitobans desperately need during this pandemic, and that means that thousands of Manitobans who need life-saving surgeries just can't get them.

Why has this government failed to address the surgical backlog?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier):** The Leader of the Opposition knows full well that in this once-in-100-year pandemic, every province is struggling when it comes to surgeries.

But this government invested, in the budget that he's going to, I suppose, vote against on Thursday, additional funding for surgical backlogs. We, of course, committed an additional \$50 million for that. We want to ensure that we're dealing with the backlog as best as possible while maintaining the health-care system for other needs, of course, that are happening during the pandemic.

If the member opposite truly cares about this issue, he'll demonstrate it on Thursday and support the funding that's allocated for it, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Well, the problem with Brian Pallister's PC government is that this government wants to hold the press conferences, claim the credit, but they want

to—they don't want to take the action that would actually help Manitobans.

So they may have announced a figure in their budget, but we've got a document here that says, of that \$50 million that the interim PC leader—the amount that he just referred to, how much has been spent halfway through this year? Less than 2 and a half million, Madam Speaker. That's less than 5 per cent of what was supposed to be going to help the average Manitoban out there who needs a surgery to have their health-care needs met.

This PC government would rather cut money than spend it on life-saving health care.

Why has this government refused to spend this money to help Manitobans, money they themselves promised?

**Mr. Goertzen:** The member opposite will know, though I suppose he opposes it, that this government has been working with a number of providers, both inside government and outside of government, to ensure that we can deal with the backlog as best as possible.

Now, every province in Canada is dealing with this challenge, of course. It's being dealt with as well in British Columbia—in NDP British Columbia. Perhaps he's suggesting that his friend John Horgan is cutting surgical support in NDP British Columbia.

I doubt it, Madam Speaker. I suspect that it has to do with the fact that it is a global pandemic and everybody is dealing with this challenge. We, of course, have the funding in place, we're dealing with partners and we're going to work to ensure that we deal with the backlog.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Madam Speaker, you know, months ago, doctors urged the Brian Pallister government to take action to address the surgical backlog. The only thing this government did was hold a press conference and claim that they would spend \$50 million to help these folks waiting for surgeries in Manitoba.

Here we are half a year later, what has happened? I'll table the document that shows the First Minister that less than 5 per cent of the allocated funds have actually been spent. At this rate, that means it'll be less than 10 per cent by the end of the year.

Tens of thousands of Manitobans in constituencies like Kirkfield Park and Riel are urgently

waiting for surgeries. In constituencies like Steinbach, people are waiting for surgeries.

Why has this government insisted on breaking its promises to Manitobans who need these surgeries?

**Mr. Goertzen:** This is a government that has invested in every way to deal with the pandemic, of course, not only in vaccine distribution, to ensure that we had among the most robust vaccine distribution in the entire caucus, Madam Speaker, but also ensuring that we're dealing with surgeries that can be done in a safe and appropriate way—of course, determined by clinicians—ensuring that we're trying to blunt the fourth wave by having public health orders that are not only in place when there's a challenge but even proactively. *[interjection]*

I know why members opposite are trying to shout me down, Madam Speaker, because they are seeing what's happening in other provinces; they're not seeing that happen here. I'm not saying that they're upset about that but, of course, when they're trying to find things that are negative, they're having a difficult time to find them in Manitoba at this time.

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

#### **Manitoba Public Insurance Diversion of Autopac Revenue**

**Mr. Wab Kinew (Leader of the Official Opposition):** One of the other many negative things going on in the province right now is that when this Brian Pallister government interferes with Crown corporations, we know that it costs you money.

We know that that's what's happening with MPI—that this year the PCs' MPI board took \$60 million away from drivers in this province. I will table the minutes of the MPI board meeting from March for the interim PC leader. That's when the scheme was approved, but did this Brian Pallister government issue a press release? Did they make comments about it in the media? No. In fact, the PCs wouldn't say anything about it until last Friday in question period.

So the question remains: When did this government find out about this scheme to take money from Autopac and to raise rates on Manitobans?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Premier):** I was hoping that the long weekend might have allowed the opportunity for the Official Opposition Leader to crawl out of the grassy knoll, Madam Speaker, but it didn't happen. He's still there, thinking that there is a conspiracy, even though it was disclosed at Crown Corporations



Committee—not to him, of course, it was disclosed. There was public vetting. There was a Public Utilities Board process.

I was glad to hear today that Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation is applying for a rebate, Madam Speaker, so that Manitobans can get more of the money that they put into the corporation back. That is the good news that is happening in Manitoba, as much as he might try to turn it into bad news.

The nattering nabob of negativity on that side can continue on, Madam Speaker, but there's lots of good news, and more coming, in Manitoba.

**Madam Speaker:** Just a caution to members to be careful with their language, and references to members should be according to their portfolios. So just a caution before we proceed.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** Did Brian Pallister tell Manitobans that his interference at MPI was going to cost them millions of dollars? No. Did Brian Pallister tell Manitobans that their MPI rates were millions of dollars higher? 'Dis' the MPI application that the First Minister refers to tell Manitobans that their rebate cheques could be hundreds of dollars more had this interference not taken place? The answer is no, no, no and no.

And will any of these PC MLAs level with the people of Manitoba about this deception? The answer, again, is no, Madam Speaker.

The PC government needs to be open and transparent.

When did they first find out about this scheme to take money away from Autopac and to raise rates?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Never once, Madam Speaker, did any member of the NDP government ever tell Manitobans that it would cost billions of dollars more to run a hydro line on the wrong side of the province of Manitoba.

In fact, it was actually the opposite, Madam Speaker. They went out into a press conference and they said it would not cost an additional cent—not one penny more—to run a hydro line on the wrong side of the province, almost touching Saskatchewan. And, of course, it cost tens of billions of dollars more. Manitobans will be paying for those tens of billions of dollars for many, many years—many, many generations.

They spent more. We have a rebate coming. That's the difference between them and us, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. Kinew:** You know, there's so many PC cover-ups with our Crown corporations the First Minister can't keep them straight. He's trying to talk about the billions in revenue they concealed at Manitoba Hydro. I'm trying to fight for cheaper Autopac rates for everybody in this province.

We know that they failed to disclose this to the people of Manitoba. We know that this was approved back in March, and we know that it's costing the people of Manitoba money. It could have been 10 per cent cheaper rates for people in this coming year. It could have meant hundreds of dollars more on rebate cheques.

\* (14:00)

But the question that remains to be answered is this: When did the First Minister, when did the Cabinet first become aware of the scheme to take money from Autopac and raise rates in Manitoba?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I will grant to the member opposite he is much better at concealing things than I am, Madam Speaker. He has concealed many things in his life.

But in this Legislature, Madam Speaker, there have been public debates. There have been public debates—hundreds of debates—regarding Bipole III, and never once did the NDP government disclose the true costs of Bipole III. There were years and years of debates and they hid it, they covered it up, they swept it under the rug. They didn't let anybody know what those true costs were.

We did something a little bit different—or the Crown corporation and MPI did. They decided to send something to the PUB after disclosing it in committee and putting it on Hansard, Madam Speaker. Manitobans can judge for themselves: years of covering things up, or in committee, with Hansard, and the Public Utilities Board. I think our approach is the right approach, Madam Speaker.

#### **Newborns with Congenital Syphilis Prevention Initiatives Needed**

**Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas):** The addictions crisis has taken a toll in Manitoba. Last year, we revealed the rates of blood-borne illnesses that are exploding here in our province.

Defenceless babies are getting congenital syphilis. And yet, with proper prenatal care this could be prevented. And yet the problem here is getting worse. Through freedom of information, which I'll table, we found out that there were 36 babies here in our province that were born with syphilis—congenital syphilis—last year.

What, if anything, is this minister doing to address that?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health and Seniors Care):** I thank the member for—from Point Douglas for the question. Our government has done much to address that issue. First we created the Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness, and Recovery, Madam Speaker. We put \$52.3 million into 32 initiatives across the province. We also fund harm-reduction networks across the province that are doing great work to address this issue.

Madam Speaker, I would be pleased to brief the member on the work that is being done regarding syphilis and blood-borne diseases.

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

**Mrs. Smith:** I just asked a question about syphilis. The member could've told us here in the House, and told Manitobans that are watching, exactly what they are doing about this crisis that is happening here in our province. But instead, does she choose to do that? No.

So I'm going to ask again, and I'm going to tell her a direct quote from an internal document from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority: There should be zero cases of congenital syphilis here in this province. And is this minister doing anything about it? No.

So through the FIPPA that I tabled, things are getting worse in this province. In fact, half the amount of syphilis rates across Canada were here in Manitoba—in our province. This is preventable. These are babies.

This minister needs to do something and she needs to tell us exactly what she is doing to stop this public health crisis from happening—

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

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, I'd like to share with the member that our Department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery has been going across the entire province talking to health-care professionals, talking to individuals with lived experiences—parents,

families—about the issues that relate specifically to such conditions as syphilis.

We're taking that information back. We are acting. The member is willing to come into the House and share pieces of paper. We're doing more than that. We're reaching into families, Madam Speaker, and we're addressing these issues right at the front end with our health-care professionals.

We will not stop. We will continue to meet the needs of Manitobans.

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

**Mrs. Smith:** While this minister goes around and does her listening tour that never gets listened to by Manitobans, because they don't put it in place, 21 babies have already been born since July in this province with congenital syphilis while this minister goes around and has a listening tour.

What is she doing right now to address this here in Manitoba so babies aren't born with congenital syphilis? This is preventable.

So the minister can stand up right now, tell this House, tell those that are listening, tell Manitobans exactly what she is doing to prevent babies from being with—being born with congenital syphilis.

**Ms. Gordon:** Madam Speaker, we want to be sure that every child that is born in this province is born healthy and has an opportunity to live a fulfilling life. And when they are born with conditions such as syphilis, we are working with health professionals at the front end. We are listening to clinicians. They diagnose. They tell us the best treatment, and we respond with funding and supports within the community.

That is what we're doing, Madam Speaker. And we will continue to do that.

### **Municipal Development Approvals Request to Repeal Bill 37**

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** Madam Speaker, five bills and the heart of the Conservative legislative agenda were stopped dead in their tracks by this NDP opposition, but Kam Blight, who's the president of the AMM, reminds us that this reprieve is not the clean slate that the remaining PCs want Manitobans to believe.

Just this past spring, Brian Pallister and his Conservatives jammed through dozens of unpopular bills, including Bill 37.

And as the AMM has reminded us, Bill 37 brings the real risk that timely decision-making will grind to a halt at the local level.

Will the minister listen to our municipal partners and repeal Bill 37?

**Hon. Derek Johnson (Minister of Municipal Relations):** I'm always pleased to take questions on Bill 37. It gives me an opportunity to dispel the ridiculous allegations that the opposition continue to put on the record.

So, with respect to the Municipal Board, I just want to point out that the NDP had racked up a nine-year backlog for unscheduled Municipal Board appeals. I'm pleased today to announce that earlier this year, the backlog is gone. Gone, Madam Speaker.

So, we inherited a nine-year backlog, now all unscheduled appeals are from the 2021 calendar year.

Not going to stand here and call them howling 'coytes'. [*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

The honourable member for Concordia, on a supplementary question.

**Mr. Wiebe:** What the minister calls ridiculous are the voices of dozens of mayors, reeves, councillors, concerned citizens and even developers from across this province who have called Bill 37 regressive. They told us that it will create an onerous appeals process that's less responsive to its citizens. And yet, it's more difficult for development. Less accountable, and yet at a higher cost.

Yet this PC caucus and both leadership candidates seem to be pushing full steam ahead on this unpopular bill.

Will the minister stop to listen to those municipal partners across the province and repeal Bill 37 today?

**Mr. Johnson:** Madam Speaker, I don't know how the members opposite handled appeals historically, but maybe they used carrier pigeons. With the NDP's view on modernization, I'm surprised we still don't have hitching posts out front of this very building.

Our government is about openness, transparency, efficiency, accountability, and these all build trust with municipal officials. These members opposite know nothing of this.

I suggest the member opposite unhitch his horse from the N-D-T-NDP hitching post out front and ride off into the sunset.

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

**Mr. Wiebe:** I am surprised that this minister would refer to the words of Kam Blight and the AMM this way, that he would disregard their concerns, and that he wouldn't listen to how other jurisdictions have limited frivolous appeals while preserving their local voices.

Bill 37 does not do that. It opens the door to unnecessary appeals and a process that threatens more, not less, red tape. Manitobans have raised a united front in opposition to this, and yet Brian Pallister's approach to governing is apparently still alive and well in this Conservative caucus.

Will the minister continue this bull-headed approach, or will he listen to the people of Manitoba and repeal Bill 37?

\* (14:10)

**Mr. Johnson:** Yes, in regards to appeals, I want to thank the chair, Jeff Bereza, and his team on the entire Municipal Board for their hard work over the past couple of years.

They have released the NDP carrier pigeons back to their natural habitat. They have removed the NDP hitching posts from out front of the building, put the horses out to pasture and brought unscheduled Municipal Board appeals out of the past and into 2021, Madam Speaker.

#### **Youth Aging Out of CFS Care Extension of Age Limit to 25**

**Ms. Amanda Lathlin (The Pas-Kameesak):** Despite the fact that Manitoba has a moratorium on youth aging out of care for the pandemic, we know that this isn't simply a pandemic-related issue and that ongoing supports are necessary for many youth transitioning out of the child-welfare system.

Normally in Manitoba, youth aging out of care are required to live on their own when they turn 18, or 21 at the latest. They are often left without supports, leaving many youth vulnerable to unemployment or homelessness.

Will the minister acknowledge the need for ongoing supports for youth aging out of care and commit to extending the age limit to 25 permanently?

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families):** Our government is committed to reducing the number of children in care, and that is why we've made significant investments in helping those youth who are either

transitioning out of care or keeping families together in the first place.

We've invested significantly in projects like the Mothering Project or the Indigenous Doula project to help families stay together and continue with reunification through initiatives like the Supported Guardianship Program.

During the pandemic, we recognized that youth in care are facing extra pressures and circumstances, and that is why we've extended benefits to youth who are in care so that no child needs to age out of care during this difficult time.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak, on a supplementary question.

**Ms. Lathlin:** Melanie Doucet, the project manager of the Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care report says that provinces should implement a readiness-based approach rather than an age-based approach. This would ensure that youth who have greater needs than others for longer periods of time are set up to succeed as they transition out of the child-welfare system.

Will the minister commit to extending supports for youth aging out of care by increasing the age limit to 25?

**Ms. Squires:** I was very pleased just a few weeks ago to go visit a community organization that supports youth in our province, particularly youth who are aging out of care, called RaY. And they had informed me of some of the initiatives that have been working for youth that have been aging out of care and some areas that need greater support, including housing supports. And that is why we're very eager and keen to work with housing partners to ensure that there are housing solutions for youth who are aging out of care as one aspect of the component when we're helping children and youth age out of care.

But, ultimately, Madam Speaker, our goal is to work with all families to support reunification and to support children staying with their families in the first place.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for The Pas-Kameesak, on a final supplementary.

**Ms. Lathlin:** Extending the age limit to 25 would be a good step in ensuring that youth aging out of care are able to access needed supports on a ongoing and reliable basis. This would help youth to easily address, overcome the barriers they face, such as finding safe and affordable housing, completing their education,

managing a budget and creating meaningful connections within their communities—at least have a chance in life.

I ask again: Will the minister commit to extending supports for youth aging out of care by increasing the age limit to 25?

Ekosi.

**Ms. Squires:** Our government is committed to helping youth age out of care. That is why we invested \$1 million in a new community helper program as another initiative. That is why we're working with a lot of community partners to help youth who are transitioning out of care.

But the goal, 'manan', in—Madam Speaker, in Manitoba is to prevent youth from coming into care in the first place. That is why we have invested significantly in a doula program. That is why we're working towards keeping families together, and that is why we ended the practice of issuing birth alerts. And I can inform the House that, compared to the NDP's birth rate apprehension of 283 in 2014-15, we, this year, have reduced that number to 22, down from 283 in 2015.

We know that there still needs to be a lot of progress to be made in keeping families together and providing those supports for families. But we've made a good first start.

#### **Vital Statistics Branch Request to Fill Vacancies**

**Mr. Mark Wasyliw (Fort Garry):** Our civil service is essential to ensuring that Manitobans have timely access to important public services, such as getting a birth certificate or a marriage certificate. However, under this PC government, public services such as Vital Stats continue to have vacancies sitting unfilled despite backlogs and long wait times. The backlog and delays within Vital Stats were already an issue before the pandemic began, and now, because of Brian Pallister's cuts, they've been made even worse.

Will this minister commit to addressing the staff shortage at Vital Stats immediately as Manitobans have been waiting months to access important records?

**Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Finance):** We acknowledge that the wait times are far too long, and that's why we have a strong plan to address this. In fact, it includes enhancing IT; it includes enhancing HR services.

It also includes making sure the backlogs that were in place, where there is over 24,000 backlogs, are cleared up.

And, Madam Speaker, as of today, 99.9 per cent of those backlogs are cleared up. We've reduced the wait times by over 50 per cent in the last six months alone. Progress is making. We got to do more though. *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

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

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Within the department's own most recent annual report, it shows that Vital Stats issued 20,000 fewer requests than the year prior, despite the birth rate in Manitoba remaining the same. It's clear that the work being done within this branch has deteriorated in terms of timeliness, and the capacity of this branch simply can't keep up because of this minister's refusal to fill vacancies.

Will the minister commit to filling the vacancies in Vital Stats immediately to ensure that all Manitobans are able to access important documents in a timely manner?

**Mr. Fielding:** I talked about our needs, our IT needs we've invested in, our HR needs we've invested in.

I know the member doesn't like to talk about results, but on this side of the House we do actually talk about results. Over 99.9 per cent of the backlog that was in place just in August—just in August alone, Madam Speaker—24,000—over 24,800 backlog has been essentially cleared.

Our department is doing great job to do that. We want to ensure that the wait times are reduced even more than the 50 per cent improvement that we've made over the last six months alone.

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Fort Garry, on a final supplementary.

**Mr. Wasyliv:** Let's talk about the minister's results.

On Friday, in Estimates, he tells us that it takes two weeks to do one of these applications. Now, according to him, with his backlog, it's still taking three months for Manitobans to get these critical documents. There still exists a 32 per cent vacancy rate in Vital Stats.

This government clearly hasn't taken this issue seriously, and Manitobans are the ones that are suffering. They can't apply for permanent residency.

They can't apply for certain federal government programs because they can't get the documents they need to qualify.

Will this minister commit to filling these vacancies today?

**Mr. Fielding:** We know what yesterday's NDP was about. It wasn't about getting results, Madam Speaker. It was about—our government is all about getting results: 25,000-person backlog in terms of these important stats have been 'essentially' cleared up. There was actually over 43 that was left; 99.9 per cent of the backlog has been filled up.

\* (14:20)

What we've done over the—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Fielding:** —last six months is we improved the wait times by over 50 per cent, Madam Speaker, and that's not good enough. We're going to continue to work on that. But we made some good progress in the last six months.

We're going to continue more if the NDP stop blocking initiatives that government do to make government better off.

**An Honourable Member:** Okay, doesn't make a lot of sense.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

What doesn't make a lot of sense is yelling across this Chamber at each other. That does not make a lot of sense because that is not a good form of democracy for the public to see or to even know that it exists, because that is not a respectful behaviour to show that everybody here is working hard by asking the questions and answering the questions. So I'm going to ask everybody, please, to stop the yelling back and forth.

And I need to be able to hear the questions and answers that are being asked. So I would ask for your respectful behaviour, please.

### **First Nations Children in Care Children's Special Allowance**

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** In 2019, I condemned the federal government's decision to challenge a court ruling about payments to First Nations children in care. And it's worth noting that no matter what the federal government provided the First Nation children in care in Manitoba, all of it was

seized by the government of Manitoba, as described in the op-ed written by chief Arlen—Grand Chief Arlen Dumas for The Globe and Mail, that I table.

In opposition, the NDP and PCs alike have called this practice immoral and illegal, and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs is in court right now, suing the government to recover the \$338 million in children's allowances that this government took.

Why doesn't this government just drop the case and return the money to the children?

**Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister of Families):** I'm pleased to hear that the Liberal contacted his counterparts in Ottawa to stop their attack on First Nations children and to ask the federal government to not continue taking them to court.

I would also like to remind the members opposite that we had ended, in our first mandate, the egregious practice of taking money from children that was deemed for children in care from the federal government and we allowed the agencies to keep that money directly. That was something that we did in our first term in office because we believe that these supports should remain with the children.

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

**Mr. Lamont:** Now, during the 2000 scoop engineered by the NDP Manitoba government, this Province was seizing more children from families than any jurisdiction in the world, over eleven—no—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** —over 11,000, with the vast majority being Indigenous—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** —already in neglect or—often the justification for seizing children, yet with—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** —social assistance rates frozen since 1992, Manitoba was the child poverty of capital and is getting worse again under this government.

The PC government could have made things right by returning that \$338 million, but instead they voted themselves and everyone else responsible immunity from getting sued.

If this government is committed—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** —to truth and reconciliation, justice and accountability—[*interjection*]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Lamont:** —did they ever—why did they—are they still denying First Nations children their day in court?

**Ms. Squires:** Our government recognized that we needed to do transformation of our child-welfare system. That is why we brought in groundbreaking legislation in our first mandate that would reform child—the child-welfare system, including expanding the powers of the children's advocate and rebuilding the relationship with the advocate's office so that we could ensure that there's child protection.

That is why we also ended the egregious practice of taking money from the federal government deemed for children in the child-welfare system and allowing the agencies to keep that money.

That is why we increased the funding under the single-envelope funding so that the agencies and authorities would have discretion on how to spend these much-needed dollars for our most vulnerable children in this province.

#### **National Day of Truth and Reconciliation Request for Support for Bill 240**

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** On August 12th, I wrote to the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), encouraging the government of Manitoba to join the federal government in recognizing September 30th as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation by declaring the day as a provincial statutory day.

Last week, I followed this up through introducing legislation, Bill 240, requesting the same.

Madam Speaker, it is very important that Manitoba recognizes the national day specifically to fulfill call No. 80 of the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Will the government support bill 40 and do everything it takes to pass it before the end of the year?

**Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations):** I respect the question from the member opposite.

We are currently engaging with Indigenous leaders throughout Manitoba on—seeking their input as to how we can properly recognize this day moving forward, and that engagement has started a while ago.

We'll continue with that engagement and we'll follow their directions.

Thank you.

### **New Schools in Southwest Winnipeg Construction Announcement**

**Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia):** Our government committed to building 20 new schools over 10 years. Yes, Madam Speaker, 20 new schools over 10 years.

Can the Minister of Education tell us more about his important announcement this morning.

**Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Education):** I thank the—my colleague for the question.

This morning, I was pleased to be joined by the MLA for Waverley, representatives from the Pembina Trails School Division and the City of Winnipeg for a groundbreaking event: an announcement for two new schools in Waverley West. A combined \$67-million investment in school capital for a growing community will mean two new schools already under construction.

This—these are numbers seven and eight of our 20 new schools guarantee, and I will say we are well on our way to delivering on time on that promise.

We are committing \$260 million to school capital this year to ensure that we have spaces for students to succeed.

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

### **Manitoba Public Service Reduction During Pandemic**

**Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** Brian Pallister cut front-line services, we thought, to the bone. Over the last five years, the public service has declined by 2,644 people. Those cuts left the Province poorly prepared for a public health emergency.

The recent annual report shows that even during the pandemic they've continued to cut. I raised the matter with the media this summer. The minister said, wasn't available.

I ask him now: Why is he continuing to cut public services during a pandemic when we need them more than ever?

**Hon. Reg Helwer (Minister of Central Services):** I'm very proud of our civil service during this pandemic. It's been a trying time for all Manitobans and they have been over and above the board for how they've responded to the pandemic. I just can't say

enough about how much work they've done on behalf of Manitobans.

Thank you to the civil servants, they've done a great job for all Manitobans.

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

**Mr. Lindsey:** You know, empty words while they continue to cut positions within the civil service, while Manitobans continue to suffer because those services aren't available to them.

You know, Brian Pallister attacked public services. His Conservative caucus applauded him. Now he's gone, but it's the same story. Nothing's changed. Millions being spent on outside consultants and contracted services. Now the public—now they've continued to cut public services during the pandemic.

We need front-line services now more than ever.

Why, even now, is this minister cutting important public services during a pandemic?

**Mr. Helwer:** We continue to hire in the civil service and we recruit from all across Canada.

But I have to say that we have a very robust training program in Manitoba and our civil servants are often targeted by other provinces to come and work for them.

We just want to thank those civil servants for the great job that they have done for all Manitobans during this pandemic. I really can't say enough about the work that they've done making sure that we can keep Manitobans safe.

\*(14:30)

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** The time for oral questions has expired.

### **PETITIONS**

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara), on a petition? The honourable member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine)?

The honourable member for Elmwood.

### **Louise Bridge**

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

The background of this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

(6) In 2014, the new City administration did not make use of available federal infrastructure funds, and instead decided to fund an off-the-list, low-priority Waverley Underpass.

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

(1) To urge the provincial government to financially assist the City of Winnipeg on building this three-lane bridge in each direction to maintain this

vital link between northeast Winnipeg and the downtown.

(2) To urge the provincial government to recommend that the City of Winnipeg keep the old bridge fully open to traffic while the new bridge is under construction and consider the feasibility of keeping it open for active transportation in the future.

(3) To urge the provincial government to financially assist the City of Winnipeg in keeping the old bridge open for active transportation.

And this petition has been signed by many, many Manitobans.

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

Are there any further petitions?

Grievances?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

*(Continued)*

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

#### House Business

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Government House Leader):** Could you please resolve into committee of—*[interjection]*—oh. Like to thank the clerks for pointing out my almost grievous error.

Could you seek leave to—could you canvass the House for leave to make the following permanent change to the Estimates sequence: in room 254, move Tax, Credits and Emergency Expenditures to the end of the list, following Municipal Relations?

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave to make the following permanent change to the Estimates sequence: in room 254, move Tax, Credits and Emergency Expenditures to the end of the list, following Municipal Relations?

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

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**Mr. Goertzen:** Now, unless I hear otherwise from my friends at the centre of the room, could you please resolve into Committee of Supply.

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

The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.



**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY****(Concurrent Sections)****ROOM 254****FINANCE**

\* (14:50)

**Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance. Consideration of these Estimates left on resolution 7.5.

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

Resolution 7.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$23,230,000 for Finance, Compliance and Enforcement, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 7.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$23,000,607 for finance, consumer protection—[interjection]—oh, sorry—\$23,607,000 for Finance, Consumer Protection and Business Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 7.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,046,000 for Finance, Treasury Board Secretariat, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 7.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,222,000 for Finance, Priorities and Planning Committee of Cabinet Secretariat, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 7.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,591,000 for Finance, Intergovernmental Affairs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 7.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$125,000 for Finance, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 7.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution seven point—or, sorry—item 1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 7.1.

Shall the resolution pass? [interjection] Oh, sorry.

The floor is now open for questions.

Seeing no questions, shall the resolution pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Pass. [interjection]

**Mr. Chairperson:** Okay. I'll have to read this.

Resolution 7.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,154,000 for Finance, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

**HEALTH AND SENIORS CARE**

**Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook):** The next department to be in this committee is the Department of Health and Seniors Care.

Does the minister need a couple minutes? Do we need to recess for a couple minutes before the minister is ready, or is the minister ready to go?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Health and Seniors Care):** We're ready to begin, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairperson:** This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the department of health and seniors.

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

**MLA Uzoma Asagwara (Union Station):** I'd like to start by asking the minister if she can provide an exact number in regards to how many health-care workers—and that would be nurses, health-care aides, et cetera—are currently vaccinated. And if the minister doesn't have that number immediately available to her, would she be willing to take it as an undertaking?

Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** I would like to ask the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for some clarity on the question posed. So, for some definition as to the member's—what the member means by health-care worker. How does the member define health-care worker?

\* (15:00)

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for requesting that clarity.

I would—actually, I think I gave a few examples, so, nurses, doctors, health-care aides. And I would actually—I would open that up, and I would say that, you know, health-care workers, we know—and the minister, I know, would likely agree with this—that health-care workers, you know, the responsibilities to make our health-care system function well falls beyond just that of nurses and doctors and health-care aides.

So I would actually ask if the minister could provide the information in terms of who is vaccinated amongst health-care workers for as many health-care staff as possible.

So, I know that the department actually does outline who falls into the category of health-care workers, and so I would ask that whoever it is that they are identifying as such and who they are tracking in terms of who was vaccinated, they could provide those details. That would be great.

And, again, if the minister has those readily available right now and can provide that, that would be wonderful.

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Union Station for clarifying. That information is not readily available. I will take it under advisement and provide that information at another date.

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank you, Minister, for agreeing to that undertaking.

I would ask: Can the minister provide some clarity around which health-care workers are reporting or being asked to report—or however that information is being tracked—but can the minister provide clarity around which health-care workers are providing information in regards to vaccination status, whether that's they have had a first and/or second doses, that would be wonderful.

Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Union Station for that question. Again, that information is not readily available at my fingertips. I will take that under advisement and come back to them with a response.

**MLA Asagwara:** Can the minister verify that health-care workers—that, in fact, the department is tracking how many health-care workers are vaccinated? And can she provide clarity as to when that tracking started?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Union Station for the question.

This information is currently being tracked, and it's being tracked by each employer and it is specifically for direct-care workers.

This activity began in September. I do not have the exact date because each employer may have started one or two days—or possibly a week—after the other. And when the public-health order was signed and released employers began tracking this information, noting that the deadline date is October 18th for direct-care workers to identify whether they have been fully vaccinated.

This is being done on a voluntary response basis. Some managers are talking directly with their staff that report to them in a manual process. Some are using a IT tool, a computerized tool. But that information is being captured by the employer and not in the department.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response.

And so are—can the minister—although she's kind of already done so, the minister has articulated, to some degree, the ways in which this information is being gathered, but can the minister explain whether or not the expectation in regards to who is providing that information at each site is consistent?

So, did the minister provide, the department provide—criteria, I guess, is the language I'm looking for—criteria for each workplace to adhere to in order to facilitate consistency? Or what are the—what specifically was disseminated to these sites in order to accumulate that information?

Again, she's kind of indicated that some managers or sites are pursuing that information in ways that they identify makes sense. But was there some sort of a template provided, an expectation delivered, by the department for these sites?

Thank you.

\* (15:10)

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question.

I can report that there was considerable debate—as the member also worked in the health system, like myself, and there are so many positions and so many—such a variety of positions. So there was considerable debate around the definition of a direct-care worker. But once we arrived at that definition and classified the health-care workers accordingly, Shared Health—Lanette Siragusa, who's a co-incident commander and chief nursing officer for Shared Health, took the lead in terms of developing the communications using the public health order around the timing of the vaccinations.

So, the criteria was that direct health-care workers needed to have their first vaccination by September 7th to meet the October 18th deadline. We also did this to ensure it coincided with the start of school, which was September 7, so that teachers and direct educational personnel were—also had at least one vaccination at the start of school.

So, moving forward, if you wait the 28 days after the first vaccination, it takes us to October 18th, which is the deadline date. So that's the criteria that was being used, is ensuring that first dose is done on the 7th, second dose—and they're fully vaccinated—by the 18th. So that's the criteria.

The template may have—when we talk about template, I think we're really talking about communication materials. So, Lanette has taken the lead in terms of developing communication materials that would speak to the various categories of health-care workers, and that information has been developed and communicated across the entire health system.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response. That certainly helps shed a bit of light on that process.

I'm wondering if the minister can share what it was exactly that Lanette Siragusa came up with in terms of that criteria that was disseminated to health-care facilities?

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm looking at the Shared Health website. This is where the information was disseminated, and it's quite a lengthy document. We'd be happy to photocopy the entire document and make it available.

But I'll just maybe go through some excerpts from the document where it starts with background, stating that a public health order anticipated to be in effect October 2021 will require direct-care health-care workers across Manitoba's health system to be regularly tested for COVID-19 and to provide proof of a negative test in advance of a shift, or to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 and to provide proof of vaccination to their manager, designate—or designate. And it says the order will take effect by the end of October 2021 with all direct-care workers required to comply with regular testing or proof of vaccination as of October 18th, 2021.

And then it goes on to define direct-care worker and it states who would not be included. So, for example, common areas such as elevators, cafeterias, hallways, public washrooms. But would include wards, private patient-resident rooms, transport facilities and vehicles.

It talks about testing, you know, just to allay some of the fears around, you know—a lot of people talk about the tearing up when they do the nasal swab. So there's a lot of information talking about the principles of testing, the two types of tests, the testing process, with an attachment to a Zoom—Teams Power Point presentation.

And then the information on self-recording each time a direct-health-care worker completes a test. And testing frequency is explained. Videos on how to do the test. Education for managers is there. Quite a lengthy document—even infection prevention and control considerations, physical space recommendations, and occupational and environmental safety and health, rapid testing presumptive positive fact sheet.

So, quite a bit of information and, again, we'd be happy to print all of this information and make it available to them and answer any additional questions.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response. I look forward to receiving that undertaking. I think that will be very insightful.

I'd like to ask now a question of—it is specific to some comments made last week by Dr. Aleks Chochinov, and I'm sure the minister is well aware of the doctor's comments that were made in the media last week. They were significant. They were significant comments made.

\* (15:20)

Dr. Aleks Chochnikov [*phonetic*]-Chochinov-I apologize for mispronouncing that; I know how important it is to pronounce names correctly, so I apologize-stated that there was a profound failure of leadership-that's a direct quote-in addressing ER wait times.

And while we all know that Dr. Chochinov was a proponent of consolidation, one of the things that he made very clear-explicitly clear, in fact-is that the Conservative government needed to tread slow-to tread slow-and to make sure that they were building capacity in our health-care system, in facilities, before closing facilities.

We all know that that is not what happened. We all know that, unfortunately, the Conservative government pushed forward, pushed ahead, did not make sure there was adequate capacity in our health-care system, in facilities, and as a result-a direct result of that-we have seen chaos in our health-care system. And we've seen an incredible amount of burden on our health-care staff in our emergency rooms.

So I'm wondering: Given how significant the comments that were made last week were, how clear Dr. Chochinov is in regards to saying that it is a profound failure of leadership that this government failed to address the areas that he indicated need to be-and many folks did ahead of time-can the minister share what her perspective is, what her thoughts are on the comments made last week?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question. It gives me an opportunity to just extend my personal thanks to Dr. Chochinov for his report. Sitting in this chair as the new Minister of Health and Seniors Care, I haven't had the opportunity to extend my appreciation to him.

Dr. Chochinov is someone I have had the privilege of knowing when I worked-I'm working with-in the WRHA. Highly respected and regarded.

So, since his wait times task force report, in 2017, I just want to-in terms of the member's question about my thoughts, is that-I know that shortly after receiving Dr. Chochinov's report we added 1,000 additional hip and knee procedures as well as 2,000 additional cataract procedures to help reduce wait times. And that's coming right out of Dr. Chochinov's report.

And then in 2019 our government committed \$90 million to a redeveloped emergency department at St. Boniface Hospital, and if you've driven by or been in the St. Boniface area, construction is under

way. But before that commitment, Dr. Chochinov was heading up in the emergency. He was lead for an emergency physician's table, and his report had asked for some capital investments to be made in to St. Boniface Hospital emerg., realizing that that would assist with patient flow and wait times. And that work had already started before our government made the \$90-million commitment.

In 2020, as well, a \$10-million fund was established for priority procedures and, sadly, just when we were started to see some of the-for lack of a better phrase-fruits of our labour or the pay-off of those investments-the day after we committed the \$10 million, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

But even while that was happening, Mr. Chair, in Budget 2021 our government has committed \$812 million for Manitoba's clinical and preventative services plan for rural and northern Manitoba. So this is going to impact the system greatly, not just on a clinical level, but ambulance services in rural and northern Manitoba will be able to address some of the EMS shortages and wait times there.

We continue to contract with service providers like Manitoba CancerCare, Western Surgery to safely provide additional surgical services that would not impact COVID care and our wait times.

So if I think back to-I've always had a passion for health, even when I wasn't working in health care, and I monitored very closely the decisions that were being made by governments-that I recall that in 2015, emergency department wait times in Manitoba were the worst in Canada, and that was without the added pressures of a global pandemic.

\*(15:30)

So the data that we were starting to see just before the pandemic was declared was showing some early results of the transformation that was happening in the system. This was before the pandemic, and, you know, some of our median wait times in the WRHA were starting to show a reduction.

So, staffing shortages have really impacted wait times, the pandemic being the biggest contributor of our wait times. So Dr. Chochinov's report was submitted to government at a different time and in a different space, and while we appreciate and recognize the good work in that report, we are dealing with a much different situation with our pandemic.

We will certainly be getting back to all the recommendations that we've received in reports, not just—

**Mr. Chairperson:** The minister's time has expired.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response.

I think it's really important for all of us to be very clear about the fact that these challenges in the emergency room maybe were exacerbated by the pandemic, but certainly they predate the pandemic in terms of the fact that health-care workers' morale being very low was reported before the pandemic. Shortages in emergency rooms in terms of staffing were occurring before the pandemic and were a direct result of this government rushing ahead to cut and close aspects of our health-care system against the advice of the very people the minister is saying now they—that they'll listen to in terms of implementing their advice and their expertise.

And the minister knows—and she wasn't the Minister of Health at the time, and I recognize that—but the minister, being someone who does follow health care, is well aware of the fact that health-care workers took the extreme step before the pandemic of going to the media and making their concerns heard that they were in crisis, in chaos in our emergency rooms, that in fact they were without the resources and the needed investment by this government in order to make sure that the care they were providing was sustainable.

And, unfortunately, what we've seen during this pandemic is the continued failure of the government to adequately invest, to listen to front-line health-care workers and providers and to take the steps that they are identifying as necessary in order to mitigate the harms that are happening right now.

I think it's important for the minister to, you know, reflect on more recent history in terms of these record-high wait times we're seeing in emergency rooms in July and August, including the fact that one out of every four patients that arrived to the emergency room just last month—or, the month prior—sorry—alone left the emergency room without being seen. We know that under this government folks are presenting to emergency rooms sicker and more frequently than they were beforehand.

So I think it's really important for the minister to not deflect but instead to reflect very earnestly on the comments made in the media by Dr. Chochinov and to take them very seriously, or else, you know, a failure to do that would indicate that there is an

ongoing failure to adequately plan and to respond appropriately to address these concerns. And, certainly, none of us want to see that ongoing failure perpetuated. We want to see this Minister of Health rise up to this occasion, where her predecessors chose not to do so, for the betterment of health care for all Manitobans.

Now, I'm wondering if the minister can talk a bit about the fact that, you know, on the wait times task force, which Dr. Chochinov was co-chair of, he did indicate that remaining facilities needed to be very significantly upgraded before closing facilities. That includes addressing staffing.

The minister talks about, you know, work that's been done, money that's been invested, but the minister fails to identify the fact that we're in a staffing crisis in our health-care system, in emergency rooms, and that that has never been meaningfully addressed under this government.

So I'm wondering if the minister, from her perspective, if she can share why that very important advice by the wait times task force was ignored by this government and what she intends to do in her capacity as Minister for Health to right those wrongs and to rectify those mistakes?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank honourable member for Union Station for the question, and I agree with the member that there have been challenges over time with—in the health system. And some of the challenges they refer to have been long-standing issues back to the time when the NDP were in power, and after receiving Dr. Chochinov's report, the wait times reduction task force report, which was released in 2017, we did, as a government, recognize that it was a driving factor that would—that led to the launch of the development and subsequent release in 2019 of Manitoba's clinical and preventative services plan.

I want to assure the member that quite detailed and lengthy discussions were held with a lot of front-line health-care providers. They were consulted, and I've heard since taking my seat as Minister of Health that it's the first time that health-care providers felt so heavily engaged in the development of a plan.

\* (15:40)

So, again, Dr. Chochinov was part of a process, along with rural medical colleagues, that contributed knowledge and expertise by—he led an inter-professional provincial team to develop an integrated plan aimed to improve overall health care in Manitoba, including in emergency departments. And some key

performance indicators were developed and he is—some of his work has contributed in significant ways to the clinical and preventative services plan.

Some of the things that are being done—although we are in the midst of a pandemic—to make it easier for individuals to access care, have been—this is just some of the things that have been put in place, such as online assessments that help a patient determine whether they should be tested for COVID; virtual consultations with physicians, allowing patients to access care without leaving their home; the development of dedicated stroke protocols across the province and the establishment of TeleStroke, which allows clinicians in remote and rural areas to more quickly consult with neurologists to diagnose and treat stroke patients, and in 2020 about 350 patients were seen and assessed in this way across the province. I look forward to the 2021 results which should be stronger than the 2020.

We strengthened clinical supports for ERS, included standardized clinical protocols, enhanced medical control to provide additional clinical support to paramedics in the field and a more co-ordinated response for inter-facility transfers, and we established various outpatient settings to support the COVID response, including testing sites, isolation centres, and the virtual COVID outpatient program, which allows medically appropriate patients recovering from COVID to be cared for virtually from home, instead of in a medicine unit.

And I look back to 2018, as well, when our government invested \$5 million into emergency department expansion project, and it was expected to consist of a number of phases, beginning with the demolition of the ambulatory care space beside the St. Boniface Hospital, and—which led to the work that I mention that was done before the \$90 million. Then the Grace emergency department development. My son, actually, worked on that project.

So these are some of the things that we have put in place since receiving the report, and we'll continue to move forward under our clinical preventative services plan.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response.

Again, I would say it's interesting. It's one thing to tout expansions and emergency rooms and that work done; it's another thing to be reflective and honest about a failure to adequately prepare those very spaces to function adequately once they're up and running.

And, unfortunately, the minister just mentioned the Grace Hospital. I mean, we've all heard and seen very clearly, as those staff have courageously brought forward their experiences and concerns, just how much they're struggling over at that emergency department and acute care and critical care in Grace Hospital—incredibly under-resourced, incredibly understaffed. The crisis is across the system in emergency rooms, but certainly the folks over at the Grace have been very clear about the fact that they are—they're really unable to keep their heads above water in that department, and I would sincerely encourage the minister to, you know, engage with those front-line providers who are struggling, who have made very clear what needs to be done or to address those concerns and who will, quite frankly, and I've said this before, you know, previous ministers have not listened to and therefore the adequate decisions that needed to be made were not.

And so the minister has an opportunity now to rectify those wrongs, to address those failures in our health-care system, listen to those health-care providers and do better for Manitobans in our health-care system who are accessing, oftentimes, health care in their worst and scariest moments.

I'd like to move on to something that our leader, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), raised today in question period that is deeply concerning and very troubling. Given the fact that this announcement has been made several times in regards to the surgical backlog and we know other provinces have addressed their backlogs—we know that British Columbia is an example of a province that aggressively tackled their surgical backlog and addressed it hugely in that jurisdiction. Many ways Manitoba could do the same thing here, yet that hasn't happened.

But we did hear, on multiple occasions, the announcement of \$50 million being set aside in the budget to address the surgical backlog. And yet we know now that Manitoba has not only failed—this government has failed to address the surgical backlog but their very own announcement of \$50 million to do so has barely been tapped into at all—that a meagre \$2.46 million of that \$50 million has been spent.

Can the minister explain to us why that is?

**Ms. Gordon:** Our government want to assure the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) that our government takes this very, very seriously. After completed preparations for our fourth-wave activities, there's no higher priority for me, as the Minister of Health and Seniors Care, than addressing

the surgical and diagnostic backlog and that work has begun.

I was pleased to have a very good discussion with Doctors Manitoba a couple of weeks ago talking about the work that the committee will be tasked to complete. And I also want to state that all jurisdictions—I have family members in Ontario, family members in Alberta and in Vancouver that are sharing with me the surgical slowdowns in those jurisdictions as a result of COVID. So the problem is not unique to Manitoba, but we certainly don't want to minimize the impact that it's having on individuals here in our province.

\* (15:50)

And the member is correct that our government committed \$50 million to address the surgical and diagnostic backlog in Budget 2021, and we do hope that their government will join us in unanimously supporting our budget when it's voted on.

And so we have contracted with organizations and partners to perform over 11,000 additional procedures to begin to address the backlog caused by COVID-19, and it includes: Pan Am—hand procedures, foot procedures; Western Surgery—cataracts, pediatric dental and plastics; CancerCare Manitoba—urology; Vision Group—cataracts; Maples—general surgery, ENT procedures. I also was pleased to hear that Pan Am, Misericordia and Victoria General Hospital all went back to their full slates at the end of wave three, Concordia went back to full slates at the end of September, and Grace returned to full slates as of today.

So I do recognize that there are hospitals that have not returned to their full slates, and we're certainly supportive of assisting those facilities to get back to a full slate, and that's why, as of October 4th, we've opened our fifth request for supply arrangement for surgical services to address the backlog of procedures due to COVID-19, and we're accepting proposals to address the backlog. And the last two proposals, 2021, \$4.2 million, '21-22, \$8.1 million, that allowed for 8,300 procedures to be contracted. So now we've gone forward with a request for proposals in endoscopy, cataracts, pediatric general surgery, dental and ENT, outpatient spine procedures, adult ENT and general surgery, and we hope to see this backlog reduced significantly.

But I'm certainly heartened by the results that I'm seeing with the facilities that have returned to full slates and are servicing Manitobans that are in need of critical surgeries and diagnostics.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response. And with all due respect, I would ask the minister why anyone would think it's appropriate to hope that things return to any semblance of baseline before the pandemic. Hope is certainly not adequate; it is wholly inadequate in terms of addressing a surgical backlog and diagnostic backlog that's—Doctors Manitoba reported was well over 100,000.

I guess, you know, my concern here is that the minister is not clearly articulating how it is possible, how could she even think it is conscionable, that \$50 million that her government has repeatedly gone out and said to Manitobans is the money they're investing to immediately address this backlog, that \$2.46 million of that \$50 million has been spent. Anybody can look at that and say something is very, very wrong here.

And I would also say that returning to a full slate for these facilities, again, is inadequate. We know that we are in a surgical backlog that is astronomical here in Manitoba, that simply returning to a full slate is not going to cut it. It's just not going to address the backlog in any sort of appropriate or adequate manner. And I'm sure the minister is well aware of that.

And so, I would ask the minister, again: How is it possible that not even \$3 million of the \$50 million that her and her government have announced repeatedly has been spent. How is that even possible?

And I would also ask for the minister, in addition to explaining how it's possible, why it is that only that amount of money has been spent out of that \$50 million?

If she could also update us in regards to how much money—how much out of that \$50 million has been spent to today's date?

Thank you.

\* (16:00)

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question.

I am informed by Shared Health that the number of surgeries that are delayed is more in line with 30,000 and—approximately 30,000.

And I do want to remind the member that Manitoba certainly experienced the third wave later than other provinces. So, if I recall, I remember in the summer our surgeries were shut down because of that third wave. And coming out of it we've taken

proactive steps as a government to blunt the fourth wave.

The delay of surgeries is definitely a capacity issue and we are working to increase capacity. I know that members opposite don't like when I talk about nursing shortages and explain that to staff an ICU bed 24-7 requires five EFTs and—not, it's not one person—and so capacity is an issue. Some individuals have been moved to other areas within the system. And so as we blunt our fourth wave and keep our cases down and get our vaccinations up, we will be able to perform these surgeries, get people the care that they need as quickly as possible.

We're also working with sites outside of Winnipeg because we have to remember that there are locations outside of Winnipeg that can perform surgeries as well, so we are working with those locations.

And, again, I, as the Minister of Health and Seniors Care, very—take very seriously getting these back—getting the backlog addressed; happy to be working with Doctors Manitoba. Again, I had a really good discussion with them a couple of weeks ago about the committee that has been struck and some of the innovative solutions that will be coming forward.

So, very happy to hear from them how we'll be working together. I'm committed to addressing the backlog, they are, everyone around the table is, and it's by working together that we reduce these numbers.

Again, it's not unique to our province, but we do focus on the needs of our citizens and ensuring that they get the care that they need as quickly as possible.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response.

I appreciate that the minister has shared the approximate number of surgeries that are currently delayed. I'm wondering if the minister can also share into specifics around diagnostics. We know, and it was reported today, actually, that there was a significant rationing of diagnostic testing in Manitoba that includes tests for superbugs and for certain types of bacterial infections. I'm sure the minister is aware of that.

But I'm wondering if the minister can provide some clear information in regards to what specific diagnostic tests were rationed and for how long were those tests rationed.

Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question.

I want to share with them that, throughout the pandemic, clinical leaders have looked at ways to increase capacity for surges in COVID-19 testing demands and patients requiring care. So, in the same way surgeries and some specialized services have been delayed, some microbiology testing was identified by clinical leaders as a service that could safely be suspended or delayed on a temporary basis to help increase COVID testing capacity.

So the suspension of some microbiology testing, which includes some urine testing, was activated during waves two and three but is not currently in place. The temporary limitation of several types of simple lab tests represented less than 1 per cent of the testing offered in these labs, and this temporary change was made in consultation with senior health-care providers, who can use other clinical indicators and tools in place of these tests without compromising patient care.

So should a health-care provider determine, for example, one of these tests is necessary for their patient, it was completed upon request. And health-care providers were advised to contact the appropriate clinical microbiology lab if individual patient cultures or testing was deemed necessary. So microbiologists, including the medical director of laboratory services for Shared Health, who is a microbiologist, responds to—was—is—was responding to these requests.

So, again, this was a temporary change made in consultation with senior health-care providers, who every day—every day, across our system—use clinical indicators and tools in place of some tests, depending on what they feel is best for their patients. And, again, these types of simple lab tests that were done represented less than 1 per cent of the testing offered in labs.

So, temporary and less than 1 per cent.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**MLA Asagwara:** Could the minister—she gave a couple of examples, but could the minister endeavour to provide a clear list of which diagnostic tests were rationed and a clear indication as to how long? Would you—willing to take that as an undertaking is my question.

\* (16:10)

**Ms. Gordon:** Thank the honourable member for Union Station for the question. I'll—we will certainly



endeavour—I will certainly endeavour, to go back to Shared Health and ask about specific circumstances where they attempted to demonstrate lab tests that were not necessary or were being inappropriately ordered, and whether they looked at other types of tests that were appropriate for use and make that information available.

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank you—thank the minister for that response and for agreeing to undertake that and come back with that information.

I'd like to ask specifically about Boundary Trails hospital. It was announced last month that close to 10 beds had to close due to a shortage of workers there.

Can the minister update as to whether or not those beds are still closed and if in fact there is a plan to reopen? And I'm also wondering if the minister can share how the region—how that region is dealing with the critical shortage of nurses?

Thank you.

**Ms. Gordon:** Thank you to the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question. We certainly want to support all our health-care facilities, not just now but in the months and years to come.

And I understand that Boundary Trails is—the beds are closed as of right now and they will be closed until October 13th.

And in terms of how they're dealing with shortages, I know that we have our overall provincial strategy, in terms of nursing shortages, that they will benefit from.

But I want to share with the member that, in terms of funding for our personal-care homes, Budget 2021 invests over \$653 million in PCHs, and that's more than the NDP government, back then, ever spent. In 2016-17, PCH funding is \$644,129,000. In '21-22, PCH funding: \$653,873,000.

So, since we took office we've built 510 personal-care-home beds, and I was pleased to be out in—for the Boyne Lodge opening ceremony, where we were adding more beds there. And the Premier (Mr. Goertzen) recently was making an announcement his—in his area of Steinbach as well.

In June 2020, we announced a historic \$280-million investment in safety upgrades to personal-care homes. So, some of them had leaking roofs and furnaces that were prehistoric and falling apart, and it took our government coming in and

cleaning up the mess made by the NDP government and saying to our seniors and our vulnerable populations that we're going to take care of the upgrades to the facilities that you reside in.

And so in our first two years in government, we've built almost twice as many PCH beds in Winnipeg as the NDP did from 2010 to 2016. And we continue to invest, we continue to build, we continued to provide innovative housing.

When I was out at Boyne Lodge, they referred the new style of care as small houses, and I was so impressed to see that we're not just moving forward with traditional ways of seniors living together but new approaches that are—allow for more interaction between residents and more shared meals and more communal living. It was very good to see.

And so our government will continue to invest—and, again, in '21-22: \$653,873,000. And we will be doing more to assist our seniors.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response.

I do find that interesting that oftentimes when members opposite will talk about beds they've created in long-term care or other such things, they will forget—they'll neglect to mention the—those efforts that were actually started under the NDP and the projects that were actually initiated and developed by the NDP. But that's an aside for the minister.

What I'd actually like some clarification on, if the minister—and the minister should have this information actually readily available—but if the minister can share what the global allocation—global funding allocation to the health regions is for this year and last year as well, and if the minister could please break that down by region.

\* (16:20)

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm pleased to—[inaudible] regional health authority—[inaudible] billion, 188,301,000—

**Mr. Chairperson:** I'm sorry, Minister, we lost your voice for a second. Could you start all over again, please?

**Ms. Gordon:** The number for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority—

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Minister of Health and Seniors Care, if you could start from the beginning, please.

**Ms. Gordon:** I'd like to provide a response to the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) with regard to the global allocation for RHAs. Can you hear me now? Okay.

For the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority: \$2,188,301,000; Prairie Mountain Health: \$578,933,600; Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority: \$240,677,500; Northern Regional Health Authority: \$230,095,800; Southern Health-Santé Sud: \$441,791,300. That concludes the response.

\* (16:30)

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank you, Minister, for that response and for providing that breakdown.

Can the minister provide the global allocation for CancerCare for this year and last year?

And, sorry, just so that I'm clear: the minister did provide the allocation for each regional health authority, I believe for—I think she provided it for this year, but could the minister also provide the information for last year? I just want to be—I'd ask for this year and for last year per region, so I'm just wondering if the minister can provide for the year that she has not, and as well, if she could provide the global allocation for CancerCare for this year and for last year.

Thank you very much.

*Mr. Greg Nesbitt, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Ms. Gordon:** I can respond with the number for CancerCare for '21-22, and that number is \$211,938,700.

We are accessing—the department is accessing the number for 2020-2021, but before that information is provided, I want to make the member aware that the number for—that I provided for fiscal year 2021-2022 is Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery. Being a new department, all of that is pulled out from these numbers. So when the number for 2020-2021 is provided, it will show a different allocation because at that time the department was one. So the number is going to be different, but we are seeking that information, Mr. Chair.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response and for providing that extra bit of clarity around what we can expect there and what.

I'd like to allow for my colleague, the member for Thompson, to ask a question of the minister at this time.

**Ms. Danielle Adams (Thompson):** I'd like to thank my colleague from Union Station for providing me an opportunity to ask this very important question.

Is the minister aware me and my colleague from Flin Flon, on September 9th, sent the minister a letter regarding northern patient transport and our concerns with dialysis? Under the current policy, people are not—northerners are not eligible for northern patient transport when they have to reside in Winnipeg for upwards of a year while waiting for dialysis.

We have yet to receive a response from the minister, and we were wondering if the minister could please provide information regarding the status of the letter and if northerners will be eligible for northern patient transport when they are having to relocate to Winnipeg for upward of a year while waiting for a dialysis spot.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

\* (16:40)

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm pleased to provide a response in regard to the northern patient transport program.

I want to be sure that everyone knows what this program is about. It subsidizes medical transportation costs for eligible Manitoba residents north of the 51st parallel, east of Lake Winnipeg and 53rd parallel west of Lake Winnipeg when they have to obtain medical or hospital care not available in their home community, and it was transitioned to the regional health authorities in 1997 as part of the regionalization process.

The northern patient transport program was established under The Emergency Medical Response and Stretcher Transportation Act and it sets out that the minister may pay financial grants to RHAs charged with the administration of the northern patient transport program or make direct payments to such persons as the minister may determine. And in 2020, this program assisted nearly 20,000 individuals who needed to travel to access care and paid out \$18 million approximately.

Now, I do hear from time to time—and I was up in Thompson a couple of weeks and travelled in the North, hearing from our health-care professionals on the Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery side of things. And I shared with them that our government's investment of \$812 million in Budget 2021 will allow for the creation of a northern hub that will see a reduction in individuals having to travel for care.

So I—my office is in receipt of the letter and a very detailed response will be provided, but we will continue to support individuals that need to travel away from their home to access care in Winnipeg.

**MLA Asagwara:** I'd like to ask a question in regards to neurology. I'm sure the minister is aware—it's been made very public, especially more recently. My colleague, the MLA for—the member, rather, for Wolseley (Ms. Naylor) has also, I know, written letters, as has our leader, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew) on this very subject. But we all—are all aware about the issues and the problems that exist in neurology in Winnipeg.

Last year, we know that many staff in neurology actually quit. They left their jobs entirely, and we know that at that time last year there was a vacancy rate of 36 per cent in neurology, which is just incredibly high. And now, unfortunately, we know—and this was—again, this was published in the news very recently—that Dr. Demitre Serterlis [*phonetic*] has also resigned, which is very disappointing. It's a big loss for us here in Manitoba.

You know, there're estimates that about 6,000 patients would be eligible for surgery—surgeries that would help end seizures altogether if the program—if the proper program was up and running here in Winnipeg.

And we also know that a substantially significant donation of \$2 million was made in—just a few years ago, 2017, from Domino's Pizza Canada CEO Michael Schlater. Now, this specific donation was made towards a special program for children with epilepsy, and it's reasonable—we've asked this question, actually, via a letter to the minister, but we know that other folks who have children waiting for these very important surgeries have also written.

Can the minister please explain and provide an update as to what happened to that money? Where is the money that was donated by the CEO in order to establish a special program for children with epilepsy?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Minister, we cannot hear you.

**Ms. Gordon:** Mr. Chair, if we could return to a previous question from the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) regarding the global allocation to the RHAs and CancerCare for the year 2021, I now have that information available.

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority: \$2,152,667,000; Prairie Mountain Health: \$555,680,900; Interlake-Eastern Regional Health

Authority: \$231,654,700; northern regional health authority: \$222,095,000; Southern Health-Santé Sud: \$383,204,300; CancerCare Manitoba: \$186,768,700.

\* (16:50)

And I will respond shortly to the question before us regarding the neurology program.

**MLA Asagwara:** Sorry, is the minister just looking up the information regarding neurology? Can—should I move on to another question, or—just so that I'm clear.

**Ms. Gordon:** The information is being looked up, so the member can proceed to another question.

**MLA Asagwara:** Thank you for providing that clarity.

Can the minister please provide the current vacancy rate in neurology right now in Winnipeg?

Completely fine if this is taken as an undertaking, as—along with that request that—what I would ask is that that be broken out with as much detail as possible. So, what is the vacancy rate in neurology in Winnipeg right now? But if that could be broken out by sites, by number of neurologists, positions, number of vacancies and the vacancy rate. If that could be all broken down and included in that response, that'd be wonderful.

Again, if the information is available now, fantastic. If it needs to be taken as an undertaking, that's perfectly fine as well. And I'm—and would be appreciated.

**Ms. Gordon:** I do have a part of that answer available. I will be taking the vacancy rate and the detailed information regarding vacancies by a site, et cetera, requested by the honourable member for Union Station under advisement and will make that available at a later date.

I do have the information with regard to the neurology program, and I want to start by saying our government remains committed to improving health care for all Manitobans, which includes long-term efforts to strengthen neurology services and care for patients with epilepsy. This includes a long-term plan to develop adult surgical program.

The neurology program, just to give you a flavour of what it encompasses, the components of a comprehensive program is mightily expected to include pediatric and adult epilepsy monitoring space, equipment and staffing; support for epilepsy neurologists and neurosurgeons; support for epilepsy surgery

equipment and operating room resources; robotized stereotactic assistant equipment for surgical cases and epilepsy-related education research.

Shared Health has been working with my department to take an incremental approach to developing such a program. So, as the member correctly stated, our government, on May 10th, 2021, announced \$4 million in capital funding to establish an adult epilepsy monitoring unit. This funding was for monitoring equipment, monitoring software and construction of a four-bed adult epilepsy monitoring unit.

So part of the construction—there's always stages to a project and planning, as most project 'maners' will tell you, the longest phase of a project is the planning. You plan well and you can execute well. And so, planning has been underway. The unit will be located at Health Sciences Centre, and I'm told it will take four to six months for the unit to be fully constructed and up and running.

So imminently, the actual—I guess, you'll hear hammers and construction occurring to actually begin to create the space, but part of constructing, part of any project, is planning, executing, monitoring and controlling for any risk and then, of course, closing the project. So four to six months for that to occur.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for agreeing to undertake to provide the information requested in my question.

I'd like to, before we move on to my colleague, the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), I'd like to ask one question pretty quickly about primary care here in Manitoba, you know, because it is so important that folks have access to a primary-care physician, primary-care provider, in order to have increased, you know, positive health outcomes. We know that the PC government has had a difficult time maintaining timely access to primary care, whether that be a physician or a nurse practitioner.

The minister currently has a website, Family Doctor Finder, that shows how many people are searching for care and how many get it within 30 days. And before the Conservative government took power, things were pretty consistent: 80 to 90 per cent of Manitobans were getting access to a primary-care provider within 30 days. And then the closures started, right? So we saw QuickCare clinics closed and shuttered. We saw primary-care facilities start to close. We saw, you know, some things like labs located in primary-care providers' facilities also close,

which disrupts people's ability to access primary care and early intervention.

This disruption is—ultimately, it's been pronounced, which is what I'm getting at. In the last quarter, only 32.1 per cent of patients actually got timely access to a care provider within that 30-day time period.

So I'm wondering if the minister can provide for us what her plan is to address timely access to primary care. What steps is the minister taking to do so?

\* (17:00)

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) for the question.

I'm not sure if the member is aware that the training program for primary-care physicians tries to use a distributed education model, where you're distributing individuals coming out of the program across the province.

I want to be sure as well that we all understand what primary care refers to, and it's that early contact with the health-care system when patients and their families receive a diagnosis, treatment or help with a new health problem or chronic condition. Services can also include speaking with a health-care provider about staying healthy and preventing illness.

So ongoing physician recruitment and retention efforts is a key priority of clinical services planning to be undertaken by Shared Health. So, where we are hearing of individuals that are seeking physicians, Shared Health is very much involved in an aggressive and innovative recruitment process, and the work of Shared Health will support consistent and reliable health-care services, effective health human resource planning, capital equipment investment, construction planning and other initiatives that should be co-ordinated—that will be co-ordinated province-wide.

Now, I myself was pleased to be in Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority for the announcement of our graduates that would be going into the various rural communities. And at that time, it was, if I'm not mistaken, I think there were nine family physicians that would be practicing in the Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority. And that was in addition to the four family medicine residents that were completing their training in that region.

\* (17:10)

You know, the focus is to as quickly as possible have residencies—individuals, completing their residency, which is the last stage in training for doctors following graduation from medical school, to be encouraged to work in our rural communities, to be encouraged to work in primary care. I know some of them want to go on to be specialists, and many of them are friends of mine, but I always try at every opportunity to convince and to encourage those individuals to work in primary care; it's a very fulfilling practice to be in. So what that—when individuals are seeking physicians, they have a pool of physicians to draw from.

So we will continue our recruitment and retention efforts to ensure that the doctor finder program is able to meet the needs of Manitobans.

And I know that the member is aware of this as well, that there are hot spots across our province. There are some areas that experience more difficulty than, let's say, for example, Winnipeg. And where those hot spots are occurring, we're working very closely with the regional health authority—Shared Health is—and we will continue to support those efforts.

**MLA Asagwara:** I thank the minister for that response.

And before—my colleague, actually, from Point Douglas, will be asking questions, moving forward, but I just wanted clarity from the minister. She had said earlier in regard to the Domino's Pizza CEO donation of \$2 million, that they were working on that.

Is the minister providing that response today, or is the minister—is that an undertaking? I just need clarification.

**Ms. Gordon:** I appreciate the honourable member for Union Station (MLA Asagwara) clarifying the earlier question. I just want to be sure that we're separating adult epilepsy from children's epilepsy. So, in May 2017, Michael Schlater, who is the CEO of Domino's Pizza, Canada, donated \$2 million, and that was to the Children's Hospital pediatric epilepsy program. So that has been long—that has been done, and has—that transfer has been completed.

**MLA Asagwara:** We can proceed with closing out Health.

**Mr. Chairperson:** No further questions on Health?

Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the resolutions.  
*[interjection]*

The honourable member for River Heights, on a question?

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Yes. My question to the Minister of Health is: I understand that in order to be seen in a Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine clinic, a person must not have had any drugs or alcohol for the previous 24 hours. On one occasion, a person was told 48 hours, not 24, but I understand most often people have been told 24 hours.

Now, normally, for—Rapid Access to Addictions Medicine would mean being seen immediately, rather than a person having to go through withdrawal on their own for 24 hours first.

I wonder if the minister can explain the policy of the RAAM clinics with regard to addictions medicine treatment?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for River Heights for the question. I would like to defer that question to the Estimates process for the Ministry of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery. That is where RAAM clinics are funded and fall under that particular ministry and not Health and Seniors Care.

**Mr. Gerrard:** Yes. My second question has to do with, in January of 2020, a report was released on the extent of lead contamination in various parts of Winnipeg. This was a report produced by Intrinsic. It was released by the Minister of Health, I believe, and maybe also the minister of—responsible for Conservation.

Now, the report projected that up to half the children in Point Douglas would be—have very high levels of lead and lead levels that would be toxic. Now I have called previously on the government to test lead levels of children between the ages of one and three, as done in many other jurisdictions and has been done in parts of the United States for decades.

The minister, I suspect, is quite engaged in this concern about lead toxicity and prevention, in part because the minister should be aware of these problems, as they've been known for many years.

**Ms. Gordon:** I think we were cut off, because I didn't hear a question.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Could the member for River Heights please repeat the question for the minister?

**Mr. Gerrard:** I would ask what the minister is doing in terms of preventive health to decrease the problems of lead toxicity in Manitoba, but particularly in Point Douglas area.

\* (17:20)

**Ms. Gordon:** I'm pleased to respond to the question posed by the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

An independent review on lead in soil in Winnipeg neighbourhoods reconfirms that there is a low health risk for Manitobans when it comes to lead in soil. Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living, now Manitoba Health and Seniors Care, and Manitoba Conservation and Climate commissioned a third-party review to determine if there are any potential risks to human health and how best to identify and manage areas with elevated lead concentrations in soil.

The report was presented to government in December 2019 and the Province has moved quickly to review its findings and prioritize the recommendations. As recommended, the Province will work towards making blood lead levels in excess of established guidelines reportable under The Public Health Act. This move will assist the Province to track and better understand where lead exposure may continue to pose a problem. This new information will help focus future public health and environmental efforts where they are needed and will have the greatest impact.

The ministry of Health and Seniors Care and Manitoba Conservation and Climate will also move forward with a recommendation to develop a communications and outreach plan that delivers a single clear and effective message to the public and key stakeholders about how to mitigate potential risk. This could include a public web page or social media platform with regular updates for information sharing and training for parents and caregivers of young children, as well as child-care centres, community centres and preschools.

The ministries of Health and Seniors Care and Manitoba Conservation and Climate will continue to work with Manitoba Education and school divisions to develop a plan to address recommendations for schools in the Weston area. Given the primary sources of lead emissions in Winnipeg are no longer present, the health risk of lead for Manitobans is low. And I also want to state the report stressed that soil remediation was not recommended as a course of action.

**MLA Asagwara:** I'd like to close Health, please. So if we could move on to resolutions.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of the the resolutions. At this point, we will allow virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the question.

I will now call resolution 21.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty, a sum not exceeding \$20,258,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Policy and Accountability, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty, a sum not exceeding \$13,546,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Insurance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$28,356,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Population Health, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$108,511,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Transition, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,807,668,000 for Health and Seniors Care, funding for health authorities, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$174,666,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Provincial Health Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,371,058,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Medical, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$284,711,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Pharmacare, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$213,587,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.11: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,305,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 21.12: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$292,458,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Other Reporting Entities Capital Investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

\* (17:30)

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

The floor is now open for questions. No questions?

Be it—be—yes, be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$12,142,000 for Health and Seniors Care, Resources and Performance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Health and Seniors Care.

### MENTAL HEALTH, WELLNESS AND RECOVERY

**Mr. Chairperson (Dennis Smook):** The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply are for the Department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery.

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

How long would the minister need to prepare?

**Hon. Audrey Gordon (Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery):** Ten minutes.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Minister of Health and Seniors Care (Ms. Gordon) has suggested 10 minutes. Is that agreed?

**An Honourable Member:** Agreed.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The member for Concordia has a question.

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia):** I do appreciate that the minister's officials need a little bit of time. I do see the minister and the critic are here and ready to go. Can we suggest five minutes?

**Mr. Chairperson:** There has been a suggestion from the floor for five minutes. Would the minister be able to have that request, or does she need 10 minutes?

**An Honourable Member:** Ten minutes.

**Mr. Chairperson:** There's a request for a recess of 10 minutes. Is that agreed upon?

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I hear a no.

**Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas):** I agree with the member from Concordia. Five minutes is more than ample time. We're nearing the end of the day. I do have a lot of questions that I'd like to get through, and I haven't been able to ask the minister since she's become the Minister of Mental Health, Recovery and Wellness.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Are there any more suggestions? Like, we need to, I guess, get this resolved before we can get started.

**An Honourable Member:** How about seven minutes?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Minister Gordon?

**Ms. Gordon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Seven minutes?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Seven minutes? Is that agreed to?

**An Honourable Member:** That's fine. Let's hurry up.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The committee shall recess for seven minutes.

*The committee recessed at 5:34 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 5:41 p.m.*

**Mr. Chairperson:** Would the Committee of Supply please come to order. The seven minutes for our recess is over.

This section of Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement? No?

**An Honourable Member:** Yes, I do.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The honourable Minister of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery (Ms. Gordon).

**Ms. Gordon:** Both the Department of Health and Seniors Care and the new Department of Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery will work in collaboration to advance their mandates through an appropriate balance of prevention and care.

The departments of Families, Justice and Education have started to identify the resources and programming that are mental health, wellness and recovery focused. It is expected that operation transfers will occur during the year and be reflected in budget 2022-2023.

This year's budget includes investments in the following—\$341.9 million core budget includes: funding to support the operations of Selkirk Mental Health Centre, \$49 million; the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, \$24 million, and the other organizations that provide mental health and addictions services in Manitoba such as the five regional health authorities, Shared Health and many grant-funded agencies; a one-time increase of \$5.0 million for a transition budget line that will allow the department to conduct stakeholder consultations to determine the most significant need for resources so that we are able to continue the work across government to invest in outcomes-oriented mental health and wellness services; funding of \$2.1 million for mental health services for the following service-delivery organizations: Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, prairie mountain regional health authority, Shared Health and northern regional health authority.

Notable within this \$2.1 million is \$1.855 million for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority to address budget pressures in mental health housing with supports. It is noteworthy that mental health patients are often very difficult to discharge from hospital and often become a contributing challenge to hospital flow and emergency department waits. This funding will

develop housing options for mental health patients in order to have a good discharge plan for the patient.

Medical remuneration funding of \$1.1 million for the safe emergency rooms initiative which was part of the Safer Streets, Safer Lives 2019 election commitment; this funding will be used to create the specific medical services to support mental health patients or those with psychosis or other needs presenting to emergency departments, to help ensure a safe environment for all. This helps ensure that staff, other patients and the patient themselves do not pose a safety threat in the busy ED at Health Sciences Centre.

Funding for price and volume increases of \$1.0 million for psychiatry services, salaries and benefits for new staff and other miscellaneous operating increases. The physician services budget for psychiatry will continue to allow virtual tariffs. A COVID learning is that we continue to see the benefits from the growing use of virtual tariffs in psychiatry. The use of virtual tariffs has been very welcomed by the medical community and by patients who may be fearful to access psychiatry services in person.

My department will work with Manitoba Health and Seniors Care to establish a mental health and addiction program within Shared Health, which was a key VIRGO recommendation, and this will be part of the health system transformation.

In addition to the items mentioned, we continue to budget for allocation of additional funds from the central internal service adjustment related to the Canada-Manitoba bilateral agreement on mental health and addictions and home and community care.

As we enter into the last year of the five first-five-year phase of the bilateral agreement, we have continued to budget for significant investments in these areas, including but not limited to some of the following priorities: Thrival Kits, integrated youth services, access to mental health emergency assessment and treatment services, school-based mental health supports for youth, Indigenous-led health services, withdrawal management services, sobriety treatment and recovery team, RAAM clinic expansions, eating disorder supports, acute medical sobering unit, community 24-7 drop-in and pregnancy and infant loss.

The departments involved are anticipating the combined costs of approximately \$23.7 million, which aligns to the values prescribed under the current health bilateral agreement for the 2021-22 year.



These funds are currently being housed in appropriation 26.2(c).

Thank you very much for the opportunity to say a few words on this year's estimates. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues in Families, Education, Justice and Health and Seniors Care for their partnership and support in this important work.

I would now be happy to answer any questions you may have, and I also want to introduce at the table with me today: Kymberly Kaufmann, deputy minister, Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery; Karen Herd, deputy minister, Manitoba Health and Seniors Care; Sandra Henault, acting assistant deputy minister and CFO, Manitoba Health and Seniors Care and Mental Health, Wellness and Recovery.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

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

**Mrs. Smith:** I don't have an opening statement. I'd like to get straight to the questions. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the member.

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

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have global discussion?

**An Honourable Member:** Global manner.

**Mr. Chairperson:** It has been suggested global. Is that agreed upon? *[Agreed]*

Thank you. It is agreed then that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

\* (17:50)

**Mrs. Smith:** Manitoba has an agreement with Canada for mental health and addiction support. It's 100 per cent federal dollars.

Can the minister tell us how much was allocated to the Province in these two areas—so mental health,

addictions—for the fiscal year 2020 and 2021, how much was spent and how much has the Province requested to carry over, carry forward—so unspent?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) for the question.

I do want to preface my answer by saying that mental health and addictions is—they're integrated. So we don't generally, in our financials, divide out mental health and addictions. They're integrated programs. There—as the member, I'm sure, is aware, there are times that an individual who is suffering from an addiction has a co-occurring condition related to mental health, so it's very difficult, financially, to break that out. We don't generally do that.

But I can provide the numbers for 2021. The allocation was \$22 million and the amount spent was \$22 million with no dollars unspent. For '21-22, the allocation is \$23.7 million. We do not have—because the year is not completed—the fully spent dollar amount or whether there would be any unspent monies.

**Mrs. Smith:** Can the minister tell us how much has been spent thus far from the \$23.7 million?

**Ms. Gordon:** Again, I thank the honourable member for Point Douglas for the question.

That information is not readily available. We will take that under advisement. Since the fiscal year is not concluded, it does require calculation of many different program sources, so that has to be taken under advisement and brought back to the member.

What we are projecting is that the full amount will be allocated.

**Mrs. Smith:** I thank the minister for undertaking that. I look forward to getting those numbers.

And, you know, it's nice to hear that the Province is going to spend all of its federal dollars. Hopefully, some provincial dollars will be thrown in there as well because we know with COVID that there has been an increase in mental health and addictions.

So I'd ask the minister: How many mental-health workers are there currently through the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority?

**Ms. Gordon:** I thank the honourable member for Point Douglas for that question.

Again, just to be certain, it's the number of mental-health workers in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority?

I will take that question under advisement—that information is not readily available—and bring the response back to the member.

**Mrs. Smith:** Could the minister tell us how many mental-health workers there were last fiscal year?

**Ms. Gordon:** Again, to the honourable member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), I will have to take that under advisement and bring that number back to you. I'm sure you can appreciate that the ministry was created in January of this year, so it requires teasing out from the previous ministry of Health, Seniors and Active Living some of those numbers.

So we will—I will take that under advisement and bring that response back.

**Mrs. Smith:** I appreciate the minister's willingness to take those under advisement and get us those numbers.

I want to switch over to overdoses and ask the minister if she has any updates on how many people have overdosed this year, lost their life to an overdose, and if they know what the drug was that they overdosed on?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order please. The hour being 6 p.m., committee rise.

## ROOM 255

### INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION AND NORTHERN RELATIONS

**Mr. Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Good afternoon. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

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

**Mr. Ian Bushie (Keewatinook):** I'm wondering if the minister can provide us with an organizational chart for the department and any vacancies that are there?

**Hon. Alan Lagimodiere (Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations):** I will refer the member, Mr. Chair, to the Main Estimates Supplement, Budget 2021, page 3, for the organizational structure.

I replaced the minister with myself. The deputy minister is Michelle Dubik and the financial administrative services, Mike Sosiak; executive 'financial'

officer, northern affairs Paul Doolan; executive director, consultation and reconciliation Geoff Sarenchuk, the director; and policy and strategic initiatives, Scott DeJaegher, the director.

\* (15:00)

In the department, we have 82 full-time equivalents, but right now, we currently have 12 vacancies. Of those, there are six competitions in progress.

**Mr. Bushie:** The other day in Estimates, we had talked about Orange Shirt Day and it being made into a statutory holiday or recognized as a stat holiday here in Manitoba, and you had made reference to it being more of an observance rather than a stat holiday. The question was raised in QP again today, and in QP you stated that we started engagement, quote, a while ago.

And I'm just wondering, in regards to that stat holiday: when is a while ago, and who has been a part of that process?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** I thank the member for Keewatinook for that question.

Yes, just continuing with my answer the other day—I think last week. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created with a mandate to inform all Canadians about what happened in residential schools. The TRC engaged in research and a truth-telling process of events across the country to document the truths of survivors, families, communities and everyone personally affected by the residential school experience.

The TRC concluded its mandate in 2015 with the release of its final report. The work of the TRC has put forth the following challenge to all Canadians, and that is how do we define, understand and advance reconciliation so that it goes beyond mere words, become integrated in our lives, our daily activities and our actions. The TRC describes reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining 'respectful' relationships. Key to this description is that reconciliation is ongoing, it is not a destination or something that is achieved and checked off of a to-do list. It will require continual effort and action over time.

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a federal statutory holiday, was introduced this year through the passing of Bill C-5. It is observed on September 30th, which is also known to us as Orange Shirt Day. This is a day to recognize and reflect on the tragic history and ongoing legacy of residential

schools, honour the survivors and remember the children who did not return home.

Since 2013, Orange Shirt Day has been a day of reflection; it started when a group of former students of the St. Joseph Mission Residential School in British Columbia came together to memorialize and honour the healing journey of residential school survivors and their families. Both the date and the colour orange were intentionally chosen for this day.

Phyllis Webstad, a survivor of the school, told her story of having her new orange shirt that was gifted to her by her grandmother confiscated by the school, along with all of her belongings. Since this day, the colour orange has reminded Phyllis of how she was made to feel as though she did not matter. The date was chosen because September was the month when children throughout the country were removed from their homes, their families and their culture, and brought to the residential schools, some of them never to return.

The annual Orange Shirt Day on September 30th, is an opportunity to create meaningful discussions about the effects of residential schools and the legacies they have left behind. It is a day for survivors to be reminded that they matter, and so do those that have been affected.

The Manitoba public service recognized the federal statutory holiday by closing non-essential government services and offices for the day to give public servants the opportunity to recognize the history and impacts of residential schools. The flags were lowered to half-mast on all provincial government buildings and the Manitoba Legislative Building was lit in orange.

This holiday responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action No. 80, which calls for the creation of a national holiday to honour Indigenous survivors, families and communities and ensure national public recognition of residential schools as a vital part of reconciliation.

Other employers in Manitoba chose to honour the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in ways that are tailored for their environments. The government of Manitoba has declared September 30th as a non-statutory holiday for 2021 and will be undertaking a series of engagements with Indigenous leadership, survivors and the Labour Management Review Committee to explore its options for future recognition of the day.

I was pleased that our government was able to support a number of events in this first national day of truth and reconciliation. I am pleased that the response from Manitoba was overwhelming. This year, several departments, including Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations; Sport, Culture and Heritage; and Education supported the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's week-long events.

In closing, the government of Manitoba is committed to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous—

**Mr. Chairperson:** The minister's time has expired.

**Mr. Bushie:** I've heard many times that the word action, the word meaningful, reconciliation, referring to they matter, so I'm going to ask the minister if he could respond and comment exactly how and if and when Manitoba's government is going to support the search for and in disclosure of potential residents—gravesites here in Manitoba.

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** The tragic identification of over 6,000 unmarked graves of children who attended Indian residential schools across the country has sparked a nationwide conversation on the tragedy and lasting impacts of Canada's residential school system.

Manitoba is seeking to advance an Indigenous-led approach and government-wide response to identify, investigate, protect and commemorate the unmarked graves of missing children who attended Indian residential schools across Manitoba.

\* (15:10)

On June 21st, 2021, Manitoba committed \$2.5 million to begin work to locate missing children who attended residential schools. Allocations will be determined through engagements with Indigenous nations, leadership, residential school survivors, elders and knowledge keepers to understand the best use of the funding.

Actions are being advanced to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action Nos. 71 to 76 focused on missing children who attended Indian residential schools. The government of Manitoba is actively understanding its role to facilitate an Indigenous-led process developed in partnership with Indigenous nations, communities, survivors and families.

Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations is leading this work to develop an IRS action plan with the support of additional departments including Justice; Finance; Sport, Culture and Heritage. Initial steps will identify and address any

potential changes—challenges associated with policies, regulations and legislation; develop strategies and procedures with Indigenous partners to locate missing children; and locate, commemorate and protect cemeteries and other sites where they may be buried.

A provincial advisory committee is being established to guide the work, to structure the engagements. Invited participants include representatives from the assembly of Southern Chiefs Organization, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, Southern Chiefs Organization, Manitoba Metis Federation, Manitoba Inuit Association, City of Winnipeg, the federal government and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Representatives from Justice; Sport, Culture and Heritage; and Finance will also be invited to the table.

The Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Long Plain First Nation and Sagkeeng First Nation have initiated ground search using ground-penetrating radar and other methods to locate unmarked graves associated with former residential school sites.

Former work stemming from over—from the work, stemming for over 10 years, Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, with academic partners, have identified 104 graves associated with the Brandon residential school across three locations. Other First Nations are in the initial stages of collecting and analyzing information. Manitoba is supporting the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, the OCN and the Long Plain First Nation.

Indigenous nations across the country have expressed a desire for the involvement of policy investigation—of policing investigation oversight in these searches. IRNR is exploring with Justice the role and involvement of policing authorities in this work. Manitoba has provided almost \$200,000 to regional Indian residential school healing centres to support a variety of cultural events centred on reconciliation, healing and honouring of September 30th, 2021.

The news from across Canada related to residential schools is a grim reminder of the cruel impact that these schools have had and are still having on the lives of Indigenous children, families and communities and a reminder that, as we work to reconcile our relationships, we must also reconcile with our past.

We owe it to the children who were forced to attend residential schools across the nation to remember the tragedies of the past and to use the lessons

we have learned from them to create a better future. And government of Manitoba is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous communities, leaders, elders and knowledge keepers to commemorate and protect Indian residential school burial sites.

The first meeting of our provincial advisory committee will be tomorrow morning.

**Mr. Bushie:** I assume the Minister for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations (Mr. Lagimodiere), then, is the government's lead and the government's person that they look to in regards to Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations issues.

So in regards to the land acknowledgement 'tasks' force that's been announced, can the minister explain why he is not included in that process and why he is not the lead on that task force?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** For us, Indigenous land acknowledgements are becoming standard practice and that has followed the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action.

In recent years, organizations, post-secondary institutions, business, sporting organizations and several municipal governments across Manitoba have incorporated and adopted the use of Indigenous land acknowledgements. All Manitoba departments continue to advance reconciliation through their respective mandates, with some departments requesting assistance from Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations in developing land acknowledgements. IRNR is currently working internally to carry out research on best practice land acknowledgement protocols that departments can utilise for future events, meetings and gatherings to recognize Indigenous 'ancestral' lands.

It is customary Indigenous tradition to acknowledge host people and their territory at the onset of any meeting, event or gathering. Acknowledging traditional territory shows recognition of and respect for Indigenous people and the Indigenous nations that encompass the territory and treaty. It also values the diversity amongst First Nations, Métis and Inuit and their distinct cultures, world views and protocols.

Recognition and respect are essential elements of establishing healthy reciprocal relations, relationships that are key towards the path to reconciliation. Furthermore, acknowledging treaty and traditional territories reinforces the government's commitment to reconciliation and to Indigenous nations, communities and people.

Land acknowledgements recognize the specific territory and Indigenous people where an event, gathering or meeting is occurring. Additional Indigenous nations and peoples are also recognized with an acknowledgement depending on the geographical location. Like the Métis national homeland, the Inuit or the Dene.

On occasion, Manitoba departments have requested assistance from INR in providing a land acknowledgement for these events and meetings. We believe that there is a place for land acknowledgements within the government. And we will be working closely with Indigenous communities, stakeholders and organizations on how we can incorporate land acknowledgements in a meaningful way to recognize the 'ancestral' lands of Indigenous peoples.

Our government is committed to advancing reconciliation, build on meaningful engagement with Indigenous nations and people. We will be taking concrete steps to consultation—to consulting Indigenous communities and incorporating land acknowledgements.

\* (15:20)

And I said in my last response to this question that I have the greatest of confidence in the abilities of my colleagues to undertake this work, a work that we feel is very important for Manitoba, and everyone in government needs to be able to demonstrate a cultural competence with respect to land acknowledgements.

Thank you.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, it's great that you have confidence in your colleagues because they clearly don't have confidence in the minister; otherwise, you'd be leading this task force. When—you speak about respect for Indigenous communities, but yet the minister himself would not put himself to be the lead in those discussions when you are the face of government when it comes time to Indigenous issues.

So, again, I ask the minister, why are you not a member of the task force?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Just before I call on the minister, just a very quick reminder to everybody that all questions and answers should be posed through the Chair.

So in saying that, the Minister of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations (Mr. Lagimodiere).

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I take a little exception to the member's statement that has to do with confidence. Leading has nothing to do with confidence in your ability to lead.

There's a lot of work that needs to be done with respect to reconciliation throughout the whole of government, and undertakings are occurring with all of my colleagues across government and every department. Our department is leading on work with Indigenous residential schools, with the MMIWG as an example, and I promise the member from Keewatinook I will be active in every space when it comes to reconciliation.

And more work needs to be done on the file. We'll have land acknowledgement across government, and I am happy to see—and we're actually glad to see that the member feels it is important to be involved in this very important work.

**Mr. Bushie:** In regards to The Path to Reconciliation Act, within The Path to Reconciliation Act, the legislation regarding reporting requirements under section 5.2 was changed from: Within three months after the end of the fiscal year, the minister must table a copy of their report in the Assembly and make it available to the public. It was changed to: the minister must table a copy of the report in Assembly on any of the first 15 days on which the Assembly is sitting under the minister—after the minister completes it.

It appears this minister is—reduces the accountability of the minister to produce this in a timely fashion.

Can the minister explain why this change was made to the legislation?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Just to save a little bit of work on that last question, my understanding is the question involved Bill 75, which is currently before the House, so, therefore, we are unable to discuss that in Estimates.

So we will go back to the member from Keewatinook for another question.

**Mr. Bushie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that clarification.

In regards to drinking water, the Auditor General report on provincial oversight of clean drinking water included important recommendations, and it appears that the department is attempting to respond to some of them now.

Can the minister please provide a breakdown of where the department is at with implementing these?

\* (15:30)

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Safe, potable drinking water for all Manitobans is the top priority of our government. And the Manitoba Office of the Auditor General released its report on provincial drinking water systems in September of 2020, and the report outlined recommendations to improve Manitoba's regulations, processes and policies to improve the quality and safety of drinking water in the province.

Four of the 18 recommendations from the OAG report impacted Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations community water systems. The OAG report examined the adequacy of the Department of Conservation and Climate's oversight of provincial drinking water safety processes. There were 18 recommendations for provincial oversight of drinking water safety; the four that directly impact IRNR water systems include a requirement for all non-compliant water systems to develop plans to comply with all requirements, recommendations to adequately train and support water system operators, recommendations to review and implement the appropriate certification requirements, and development of a strategy and targets to reduce long-term boil water advisories.

Most of the water systems in the IRNR communities are owned by the department and operated by the communities. A collaborative approach is needed to address the recommendations. IRNR is part of a provincial oversight of drinking water steering committee to implement the recommendations of the OAG report. The department will work with Conservation and Climate, economic development and training and Municipal Relations to address the recommendations specific to IRNR.

The committee will provide an opportunity for interdepartmental collaboration and co-operation with respect to issues of drinking water quality and the recommendations of the OAG, following the review of the provincial oversight of drinking water safety document. IRNR has already taken steps to address non-compliant water systems and to improve operator certification.

IRNR has currently taken steps—working with Conservation and Climate, I-R-N-I has identified the areas of non-compliance in northern affairs communities, and we're working with the drinking water safety subcommittee to monitor ongoing processes

and to identify potential options to compliance. A pilot circuit rider project to provide onsite, hands-on training to water system operators was initiated this fiscal year and is already helping community operators gain confidence in their water systems.

Capital upgrades work is ongoing, or expected to be completed this year to address long-term boil water advisories in Sherridon, Duck Bay, Matheson Island and Moose Lake. Work in Moose Lake may include connecting to the nearby First Nations water system. Maintenance work in Thicket Portage is expected to address remaining concerns so that advisory can be lifted. Consideration is being given to redesigning Berens River south and Disbrowe Island as non-potable to address long-term advisories in those small communities.

A compliance plan to address bacteria testing concerns was supported to the Office of Drinking Water and has received approval in principle. The department will be working to implement it this fiscal year. A comprehensive compliance plan to address issues with operator certification is being developed, and we are working with a dedicated—we have a one person dedicated to advance this.

Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations welcomes the report in the drinking water safety oversight from the Office of the Auditor General and is pleased to advance the recommendations specific to our community and water systems. The department continues to assist and support community councils and their water treatment plant operators to treat and provide drinking water that meets legislative requirements.

**Mr. Bushie:** Thank you for the—and—that rather long explanation.

You had talked about interdepartmental partnerships and stuff within the Province of Manitoba and within INR—Indigenous Reconciliation—sorry, I keep getting the new title mixed up. But, however, there are still currently northern First Nation communities here in Manitoba like the Tataskweyak and Shamattawa First Nations that do not have access to clean drinking water. So those are children in this province who have never had access to clean drinking water in their entire lives, and this is unacceptable.

Can the minister please detail the steps that are being taken to work with the federal government and the First Nation communities to ensure that these communities are able to access clean water?

\* (15:40)

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Once again, potable water is a top priority for this government—a potable water for all Manitobans.

And generally, it's the federal government that has the responsibility for potable water on our First Nation—or on First Nation communities, and we currently look forward to working with the new federal counterparts. Once their Cabinet has been formed and we know who the new ministers will be, we will be reaching out to them on this important issue.

We want to advance Manitoba's priorities in supporting Manitoba First Nations and the communities on their potable water issues and that currently know that our staff have ongoing conversations to discuss—with our federal officials to discuss the infrastructure and other priorities for our communities.

Potable water, as I said, is a top priority and there are opportunities out there, we believe, to be able to partner on shared infrastructure on a number of fronts.

**Mr. Bushie:** A couple of questions about the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative.

Within the annual report there's a mention of, quote, a review of major program and funding agreements, including the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. I'm wondering if the minister could please provide more details; perhaps any reports or briefing, advisory notes on the funding review that took place within the department.

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** The Northern Healthy Foods Initiative supports local and regional projects that contribute to the development of culturally relevant healthy food systems while improving health and wellbeing. The Northern Healthy Foods Initiative's goal is to increase access to food by working with communities and co-ordinating efforts aligned with the program's goals and objectives.

The NHFI received Treasury Board approval on January 2020 to reallocate existing program funding of \$662,000 towards stabilizing the current service delivery model and create a new innovation grant stream to support disruptive approaches to northern Manitoba food security.

Over the last fiscal year, approximately 168,000 pounds of fresh food was accessed by roughly 10,000 participants in the program. Approximately 183 training events were delivered to roughly 3,445 participants from 41 communities, and approximately 24 communities provided intergenerational

knowledge transfer around Indigenous food systems to approximately 485 youth.

Over the life of the program, approximately 2,488,236 pounds of healthy food has been accessed since 2010-2011 when recordkeeping began, and projects have accessed over \$8.8 million in funds from external sources to support and complement the activities. In-kind support from other stakeholders has been valued at approximately \$3.5 million.

Now, Mr. Chair, I would just like to ask the member if he could clarify the question a little further. I'm not sure we really fully understood what the question he was asking entailed. So I hope that answered his question. If not, if he could restate it in another way for us.

**Mr. Bushie:** Well, two and a half minutes later he—of giving an answer, he then asks for clarification. So I assume he was just trying to talk around that a little bit. So I'll ask another question.

Within the annual report, the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative was underspent by almost \$250,000 or more accurately, about \$244,000. Can the minister please provide an explanation for the underspending?

*Mr. James Teitsma, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*  
\* (15:50)

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** I just want to tell the member that the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative was one of the priorities that I had when I was travelling through the North. I made it a point to visit these sites and actively see what is occurring in these communities and how they are working with the funding that we are giving them.

I want to point out that we did not underspend in the core program. In fact, we have enhanced the program by \$163,300. We have also flowed \$270,000 through the discretionary grant funding. We have resulted in underspending of the innovation line, which is a new component to the spending that we have, and that is a result—a direct result of COVID and the inability to engage actively with partners in these areas.

We continue to focus on providing the funding needed and to work with our partners in these areas on the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. We've got some fantastic partners out there who are working double time to ensure that northern communities have access to fresh, healthy produce.

One community that I visited, the gardening project that was occurring there, the entire community was on board. And by the entire community being on board, I mean, the garden is centrally located in the community and throughout the day, the community members will show up and weed the garden, tend to the plants, help water them, maintain them, and in that program that they have ongoing there, those individual community members also have the opportunity to be able to go to the garden at harvest time and pretty much grab what they need for a good, healthy meal whenever they need it. While I was there, the potatoes were ready in one of the plots and two individuals showed up, grabbed a shovel, pulled a hill of potatoes and took off with a nice little meal for themselves.

So the program is very important for the North, encouraging growth and production of foods in the North, for the North and it's important that we continue to work with these communities on delivering on that very important aspect.

**Mr. Bushie:** Okay, so just to clarify: the minister is saying that it is in fact not underspent. But yet in the annual report—even going back the last five years—in 2016-2017, underspent \$624,000; '17-18, underspent \$666,000; 2018-2019, underspent \$659,000; 2019-2020, underspent \$692,000; and 2021, underspent \$244,000. So in the last five years, program—as it's listed in the annual report—has been underspent by \$2.85 million.

I'm just wondering, when the minister says that it's not underspent—yet that's a 45 per cent of underspent money in the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, and it seems to be pretty consistent. I'm just wondering if the minister can clarify: are my 'figures' inaccurate, then? Is that not an underspent program?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** The member's information is not correct. It's not wrong in that the—what we found was the programs, the previous programs, were not working. So the programs were redesigned with respect to the funding envelope to strengthen the programs.

*Mr. Chairperson in the Chair*

\* (16:00)

There was significant reinvestment of funding in core programs. In the core funding, that was reinvestment in enhanced fundings to do things like support the workers, allowed for greater flexibility to help meet individual community priorities and they worked to enhance grants for innovation ideas.

And three of those innovation ideas—just to give you an example—Grand Rapids School FSD received \$35,000 to support a project. This funding was used to create a traditional foods processing space that includes a butchering and a storage facility. The space is for both students and local hunters to process, preserve, store and learn about traditional foods.

Another example, the Churchill Northern Studies Centre received \$25,000 to support the Rocket Greens hydroponic growing project. The funding was used to hire a six-month sustainable—sustainability intern to support their organization as they navigated through the global COVID-19 pandemic and to acquire critical supplies for the hydroponics farming system.

As well, NACC received \$40,000 to support the increased food production super kits which were used to purchase greenhouse and irrigation system kits for 12 communities.

And looking forward, we're looking forward to development in the innovation line with further development in all of our northern communities.

**Mr. Bushie:** The minister had referred to—I might get this wrong—that I was not right but I was not wrong, or something to that effect, when it came time to discussing the underspending of the healthy foods—of Northern Healthy Foods Initiative.

So I'm wondering if the minister can then table the correct numbers for that Northern Healthy Foods Initiative budget or wherever it was reallocated to.

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Yes, just to clarify for the member, the annual report numbers are correct. So, just to state that again: those numbers are correct.

With respect to this, our investment in northern healthy foods has increased by \$448,000 in actual spends and, moving forward, we look forward to maximizing those dollars fully.

**Mr. Bushie:** So, thank you for that clarification as to the numbers, then, being correct.

So with the numbers, then, being correct, it is showing that the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative program was, in fact, over the last five years, underspent by almost \$2.9 million. That's almost 45 per cent.

So the question, then, remains, is, first off, where was that allocated to, and—but more so, why is more not being done to reinvest all this underspending to ensure northern communities get access to that affordable, healthy food?



**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Just for the member's information, here: on June of 2020, the government of Manitoba announced a pilot project to provide fresh, healthy foods to families with school-aged children in multiple sites throughout the province, and learning resources were included with the food to facilitate nutritional education.

And I was actually in Wabowden discussing what was going on there with the individuals looking to the program and how they were getting the packages out to the individual communities along the Bay Line, along with the information they needed with regards to the nutritional aspects of the food and how they could prepare the food once they received it.

As part of this project, the government allocated \$273,000 towards multiple communities along Manitoba's Bay Line. And, I said, there was Wabowden, there's Thicket Portage, Pikwitonei [*phonetic*], Ilford. The portion of the project was facilitated by the Bayline Regional Roundtable, and in September of 2020, the government announced a \$280,000 expansion of the Bay Line portion of the project. Between 80 and 160 families have received food and educational resources each week since July when the pilot was implemented, and in December of 2020, the government announced an additional investment of \$1.2 million to extend the program until the end of March 2021.

**Mr. Bushie:** Just to kind of switch gears a little bit, I was wondering if the—does the minister agree that the Métis are a rights-bearing group?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Yes, I do believe that the Métis are a rights-bearing group.

**Mr. Bushie:** So does the minister agree, then, that he has the duty to consult with the Métis people?

\* (16:10)

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Mr. Chair, I believe the Métis have rights under section 35 that are protected by the constitution of Canada. That requires the government to consult when any treaty or First Nation rights may be affected.

**Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Tyndall Park):** I'd like to thank the NDP for allowing me 10 minutes to ask some questions.

With that, 10 minutes goes by really quick, so I'm planning to keep my questions short and concise, and my hope is that the minister will do the same with his answers.

First question is, the Consultation and Reconciliation division of IRNR is estimated to increase by \$3,000. Could the minister please detail the \$3,000 increase, and why isn't the Province investing more in Consultation and Reconciliation?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Could you clarify? Did you say \$3,000, and if you have \$3,000, where did you find that figure from?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Just, again, just a reminder to pose all questions and answers through the Chair, not to you. It needs to come through a third party.

So with that, I'll call on the member from Tyndall Park.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I apologize. It would have been \$300,000. I don't have the page number right in front of me, but I will get that to the minister. I suspect he should be aware of it, though it was one of the increases made for consultation.

I'm just going to throw in my second question with this information here. Under infrastructure, winter roads underspent by \$1.1 million, just over 10 per cent of the entire budget, and if he could talk a little bit about this, and how are northern Indigenous communities negatively affected when they don't have their basic infrastructure in place?

**Mr. Chairperson:** The member from Tyndall Park.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** I just wanted to clarify, as I received a little bit more information. It is, in fact, \$3,000. It's found on page 14 of the Estimates book. It's the number—\$2,337,000 has been increased to \$2,400,000.

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Thank you for that clarification. We, too, found where that is reported as \$3,000 difference, and that difference is to offset guaranteed salary increases over that time period.

With respect to the question regarding the winter roads, am I—is it the department that looks after the winter road program? We do not have any details of their spending in front of us at the present time. I would assume—I don't know if correctly or not—we had an abnormal season. It was abnormally warm last season, which may have resulted in a much shorter season and possibly one of the reasons for under-spending on the roads, but really, we'd have to reach out to the Department of Infrastructure for that information.

**Ms. Lamoureux:** This will be my last question. Just wondering why the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative

underspent by \$244,000, a 25 per cent reduction of the budget for the program?

\* (16:20)

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** It's unfortunate that the member missed my responses to some of these questions previously.

I just want to restate that we have increased funding to our core program by \$163,000, and that was money used to stabilize the program and increase the flexibility needed for other northern communities. We provided \$270,000 in discretionary grants, which I previously read into the record, and those include grants for communities like Grand Rapids, \$35,000; Churchill, \$25,000; and NACC, \$40,000.

The member will also notice that we have increased actual spending by \$448,000 over last year, and while underspending \$240,000 on the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative, the government has actually allocated over \$108 million to the Bayline pilot project. And I had explained, you know, during my summer travels, that I did attend the community of Wabowden where the Bayline pilot project was being undertaken. And the—you know, goods were being prepared, the foods were being prepared to ship out to communities along the Bay Line and it was a—the project was a tremendous success in the communities.

And I just—need to clarify here that we allocated \$1.8 million—I don't know if I said \$108 million, but it was \$1.8 million that we allocated to the Bayline pilot project.

**Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** My first chance, I guess, to congratulate the minister on his appointment.

So you've talked about some things that you've done with the healthy foods initiative on the Bayline communities. Could you tell us what exactly it is you've done to help out particularly the fly-in communities?

\* (16:30)

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Just for clarification for the member, the government doesn't deliver the programs. The programs are delivered by our partners, and the partners that we have are the Bayline Regional Roundtable, Food Matters Manitoba, Four Arrows regional health authority, the Northern Association of Community Councils and the Frontier School Division.

Of those, two—Food Matters Manitoba and Four Arrows regional health authority—work with communities that reach out to them for assistance. The programming is designed to support healthy foods in the North and throughout the North, and our staff are currently in discussion with officials at the federal government level to look at expanding this best practices program moving forward.

**Mr. Lindsey:** I just have one question on a different matter.

When it comes to Internet service providers in the northern communities, your government has chosen Xplornet to be the one that's going to take that on. Is the minister aware that many of the communities already have service from Xplornet, and a goodly portion of them are not very happy with that service? Can the minister explain why the decision was made to grant Xplornet the contract as opposed to seeing if there were alternate, better service providers out there?

**Mr. Lagimodiere:** Following a competitive tendering process, the Manitoba government signed the memorandum of understanding with Xplornet Communications to connect more than 125,000 unserved—or underserved Manitobans with reliable high-speed Internet services.

The COVID pandemic has reinforced the importance of broadband connectivity and the need to ensure that Manitobans have access to critical and timely information and services no matter where they live, work or travel in Manitoba. And I can tell you that that has never hit home more than when I was travelling on my listening and learning journey earlier this year.

So the agreement between the Province and Xplornet Communications will provide broadband services to nearly 30 First Nations and approximately 270 rural and northern communities. Additionally, this agreement will also serve 350 communities with cellphone access.

With that, Xplornet is looking forward to collaborating with the government of Manitoba to accelerate the network investment plans to deliver improved speeds and unlimited data plans at affordable prices to rural Manitoban's homes and businesses.

\* (16:40)

So, with that, once the contribution agreement with Xplornet is finalized and they will be able to actually engage actively with First Nations on fibre

access needs, and I am very excited that Xplornet will actively reach—reaching out to communities that require these Internet services and they will also be actively working with other partners to deliver Internet services into those northern and remote communities.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Are there any further questions?

Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of resolutions. At this point we will allow all virtual members to unmute their mics so they can respond to the questions.

Okay, I will now call resolution 19.2: Be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$28,753,000 for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 19.1.(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 19.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

Hearing no questions, resolution 19.1: Be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,760,000 for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, Administration and Finance—I'm going to read that again because my 60—my 16s, I guess, sound like 60s, so—be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,716,000 for Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Okay, with that, then, this completes the Estimates of the Department of Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations.

So the next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Legislative and Public Affairs.

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

So we will sit in recess.

*The committee recessed at 4:43 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 4:51 p.m.*

## LEGISLATIVE AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

**Mr. Chairperson (Len Isleifson):** Would the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Legislative and Public Affairs.

Does the honourable First Minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Legislative and Public Affairs):** In the interest of time and preserving time for the opposition to ask pointed and good questions, I will not make an opening statement.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank you for those comments.

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

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** No.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank the member.

So, under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 22.1.(a), contained in resolution 22.1.

At this time, I invite the department staff to approach the table. I would ask that the First Minister please introduce his staff.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Pleased to welcome Deputy Minister Elliot Sims to the table, and also to the room Colin Hornby, who is the special assistant.

**Mr. Chairperson:** And we thank you for that.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

**An Honourable Member:** Global.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Global discussion? Thank you so much. It is agreed that we will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

**MLA Marcelino:** Can the minister please provide clarity for the committee if it was he who gave approval to removing key information from the

Estimates books such as staffing and spending levels? Who directed that this be done or looked into?

**Mr. Goertzen:** It wasn't me, but I think that that information should be returned for future Estimates.

**Mr. Chairperson:** The member from Notre Dame? The floor is still open for questions. *[interjection]*

Order. *[interjection]* Order.

The member from Notre Dame, if you have a question?

**MLA Marcelino:** So was it Brian Pallister that directed that this be done or looked into?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I don't know, but I think the information should be returned and the Estimates book should revert to the form that they had historically been formatted in.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you for that.

Could the minister please provide the documentation or background information on how that follows best practices?

**Mr. Goertzen:** It's best practice for me to say that it should be returned to the form that it was previously formatted in. I think the critic should take that as a win for today.

**MLA Marcelino:** Okay, I think I understand that now. Thank you.

Our next question is about FIPPA. How many full-time employees are there and how many vacancies are there for FIPPA across government departments? Can the minister please provide a breakdown of how many FIPPA staff there are currently working in each department—specifically for Finance, Central Services, Executive Council?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I thank the member for the question.

There are five individuals within this department who deal with FIPPA. Across individual departments, there are FIPPA officers within each department. So we would have to endeavour to seek that information from other departments, in terms of the 'absence' that exist within other departments for their FIPPA officers.

**MLA Marcelino:** Could the minister please provide what the average response time is per department?

**Mr. Goertzen:** It would be maintained within their individual departments. Again, we can seek to try to find that information.

**MLA Marcelino:** Will the minister and Premier (Mr. Goertzen) please undertake that information that we'll get to that?

**Mr. Goertzen:** We will do our best.

**MLA Marcelino:** Will the minister please explain what work has been done to improve FIPPA response times and processes since the Ombudsman report in—released in June 2020?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I thank the member for the question.

So there's a number of things. The member will know new legislation came into place regarding freedom of information and the responses that can come out of FIPPA. And I think that—I acknowledge that this is important for all members. I was in opposition for a long time, relied on freedom of information.

But it's not just political parties, although that's become more of a preponderance over that last number of years that political parties are disproportionately using it compared to the rest of the public. But it's an important aspect of government.

So the legislation that was brought in was intended to help in many ways. Well, some might say that it will extend the time. We also think that there's an opportunity to reduce the time that responses are coming from the freedom of information officers in the individual departments.

There probably also are some changes that need to happen on the technological side of things and that there needs to be co-ordination across departments, and to ensure that responses are coming in a uniform way and the intake is coming in a uniform way.

So lots of work ongoing. I know the member opposite feels strongly about freedom of information, as do I. There needs to be timely access, but also access that provides the right information in the right way.

**MLA Marcelino:** Any chance of hiring more staff to deal with the FIPPA backlogs and timeliness issues, like what the Ombudsman suggested?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, there's always opportunities to look at adding staff where there's, you know, a deficiency. I think that it's not always just about staff. It's about using that time well and ensuring they have the right technological resources to co-ordinate properly across the FIPPA system, but if there's—if the limiting factor is staff, then that would be something that would be considered.

**MLA Marcelino:** Has the Ombudsman's follow-up audit of Finance, Central Services, Executive Council and Crowns begun yet?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm not aware if the follow-up audit has begun.

**MLA Marcelino:** And for the new act, what changes are under way in anticipation of the new FIPPA act taking effect in January?

\* (17:00)

**Mr. Goertzen:** The member will know that the forms and the intake will be changing when it comes to applying for freedom of information.

The regulations will be published and there'll be consultation, I believe, in a month or so, so the public and the member opposite and others who are interested can provide feedback on those regulations when they become public. I know that she'll be interested in that and other members will as well.

**MLA Marcelino:** On page 8 of the annual report, it states: providing legislative and policy direction on the administration of FIPPA, including the development of amendments to the statute and the access and privacy regulation in conjunction with the statutory review of the act.

Is the minister planning on further regulatory or legislative changes aside from the bill that was recently passed?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Not at this point, no.

**MLA Marcelino:** Do issues management meetings regarding FIPPA still regularly occur?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I don't meet on the issue of FIPPA that are coming in. I think the deputy minister would meet at times across government just to manage the flow of FIPPA requests, but I don't have meetings with—regarding FIPPA.

**MLA Marcelino:** In addition to the deputy minister, who else would be accompanying you in these issues management meetings regarding FIPPA?

**Mr. Goertzen:** So, within the individual departments there are FIPPA co-ordinators who are assigned—either directors or ADMs generally at that level. So the deputy minister would liaise with the individuals who are responsible for FIPPA in the individual departments.

**MLA Marcelino:** So, the answer is that you're not meeting anymore with issues and management meetings with FIPPA anymore—

**Mr. Chairperson:** I just want to caution the member that all comments should be directed through the Chair, please.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thanks for that direction, Mr. Chair.

So there won't be any more meetings with issues management and FIPPA, not on a regular basis, just like a handful every year?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm not certain what you're referring to when you're speaking of issues management.

**MLA Marcelino:** Well, Mr. Chair, I think it was actually called issues management in the letter by the Ombudsman and in her report. What I think we mean by that is any kind of consideration that this would have any kind of political sensitivities of this for—if this information would be to be released.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm advised from officials that issues management meetings refers to a practice that was done under the previous administration where there'd be political staff, I guess, who had meetings or discussions that didn't continue under this government, I'm advised.

**MLA Marcelino:** Okay, thank you for that.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to move on to a few questions on proactive disclosure.

How is it decided what is posted to the site?

**Mr. Goertzen:** A lot of times, there's discussions with departments to see what kind of information is regularly asked for under freedom of information and that can be—then be considered for proactive disclosure or what information the department regularly would be themselves compiling. So that could be proactively disclosed.

So it probably is two pronged: what information is a department regularly holding and what information is regularly being asked for. This makes it simpler, obviously, if you can proactively disclose things rather than have to always respond to a FIPPA request.

**MLA Marcelino:** The Ombudsman's report asked the government to proactively release documents to cut down on FIPPA delays. Can the minister explain how it is decided what gets posted to the proactive disclosure site and when?

So, for example, why aren't contracts publicly disclosed, like, who can—who the successful

proponents were and their respective contracts? You can FIPPA a contract.

**Mr. Goertzen:** We would have to talk to Central Services on who issues the contracts and goes through that—the MERX program, the broad cross-Canada tendering program. We were under the impression that MERX would disclose who was rewarded the contract, generally, but we'd have to speak to Central Services to see what kind of information is disclosed.

**MLA Marcelino:** What efforts is your government taking to disclose more on the proactive disclosure site? Do you have, like, a committee that's in charge of this, do you have staff that are—you know, are focused on that kind of goal?

**Mr. Goertzen:** It's sort of an annual process where we engage with the departments as—you know, do a check to see what information is being regularly asked for that hasn't already been proactively disclosed or if there's new information that they're collecting that would make sense to just proactively disclose.

So it really is an interaction with the individual departments which hold the information.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, we're going to be going on to records management now.

On page 91 of the budget, it states: As we move past COVID-19, digital technologies, platforms and service contracts will provide government with the capabilities it needs to continue transforming the public service. Below are some initiatives that support the digital transformation document and record management modernization, modernizing the tools and processes that support correspondence and workflow, approval management and tracking of critical government documents such as briefing notes, Treasury Board and Cabinet submissions, Estimates materials, speaking notes, public correspondence, et cetera.

Can the minister please explain in more detail what modernizing the tools and process actually means?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I mean, it is really a cross-government discussion about what's the best way to manage information. I think every government has struggled with this at different times because technology continues to change and what it is that's being warehoused in terms of records continues to change. So it's an ongoing discussion, not specifically just with LPA, but with departments across government.

It's also a bit of a learning experience outside of COVID. I think part of the challenge in government is that most of the experiences with COVID people sometimes focus on as being negative, but there's also been, you know, great opportunities to do things that otherwise, you know, might have taken decades or might never have happened at all but for the need to do it because of the pandemic.

So I mean, it's a really a cross-government discussion about how best to manage information records.

**MLA Marcelino:** How exactly is record management changing? Are documents and records going to be labelled or categorized differently now?

\* (17:10)

**Mr. Goertzen:** That would be part of that ongoing discussion across government and departments, you know, moving through the pandemic, about what the experiences and learnings have been about how best to store information and access it.

I can assure the member there hasn't been any specific decisions made that would look or feel different from what is currently happening.

**MLA Marcelino:** Will you be—Mr. Chair, will the minister be moving away from AIM Software? If yes, what would you be switching to?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm not aware of any decision to move away from AIM. That would be, I suppose, a Central Services decision, but I've not been made aware of that—any movement away from AIM.

**MLA Marcelino:** What kind of yearly budget will you be allocating to the—will the minister be allocating data management modernization?

**Mr. Goertzen:** That budget would likely be housed in Central Services as sort of the central deposit for government services; hence, the name of the department.

**MLA Marcelino:** Would you be able—would the minister be able to get that information to me at a later date?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I mean, I can get you the budgets for Central Services. I don't know that there's been a determination on line item specifically for the issue that the member is asking questions about.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the minister if this data management modernization process is in congruence with his open government initiatives.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I mean, everything is put forward—put through the lens of an open government policy.

I think the government has tried to be open and transparent about issues. That, sometimes, can be in the eye of the beholder, and the member opposite and her colleagues might not always feel that way, and I maybe didn't always feel that way in opposition, but I think there's always a movement to try to be more open and transparent when it comes to government information where it's acceptable to do so.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, the next few questions will be about Elections Manitoba.

Has the minister had any discussions with Elections Manitoba regarding elections and COVID-19 protocols?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I've not spoken directly to Shipra Verma, the Chief Electoral Officer, about that, although I have indicated that we are willing to move forward on the mail-in ballot provision, particularly when it comes to any sort of impending by-elections. And, of course, one will have to be scheduled in the next six months, which we would assume would still be sort of within the realm of a pandemic, although hopefully a fading one.

But, you know, we recognize that the mail-in ballot at this particular time probably makes sense. I think it'll be the subject of an Elections Manitoba committee meeting tomorrow night, but it's something that was used, obviously, in the federal election and probably should be considered for the upcoming by-election in Fort Whyte.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the minister what are some of the main concerns or needs that need to be addressed in order to hold an election during COVID-19, apart from mail-in ballots?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I mean, I imagine that there'll be, you know, questions about how individuals are receiving information, how the individual campaigns are, you know, out going door knocking and those sort of things. I'm not sure that that can all be regulated. A lot of the parties are going to have to take their own initiatives, and it then depends where we are in the pandemic.

As the member will know, waves sort of come and go. You know, we're hopeful that the fourth wave, such as it is, will be relatively blunted. But, you know, some of that is yet to be determined, right, as we move into the fall and into the winter. But I think that whenever the by-election is called, individual parties

are going to have to make some determination about what is the best way to campaign in the midst of a pandemic, depending on what the risk assessment is at that time.

There is six months to call the by-election, or, I guess, a little bit less now. So it—you know, it's possible that we could be into the early part of spring for there to be a by-election, and the pandemic could look quite different by that time. But I think some of that'll be determined by Elections Manitoba, polling stations, what it looks like entering polling stations, but a good part of it, in terms of the campaigning, will have to be determined by the parties itself.

**MLA Marcelino:** Does the minister plan to initiate a conversation to ensure proper protocols and resources are in place to successfully carry out the upcoming by-election?

**Mr. Goertzen:** That's a good question.

I think that that will be part of the discussion happens tomorrow night with the elections commissioner. I know they have specific issues on the agenda regarding to mail-in ballots, vote anywhere proposals, strike off proposals, tabulation of ballots, those aren't specific necessarily to the pandemic other than the mail-in ballot part of it. But there probably is an opportunity to engage with the elections officer about other issues around voting in a pandemic.

**MLA Marcelino:** Who will be—Mr. Chair, who will be making the call for when the by-election will take place?

**Mr. Goertzen:** The premier makes the decision on when the by-election takes place within the legislated parameters, which I believe is six months from the resignation of a member. So the member for Fort Whyte, it'll—resigned and the legislation requires a call or the election within six months.

The member wasn't here but may remember that in one by-election, the by-election that elected the now member for McPhillips (Mr. Martin) but it was for the—as the MLA for Morris, there was a one-year wait period for that by-election to take place, and I think it took place in one of the coldest months in Manitoba recorded history.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, as the minister for Public Affairs—would the minister agree that it's in the best interest of Manitobans to release ample information on COVID-19 so that they can feel informed to make decisions and respond adequately?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, I think information's important when it comes to COVID-19, probably from, I mean, I know this drifts more into the health perspective and so I should be careful because there is a Health Estimates taking place down the hall.

But having been the Health minister or the acting Health minister for a period of time in the pandemic, and the former Health minister, information is important. I think that there's more information being released from a health perspective now than there has been in our time as legislators, and probably in our living memory, in terms of health information that's—that is being released.

**MLA Marcelino:** Why hasn't the minister's government released regional test positivity rates, either by health region or district, to help Manitobans know where the risk is and what is happening in their own backyards?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Those decisions are made by the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, based on what they believe is the right information to be released for Manitobans to make decisions.

I have confidence and faith in Dr. Brent Roussin and the way that he's performed his duties over the last—well, not just the last 18 months because he was the provincial health officer before that, too, but certainly, during the pandemic.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, but doesn't the minister have the power to decide after medical officers of health provide that type of advice?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I think the member's asking whether or not we should overrule the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer; that's probably a dangerous path to move down.

**MLA Marcelino:** Have—has the minister had any discussions with public health and/or the Minister of Health with releasing such information on a regular basis?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Discussions with, in the other role that I'm currently acting in, have discussions with public health and the Minister of Health often, certainly, with the Minister of Health almost daily. And we rely on the advice of Chief Provincial Public Health Officer about what information is the important information to release.

**MLA Marcelino:** Has the minister or his government ever overruled any of the advice or decisions that public health has made?

\* (17:20)

**Mr. Goertzen:** The member will know I've not been the Health minister for the majority of this pandemic.

I was the acting Health minister for, oh, two or three months—it felt longer—in the spring during the third wave, and I certainly remember following the public health advice as the acting Health minister.

**MLA Marcelino:** I understand that the minister said that he's confirmed that he has never—aware—he's not aware of any overruling, but is he aware of any member of his government overruling decisions made by public health?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I think that the member has drifted pretty far into a department that isn't related to this department, and I think that the Health Estimates are happening just down the hall, and if there's more specific questions she has related to the pandemic or health, that's probably the appropriate place to pose those questions.

**MLA Marcelino:** Dr. Roussin previously explained that Manitoba's fourth wave was more delayed than what earlier projections had shown, but we are on this severe trajectory right now. Manitobans haven't seen updated modelling in quite some time, so when can Manitobans expect to see updated modelling?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Whenever public health determines that it's time to release it.

**MLA Marcelino:** Public knowledge helps public health. Releasing data can help those who are hesitant or have been putting off getting vaccinated to finally make the decision to get vaccinated. It also helps people make smarter, safer public-health decisions if they know there is potentially a greater risk.

Will the minister commit to the government releasing updated modelling this week so that Manitobans know what's to come in the fourth wave?

**Mr. Goertzen:** So, I'm a little confused because I sort of took it from the member's questions a little bit ago that she would have been adverse to us interfering or overruling, in her words, public health. Now it seems that she's advocating that we direct—overrule public health in things they may or may not want to do.

We committed months ago that it was good to have public modelling available. Public health have been releasing data as they have it. I don't think modelling happens every day, but they have been regularly releasing modelling and I support that.



**MLA Marcelino:** I'd like to ask a few questions about the Ombudsman's review of the politicization of the civil service.

What work has been done to improve the vetting for partisan messaging in government-issued documents, and specifically in news releases?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm advised from officials that, you know, there is a process that's being reviewed to ensure that government messaging isn't political, recognizing again that's sometimes in the eye of the beholder, depending when something's political or not.

That particular portion of government when it comes to communications is housed in the Department of Finance right now, but I think it's fair to say that that review is ongoing to ensure that communications isn't politicized. I don't think anybody wants that, nor am I certain that it is ever intentional. But, again, sometimes these things become a bit subjective in terms of how people view them, but it is important to ensure that government messaging isn't drifting into the realm of politicization.

**MLA Marcelino:** So it's been two years after the Scheer news release, and Communication Services Manitoba is still drafting procedure on vetting news releases, and a separate guidance on political impartial communications. The Ombudsman expressed concern that there's still no updated policy as of this month and pointing to clear rules that already exist in other provinces.

Has Communication Services Manitoba drafted a procedure yet on vetting news releases? The minister's indicated not yet, but why not? When will this be complete?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Communications Services is housed in the Department of Finance, so you'd have to ask that question to the Department of Finance.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, I'd just like to go back to my win.

So, I'd just like to confirm with the minister that, for example, the Health spending Estimates book. So, in 2020 we went from 145 pages to a 32-page summary; for the Families Estimates book, we went from 128 pages in 2020 down to now a 33-page summary; for example, in Education, the Estimates book, we went from 109 pages down to a 35-page summary.

So the minister's indicated that it will go back to the normal like, since the 1982 from Rick Schroeder,

the Finance minister then, that those spending Estimates book will be back to normal.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, I'm not the Finance minister, but I've indicated that it's my belief that it should.

**MLA Marcelino:** Those are all of my questions. I'd like to maybe defer to my colleague to see if he has any questions. Okay.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Member for Notre Dame.

**MLA Marcelino:** Sorry, I—Mr. Chair, I'd just like to confirm then that this minister is not going to be making that call to return back to the previous types of Estimates books that we used to have but it will be the Finance minister?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Right, it's housed in Finance, Treasury Board. I've given you my view on it, I've been pretty open about it. Hard for me to say who's going to be doing what in a year from now. I didn't think three months ago that I'd be the premier, so who knows what could be happening in three months from now. But that's my view of it.

**MLA Marcelino:** Sorry, just to clarify because I didn't understand. So, it will be the Finance Minister that will be making—is supposed to be making that call to return the Estimates book back to their previous state?

**Mr. Goertzen:** It's in Treasury Board, which is in the Department of Finance. Treasury Board prepares the books.

**MLA Marcelino:** I understand that Treasury Board prepares the books, but who is responsible for that political decision to make that happen?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm not confirming that it's a political decision. I think that there was a view that this was the proper way to prepare these books. I hold a different view.

**MLA Marcelino:** Prepare the books or cook the books? I was just—okay.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Just so the record's clear, it would be prepare. *[interjection]*

**Mr. Chairperson:** No. Yes, the member from Notre Dame.

**MLA Marcelino:** Those are all of my questions. I'll defer to my colleague, the critic for Finance, and after that, the folks from the Liberals, I guess.

**Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry):** No, I'm going to yield my time to the member from St. Boniface.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** Yes, just some questions about—mostly about the FIPPA report.

Just on page 9 of the FIPPA report, it notes that it seems to be that response times are getting a bit worse. On-time has gone from 66 per cent down to 63; response within 31 to 60 days—it's minor, but 19 to 20; and more than 60 days have gone from 15 to 70 per cent.

So just beyond changing the legislation, what is the government doing to ensure that departments can fulfill FIPPA requests on time?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, part of it is absolutely the legislation and so having a little bit more time on the front end hopefully reduces the amount of times that there has to be an extension that's asked for. So we hope that that turnaround time will be better, not worse.

And then part of it is co-ordination and potentially technology changes, as mentioned to the official opposition critic, that that can be certainly a part of it. And then the department is always looking at ways to streamline the requests that come in from the public and others.

\* (17:30)

You know, there has been a significant increase in political party requests for freedom of information. Not that that's a bad thing, but it does put a strain on the system, and it wasn't, you know, necessarily always foreseen that that would be how the system would be used.

**Mr. Lamont:** On page 4 of the FIPPA report here, it says there were 2,500 requests submitted in 2019 and 2,102 completed. In 2020, the number went up to 2,630 applications submitted, with 2,146 completed. So, I mean, the number of requests has gone up considerably.

Just wondering, you know, why is—why are there less completed as per the total submitted, and does there need to be more staffing? Is that something that—interesting whether it's just the opinion of the Premier (Mr. Goertzen), whether that's—does there need to be more staffing to fulfill FIPPA requests on time?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Wouldn't rule that out as a possibility. Course, there's other actions that are taking place, but there are complications.

The complexity of the requests are significantly more, I'm advised, than was the case even five or, you know, five or seven years ago. So it's not just a matter of the volume but also the nature of the requests.

**Mr. Lamont:** Yes, and on page 7, it's a similar situation, with 22 per cent of records were deemed as denied. Where there were no records in 2019, it was 19 per cent. And 12 per cent, the records being deemed as denied for exceptions to disclosure, and there—it's not covered in much detail, I don't think, in the report, but is there a reason for the increase in the denied records, and is there possibility—is there anything that can be done to—for departments to work with applicants to ensure that they're able to actually receive their requested records?

**Mr. Goertzen:** Part of the reason that there's an increase in the denials, I'm advised, is because they get denied when there's already a proactive disclosure. So somebody might not know that a particular record is already proactively disclosed, so they request it anyway, but then they would be denied the information, but then, I suppose, be referred to the proactive disclosure that's already been provided.

So it looks like a denial, but it isn't really a denial.

**Mr. Lamont:** And just one last question, and then I'll cede my time.

Just to—for page 9 of the annual report, under capital investments; I believe this is for the Legislative Building. Capital investments were underspent by \$4.472 million. If the Premier could explain what projects weren't completed or—if that's available, or if it's not, if it could be—but if we could let it a bit—find out later.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm glad that the member asked this question because I think I probably share his view, not to put words in his mouth, but that this building, the Legislature, is, you know, a treasure that Manitobans need to see preserved and I think that they would want preserved. And I know there's a price tag to it, but the alternative is tearing it down and building something else, and I don't think anybody wants that. So we have to preserve this building.

It's a beautiful historical building, but it is a hundred years old, and so it is showing its age in different ways. So the \$10 million that was set aside is specifically to ensure that this building is maintained for not only future generations of elected officials but, really, for all Manitobans. And so the work that's happening either on the exterior of the building or on other parts of the building is going to be fully expended. I understand that COVID delayed—like, it's delayed a lot of things when it comes to capital projects, delayed some of the projects when it comes to this building, but that will be oversubscribed for this coming year;

so those projects will be completed and the entire \$10 million will be expended and then, likely, future governments will have to look at what other things have to be done on this building.

But it's always difficult, whether you're in Ottawa and its Parliament or you're talking about 24 Sussex, these sort of historical, old structures that are difficult to maintain but are part of a province's or federation's history are important to be maintained. So there's a cost and sometimes there's a political turbulence to be paid for that, but I think it's important. So I'm glad the member raised it. I think he probably shares the same views about the beauty of this building and the need to maintain it and to ensure that it is sound for future generations.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Are there any further questions?

Okay, hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to consideration of resolutions.

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

I will now call resolution 22.2: Be it RESOLVED that there be granted Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,187,000 for Legislative and Public Affairs, Corporate Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

So the last item to be considered for these Estimates is item 22.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 22.1.

The floor is now open for questions.

Okay, so we just clarified because we are discussing the minister's salary, we will ask the staff to remove themselves from the table, please.

Okay, seeing no questions, resolution 22.1: Be it RESOLVED that there be granted to Her 'majesty'—Majesty, pardon me—a sum not exceeding \$883,000 for Legislative and Public Affairs, Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

So, at this time, this completes the Estimates of the Department of Legislative and Public Affairs.

Is it—shall we take a brief recess to allow the next department and critics to come in and set up?  
*[Agreed]*

We stand in recess.

*The committee recessed at 5:38 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 6 p.m.*

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order.

The Committee of Supply is back in session, and the hour being 6 o'clock, committee rise.

## CHAMBER

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOBS

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** 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 Economic Development and Jobs. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

\* (14:50)

**Mr. Jamie Moses (St. Vital):** Just want to confirm, can the Minister hear me?

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Yes, we can hear you. Go ahead.

**Mr. Moses:** I'm not sure if the minister can.

**Floor Comment:** *[inaudible]*—for this department will proceed in a global manner.

**Floor Comment:** Can you hear me, Minister?

**Floor Comment:** The member for St. Vital.

**Floor Comment:** Can you hear me—

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** We can hear you, minister, but we're getting feedback from someone.

So the member for St. Vital, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Moses:** Thank you. I'll ask my question to the minister.

So as through the last several months, as we've gone through the course of the pandemic, I think it's obviously taken a health toll on many Manitobans. I

think there's been evidence that people in marginalized communities have taken the brunt of that.

And we also know that that's not just limited to the health outcomes but also to the economic opportunities for those individuals who are in the, you know, Black, Indigenous or people of colour and other groups have also suffered worse during the course of the pandemic.

I'm wondering specifically if the minister has looked into certain initiatives—funding, grants or programs—that would specifically address the economic—the reduced economic opportunities that people of colour, marginalized communities have faced over the last few months as a result of the pandemic.

**Hon. Jon Reyes (Minister of Economic Development and Jobs):** First of all, Mr. Chair, I just want to ensure that you and the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) can hear me. Okay, just—

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Yes. Yes, minister.

**Mr. Reyes:** Okay, just one moment.

Thank you very much, again, for the question there to my colleague from St. Vital.

I just want to let him know that we have had a number of programs in place for all Manitobans, in terms of supports for individuals and supports for businesses.

We want to ensure that these programs do not overlap. And that includes people of colour, people of Indigenous backgrounds, all Manitobans that we're—who we're actually supporting.

I've had meetings as well with non-profit organizations, as I've told the member from St. Vital, you know, recently, last week, that I'm very happy that organizations do have a component that will help benefit those from our BIPOC communities, Indigenous communities. We're continuing to listen to all Manitobans, including the stakeholders that he's referring to. And being a person of colour myself, and I take this very seriously. As all people who are in public service should, as we should represent all Manitobans.

**Mr. Moses:** Thank you for the response.

It's been quite obvious that minorities, people of colour, Black people, Indigenous people often work in more precarious job situations. They've suffered job loss and often and definitely have had lower wages over the last few months as a result of the pandemic.

And having that data, I think it would be quite clear that there's a need for the government to take action and to help this community—help these communities improve their economic condition. And so I'm hearing from the minister that he's suggesting that the programs are a one-size-fits-all approach when that's simply not the best way to help many people in many communities.

And so I'm asking again: is there a minister—if he hasn't to date initiated any programs to help people of colour, Indigenous people or Black people economically, is the minister looking at doing programs in the future or grant opportunities in the future to help people who have been more affected by the economic downturn as a result of the pandemic?

**Mr. Reyes:** Thank you again for my colleague from St. Vital for the question.

You know, we have programs in place that are helping individuals and businesses. And I can understand that, you know, based on the data, he is correct that, in terms of the pandemic, it's hit—it's been hit harder on those from our Indigenous communities and our BIPOC communities—specifically, you know, in Point Douglas and in, you know, areas such as those.

We'll continue to listen to all stakeholders. I—you know, I, as a minister, am always engaging with all types of organizations. And if there are any good suggestions that they may have, also based on the data that you're explaining, I'm willing to listen and to ensure that, as a government, that we can help support those Manitobans in need, because a—healthy Manitobans means a healthy economy.

And we will strive to ensure that our province goes forward and a positive outlook for our economy. And that includes everyone, including our BIPOC, Indigenous communities that he's referring to.

**Mr. Moses:** Thank you for the response.

I do appreciate the minister's willingness to listen to communities and to engage in that dialogue, in that discussion. But with respect: we've been in the pandemic for 18, 19 months now, right? This is going on second, third, fourth wave we're approaching now. And it's been quite known who's been suffering and who's been the hardest hit as a result of the economic downturn because of the pandemic.

And so it shouldn't be a surprise to the government. And this is something that, you know, we should—where we should be past the listening stage, where we should be, certainly, into the action stage.

Or we should be implementing programs that are going to help the people who have been the hardest hit.

And so I just want to give the minister one more—you know, hopefully, you know, he's had a chance to think about this and suggest that he's going to implement a program. So I just want to ask again to the minister: Are you going to be implementing any programs that would specifically help the BIPOC community as a result of the economic downturn of the last year and a half, two years, because of the pandemic?

**Mr. Reyes:** Thank you again for the question from the member from St. Vital.

I see that we have other committee members here on the call, and I see one of them, the member from St. James. I want to let the member of St. James know that our mutual friend JR Alibin, who owns Max's Restaurant—I believe it's in his constituency—who is a person of colour himself, who has created jobs by investing in Manitoba by putting this business here in Winnipeg, is at—he gainfully employs many people of colour, specifically from the Filipino community and programs that work, the Healthy Hire program, he's applied for.

\* (15:00)

Most of these businesses have applied for the programs and it's been able to continue to gainfully employ individuals specifically of colour that he's referring to because we know that during the pandemic, small businesses have struggled, but there are supports in place that we have put out there to help business owners gain supports for individuals.

Regular calls with the business community that I've done, it has helped tremendously to—in terms of collaborating, you know, and communicating to ensure that they can continue to serve Manitobans with their respective industries, in this case, the restaurant industry.

And my suggestion is, as well, if you haven't gone to Max's already, you should join your colleague and myself when we go to sunny St. James. Isn't that correct? Give me a nod there for St. James, absolutely.

Thank you [*inaudible*].

**Mr. Moses:** So, just to be clear, I appreciate the story that the minister is saying, and I think that, you know, one individual business or employer is not the story, though.

Wider—the larger community of people who have been the hardest hit, you know, economically, in our province, and so I appreciate the story that was just shared. However, I also would suggest that it's clear that the minister hasn't said anything that the government has done to the most hardest hit economically individuals, yet they haven't done anything yet to help those people out, and their minister is clearly not saying anything that he's going to be doing in the future to help these people out.

So, again, I think this is pretty indicative of this government who has, I think, failed to help a lot of Manitobans throughout this very difficult crisis that we've all been through.

I'll just move on to another pressing topic that I think we've experienced economically in the last few months, and that goes to the labour shortage. Many businesses in our province have experienced difficulty hiring, specifically looking at businesses in the restaurant, hospitality, tourism industry have struggled to fill vacancies. What is the minister doing to address some of these issues and help to find—address that shortage of labour in our economy?

**Mr. Reyes:** Mr. Chair, I just want to let the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses) know that, you know, we're going to continue to improve and enhance our programs and our government continues to support businesses during this economic situation to protect jobs during this time of uncertainty.

I should remind him that we've supported, you know, over 4,000 employers to hire or rehire nearly 17,000 employees through our wage subsidy programs. Our current programs have so far supported 1,100 employers providing up to 7,200 jobs. We've invested also more than \$470 million in financial supports to help businesses and non-profits in response to the pandemic.

So our government will continue to engage with Manitoba businesses and industry associations, non-profit organizations, individuals, because we need that feedback as we have been, you know, supporting, I know, businesses before, during, and we will well after the pandemic, through a wide variety of supports for Manitoba businesses and non-profits. And we'll focus also on kick-starting the economy through the programs and supports that we offer. We'll continue to listen to Manitobans, businesses, so that we can improve and enhance these programs to help the province.

Thank you.

**Mr. Moses:** Has the minister looked at addressing the labour shortage through enhancing educational programs, for example, additional supports to adult education? I didn't hear that as something the minister's looking into, or perhaps investing in advanced education or other strategies, on-the-job learning programs, incentives.

Again, I don't think the minister has addressed the labour shortages. That's what I'm asking about right now and I'd just like to hear if the minister has anything that he's working on in terms of addressing the labour shortage because it's quite clear that, specifically in the hospitality, tourism, restaurant but other industries as well, that there is a labour shortage right now and it's difficult for employers to fill their vacancies.

**Mr. Reyes:** I have met with presidents of post-secondary institutions, the leaders of the restaurant association, the hotel association. I have regular meetings with them and they have, you know, they have brought up the issue of a labour shortage.

But this is not only happening in our province, it's happening in every province, as he knows. And that's why we are making investments, in terms of programs like Healthy Hire. We also had committed to \$50 million to support the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce administer a long-term recovery fund, which I want to mention to him. And we had a program called the TRIP program that helped hotel owners, also helped a lot of Manitobans in terms of, you know, just getting out there and enjoying their province.

So I know that it's been tough for employers, given the situation, but we are definitely having these conversations, taking this whole-of-government approach, in terms of talking with the appropriate stakeholders, as well as my colleague, the Minister for Advanced Education, on how to continue to move forward and improving and enhancing the services that we can provide to these Manitobans.

**Mr. Moses:** So just, again, on the labour shortage issue, it's been quite clear that our economy is suffering because of this. You know, businesses are not able to operate at full capacity.

Is the minister looking at initiatives which would enhance or improve conditions in work environments, such as, you know, better work conditions in environments, higher regulations to improve those work conditions—perhaps increasing the minimum wage for many staff who are—would be earning minimum

wage, or even improving child-care needs because that is, I know, also a barrier for individuals to return to work.

Those are some of the things that I've been hearing about in the conversations that I've had with many of the same people you have had, minister, like people—the leaders in the hotel and restaurant area and in our advanced education institutions in our province. And they're telling me those are some of the barriers, around child care, around working conditions and salary, mainly minimum wage.

And so I'm wondering if these are initiatives that the minister is also willing to put forward concrete and substantive initiatives or programs to improve those so that workers are more willing to come back to our labour force?

**Mr. Reyes:** I just wanted to remind the—my colleague from St. Vital what I said last week that, in terms of the latest report for StatsCan labour force, that total jobs inched up to 7,800. We were 1.2 per cent above the national stat. Our Manitoba labour force increased 7,100—1 per cent versus 0.7 per cent for Canada.

So just also want to point out the fact that, you know, we've provided programs to help employers, certain industries even such as the—there is the Hospitality Relief Sector Program which provide \$8 million in financial relief to Manitoba's accommodation and tourism sector. As he should know, and from my experience working at hotels, that most of the employees at those hotels are people of colour but, like, people of all backgrounds.

\* (15:10)

Some of the best times I had was actually working in the hospitality industry. You know, it taught me a lot about customer service. It taught about—taught me about, you know, how to treat people, customer service. You know, just as I would say, even on the record, even 30 years ago when I worked at the Marlborough inn that the Minister of Infrastructure (Mr. Schuler), him and I had worked there together many years before politics. So, I guess, serving the people was always in our blood, and here we are 30 years later, serving as MLAs, as fellow ministers.

And, you know, we're going to ensure that, you know—because, you know, from experience, we're going to ensure—I'm going to ensure that we have the ear of the public, we have the ear of the business community in terms of taking care of not only the workers but those who gainfully employ those workers so that we can continue to improve this economy.

The situation has been very difficult. But in order for our economy to grow, we have to recover and we have to ensure that we have programs, recovery programs, to ensure these businesses recover so that they can gainfully employ these individuals. That's why, you know, we've committed, again, \$50 million to support, you know, these stakeholders in terms of a long-term recovery fund, which there will be more announced later on some of the extra dollars that are going to be used towards these programs.

**Mr. Moses:** I'd like to provide about 15 minutes of time to the member for St. Boniface. Is he in the room?

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** I don't—the member for St. Boniface is not in the Chamber. *[interjection]*

Oh, sorry, okay. Okay, I was in error there. I should not have reflected on the presence or absence of a member. So I apologize for that.

**Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface):** Thank you much. My apologies.

I just wanted to ask a question, and it comes to the Estimates books for Economic Development and Jobs. While there is an increase of financial assistance by \$26.496 million, there does seem to be a pattern of underspending in the 2020-'21 annual report. So I was just wondering is—an example, Finance and Corporate Services was underspent by \$1.137 million because of vacancies in the department. The Economic and Labour Market Policy was underspent—it was just under half—by \$1.498 million.

And I know that there have been some fairly deep cuts or perhaps through attrition to the—to departments. I think it was—the civil services lost something like 18 per cent of its—of workers. So is there a plan to fill these spaces? Because I know that, in certain circumstances, that if you have that deep of a loss, it means that work piles up for those people who are left behind and it means that there isn't always the capacity to get other stuff through when it needs to get done.

**Mr. Reyes:** Thank you to my colleague from St. Boniface for that question. I think, you know, as, you know, the first week or two when I took over as Minister for Economic Development and Jobs, you know, I was very enthusiastic to meeting those who work for this department. So one of my priorities was actually visiting the people that work for Economic Development and Jobs, the civil service, you know, because, to me, they're the heart and soul of the department. They work hard. I thank each and every one

of them for their service through these times because they've had to adjust, and adjust well, they have.

Based on the information, you know, we—I know we have 58 positions that are in the various stages of their recruitment process. We're going to continue to fill those positions as best as we can. Like any other organization, whether they're private or public, you know, a large one, there's regular 'turnover'—turnover. So we're going to continue to provide excellent service through the means of our hard-working civil service. Those, again, those men and women who I've met and who are very thankful that they were serving our province in the capacity that they're in, and, again, I just want to say that, you know, everyone's gone through challenges, including the civil service, but it's my job as the Minister responsible for Economic Development and Jobs, the people that work for my department are well taken care of, and we'll ensure that the positions are well maintained, filled.

But I just wanted to remind my colleague that there are various stages right now that are happening in terms of their recruitment process. So those positions will be filled. We will also—there'll also be turnover, as I said, but, again, I want to thank the civil service for serving Manitobans in their capacity.

**Mr. Lamont:** The annual report states the department has expanded the apprentice to journeyman ratio from one to one to two to one. I know that there have been some concerns about this, from the point of view of both the quality of training as well as safety in discussions with some of the trades.

So I don't know if the minister could possibly—could answer this or commit to answering it later, if possible: was safety taken into account? Was safety one of the major considerations, or is it being done more on an economic basis, that they would simply—that it was decided that it would be lower cost for industry to reduce the apprenticeship ratio?

And if you could answer the second question: what is the department doing to work with health and safety in order to ensure that safety is taken into account on every decision?

**Mr. Reyes:** With respect to the apprentice-journeyman ratio, the decision to move to an expanded two-to-one ratio will increase the skilled labour available to Manitoba companies and will enable more Manitobans to become skilled journeymen. The regulatory change was driven by feedback from stakeholders, which demonstrated support for the change. The regulatory changes do not prevent

employees from maintaining a one-to-one ratio, however.

\* (15:20)

So enhancing the apprenticeship system is of particular importance now as the Province continues to pursue opportunities for Manitobans to enter the labour market and restore the economy.

**Mr. Lamont:** Again, on—just on the issue of apprenticeship: on page 24 of the annual report, Apprenticeship Manitoba, its underspending was quite significant; I think it was—for financial assistance, for example, the variance under budget was \$6.2 million.

So I was just wondering—I guess two questions: one is what happened to the salaries and benefits of the individuals who facilitate and train out of that program? And with that gap, the labour market is going to be 'missing' many trained apprentices.

So are there any tangible steps the minister is going to be taking to catch up on the number of apprentices, making sure that these—that we don't see these variances of \$6 million in underspending?

**Mr. Reyes:** The progression of apprentices and technical training remains a priority for the department. A skilled tradespeople are key to Manitoba's recovery plan.

The department schedules technical training courses for apprentices based on demand from the industry. Apprentices are encouraged to attend in-school training each year to ensure they progress in their respective program.

Our department continues to promote the apprenticeship program and provide training to apprentices when there is a demand for training a trade and we will continue to do so.

**Mr. Lamont:** The annual report states the—that the Province supported newcomers, some of which came through what's called the Refugee Employment Development Initiative.

So I'm just wondering if the minister could provide a few more details on this initiative. Where did newcomers settle in Manitoba?

**Mr. Reyes:** I just want to let the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont) know that workforce training and employment is very important to provide—we have to ensure we provide funding to a skilled and diverse workforce, including the stakeholders that he's mentioned.

You know, we know that all governments, whether it's federal and provincial governments, have to ensure that we, you know, find a way that we can ensure that these individuals that come from other countries have their credentials recognized so that we don't create issues for them when they arrive to Canada, to Manitoba and to other provinces.

And that's why, you know, as a government we're going to continue to help these individuals get on their feet as best as they can to ensure that whatever they learned from back home, whether it's—you know, whatever occupation they had, the education that they acquired, when they immigrate to Canada, we need to ensure that we communicate it that they can be gainfully employed here when they do arrive because we have to ensure that immigrants, refugees are part of our society, and if that means to ensure that we have programs in place for them so that they can be, you know, working right away in this—in the field that they learned back where they came from, we have to ensure that we have funding in place so that we can have that skilled and diverse workforce because that'll benefit our province and our country when they are working here and living here.

Thank you.

**Mr. Moses:** I would like to say that there's no more questions at this time for the minister.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, seeing no further questions, we will now turn to the resolutions, beginning with the second resolution as we have deferred consideration of the first resolution containing the minister's salary.

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

We'll start with resolution 10.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$117,616,000 for Economic Development and Jobs, Industry Programs and Partnerships, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 10.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$88,547,000 for Economic Development and Jobs, Workforce Training, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**



Resolution 10.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,000,000 for Economic Development and Jobs, Loans and Guarantees Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 10.1(a), the minister's salary, contained in resolution 10.1.

The floor is open for questions.

**Mr. Moses:** I move, that line item 10.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Economic Development and Jobs' salary be reduced to \$1.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Do you have that in writing?

**Mr. Moses:** Yes, it was just emailed in.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, we don't have a motion. We—it hasn't been received?

Who—the member for St. Vital (Mr. Moses), who did you email it to?

\* (15:30)

**Mr. Moses:** It was just emailed to Tim Abbott. He received it.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** It should—okay, if you could email that to the moderator.

**Mr. Moses:** And Katrina [phonetic] as well was sent—it was sent to.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Yes, it has to go to the moderator.

Okay, so it's been moved by the honourable member for St. Vital, that line item 10.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Economic Development and Jobs' salary be reduced to \$1.

Is there any debate on the motion?

Okay, is the committee ready for the question?

**Some Honourable Members:** Question.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, the motion moved by the honourable member for St. Vital, that line item 10.1(a) be amended so that the Minister of Economic Development and Jobs' salary be reduced to \$1.

Shall the motion pass?

**Some Honourable Members:** Pass.

**Some Honourable Members:** No.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, I hear noes. So the motion is accordingly defeated.

Okay, and we have the last resolution 10.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,881,000 for Economic Development and Jobs, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2022.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Economic Development and Jobs.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Conservation and Climate. Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and critics the opportunity to prepare for the commitments of the next department? [Agreed]

Okay, the committee is in recess.

*The committee recessed at 3:33 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 3:36 p.m.*

## CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay. All right. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Conservation and Climate.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

**Hon. Sarah Guillemard (Minister of Conservation and Climate):** I do.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, go ahead, Minister. The floor is yours.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** It's a pleasure to be here and speak as the Minister of Conservation and Climate about the department's programs and how they will be delivered with value within this year's budget.

I want to state how pleased I am to be the minister of this diverse department that serves Manitobans in numerous ways. I would also like to acknowledge the senior staff of my department that are with me here today. They are: Jan Forster, the deputy minister; Matt Wiebe, the executive financial officer and assistant deputy minister of the Finance and Shared Services Division; Blair McTavish, the assistant deputy

minister of the Parks and Resource Protection Division; Shannon Kohler, the acting assistant deputy minister of the Environmental Stewardship division; Neil Cunningham, the acting assistant deputy minister of the Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office; and my special—my acting special assistant for my office, Connor Verry.

At this time, I'd like to acknowledge the hard work and professionalism of all of our departmental staff. I take the responsibility of my role as minister of the Department of Conservation and Climate seriously.

Our vision is one of a healthy and resilient natural environment where current and future generations will prosper. This reflects my government's commitment to balancing the needs of Manitobans while protecting the environment and also sustainably growing our economy now and in the future.

The importance of protecting the environment has been clear this past summer as we battled an extremely busy wildfire season due to dry weather conditions. I'm very proud of our Manitoba Wildfire Service, and I will speak to it again shortly.

Since becoming minister of this department in October of 2019, I have had the opportunity to meet a variety of stakeholders, industry representatives and Manitobans, including Indigenous communities. Hearing from Manitobans is something that my government and myself as a minister have been prioritizing with great success, and it is something that I'll continue doing moving forward. I'm committed to listening to all Manitobans and stakeholder groups to improve the services of our department.

Despite the challenges of the past year and a half due to COVID-19, meeting with individuals and groups from across this great province, often over telephone or video meetings, has kept me up to date on important issues. These meetings are key to reach goals within our department.

I want to highlight several priority areas of our work in our department as a way to frame the opening of our discussion in committee today. As I've already mentioned, the wildfire situation this year in Manitoba has been very significant. Dry weather conditions and lack of rain led to a very busy opening to the wildfire season throughout the province and has continued throughout the entire season. I'm proud of our firefighting crews and leaders, who worked so hard all spring and summer protecting Manitobans and

property, ensuring we professionally and safely manage these dangerous situations.

I'm also proud that this year my government approved the increase of 25 seasonal positions to increase resources in preparation for this fire season. This equates to five additional initial-attack crews—front-line staff who are trained in fighting wildfires that endanger communities.

My government is committed to the Manitoba Wildfire Service and ensuring personnel are hired, trained and working co-operatively with other agencies, from rural municipalities to Indigenous communities to other provinces.

\* (15:40)

The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, which is based in Winnipeg, is a cross-Canada organization that ensures provinces work co-operatively together by sharing resources each year where required, depending on where the heavy activity is in the country.

I want to thank the firefighters from out of province, including those who came from overseas from South Africa, who came to Manitoba to support our hard-working crews in battling multiple fires. Firefighting is truly a team effort and it is great to see the interagency co-operation that occurs every year.

We will continue to review the results of this past year and plan for next year's fire season over the winter. We will enact safety measures like fire bans and back country closures when they are required to ensure safety of Manitobans.

Our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan sets out a bold vision for Manitoba to become Canada's cleanest, greenest and most climate resilient province. It includes a variety of tools to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to a changing climate, build a prosperous green economy that focuses on adding green jobs in Manitoba, protect our valuable waters and conserve our natural environment for both current and future generations to enjoy.

Manitoba has been able to work with the federal government in other provinces and territories through the pan-Canadian framework to ensure access to dollars that deliver innovative and green programs and initiatives.

For example, the government of Canada, through the Low Carbon Economy Fund and the government of Manitoba, through Efficiency Manitoba, are each contributing \$32.3 million to support natural gas

reduction programs offered by Efficiency Manitoba. These programs will reduce natural gas use and greenhouse gas emissions by offering rebates and incentives for energy efficient equipment and retrofit measures.

This is a tangible benefit that will improve Manitoba's energy efficiency and the health of our natural environment. In addition, the Climate and Green Plan Implementation Office has been instrumental in leading the Efficient Trucking Program, which has seen the government of Manitoba contribute \$5.9 million to this initiative that reduces greenhouse emissions in the transportation sector by providing rebates for fuel-saving technology and retrofits for heavy duty vehicles.

We have begun implementing our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan and have already achieved great success. The Expert Advisory Council and Youth Advisory Council has been meeting and providing excellent information and advice. They continue to provide exceptional contributions as we continue to advance initiatives under our Made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan.

The diverse expertise on these councils will certainly inform the government on how to achieve our goals as the cleanest, greenest and most-resilient province. The introduction of our government's Conservation and Climate Fund has an exceptional year of activity with a number of proposals being approved for funding: \$600,000 was committed in the past fiscal year and there were an array of exceptional projects approved; from electric conversion of tundra buggies in Churchill to nutrient reduction projects in the Lake Winnipeg basin, to organic composting in Winnipeg.

Another intake of the fund is ongoing right now for 2021 and I'm looking forward to announcing more successful projects for this year in the very near future. These innovative green projects are achieving great success here in Manitoba.

A low carbon government office has been established that works across the organization to support government of Manitoba departments and the summary government's many agencies so that we can become leaders in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building climate resiliency.

I was also very excited about my announcement several months ago surrounding the creation of a new \$20 million provincial park endowment fund. Our provincial parks are truly treasured gems and we

are committed to continue investing in them and enhancing them.

COVID-19 has seen record numbers of Manitobans exploring the outdoors in our parks and campgrounds and this demonstrates how important these natural spaces are. My government is committed to enhancing and modernizing our parks and the new endowment fund is a great ongoing funding mechanism that will allow higher levels of investment than ever before.

Our partnership with The Winnipeg Foundation will ensure that the endowment fund is managed and invested effectively and that up to \$1 million will be available every year to invest in projects.

The department continues to develop a multi-pronged approach to modernization of our provincial parks. The park endowment fund obviously was a very big piece of this and it illustrates the commitment of our government to provincial parks.

I will—sorry, we launched a study and partnership with Travel Manitoba to better understand the opportunities to consider improvements to our parks, and I'm looking forward to reviewing the creative and innovative ideas that may come from the study.

My department in partnership with other departments and stakeholder groups is focused on the development of a trail strategy that will enhance trails for Manitobans as well. Trails are critical infrastructure. They allow a variety of Manitobans to enjoy the great outdoors. And we're committed to delivering a thoughtful and strategic plan.

Manitoba has made great strides in waste reduction and recycling as well. There are many ongoing activities and critical priorities for the Department of Conservation and Climate. We're committed to building partnerships and continuing our ongoing discussions and consultations with individuals, organizations and Indigenous communities across Manitoba. I'm excited to continue working co-operatively with all stakeholders to fulfill our mandates and priorities.

In closing, I want to state again that this is simply a small sampling of our various activities and programs, and I look forward to exploring additional details as we discuss our departmental budget estimates. Thank you, merci and miigwech.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the Official Opposition critic have any opening comments?

**An Honourable Member:** No, I want to go straight to questions.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay. Okay, the honourable member for Wolseley?

**Ms. Lisa Naylor (Wolseley):** I would like to go straight to questions.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, great.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 12.1 (a) contained in resolution 12.1.

Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

**An Honourable Member:** Have a global discussion.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Okay, thank you. It's agreed, then, that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Ms. Naylor:** Could the minister please provide the total number of positions in the department, the number of vacancies and the vacancy rate for the department, including which division or branch has the highest vacancy rate.

\* (15:50)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Appreciate the question from the member opposite.

So our total FTEs are 475.25. Our vacancies are 77.25 FTEs, and that's a vacancy rate of 16.3 per cent. The highest vacancy that we are seeing in terms of FTEs is in parks, and that is 21.25, and I'll just note there that approximately half of the vacancies there are back-office administrative positions and we focused on filling our front-line workers in that area for this year.

**Ms. Naylor:** Thank you for that detailed answer. I'm going to move on to asking about the plastic bag ban that was first discussed in 2019. Can the minister please provide an update on any progress made to ban plastic bags?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, and I do appreciate the question from the member opposite about our process of elimination of our plastic bags initiative. And, as the member knows, this last year and a half has been quite the unpredictable year for many people, including our retail sector. And one of the interesting pieces of information that has arose over the last year and a half has been how we've had to balance our—the health and the environment at the same time, and certainly this pertains to our plastic bags elimination process.

We've seen a number of retail sectors actually reduce the use of their plastic bags, and some have stopped handing those out at the point of sale, and that's been a great initiative. But what we've also seen is that there had been concern about understanding how the COVID virus itself was being spread, and at one point there was some thoughts on some of the reusable bags potentially hovering the viruses.

So there was a little bit of a hesitancy even within stakeholders that to completely eliminate the plastic bags. And that's been raised again with some of our stakeholders that they're wanting to take a cautious approach as we move forward over this next fourth wave as well.

So we are definitely making progress in the elimination of the plastic bags, and we're doing so in a safe and cautious manner. And I know that the member opposite will celebrate alongside government when we achieve that goal.

**Ms. Naylor:** Thank you, minister.

I'm going to take us to talk about parks now. You had identified the vacancy rates there, so it's a good time for me to ask if there's been any discussions about the contracting out of management services, of other provincial parks or their assets, similar to what happened at St. Ambroise?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I do appreciate questions on our beautiful parks in Manitoba and particularly when we're talking about partnerships with third parties to offer services within our park. I know the member is aware because I've shared it multiple times in the House previously, that there are over 183 third-party operators throughout our provincial parks that, you know, have signed agreements from historically all the governments that have represented our provincial parks. So that's not something new to Manitoba and certainly wasn't initiated by the current government, but it is a continued good practice that helps to build

the economy and helps to sustain our provincial parks and continue to service those who visit them.

In particular to St. Ambroise, I do find it interesting that the member's raising that particular park considering it had become in disrepair and really not usable, aside from day use at the beach in 2011 under her party government's watch. And there were absolutely no plans or funds available to restore it so it could be used as a campsite and people could stay longer and really enjoy the area.

So I have no qualms about really highlighting what a great move that was considering COVID-19 hitting and everyone wanting local parks areas to visit. This was up and running and made available to Manitobans so they had a place to get away and clear their heads and enjoy the beautiful beaches of Manitoba.

\*(16:00)

So in that, that was a wise decision that made sure that that park was available and spaces available to Manitobans during a time of need a lot sooner than any plans that were under the previous government.

As far as it goes to any future partnerships, we are always open to partnerships that will grow the economy and continue to serve Manitobans and to keep the services responsive to the needs of Manitobans and visitors to our parks.

**Ms. Naylor:** So, I can tell that the minister is a fan of the relationship with the St. Ambroise Campground. So, specifically, is the minister considering contracting out the management of any further campgrounds or beaches such as what happened at St. Ambroise?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** At this point, we do not have any proposals before us for consideration and just as previous governments of various political stripes have considered proposals as they come before them, we will continue to consider the proposals and we will decide what's in the best interest of service for Manitobans.

There's a high demand for campsites. We clearly have seen that over the last couple of years and the supply has, you know, not necessarily met those demands. So, we're always open to exploring ways that we can have more Manitobans and more visitors come and visit our beautiful provincial parks.

**Ms. Naylor:** I have a question that doesn't fit neatly in parks, but the minister previously referenced the partnerships between different departments for the new trail development which I say is a very exciting

project for Manitoba. But I'm wondering if the minister can speak to whether there is a plan to charge Manitobans for use of the trails once they are finished?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, can I get the member opposite to maybe specify? Are you referring to the non-motorized trail use or the motorized trail use?

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm referring to the new trail development project that is across a number of departments. I'm not certain of everything that's involved in that, but I think some of the community environment groups have been really wondering specifically about the non-motorized trail use.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I appreciate that clarification. There are no discussions at this point talking about a fee for non-motorized trail use. We've been very adamant of making sure that our active trails for those who are walking or cycling will remain free and accessible for those who want to use them. However, I will put a little caution—or not caution—a caveat in there, that, of course, accessing the trails that fall within our provincial parks, you would need either a day pass or an annual pass in order to be accessing those.

**Ms. Naylor:** In respect to the sustainability of parks review, has the minister seen a draft of this report, and when can the public expect it to be released?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, and so the report that the member opposite is referring to, it was actually organized and commissioned by Travel Manitoba. So it is within their hands at this point. I do anticipate probably seeing some of the results of that report within the next few weeks. But I will point out that even after seeing that report, that report will absolutely help to inform our department of some of the areas of potential investments and policy changes, but our department will be undertaking its own review and seeking input and information from the general public as well as other stakeholders in order for us to put together our own parks strategy.

**Ms. Naylor:** Can the minister just clarify about her department taking on its own review? Is she referring to the EngageMB survey on how to improve parks, the parks reservation system or something else?

\*(16:10)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, everything that our department has done in terms of the Engage Manitoba that—and the information that we've gleaned from

responses about the Parks Reservation System, including the information we'll—we will be receiving from Travel Manitoba about their outreach and the feedback they've got.

All of that, in addition to our own outreach efforts, are going to help to—us to form the new parks strategy that will be reflective of what Manitobans are telling us they'd like to see in their parks and how they would like to keep those parks sustained in the years to come.

**Ms. Naylor:** How many respondents have there been on the Engage Manitoba survey to date regarding improving the Parks Reservation System? And also, is the minister looking at outsourcing the reservation service system?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** So we actually have had quite a large response to the Engage Manitoba survey on our PRS. I don't have the tally of the numbers up to date, because it's still open, so we're still receiving feedback—there are still people providing their input.

I do know that after our first day the numbers that we saw was over 2,000 contributions. This is one area we know that Manitobans actually do feel very deeply about. They'd like to see a very successful long-term strategy. They certainly want to see improved services and our government is committed to taking the steps in order to respond to their needs.

**Ms. Naylor:** Thank you for those answers to parks. I'm going to move on.

I want to—I'm wondering if the minister can tell me if someone has been awarded the RFP for the detailed and comprehensive review of The Environment Act, The Dangerous Goods Handling and Transportation Act and The Water Power Act, and if yes, who has been awarded this contract?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Thank you for the question from the member opposite and I'm positive that the member opposite knows that the RFP process is quite technical in nature. So once bids have come in, they are reviewed and carefully examined for which ones might address the needs of what the RFP had been put out for. And once a decision is made, then any proponents will be—if they're awarded the contract, that will be made public.

So, no, at this point, there has been no awarding of that RFP.

**Ms. Naylor:** So, I'm aware that the RP closed about six weeks ago, so is there—has the department created

a shortlist of proponents? Just so we get a sense of where things are at in this process.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** As I had stated earlier, there is a process to follow whenever there are RFPs issues by—issued by the government, and the proposals that are now before us are still under review. And I will remind the member, as well, that there are times where processes, you know, can have multiple submissions but the submissions don't quite meet what the RFP has requested as well.

And I know that under previous governments that has happened, and that's part of the importance of these RFP processes is that we can vet various companies and see what's out there, what the capabilities are and make sure that we are choosing based on the best interests of Manitobans, moving forward.

So at the time that a contract is awarded or any movement on this particular topic happens, it will be made public.

**Ms. Naylor:** So it's clear that this is a big undertaking and it seems to be unprecedented for this type of review to be done externally, rather than as an internal review.

So can the minister share with us why the decision was made to hire an external consultant to conduct this review rather than doing it as an internal review?

\* (16:20)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I appreciate the question from the member. And as she has pointed out, this is actually quite a large undertaking. The act itself has not been reviewed in decades, and certainly there's been some need for a review and some updates to the act.

So we want to make sure this is done right. And similar to how the member's party, when they were in government, you know, contracted out for the Peachey report, when it's a large department or a big undertaking, you do seek external advice and you seek that expertise that can come from other jurisdictions, as well, so that we are making decisions that are right for the environment as well as right for Manitobans.

**Ms. Naylor:** So the minister has already identified that there's a, you know, various private companies that are vying for this RFP and that perhaps some haven't met the appropriate criteria.

But what is the mechanism in place within the department to ensure that there's no conflicts with a private company conducting the review and that any

changes to the act don't actually favour the proponent who's undertaking the review or the company they represent?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I do want to clarify as well that I didn't indicate that any of the proponents were not meeting the criteria. I was just highlighting that sometimes during processes that has happened historically, there have been some proponents that haven't quite met criteria. I have no knowledge of any of the proponents thus far that is being assessed at a separate committee, a cross-government committee and I have yet to have any reports on that. So I just wanted to clarify that.

And, you know, in terms of how do you prevent, you know, conflicts with potential private industry who may be bidding on various RFPs, our government has a very robust process, again, with the cross-government committees reviewing every bid that comes in for these RFPs. We are, you know, staffing these committees with senior civil servants who have always acted with the utmost professionalism and certainly have done a great job thus far.

Not quite sure, you know, what kind of governments the member opposite has worked within to be raising some of these questions of concerns about conflict, but I have no questions about the process. Other people who are involved, I know that they have done a wonderful job but will continue to make sure that these processes are followed and that there is no room for conflicts within these decisions.

The other thing I wanted to clarify, it seems a little bit from this conversation or this question that the member has put forward, that she's under the impression that this RFP and then the process and then the reporting afterwards when the work is done—we are not finding somebody to come in and review The Environment Act and then make changes to it.

We are looking for input as to what areas could be changed, what areas are important for us to review and maybe update and be reflective on some of our ongoing needs within our protection areas of the environment. And once the information is submitted to the department, then we look at the recommendations within the reports and then we formulate some of the changes and updates to the act based on that input.

But whoever does win this RFP, regardless of who they're affiliated with, are not actually deciding what happens with The Environment Act; they are merely providing expert advice and recommendations

and ultimately it's the government who decides what goes into the act and what does not.

**Ms. Naylor:** Thank you, Minister.

I—yes, I guess, given that the review and recommendations of the RFP talk about modernizing the legislation, talk about the implications of legislation and policy and the operations framework in light of the new—or sorry, modernizing the operations framework, it does seem that this external company will have a lot of impact on what happens with The Environment Act.

But I guess I will ask, in addition to whatever private company is awarded this contract, have any public and stakeholder consultations taken place in regards to the review?

\* (16:30)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, and I appreciate the question from the member opposite. The part of the R-S-P actually specifies the public engagement process will be a component of any proposals coming forward.

So, to date on this particular issue: no, there have not been any formal public consultation or public engagement. Certainly, there have been many discussions on—with stakeholders who have visited me, who have raised some suggestions of what they would like to see in The Environment Act, but that's not part of the formal consultation or public feedback process. That will be undertaken once an award is given to a company, and that will be part of their undertaking as they move forward.

**Ms. Naylor:** And for the minister now, I would like to ask some questions about the Clean Environment Commission. Recently, Jonathan Scarth was appointed as the chairperson of the Clean Environment Commission. Could the minister explain how that appointment process worked and if any other people were actually considered for that position.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, I'm happy to share some highlights on the newly appointed CEC board chair. Jonathan Scarth actually has a masters degree in natural resource management, in addition to his law degree. And I know that he is well-respected within the community, as well as amongst the stakeholders that, you know, we deal with within our department.

And I will inform the House as well that he came extremely highly recommended from outgoing chair Serge Scrafield, and I have the utmost respect for Serge. He and I have had multiple opportunities for discussions. He's been a very clear voice on giving

feedback about many of our initiatives and he's a trusted voice in the community as well.

So I had no qualms and no hesitation when the recommendation came from Serge. He's always held himself to a very high standard and professionalism, and I think it's important, as we move forward with important initiatives and large projects in the near future, that we have somebody who is capable and competent and comes highly recommended by those who are respected in the community.

**Ms. Naylor:** Part of that question wasn't answered, though. Were any other people considered for the position or was this just a hand-off from the previous chair to the next chair that he personally appointed, it sounds like?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I assure the member that Jonathan Scarth was the most appropriate choice for the chair and he was the most qualified to sit in that position.

**Ms. Naylor:** So, specifically, how many other people were considered for the position?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** The member opposite knows that that information would be confidential. Any time that you are appointing members or choosing for committees or even hiring into positions, you don't reveal the number of people who have applied.

**Ms. Naylor:** Since the—your government took office, Minister, in 2016, the government has never once called on the Clean Environment Commission to undertake an independent environmental review of any major proposed development project. Why is that?

*Mr. Andrew Smith, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Mrs. Guillemard:** The short answer to the member's question is because we have such amazing civil servants within our department who are able to perform a lot of the necessary criteria for assessing these projects.

\* (16:40)

But the longer answer is that in order to trigger a CEC hearing, there are some criteria that need to be met in order for directors within the department to recommend a CEC hearing to the minister. And I'll give you a couple of those criteria because I'm learning myself here what that would require.

One of them is if our department didn't have adequate resources to do a public consultation or engagement process, and our processes actually are very robust and they do have a number of opportunities for

public engagements and for consultation with the public. So that would need to be met and because we can provide that in-house, then that never triggered the director to require or to recommend the CEC hearing.

Secondly, if the government doesn't have the technical expertise in order to perform the assessment of various progress—or, projects in-house, that would also be one of the criteria that would trigger the department to recommend that we have a CEC hearing to start.

So, thus far, we've had the technical expertise within various departments to assess the project. In addition to that, we've had a robust process for public engagement and consultation.

**Ms. Naylor:** So, okay. Thank you for explaining that criteria to me as well, minister. It sounds like—I mean, it sounds to me from that little bit of information that a decision about the technical expertise being in the department has—is why there haven't been any requests made to the CEC to undertake independent environmental reviews. But then that's, you know, leading me to wonder if there's been discussions regarding changes to the rules or powers of the Clean Environment Commission, kind of similar to how Bill 35 sought to reduce the roles and power of the PUB.

Is more of this landing in your department and with an eye to reducing the power that the CEC has?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Appreciate the question from the member opposite. There are no discussions or thoughts put into changing any of the CEC's role moving forward at all. And I didn't want to give the impression that just because there haven't been CEC hearings triggered or recommended that they haven't been doing some very important work.

We have asked them on multiple occasions to review various aspects within the department and give us feedback on how they feel we are doing and some of the direction that we've been going. So they've been given special projects to give feedback and I've depended on that feedback and the expertise that come from the CEC to inform me on decisions that have to be made. So they've been kept busy. Maybe not in the ways that the member opposite, you know, thinks of the CEC, but certainly, they've been an integral part of our forming of decisions and moving forward in some of our initiatives.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm going to talk a little bit now—or, to ask some questions now about some of the wildfire work in planning this summer. I know both the



minister and I earlier today thanked firefighters and we're definitely aligned in our appreciation for their work.

I wanted to ask about—both in Pukatawagan and Cranberry Portage there—we know that there were pretty large fires in that area. And it appears that there were no initial attacked forest fires in either area in 2021. And, in fact, no firefighters in Pukatawagan since 2018.

So could the minister explain why there are no firefighters employed in these locations?

\* (16:50)

*Mr. Josh Guenter, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair*

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I appreciate the question from the member and yes, I was happy to acknowledge and give praise to the crews who kept the buildings safe and people safe during this really challenging wildfire season. So we do know how important these firefighters are to the province and certainly this year that was highlighted.

As it pertains to Pukatawagan and Cranberry Portage, I know that there have been difficulties in years past just recruiting people to work in certain areas of the province, so not just specifically those communities but multiple communities. And so the department has undertaken to make sure that there are fire bases located strategically, that they can be mobile and access various corners of the province.

And not every community actually has initial attack crews in them, so it's not specific to these two areas in terms of not having initial attack crews. But the support and the protection is equal in all of those areas because we are mobile and we have very dedicated crews who can get to the locations that are under threat for fires.

**Ms. Naylor:** So it sounds like the minister doesn't feel that those vacancies compromise the initial response to wildfires this year, but I'd like her to just explain that a little bit more, where the evidence is that that is true and also, what efforts are being done to recruit for these locations?

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Were you—sorry, minister, were you wanting to speak?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, I had raised my hand. I just couldn't hear anything.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** Go ahead, Minister. Yes, the floor is yours.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, and I would like to clarify for the member opposite that, you know, our crews, fire crews, throughout the province go to where the highest needs are and where the fires are burning. So even if there were crews that were within some of these communities that she's speaking of, if there were no fire threats in that immediate area, they would be redeployed to areas of the province that needed the extra support.

So there are multiple times, even with communities who do have initial fire attack crews within them, that we'll have no crews at the base. They would be going off to bunkhouses in areas of highest need. And that's how we stayed ahead of fires this year is that our co-ordination and mobility of our fire crews, in addition to hiring five new crews for this year's—or, this season, which gave us 25 extra bodies for the 'initial' attack—that's what kept our communities, our people, safe and our properties protected.

So in no way am I insinuating that certain communities are more important than others. The whole province is important, and the priority is set based on the threat of wildfires, not necessarily based on location.

**Ms. Naylor:** Well, there were actually big fires above Pukatawagan and Cranberry Portage, and there were—it did seem to be some delays in the initial attack on those forest fires.

But moving along to also talk about some of the other communities where we're seeing vacancies: Island Lake, Norway House, Swan River have seen decreases in the number of people employed there. So has the minister actually eliminated the number of F-T-D—FTEs there, and if not—if it just—these are vacancies, what efforts are being made to address this?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** So the member opposite had asked about the numbers of fire crews and whether certain locations, if they didn't have some fire crews in them, indicated lower numbers, and that's not true. There have been no reductions in the number of fire crews. In fact, we've increased the number by 25 this year. So the locations may have changed in terms of where they are situated or camping, but the numbers have actually increased, not decreased.

**Ms. Naylor:** Now I'd like to ask the minister some questions about forestry.

According to the ministerial mandate letters and internal briefing notes, the minister's been working with the Minister of Conservation and Climate for a

single approval process under The Forest Act, so could the minister provide an update on where work is at on creating this approval process and when it's expected to be complete?

\* (17:00)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** And I'm happy to speak about this process to streamline The Forest Act. We're actually quite proud in the department of the hard work that was done in order to reach a level of understanding where we have very strong environmental standards in place and will be met equal to or better than previously. But it will streamline the process with less administration and red tape for proponents, and I think that that's only going to bode well for our environment as well as our economic growth.

The stage we're at right now is the agreements have been drafted and translated, so we're in the final stages before signing. I imagine that will happen in the near future, but there's still a few steps to go through before—for that—before that's finalized.

And just as a neat note here, this process was also informed by the CEC. So they were very helpful in pointing out ways that we could streamline the process and ensure that we had environmental protections that were—I know it's well known across Canada that we have some pretty strict environmental standards, and we have stayed true to that to make sure the environment is prioritized as we move forward.

**Ms. Naylor:** Minister, what consultations have taken place, and with whom, when designing the process for this review?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** And yes, the member had asked how many or who we consulted with—engaged with during this process and there was a survey that was placed on EngageMB that was open to all Manitobans and we—our department sent letters to Indigenous communities in order to inform them of the survey and encourage opportunities to give feedback about this process.

The CEC also offered a webinar based on the report, for anyone who had any technical questions or wanted some clarification around what they were going to be recommending to the minister. And of course, this was all done during COVID so, you know, safety was priority and means of reaching out to various communities and various stakeholders was mainly virtual.

**Ms. Naylor:** Can the minister provide a copy of the CEC's report on provincial forestry?

\* (17:10)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I also actually had skipped over the fact that we did have the industry consultations done, as well, during this process. But the report that the CEC had submitted is actually public. It would be on our website, so the member's free to go and peruse that at her pleasure.

**Ms. Naylor:** Minister, the annual report mentions changes to the land-use categories in Turtle Mountain and Duck Mountain provincial parks ensuring the protection and sustainability of over 6,000 hectares of natural habitat species in these areas.

What specifically—could you specify what changes were made?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I appreciate the member raising, you know, an area that we're quite proud of, being able to protect more area within Manitoba. And, of course, these fall within the criteria for a protected areas reporting federally as well. And every time that our Province can move in the direction to protect some of our natural resources and really restore some of our natural land, we're happy to do so and it was actually quite exciting to be a part of that process and be able to announce that. We certainly have quite a ways to go to add additional lands, but we are quite proud of the fact that we were able to add these two areas into our protected areas.

**Ms. Naylor:** So part of—like, one of the things that obviously the minister knows is taking place in Duck Mountain park is the clear-cutting with Louisiana-Pacific, and they had their licence extended in 2019 by this government for two years, and that expires in December.

Will the department extend their licence after December?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, and I'll let the member opposite know that currently, a proposal is under review—under an environmental review. So I don't want to predetermine the outcome of what that review will determine but I assure the member that once a decision has been made, it will be made public.

**Ms. Naylor:** Minister, what percentage of Louisiana-Pacific's clear-cutting actually takes place in the park versus outside of the parklands?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Just want to mention that you're very, very low volume in my headset. I don't know if that's me or you.

Yes, so the member's question was specific to where logging is occurring, in terms of in parkland versus out of parkland. And that question is actually better suited for Agriculture and Resource Development, as that is where the information would be.

So I would encourage the member or have the member speak to her colleagues to ask that question when ARD is up.

And having said that, I just want to clarify that our department's responsibility really is to assess proposals and consider for permits or licensing. So we aren't actually the overseers of the industry. We just do the environmental review and determine who gets licences and who does not qualify.

**Ms. Naylor:** So I'm not sure if my next question, with that clarification, if it fits but I wanted to know the extent of consultation that's taken place with First Nations and other residents in the area regarding the potential renewal of the licence and the renewal of the licence in 2019.

So is that something the minister can speak to?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Right, so that information again would be within the ARD department, as they are leading the section 35 consultation process.

\* (17:20)

**Ms. Naylor:** We were speaking a couple of minutes ago about protected areas and the expansion of protected areas and I hear the minister has a commitment to seeing more protected areas in the province.

And so with—I know that the government's collaborating with the Skownan First Nation to expand the protection of the Chitek Lake Anishinaabe provincial park. Can the minister tell me how much new land and waterways will be designated protected areas?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, and the member's absolutely right that we are continuing ongoing discussions with actually multiple groups who are interested in protected areas. And they've been very positive discussions and actually very creative in terms of, you know, what we want to achieve together, both in northern regions and actually throughout the province.

So I will continue to engage in those discussions and I do look forward to having some positive announcements in the future.

**Ms. Naylor:** I do look forward to getting an answer on how much new land and waterways will be designated through the collaboration that I mentioned.

I'm also wondering, the new area in the Fisher Bay Provincial Park region, how much of that will be protected and what is the nature of the government's collaboration with the Fisher River Cree Nation on that project?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I appreciate the comments and the question from the member opposite and I was actually to have a presentation by the Seal River Watershed association or group, very informative and very well put together. And I look forward to those continued conversations because I think that there's some real potential, especially in the northern areas, for ecotourism opportunities and that was one of things that was highlighted during that conversation.

And I know in many ways that we align with our outlooks of, you know, the land has really been a gift to all of us and provided for us and will continue to do so, and the view is that you can continue to have economic opportunities on the land, but the outlook is to not to do more harm to the land.

So in that we do align and I do look forward to further discussions about how that process can unfold as well as other discussions we're having with communities who are looking to have protected lands but not sort of untouched lands, opportunities for economic growth but with sustainability in mind and environmental protections in mind.

So those are exciting new discussions we are having and, again, I look forward to some positive news in the near future where we can maybe go into some more details.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm sure the minister is aware that protective and conserved areas have a critically important role in securing biodiversity, restoring natural ecosystems and protecting against climate change. And also the term protected lands has specific meaning. So I was just a little unsure what I was hearing about untouched versus protected. We know that certain activities can take place on protected lands, but to have that designation, there can't be significant development or mining and a number of other activities that are restricted.

So, in January of this year, the federal government announced that it will move to protect 25 per cent of Canada by 2025 and 30 per cent by 2030. The provincial government has no targets for protected areas and have actually only protected

0.2 per cent of land in the past five years. So what's being done to move the needle on this in Manitoba? We're sitting at something like 11.1 per cent of protected land. Is the government going to set a target for protected areas in line with the federal government and with the International Union for Conservation of Nature?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Appreciate the question from the member opposite. And, you know, it gets tricky when you're setting these targets because it's just a number; it's not reflective of actual land, and, really, our focus has been on reaching out and having dialogue with Indigenous leaders in terms of what their vision and needs are for the land.

And what's interesting is I attended a conference, or, CCME conference, and there was a special meeting with Indigenous leaders where they were able to share feedback on some of the topics that are important to them and where they wanted to be heard.

\* (17:30)

And one area was that they felt that the federal definition of protected areas was quite restrictive, even in terms of their land use and what they had envisioned for hunting, trapping and other economic development opportunities for their communities. And that was a very enlightening conversation to be a part of where that also aligns with some of our concerns within the Manitoba context.

And in further discussions, you know, I think that it was commendable that the federal government did allow for OECMs, which are other effective area-based conservation measures, to fall within the criteria to be counted as protected areas that did allow for much more room for Indigenous communities and for our government to look at opportunities for protected areas. And I think that there can be some further dialogue along those lines.

But having said that, we are undergoing a process right now; in fact, there is an R-S-P posted right now where we're looking for a consultant to help develop a large area of planning. And I know that there were many voices within the Indigenous community that had asked for this process to be undertaken so that we can understand, you know, the land that we are living on and how it can and should be used and sustained and protected. So that's going to help to inform where areas we can identify that could be protected areas in discussions with Indigenous leaders and communities about how that would benefit them as well.

**Ms. Naylor:** Thank you, Minister. I just wanted to clarify that I don't think that the federal government has a barrier to hunting or trapping on protected lands from my understanding, but I'm glad that that work is being undertaken and I do think it's important to set targets. That's how we move towards goals.

But I'm going to move on to the Low Carbon Economy Fund. As of August 24th, 2020, 38.7 million had been allocated to projects and Manitoba has identified projects for the remaining 28 million with the application deadline was—approval was June 30th.

So could the minister please provide a list of projects, including the description, the project status and the value of each product—the projects that were applied for under the Low Carbon Economy Fund.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, so the member's correct in terms of the amount that have already been announced and that was for the trucking—Efficient Trucking Program, as well as Efficiency Manitoba programs.

We fully expect to expend the entire allocation, and I will inform the member that there was a two-year extension on this program that was extended to provinces, so the monies will be fully expended by the end of this program.

I am not able to list the details of any of the future projects, because the discussions and agreements are under way with the federal government, and at the time that the announcements are made, that will be made public.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'd also like to ask about the Conservation and Climate Fund.

In the annual report, in regards to the Conservation and Climate Fund, it talks about the results-oriented nature of successful applicants. So I'm wondering how those results are measured. What are the metrics of the department for this fund?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** Yes, I'm always happy to talk about our climate and—our Conservation and Climate Fund. I think it was a wonderful initiative that I know is going to get great results. So part of that follow-up, sort of, assessment for results will be, obviously, collecting data on emissions reductions for certain projects that were submitted and approved. Also, as well, we'll be assessing the climate adaptation benefits to the various areas and where the projects have been implemented as well as measuring, you know, the clean water effects.

So there are multiple avenues that will be taken to collect data on the achieving of the results to ensure that these were strategic and smart investments. We also are requiring these companies that did receive the funds to submit interim reports so we will be kept informed, along the way, how well the individual projects are performing in their respective areas. And that will help to inform us in future of, again, areas that we can increase funding or investment.

\* (17:40)

And I'm sure that the member is, you know, poised to ask if this information that we're going to get is going to be made public. And I just want to kind of jump ahead with that and say that a lot of this data and information is coming from private businesses who have received these funds.

So the information will be likely proprietary in nature, and so we will have to keep a lot of that confidential. But there will be third-party assessors of overall climate actions and green plans that we'll be able to assess different sectors and how well they are doing in reducing these emissions.

**Ms. Naylor:** So I am confused here, Minister. I have asked several times, probably multiple times, in the Legislature, about funding that was cut to various organizations. And I guess I'm not really confused, I—what I'm—what I've heard over and over is that there is this new Conservation and Climate Fund and these organizations can apply.

But what became really clear to me in speaking with each of these organizations whose funding was cut, is they simply don't qualify. And some of the things that you're measuring, like emissions reduction and specific climate benefits, those things aren't necessarily measurable by some of the organizations who not only don't qualify for the Conservation and Climate Fund but have also had their funding cut.

And I'm speaking not about private business, as you're speaking about, but about not-for-profits whose main purpose is to educate the public, build capacity in communities so that, you know, they—so that individuals understand more about what they can do, whether it's active transportation or composting or other specific things to help the climate.

So when their funding decreases and they don't qualify for the new funds—and these are actually the not-for-profits on the front line educating Manitobans—where, you know, what's the answer for that? What can your department do to actually support

this important work of education and motivation of the public to do their part?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I will clarify, as well, for the member that I didn't specify it was only private businesses applying for these grants. We have multiple NGOs who were granted under last year's grant program, including a community organic composting project that had an educational outreach component to it.

We had a bike share project that was approved, as well, Ducks Unlimited, many community outreach components, part of these proposals that came through and these are all NGOs, as well, so.

There are many NGOs who met the criteria within the grant program and we do encourage other programs to look at the criteria and see if they can adapt their program so that they can fall within what the approved criteria is because, ultimately, for climate change, we do need a reduction in emissions but we also need projects that are frontline and educational in nature.

And so we have a good balance of approved projects that do meet those needs and I would encourage, you know, any other entity and whether they're NGOs or private business who are looking at ways to improve emissions reductions, that we are open to your suggestions and really encourage more to come forward and try their hand at reaching some of these goals with us.

**Ms. Naylor:** In 2021—sorry—in a news release the minister mentioned that in 2020-21 they co-ordinated efforts across government to implement measures to achieve the carbon savings account emission reduction target for 2018 to 2022.

Is the government on track to achieve the commitment of one megaton reduction in GHGs over this period?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** I appreciate the question from the member opposite and, you know, I will assure the member that we are continuing to make progress towards the goal of the one megaton emissions reduction and every project that comes forward to us is considered based on achieving that goal. And we've had so many creative ideas come forward and many of them have been successful.

We are still collecting a lot of data and, as the member knows, that a lot of times the data can be a little bit delayed. So as that data does come in it will

be included in our reports that will be submitted by end of year.

So I encourage the member to keep her eye open for that and be able to look at some of that progress that we've made.

**Ms. Naylor:** I'm not sure that was really a clear question. We're three years into that four-year reporting time, and although I don't agree that the goal for reduction in GHGs is enough, I'd like to know if the government's anywhere on target towards meeting that goal. What methods are being used to move Manitoba towards meeting this goal by 2022?

\* (17:50)

**Mrs. Guillemard:** So, yes, in terms of the data collected, just as an explanation for how this works—I know that the member is very familiar with some of the data collection and when it's reported—we tend to not get data or information until roughly about 18 months after initiatives are implemented, and that's just a factor of we don't have real-time measurements happening anywhere across Canada.

So, even for our end of 2022—so, December 31st, 2022—target date of our first five-year CSA, we won't have the data available to measure how well the policies and initiatives have done until roughly about a year and a half following that date.

So as we collect the data and as we measure how well these policies and projects are going, it's about an 18-month delay after the fact.

So although the member does point out that, you know, we're three years into this five-year plan, the data that we're collecting is really from 18 months ago.

So, as we move along, we are seeing some positive trends. We anticipate that those positive trends will continue and, again, we'll be getting closer and closer to that target that we set and hopefully celebrating alongside the member opposite when we reach it.

**Ms. Naylor:** Minister, I would hope that with reports from 18 months ago, and with the expertise of the folks who are helping you work towards these targets, that you'd be able to predict in some way whether you're actually going to get there in 2022.

So I'm hoping that you will be able to speak to that again, but I guess the more important question I have is when will this government set emission reduction targets that are actually in line with federal

and international targets? We're quibbling here about when you're going to have the results on targets that aren't even really meaningful or measurable in the same ways that other jurisdictions are doing this around the world.

So can you speak to that, please?

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** The honourable minister.

The floor is yours, minister. Go ahead.

**Mrs. Guillemard:** So our focus on having the five-year rolling cumulative savings account is actually based on recommendations from the UN international panel on climate change where they have recognized that that method allows you to measure on the cumulative basis for emissions reduction.

So if you reduce your reduction—or you reduce your emissions in one year on a various—on a certain initiative or policy, that's an additional savings from the year next because you won't be making those emissions in future years.

So it has this cumulative effect to build on, you know, the smaller successes early on grow into larger successes later down the road.

And in terms of us aligning ourselves with the federal, you know, initiatives: in fact, the federal government has taken a good look at these, you know, five-year assessments for the Carbon Savings Account and they're starting to implement and move along that direction as well.

So they've recognized the wisdom in the accountability aspect of carbon savings accounts and, you know, setting five-year targets because then you can actually be held accountable as a government, setting targets well into the future.

You know, it's easy to set targets if you're not going to necessarily be the one making decisions to reach those targets, whereas you do the shorter-term targets and you know that you've got to act quickly and you've got to act wisely and we're achieving a lot of those results that I think are important to address climate change and to keep our environment clean.

So, in those respects, as great as the member opposite really thinks that the federal government is doing, I think that the member can take some time looking at our own plan and celebrating here in Manitoba some of the achievements that we have made ourselves.

**Ms. Naylor:** I know we'll be continuing this conversation more tomorrow, but maybe just before we end, I'd love to ask the minister if she has any plans for setting a specific greenhouse gas emission target for 2030 and if there's any discussion in her department or her government about the achievement of net-zero emissions in Manitoba and when that could be achieved by?

**Mrs. Guillemard:** And again, I'm going to reiterate that we're quite confident in our approach of setting our five-year CSA targets and our next one will be set for the period of 2023 to 2028. And I know that the

member will be happy to join us in celebrating when we do reach our first target and I'm sure that she'll be ready to ask more questions based on our second target that we'll be setting.

**The Acting Chairperson (Josh Guenter):** The hour being 6 o'clock, committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

**IN SESSION**

**The Acting Speaker (Josh Guenter):** The hour being 6 o'clock, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Tuesday, October 12, 2021**

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